



Be Doers, Not Just Hearers of the Word
Demonstrating Faith Through Patience
April 18, 2007
James 5:7-12

Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. We are nearing the end of our series on the book of James. In fact, next week is our final lecture and the next week, Wednesday May 2 will be a time for you to get together with your small group. Today/tonight we will be studying the middle section of the fifth chapter of the book of James. Last week, Michelle covered the first six verses of chapter 5 which addressed warnings to rich oppressors. This week James is obviously addressing fellow Christians, he uses the word brothers numerous times. Now many of those Christian brothers would have been poor, but as we will see from our study all Christians rich or poor can learn from this passage. If you have your Bibles, please open them to James chapter 5; we will begin in verse 7.

Passage (James 5:7-12)

⁷Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

¹²Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No" no or you will be condemned.

Primary Concept: Patience

The primary concept we are going to be addressing in these verses is Patience. Patience is one of those words we all can define; except when we are asked to explain it to someone else. One of the popular books being read in our house these days is, Making Brothers and Sisters Best Friends by Sarah, Stephen, and Grace Mally. In this book Stephen Mally defines patience as the character quality which children under five instinctively aim to develop in those around them.¹

¹ Making Brothers and Sisters Best Friends by Sarah, Stephen, and Grace Mally. Tomorrow's Forefathers, Inc. Cedar Rapids, Iowa. 2006 page 26.

Webster's dictionary defines patience as the will or ability to wait or endure without complaint; steadiness, endurance, or perseverance in performing a task. Patience implies the bearing of suffering, provocation, delay, tediousness, etc. with calmness and self-control.²

The Greek words used in this passage regarding patience carry the idea of waiting with calm and expectancy. The other word describing patience is closely related, but is translated perseverance in the NIV. It appears twice in this same collection of verses and means patient endurance and fortitude.³

Patience is mentioned several times in the Bible. From various references we learn that patience is an attribute of God and an expected attribute of God's children. The following verses illustrate patience as an attribute of God.

Patience is an Attribute of God.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Romans 9:22

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath –prepared for destruction?

2 Peter 3:15

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation . . .

God is patient. God also expects his children to demonstrate patience. The following verses illustrate that patience is an expected attribute of God's Children.

Patience is an Expected Attribute of God's Children.

Galatians 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Colossians 3:12

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

² Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, 2nd College Edition. The World Publishing Company, New York and Cleveland, 1970, page 1041.

³ NIV Application Commentary: James. David P. Nystrom. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan. 1997, page 284.

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--- with great patience and careful instruction.

Patience is the primary concept in this passage. We are to be patient. God is patient. God expects us to be patient. This will not come naturally it will take effort; but it is not impossible. To help us grasp what patience looks like in real life, we are given three practical examples: the farmer, Job, and the prophets. We will examine each one.

Three Practical Examples

Example #1: The Farmer

The farmer patiently waits for the land to yield its harvest and for the rains to come. The autumn rains in the Middle East usually came in October and the spring rains usually came in April or May; both were necessary for a good harvest. The farmer was to wait for the rains; to calmly expect that they would be provided. He was dependant on God to give these for his harvest.

In preparation for these rains; however, there was much to do. He had to prepare the soil, obtain the seed, secure equipment to plant the seed, and then care for the growing crop. Although the farmer certainly had to do his part, the crop would not be realized without the grace of God providing the autumn and the spring rains.

Patience in the Dailyness of Life

I think the farmer is an example to us of the patience required in the dailyness of life. Farmers were pretty common in the ancient world. It wasn't really a newsworthy event when they planted their crops and waited for the harvest and for the rains.

You may be engaged in daily activities that the world doesn't consider very newsworthy either. No one comes to videotape me doing my regular housecleaning chores each day, or providing child care to our young son. No one probably photographs you either when you engage in the dailyness of life like: getting up and going to work, making dinner, recruiting volunteers for ministry, caring for aging parents, or mowing the yard.

