

[1]
Patience in Suffering
James 5:7-12
January 10, 2016, Jeff Germo

There is a thread that weaves its way through the passage we are going to look at this morning. I'm going to read it and see if you can figure it out. What is the major theme? Listen carefully.

[2]

James 5:7-12 (ESV)

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

[3]

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

[4]

¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

[5]

Did you catch all that? What is the theme you see in the passage? ‘Patience’ and its partner, ‘steadfastness,’ or ‘perseverance’ in some of your Bibles, weave their way through this passage. Don’t you hate it when someone tells you to be patient? Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit that Jesus will develop in us as we cooperate with him as his apprentices.

Much of my job as a pastor seems to be talking with people who have experienced disappointment, or hurt, or some kind of injustice. Usually what they want to know is, what should I do when someone has let me down? How should I respond in the middle of suffering? What should my attitude be when my circumstances are not what I want them to be?

Cathy Morgan popped by our place on Christmas Day and played some games with us. While we were playing I asked her if she had made it to the Christmas Eve service. She said, she was planning on it, but certain circumstances prevented her from going. It was such a great story of the perfect storm in which she got to practice patience that I asked if I could share it with you. She was kind enough to send me the message that she had sent to her son, Pete in Quebec, describing how her day was.

“Well it has been a tough day. We got the snow that should have been sent to Quebec. If you are going to send us snow the least you could do is send a couple of plows and sidewalk cleaners! Been shovelling since 11.00 am. And it is just like shovelling cement. So then I wanted to go to store, so got in my car and started it and got out to take the snow off the windshield... and the doors locked on me... with my spare key in my purse ..in the car.

So the engine is running I have no key and it is Christmas Eve. How am I going to get my car unlocked? Go make tea; this is a long story...and stop laughing. So I am standing there trying to be a good Christian woman and not have to atone for my words and thoughts...that was tough... I go to go back to the house.. but then remember that my keys are in the car...and the car is ...locked.

Getting hard to keep my mouth pure. So I am also locked out of the house. Perhaps I could call someone.. but my phone is....yep...in the car...

My landlords upstairs...are they home? Linda has left with the car but Tom is home. I go around to their door and knock...Tom is wondering why I am at his door. I relay the story...does he know any locksmiths?... "Yes!" I call...they are closed. I call another one in the phone book...ring ring..."hello"...I ask if someone is available as I locked my keys in the car. He says, the tech guy for Campbell River just left... my car is running and has a full tank of gas that I thought would be good for the holidays.

He says he will see if he can catch him...puts me on hold. He got him and he will come. Wonderful! He arrives and has the car unlocked in literally 15 seconds. I want one of those nifty [slim jim] bars! Cost me 50.00 for 15 seconds of work. So all is right with the world...or is it?

I get in the car to go to the store and attempt to navigate up my driveway which is covered in icy snow that I thought I could just drive through... picture the sound of spinning tires on ice. I am thinking that I am not supposed to go anywhere. I park and return inside to warm up and make coffee as I am needing a coffee about now.

Was going to go to the Christmas Eve service but I don't want to drive...I could walk but the streets are all icy and remember we have no side walk plows so you literally have to walk in the middle of the road to go anywhere on foot. So that's been my day...how was yours?"

That's a pretty crazy story isn't it? Now, I'm not sure how Cathy was feeling when this was all unfolding, but when she told us the story she thought it was quite amusing - after the fact. In the big scheme of things this was a pretty small and insignificant incident, but when you are going through something like that it can be very frustrating. But, it is in those types of situations we are given an opportunity to practice patience and endurance, or steadfastness.

I used to think I could pray for God to build godly character in me and it would somehow just happen. “God, make me like Jesus. Help me to love like he loves. Help me to be patient. Help me have faith.” I’m not sure how I thought it would all happen, but what I didn’t know is that change happens as we respond well to trials in our lives.

