

Lesson 5 | April 2, 2023

Practicing Patience and Prayer

Study Text: James 5:1–20

Central Truth: Christians are called to lead persistent, prayer-filled, and compassionate lives

Key Verse: James 5:8

Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh (KJV).

You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize the importance of patience, especially as they await the Lord's return.
- Students will develop a regular practice of praying for healing for themselves and others.
- Students will have a keen awareness of those who may need encouragement to keep them from falling away from God.

Introducing the Study

Say: This final chapter of the letter from James deals with patience, prayer, confession, and restoration—all of which believers greatly need to live in a world that is increasingly evil. Likely most of you have dealt with long waits for answers to prayer, a desire for Jesus to come

soon, and the heartbreak of seeing someone you care about wander from the faith. In the Book of James, God has given us practical help for all of these difficulties.

Opening Activity—Patience Required

Ask. What activities or situations in your life have required the most patience?

Say: Perhaps you have said, “I need patience, and I need it now!” Unfortunately, patience is not delivered in an instant. Instead, it grows only through practice. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is possible James's warning to the rich in James 5:1–6 is related to his discussion of patience in the following verses. Perhaps some of his readers were among the poor who had been mistreated and defrauded. James warned the rich, not because of their wealth, but because that wealth was amassed by cheating and mistreating innocent people. This warning may have been related to those mentioned in the previous chapter who made their own plans rather than submitting to God. More than likely, James was not talking to members of the congregations since there is no call to repentance. However, he did directly address members of the congregation when he began his discussion of patience and endurance in the verses that followed.

[Jas 5:1-20 KJV] 1 Go to now, [ye] rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon [you]. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. 3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. 4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. 5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 Ye have condemned [and] killed the just; [and] he doth not resist you. 7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. 9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. 10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. 11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. 12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and [your] nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. 13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16 Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. 17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. 19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

Part 1—Value of Patience and Perseverance

Waiting Patiently

James 5:7–9

Say: If you have ever waited at the doctor’s office, in a long line at the supermarket, or in a line of traffic trying to get through a construction zone, you understand the need for patience. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In James 5:7–9, the author encouraged his readers to be patient in their sufferings. Some of that suffering may have been brought on by their interactions with the wealthy addressed in verses 1–6. More importantly, he specifically encouraged them to be patient as they waited for the return of Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest sources of help in trials is our belief in the return of Christ. Many believers have withstood suffering because of this hope. James encouraged believers to be patient until Jesus’ return.

To illustrate the believers’ need to endure hardship until Christ’s return, James mentioned farmers. The farmer waits for crops to grow and be harvested (verse 7), depending on God for the fall and spring rains which nurture them. In the same way, we need to be patient. God faithfully provides the rain the crops need, and He has faithfully promised that Christ will come again.

As we wait for the Lord’s return, we must stand firm (verse 8). This means making Christ our solid foundation. We can depend on Him to keep us in the faith. God knows the future and will never fail those who trust Him.

In verse 9, James admonishes his readers not to “grumble” (NLT; “grudge,” KJV) about each other. The grumbling James referred to is not open complaining but an inward bitterness. If not taken care of, this bitterness will likely be expressed against those close to us.

When we are suffering and others are not, perhaps we may feel that we are not being treated fairly or even that other believers were the cause of our persecution.

Grumbling against others opens us up for judgment (verse 9). When we stand before God, we will be judged for every idle word we have spoken (Matthew 12:36). In light of this, we need to demonstrate Christ’s love through our actions as we await His appearing.

Discuss

? How can we be patient when we are mistreated?

? Why would we sometimes grumble against other believers when we are experiencing persecution?

Examples of Patient Suffering

James 5:10–12

Say: Since James was writing to “Jewish believers [who were] scattered abroad” (James 1:1, NLT), it is understandable that he would use Old Testament examples to illustrate patient suffering. His readers would have been familiar with the suffering endured by the prophets, often because their messages were unpopular, and by Job, who continues to be known for his patient endurance in the loss of possessions, family, and health. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Many Old Testament believers suffered persecution and even death (see Hebrews 11:32–40). In their suffering, they are examples of patience (James 5:10). They knew God would never fail them. Their steadfastness and loyalty can inspire us to be steady in spite of opposition. Contrary to what people would normally do, James encourages believers to consider those who have endured trials to be blessed of the Lord (verse 11). The word endure can mean “endurance under extreme trials or stress.” In fact, Job is an example of someone who experienced devastating events, yet endured. Even though Job experienced great suffering, he was victorious because he depended on God throughout his ordeal. Because of his example, Christians today can persevere through trials as well, because the Lord is “full of tenderness and mercy” (verse 11, NLT).