Add to that list, these examples from the Life Application Bible Commentary⁴: "waiting for the arrival of a new baby, starting a new job, finishing school, waiting for a loved one's visit, or slowly improving health during a prolonged illness".

⁴ Life Application Bible Commentary: James. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois. 1992. page 129.

These are the activities that make up the dailyness of life. They are not necessarily exciting or newsworthy; but they require patience. They require us to look to God to bring in the fruitful harvest. That harvest may be financial provision for our families, the fruit of a well run home, the harvest of children who are wholeheartedly devoted to God, or an effective ministry and witness. Even in the dailyness of life we must be patient and look to God for the water and blessing that will produce a rich harvest.

Practical Example #2: Job

Let's take a look at Job chapter 1 beginning in verse 1.

¹ In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. ² He had seven sons and three daughters, ³ and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

⁴ His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. ⁵ When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Now, as you recall, into the midst of this calm life of this righteous family man came disaster. Satan requested permission to attack Job and God allowed it, but with strict boundaries. The devastation begins in chapter 1 verse 13:

¹³ One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁶ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁷ While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" ¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

As if that wasn't enough Satan makes additional requests of God and attacks Job's health. Job 2: ⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. ⁹ His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰ He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

To summarize Job has lost his oxen, donkeys, sheep and his camels. Camels were a resource of the very rich during this time period and of course wealth was defined pretty much in terms of livestock. Job has suffered terrible financial loss if not complete financial devastation. All of his servants, which had to be considerable just to manage his thousands of livestock, are dead except the four messengers who reported the devastation.

All of his children are dead. His wife is at best extremely depressed and suffering a crisis of faith. He is in excruciating physical pain and is suffering from a terrible disease.

I am not sure I can even imagine these successive waves of devastation that rocked his life. Just one of those tragedies would be shocking to the senses and the grief would be overwhelming; but they just come one right after another. Yet, Job clings to his God and his faith and he is held up as an example of patient perseverance.

Patience in the Tragedies of Life

Job, is an illustration of the patience required of us in times of unexpected devastating tragedy. These are the times in life when you are just blindsided with such devastation and grief that it threatens to just take you over. These are the trials that out of all the potential difficulties in life you just didn't fathom that you would be experiencing this one. These are the ones that leave you in such shock that you have to recover before you can even grieve.

I was finishing the edits on the manuscript for this lecture on Monday when I turned on the television for a quick look at the news. There it was pure devastating tragedy. I thought of the 30 or so mothers of students at Virginia Tech who would get a call that day that their son or daughter had been murdered in a mass shooting. These are the unexpected devastating tragedies.

But, even in these we are to be patient. We are to persevere. It will not be easy. It will be painful. Now some through the ages, have kind of mocked Job to some decree pointing to his words like those in Job 7:11-16 and 10:1-8 as proof that he was not patient, but rather complaining. I don't know exactly how to reconcile his words with the grumbling of the Israelites that we will discuss in

a few minutes; but I suspect there was something about those two that were very different. We can know a couple of things from his example. We know that God in his inspired word in the book of James held Job up as an example of perseverance in trials. Job was His servant and the Master's opinion is the only one that counts. God says he is a worthy example.

We also know that at the end of the book of Job, God upheld Job as righteous. Job 42:7-9 says, ⁷ After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁸ So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

Job struggled, questioned, begged, and sought God's explanation for the devastation in his life, but he held fast to God. He stayed in relationship to him; confident that somehow God would make it right in the very end. Job is an example of patience in the tragedies of life.

Example #3: The Prophets

We have so many worthy examples that we could examine. We have the very early prophets like Moses. We have the Major Prophets; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, classified as such by the length of their writings and not the importance of their work. We have the Minor Prophets: Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. We have so many Godly men to look to as examples. For the purposes of our study this morning/evening we will focus on the lives of Jeremiah and Daniel.

Jeremiah and Daniel

These two men represent the attribute of Godly patience lived over a lifetime. Both were called into the service of God at a young age. Some scholars postulate that Jeremiah was called around the age of 13. Jeremiah 1:4-8 says, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

⁶"Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." ⁷But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.