I didn’t think to ask Cathy if she had, perchance, just prayed that God would teach her to be patient. That is how we grow in the fruit of the Spirit. God gives us arenas in which to practice.

I will not magically become like Jesus without going through some difficulty. I will not grow in the fruits of the Spirit without experiencing pain. It is an impossibility. I’ve said this before,

[6]

I can no more grow in the likeness of Christ by simply reading the Bible than I can become an Olympic athlete by reading a book on how to become an Olympic athlete. It will not happen by chance. It always takes practice and training.

The Bible says that even Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). So, if Jesus couldn’t escape suffering to grow, I don’t think we can expect to grow without it either.

The passage we are going to look at this morning has one theme running through it from front to back. It is about being patient when someone is taking advantage of you. The preceding passage was about the rich taking advantage of the poor. James says, the rich who take advantage of the poor *will* be judged by God. He does not take these things lightly. The Bible continually portrays God as a defender of those who are disadvantaged.

So, James gives us some tools in this next passage to endure hardship.

[7]

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

Be patient. It sounds so easy doesn’t it? NOT!

We tend to think that this life down here is all there is. What we can touch and smell and hear and experience down here on earth is what we focus on. Gravity pulls us down. James says, the first thing we need to do when we are experiencing hardship is to remember that there is more to life than what we can experience with our five senses.

Here’s what Paul said to the Colossians:

[8]

Colossians 3:1–4 (ESV)

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden

with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Are you going through some difficult things right now? Look up. Set your heart and mind upward. This is not all there is. There is something more happening behind the scenes that you cannot see. God can use the difficulty you are going through right now to hone your character. Keep your eyes focused upward.

That's why James could say,

[9]

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. - James 1:2-4 (ESV)

So, when you are having one of those days where your patience is being tested, practice looking upward. You may not see a purpose in what is going on, but one thing you can know for sure is that if you respond well you will mature. If you don't, you won't. It's as simple as that. That is your choice and your choice alone. You don't have control over many of your circumstances, but you do have a choice in how you respond to them.

[10]

James 5:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Real growth takes time. Once a farmer or a gardener plants their seed, after they have done the work of picking the rocks and pulling the weeds and tilling the soil, they wait for the growth. They don't wait in a passive sort of way, though. There are things to do while waiting, such as picking more weeds and watering, and spreading fertilizer.

And so James is not saying we need to be a victim of people who would want to take advantage of us. Jesus, in Matthew 18:15-20 taught about what to do if someone sins against you.

First, he said you go to that person alone and let him know you were hurt. If he listens, Jesus said, ***“you have gained a brother.”*** There is a closeness that is developed when we face conflict in the way Jesus taught. If he doesn't listen take one or two others with you and talk to him again so the witnesses can hear both sides of the story. If he still doesn't listen after that, Jesus says, tell the church. And when he says tell the church he is not saying blab it to the whole congregation. His intent was that you take it to the leadership of the church. And if he still won't own up to the wrong done to you, Jesus said, ***“treat him like a Gentile and a tax collector.”***

Now, a lot of people get this wrong. They think Jesus was saying that you should shun them. Is that how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors? Not at all. He moved towards them. He loved them. He wooed them. He obviously wouldn't put them in a leadership role until there was some growth, but he certainly did not disenfranchise them. So, neither James, nor Jesus were saying that we need to play the role of victim and let people walk all over us. There are things we can do that are in our control and there are things we have no control over.

James, said that once the farmer has done everything possible to ensure the soil is fertile, the waiting continues. There is growth that happens behind the scenes. Real growth cannot be hurried.

No amount of worrying or pacing or watching will make your produce grow any faster, so you might as well enjoy the process. ***"Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."***

[11]

"Establish your hearts..."

I've told you before that one of the things I need to do every morning, even before I get out of bed, is take my thoughts captive. My thoughts naturally go negative. If I am not purposeful about doing that first thing in the morning my attitude will be in the pit. So, first thing I do when I open my eyes is say, "Thank you Jesus." I immediately turn my thoughts towards him.