Resource Packet Item 1: Successful and Sick

Distribute the case study and have someone read it aloud; then discuss the questions as a class. If your class is large, you may want to divide into small groups to facilitate participation.

In verse 12, James repeated the teaching of Jesus found in Matthew 5:33–37. It was common in the first century for people to make oaths and swear they would fulfill their vows based on an object or person. James urged people not to make such oaths. Saying “yes” or “no” would be sufficient. Believers are to be known for their honesty in all things, including their speech.

Discuss

? James used the prophets and Job as examples of patience. What other biblical or modern-day examples of patient endurance can you think of?

? How do you think most of the world perceives the Church in terms of honesty? Explain.

Part 2—Consequence of Prayer and Confession

Pray in Faith

James 5:13–15

Say: God should be central in our lives, no matter what we are facing. One of the great trials believers face is illness. We live in a fallen world, and disease is part of it. But God has instructed us to come to Him with our illnesses and pray for healing. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

As Christians, we should depend on God not only during persecution but in times of sickness as well. In James 5:13, James encouraged his readers to pray rather than grumble when facing any type of calamity. When going through a difficulty, it is easy to complain. Instead, God wants us to pray. Prayer expresses hope and trust in God. In prayer, we are committing ourselves to His will. It is through prayer that we receive His power to help us persevere during trials.

Some believers have already come through difficulties. James instructed them to sing songs of praise. Many people pray in times of trouble but never take time to praise when the trial is over and life is good. God wants us to praise Him as He walks with us both in the happy times and the difficult times.

Prayer for the sick was common in the New Testament Church and should be common in the Church today. God uses fellow believers to provide help during difficulties. When we pray for one another, we should empathize with each other, especially when we pray for those who are sick. James did not chide sick believers for a lack of faith. Instead, he instructed the elders of the church to pray and anoint the sick with oil.

Oil was one of the most common medicines used in biblical times (see Luke 10:34). But the oil of anointing here was probably a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the healing He brings. The oil, though, was not the most important part of these instructions. The emphasis was on prayer offered in faith (verse 15)!

Praying for and anointing the sick are to be done “in the name of the Lord” (verse 14). Praying in Christ’s name carries divine commission and authority. Healing is a result of this prayer, but it is not the power of prayer or the oil that brings healing; it is the Lord who raises the sick (verse 15). After all, He is the Great Physician! The prayer of faith demonstrates our confidence that God will heal.

The seriousness of the illness should not deter Christians from praying for healing. The word used for sick in verse 14 is different from the word used in verse 15, which may refer to someone who is critically ill. The Bible records the healing of those at death’s door (e.g., King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:1–11) and of those with long-term illnesses (e.g., the man who had been unable to walk for more than forty years in Acts 3:1–12; 4:21–22). God is not limited to what we consider possible. The seriousness or duration of an illness does not overwhelm Him.

Discuss

- ? Why is praying for others an important part of a Christian's responsibility?
- ? What does it mean to pray in Christ's name?

Confession and Prayer

James 5:16–18

Say: When Jesus and His disciples encountered the man born blind in John 9:1–7, the disciples asked Jesus whose sin was responsible for the man's condition, assuming that either the man himself or his parents had sinned. But Jesus responded that the man's blindness was not a result of his or his parents' sin. We should not assume a person's sin is the cause of illness. However, there are times when confession of sin is necessary for healing to occur. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God sometimes allows sickness as discipline (1 Corinthians 11:27–31); however, not all sickness is the result of personal sin (John 9:1–3). In James 5:16, James focused on the healing from sickness that does result from sin, and confession is an important part of the healing process. Confessing our sins to God and accepting the forgiveness offered through Jesus breaks the hold of sin and guilt in our lives.

If we have sinned against another believer, we should go to that person, ask for forgiveness, and be reconciled to him or her. Then we can pray for each other and experience the healing God intended us to receive.

Some may wonder if their prayers do any good, especially if they have prayed for something over an extended time and the answer has not come. Our prayers do make a difference. When we have confessed our sin and God's righteousness is in us, His power is available to work through us as we pray.

James used Elijah as an example of praying in faith (verses 17–18). Elijah was not superhuman nor did he have an incredible amount of faith; he was human just as we are. Yet he prayed that it would not rain, and the rain stopped for three and one-half years.

God honored Elijah's prayer, and He will honor our prayers as well. We do not need to be super spiritual for God to answer our prayers. If we are righteous, the earnest prayers we offer up in faith will result in God's power being manifested in this world and in the lives of those for whom we pray.