Daniel also began his service to the LORD at a very young age, probably around 15 when he taken among the first round of captives to Babylon. Jeremiah

ministered as a prophet to the people of Judah for 40 years. Daniel also served a life of faithful service to God well into his eighties.

Jeremiah faced many hardships over his ministry. His mission was hard. He is known as the weeping prophet. He had to confront the nation with its many sins, call them to repentance; but realize that the people would not listen or repent, and so they would face the judgment of God. Jeremiah 7: ²⁷"When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer.

In that same chapter verse (God says) ¹⁶"So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you. . . ²⁰"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.

In Jeremiah 36 Jeremiah is instructed to take a scroll and write on it all the words regarding the disaster that was coming upon the unrepentant nation. The scroll is eventually read in the king's presence. The king is so hardened that he leisureed sits in his winter cottage by the fire and each time 3 or 4 columns of the scroll are read he cuts the words out and throws them into the fire until the entire scroll is burned. He then tries to arrest Jeremiah. Jeremiah is eventually imprisoned in a muddy cistern that had no water. It is full of mud and sinks into it. The king and royal officials left him there to starve.

Daniel had many trials of his own. Right away after his arrival in Babylon, he had to make the dangerous choice to not defile himself with the royal food and wine from the king's table. After the Babylonian wise men failed to tell King Nebuchadnezzar his dream and the interpretation; Daniel boldly attempted negotiations with the executioner who had arrived to hack all the wise men of Babylon to pieces; including Daniel and his friends. Daniel is summoned to a drunken party to interpret the Handwriting on the Wall and that very night, the Medes invaded and overthrew the kingdom. Daniel is thrown into the Den of Lions because he prayed to the one true God as was his regular custom.

Patience Over a Lifetime

In spite of all of these challenges, these men persevered with patience throughout a lifetime. It was hard, it was stressful—having so many threats on your life tends to be stressful. I am sure there were days when they thought we just can't do it; but with God as their personal strength they did persevere day after day, year after year, decade after decade for a lifetime. So whether you are 13 or 25, or 40, or 60 or 80 the lives of the prophets are an example set before you of patience demonstrated over a lifetime.

Six Prompts for Patience

Those are some powerful examples; but how can we emulate them? How can we demonstrate this kind of patience in the dailyness of life, in the tragedies of

life, and over a whole lifetime? I think there are six prompts provided from the lives of the prophets and from these verses that will prompt us toward patience.

Prompt #1: Ponder the Scriptures

The first prompt is to ponder the scriptures and this example comes from the life of Daniel. Daniel 9:2: "in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years." Daniel was not only reading the scriptures, he was studying them and pondering them. He recognized the time of the desolation of Jerusalem was almost over. I think that continued to give him patience in the later years of his life because he could see the promises of God and their nearing fulfillment.

We must also ponder the scriptures, not just quickly read them so we can check that off our list, but we must ponder them and think about them. The Word of God will sustain us. The promises of God will encourage us. Together they will prompt us towards patience.

Prompt #2: Prayer

The second prompt is prayer. Daniel, Jeremiah, and Job were all examples of praying men. They talked with God. They poured out their hearts to him. They asked him for direction, encouragement, and assistance. When we pray we will be prompted toward patience. Our lesson next week is dedicated totally to the topic of prayer, so we will let Lorie finish the instruction on this point.

Prompt #3: Personal Relationship

The third prompt is a personal relationship. These men knew God. He was near and approachable. He was concerned about their tragedies and their crises. He walked with them through all of their difficult times. When we have a personal relationship with God it prompts us toward patience because we know he is in control and he will never forsake us or leave us.

Prompt #4: Do not grumble.