And then as I am getting my breakfast ready I continue to turn my thoughts upward, purposefully making myself aware of the presence of Jesus so that when I sit down with my Bible and my journal my heart is ready to listen to the voice of Jesus. That is what James means when he says, ***"Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."***

Practice being aware of the presence of Jesus. Practice being aware that there is something more going on than what you can see. God is big enough to handle your problems, and if you respond well to what you are going through, he can use it for your good and his glory.

Here is what Paul said to the Corinthians,

[12]

2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (ESV)

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

[13]

So, **1. be patient; 2. Look up and wait for God and ask him for help.** Remember that whatever you are going through right now is not the whole story.

[14]

You're going to like this next part.

James 5:9 (ESV)

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

3. Do not grumble or judge. It is so easy and natural to grumble and complain when we are going through difficulties, or to set ourselves up as judge, isn't it?

[15]

Cathy admitted she was tempted to go negative when she was going through her perfect storm. It's what we naturally do.

When things don't go the way we want them to, our thoughts naturally go in places we do not want to go. And it is so easy to take it out on those who are near us. The people we are supposed to love become collateral damage in the wake of our wrath because we didn't get our way. Can anyone relate to that?

I have been reading through the Old Testament recently and I gotta tell you it is so clear that God hates it when we grumble. When we grumble and complain we, in essence, are telling God we don't trust him.

Remember when God miraculously delivered Israel out of captivity in Egypt after being brutally oppressed as slaves for 450 years? He showed them, in no uncertain terms, that he is in charge. He promised them that he would take them into the Promised Land. He met their needs, fed them, helped them defeat their enemies. And then Moses sent twelve spies across the Jordan River to scope out the land. Ten of them came back, shaking in fear, saying that the obstacles were too big for them. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb said, "No, if God is in this, he will give us victory no matter how big the obstacles."

Well, who do you think the Israelites decided to listen to?

[16]

Numbers 14:1–4 (NLT)

¹ Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. ² Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. "If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!" they complained. ³ "Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Wouldn't it be better for us to return to Egypt?" ⁴ Then they plotted among themselves, "Let's choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!"

Now, here's the deal. The Israelites had a lot of reason to complain. They were hundreds of thousands of people in the desert trying to make their way, not knowing where their next meal was going to come from at times. They had enemies who wanted to kill them. Isn't it okay to complain and grumble in situations like that?

Well, look what God said about their grumbling.

[17]

Numbers 14:11–12 (NLT)

¹¹ And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? Will they never believe me, even after all the miraculous signs I have done among them? ¹² I will disown them and destroy them with a plague. Then I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they are!”

If you read on you see that Moses interceded for the Israelites and God didn't destroy them after all. They did, however, end up wandering in the wilderness for forty years because of their complaining. It is very clear just how much God hates grumbling, because when we grumble and complain we are telling God that we do not trust him, and we set ourselves up as judge.

[18]

Did you know that **it is impossible to learn and grow while complaining?**

If you take the posture of a complainer you dig in your heels and refuse to learn or grow. And when you get into that kind of mindset you lull yourself into believing that it's okay to be grumpy. As simple as this sounds, if you want to get through a difficult time well, you need to change your attitude. Stop grumbling about it. Grumbling and complaining rarely make things better. As a matter of fact it usually makes things worse because it's contagious. Pretty soon you will be surrounded by a whole bunch of other people who like to complain and you will hang around each other because you justify each other's negative behaviour.

Complaining is so easy! You just need to do what comes naturally. The hard thing and the more godly thing to do is to allow the Holy Spirit to develop self-control in you so you don't feel the need to complain just because things didn't go your way. And, furthermore, James says, when we complain or grumble we set ourselves up as judge and jury over others, or over our circumstances even. And James reminds us that there is only one Judge and “he standing at the door.” And it's not you.

Next James says if you want an example of some people who had a right to complain but didn't exercise that right look at some of the Old Testament prophets.