Discuss

- ? How does the concept of confession relate to the promise that the prayers of the righteous person are effective?
- ? What hinders effective prayer in our lives today? What can we do to pray more effectively?

Resource Packet Item 2: Pray for One Another

Have each student select a prayer partner, and distribute the worksheet. Ask the students to fill out the top portion of the worksheet and exchange it with their partner. They should pray for one another during the class, take the sheet home to fill out the rest of it, and return it to the original owner next week.

Part 3—Significance of Rescuing and Restoring A Wandering Believer

James 5:19

Say: Perhaps you have encountered someone who believes a person who is truly a Christian can never wander away from God and be eternally lost. However, the words of James seem to refute that position. Whether it is because of worldly distractions, hurt from other believers, or personal disappointments, people do wander from the faith. Others in the Church should be aware of what they can do to help them return. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Some Christians believe once a person is saved, he or she can never lose salvation. However, a person does not lose his or her free will upon coming to know Christ. God wants people to continue to serve Him, but each person chooses whether or not to accept Christ and continue to be in relationship with Him.

James 5:19 shows that it is possible for a believer to “err” (KJV) or “wander away” (NLT) from the truth. It refers to a serious departure from the faith (see 1 Peter 2:25; 2 Peter 2:15). Peter indicates that such people “are worse off than before” (2 Peter 2:20, NLT). In Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seeds, the rocky soil represented those who “fall away when they face temptation” (Luke 8:13, NLT).

Yet all is not lost. These wandering believers can be “brought back” (James 5:19, NLT). This teaches us that every believer is responsible to watch out for other believers by encouraging, mentoring, guiding, and lovingly correcting them.

Discuss

? Why is it important to understand that it is possible for one to turn away from God after being saved?

? Why do some people turn away from God?

Reconciled to Life

James 5:20

Say: We often read or hear stories of people who have done heroic acts like saving a drowning child, calling 9-1-1 just in time to save a life, or rescuing someone from a burning car or building. While these acts of bravery are certainly to be celebrated, it is

even more important that we help rescue people from eternal death. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

“The sinner” in James 5:20 (NLT) refers to the one who “wanders away from the truth” in verse 19 (NLT). This person has turned from the truth, but if we can lead him back, we can save him from death. All attempts at restoration need to be undertaken with humility. We need to be gentle, pointing the backslider to a loving God. Compassion and care may help the person to be restored to God. When we are part of lovingly restoring someone to faith in Christ, we “hide a multitude of sins” (verse 20, KJV; “bring about the forgiveness of many sins,” NLT). This does not mean we cover up or ignore sin; rather, the blood of Christ covers and forgives their sins.

Love compels Christians to reach out to one who is falling into sin and to forgive him when he repents. To some extent, members are responsible to and for one another. A Christian must not stand idly by while another believer’s soul is in danger of being lost for eternity. If we are right in our own relationship with God, we will seek to restore the wanderer. With patience and prayer, the body of Christ can be built up as every member ministers to others.

Paul gives a similar instruction in Galatians 6:1: “Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself” (NLT). No one is beyond the reach of temptation, so Christ compels us to help each other in our relationship with God..

Discuss

? In what ways are we responsible for the spiritual health of others?

? What steps do you think you could take to restore a “wandering believer”?

Resource Packet Item 3: Ministry of Reconciliation

Distribute the worksheet and ask someone to read aloud each passage at the top of the sheet. Then discuss the answers as a class. For added learning value, write the answers your students give on the board. This is especially helpful for visual learners or people who may not easily hear the answers given by other class members.

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Difficulties often reveal who we are on the inside. Sometimes we show irritation or lack of faith, or we may even turn our backs on God because life is not as easy as we would like it to be. But God is faithful. He gives us His strength, and He has provided others to help us and pray for us during our difficulties. As believers, we have responsibilities toward other believers. We need to pray for one another and encourage others in their Christian walk. Let Christ’s love show through us as we give and receive encouragement in the soon return of Christ.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Consciously work on being more patient in little irritations as well as big issues.
- Pray earnestly for another person in your class, church, or community who needs healing.
- Look for a way to encourage another believer in their walk with Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Jacob Wrestles with God.
Genesis 32:22–30

Tuesday:

Josiah's Unwavering Devotion to God.
2 Kings 23:21–25

Wednesday:

Army of Israel Shows Compassion.
2 Chronicles 28:12–15

Thursday:

Jesus Is Moved with Compassion.
Matthew 9:35–38

Friday:

Relentless in Prayer.
Luke 18:1–8

Saturday:

Plea for Reconciliation.
Philemon 8–18