Last Wednesday, after everyone was up and out the door to school, I was contemplating the various aspects of today's lecture. The one I was pondering was our fourth prompt: Do not grumble. I don't know if you remember last week, but that was the day we got about 5 inches of snow. This is a sample of what you would have heard that morning if you were a fly on the wall in the Wright household. I won't confess to you which phrases were mine:

- How can the Department of Transportation map on the internet label the road conditions red with difficult driving conditions and we still have school?
- Have you seen my snow gear? I am sick of snow.
- What happened to spring? It is April.

Why are we told not to grumble? It seems like a small thing. I mean this is not like gossiping, or stealing, or even adultery. I wasn't sure, so I decided to do a word search for all the times the word grumble or its variant appears in the Bible. I was surprised. This is just a sampling. I will just read the verse and you can note the reference on the screen.

Ex 15:24

So the people **grumbled** against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

Ex 16:9

Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your **grumbling**.'"

Nu 14:2

All the Israelites **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert!"

Nu 14:27

"How long will this wicked community **grumble** against me? I have heard the complaints of these **grumbling** Israelites.

Nu 14:29

In this desert your bodies will fall--every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has **grumbled** against me.

Joh 6:43

"Stop **grumbling** among yourselves," Jesus answered.

Joh 6:61

Aware that his disciples were **grumbling** about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

1Co 10:10

And do not **grumble**, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel.

1Pe 4:9

Offer hospitality to one another without **grumbling**.

It seems to me that we can learn several things from those verses. God hears our grumbles. He doesn't like them. He takes them personally. He expects us to exercise restraint in our speech and stop grumbling.

As one of the nursery workers, who reads the lecture notes, said to me a few weeks ago, "This book just steps all over my toes.". Well, if your toes haven't been stepped on yet, the admonition to stop grumbling ought to do it. A grumbling attitude works against us in the development of patience. It doesn't improve our circumstances and often just makes us feel worse. It also is a sign of disrespect to our Sovereign God. Do not grumble.

Prompt #5: Do not swear.

The fifth prompt is Do Not Swear. Swearing means to take an oath and was a common practice in the ancient world. This is not really referring to the practice of taking an oath in the courtroom, but rather the inclusion of oaths in everyday casual conversation as a way to sort of strengthen your statements. Jesus referred to this practice in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount and also in Matthew 23:16-22. These are Jesus' words to the Pharisees: ¹⁶Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' ¹⁷You blind fools! Which is

greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁸You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath. ¹⁹You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²²And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it.

The Jews had created an elaborate system of oath taking. They had a list of things they could swear by that were binding and a list of others things they could swear by that were not binding. To top it all off they were using the very objects of worship that God had provided as the subject of their nonbinding oaths. Christ notes that even in that they lacked an understanding of what was sacred.

This quote from the Holman Commentary sums it up well. "Making oaths was a common practice, and James wanted it discontinued among the believers. People made disrespectful or arrogant verbal guarantees that they themselves could reverse by legal technicalities. Like boldfaced warranties with lots of fine print, these oaths were intended to create an impression of truth—but those who uttered them did not really expect to be held to them. Christians should not need to use oaths in order to guarantee the truth of what they say. Our honesty should be unquestionable."⁵ Perhaps it is a bit of a stretch to include this under the prompts of patience; but consider that swearing in this sense indicates a definite lack of the calm expectancy and perseverance that we are being asked to display.

Prompt #6: Live in the Light of the Coming of Christ

The final prompt for patience is to live in the light of the coming of Christ. The promise of the coming of Christ should motivate us to live lives of holiness. There is an endpoint. Our patience will not be required forever. Yes, a lifetime seems a very long time this side of heaven; but in eternity it is actually a small fraction of time. Knowing that He is coming should prompt us toward patience.

Knowing that he is also Judge and will judge every careless word we have uttered should also prompt us toward patience and attention to our speech. And knowing that is a forgiving God, full of mercy and compassion should strengthen us to begin anew each day.

⁵ Holman New Testament Commentary: Hebrews and James by Lea, Thomas D. General Editor Max Anders. Holman Reference, Nashville, TN. 1999. page 135.