[19]

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Notice how this theme of patience and steadfastness weaves its way through this passage. ***We consider those blessed who remained steadfast.*** What does the word “blessed” mean? The Greek word is *makarizo*. It means fortunate, or happy. So, we consider those happy or fortunate who persevere through suffering. Why are they fortunate? Why is it a blessing to persevere through suffering instead of complaining or grumbling when you don’t get your own way?

Well, it goes back to what James said at the beginning of his letter.

[20]

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. - James 1:2–4 (ESV)

We consider those blessed who remain steadfast, or persevere through trials because they come out the other end stronger and more mature.

This is the overriding theme of James. It’s all about the process of maturity. The only way we mature is by remaining steadfast through trials, looking to God, keeping our hearts open to learning what we can through the trial. There is no other way.

Now, sometimes what we like to do when we are facing difficulty is to make deals with God. Have you ever done that? “God if you get me out of this mess I got myself into I’ll..._____.” Fill in the blank.

Well James parallels what Jesus said in his *Sermon on the Mount* about making deals with God.

[21]

¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

When we try and make deals with God like that what we are doing is short -circuiting the growth process. “God, if you get me out of this mess, I’ll do this or that. Or I’ll stop doing this.” In other words, what you are saying is, “I want to take the easy way out. I don’t want to grow. I choose to stay immature.”

James says, don’t make deals with God. Just do what you know you should do and trust him with the outcome. Do the right thing and then trust God. Trust God and then do the right thing. That is how we grow.

[22]

When you are experiencing some kind of pain, suffering or injustice, James says:

1. Be patient

[23]

2. Look up and wait for God and ask him for help

[24]

3. Don't grumble or Judge

[25]

4. Do the right thing and then trust God with the outcome

None of this is easy or natural, but when we come out the other side of a trial, no matter what kind it is, if we respond in this way we will come out the other end stronger and more mature. And James says this is why we can face our trials with joy.

[26]

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. - James 1:2-4 (ESV)



Patience in Suffering
James 5:7-12
Week of January 10th, 2016

Objective of this study: To understand what it means to respond well in suffering.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalms 37:1-9** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

What kinds of things do you most naturally complain about?

Word(30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the last two sermons?
2. Read James 5:7-12 slowly and allow God to reveal his heart to you.
 1. What new things does God show you from this passage?
 2. How many times do patience and steadfastness show up in the passage?
 3. How do patience and steadfastness relate to each other?
 4. What does it mean to “establish your hearts?” (Verse 8)
 5. In verse 9, James urges us not to judge each other. Why? How does judging relate to grumbling and complaining?
 6. Why is it a blessing to persevere through suffering instead of complaining or grumbling when you don't get your own way? (Verses 10-11)
 7. Muse together about the difference between the kind of “complaining” David did in the Psalms (Ps. 42 or 43 for example) and the kind of complaining the Israelites did in Numbers 14:1-4. How did it affect their choices?

Sermon Quote: “So, when you are having one of those days where your patience is being tested, practice looking upward. You may not see a purpose in what is going on, but one thing you can know for sure is that if you respond well you will mature. If you don't, you won't. It's as simple as that. That is your choice and your choice alone. You

don't have control over many of your circumstances, but you do have a choice in how you respond to them."

Work(30-45 minutes)

1. Consider the main points from the sermon:
 1. **Be patient**
 2. **Look up and wait for God and ask him for help**
 3. **Don't grumble or Judge**
 4. **Do the right thing and then trust God with the outcome**

How would applying each of these strengthen your relationships?

How would applying each of them help you respond well in trials and grow in maturity?

Which do you feel God nudging you to work on?

2. Is there a trial you are currently experiencing, and you are having trouble waiting for God in it?
3. Pray for each other.

For your own quiet time with God consider the following:

What does being patient reveal about God's character?

How does patience develop our relationship with God?

What is the end result of patience?

What are some consequences of being impatient?