

James: The Practical Christian

God's Prescription for Patience

James 5:7-11

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January 29, 2006

God's Prescription for Patience

Scripture

Stanislaw J. Lec once said, "You must first have a lot of patience to learn to have patience."

I wonder how many would agree with that statement. It does seem that those who are patient have large doses of it to begin with, doesn't it?

In our text for today, James gives us God's prescription for patience. What James says may surprise you. Let's see what James says in James 5:7-11:

⁷ Be 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. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As 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. (James 5:7-11)

Introduction

You're at the grocery store. You have a very busy evening ahead of you. You find that your shopping cart has a wheel that drags. You finally finish your shopping and choose a checkout counter with only two people ahead of you. The checker is new on the job. Her hands tremble; beads of perspiration dot her brow. Slowly she gets to you. Her cash register tape runs out. She doesn't know how to change it. You're delayed. How do you respond?

It's finally date night. You're going to your favorite restaurant. You've fasted most of the day so that you can gorge tonight. You made reservations so you won't have to wait. But when you arrive, you learn that the restaurant has no record of your reservation. The manager asks if you called that particular restaurant or perhaps another one in their chain. You are given a menu and escorted to a crowded bench. There you sit, hungry as an Emperor Penguin in winter with a menu that you have begun to gnaw on. You're delayed. What's your response?

The genuineness of your faith in Christ is proven at such intersections in life. The best tests of your Christianity always take place in the mainstream of life, not in the quietness of a worship service or the pleasant atmosphere of a Bible study. It's in those grocery lines, busy restaurants, delays, setbacks, and hindrances where genuine faith is proven.

James was a man interested in helping people like you and me develop a faith that really works in the mainstream of life. He knew that one distinguishing mark of genuine faith is *patience*.

So James begins the text we're studying today with the simple command, "**Be patient.**" James uses the word "**patience**" four times in the text before us.

The original Greek term translated "**patience**" is a compound word taken from two other words. One word means "long," or "far." The other means "anger," or "wrath." Putting it together we come up with the literal translation of "long-angered." You've all heard the expression, "*short-tempered*"? That is a description of a person easily angered. Well, the expression for **patience** is "*long-tempered.*"

It goes without saying that **patience** is a rare and remarkable virtue among people today. Who among us hasn't uttered that now-famous American Prayer, "Lord, give me patience—and I want it right now!"

That great American Statesman, Thomas Jefferson, worked out a way to handle his impatience. He included it in his "Rules of Living," in which he outlined how adult men and women should

live. He wrote, “When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry, count to a hundred.”

About 75 years later, author Mark Twain revised Jefferson’s words and wrote, “When angry, count to four. When very angry, swear!”

If we are honest, most of us would have to admit that although we may have tried everything from Jefferson’s philosophy to Twain’s, we still have a problem cultivating that fruit of the Spirit called “**patience.**”

The result is that our ongoing impatience has a way of robbing us of our testimonies. It injures our home lives and our relationships with family, friends and co-workers.

Some of the original readers of this letter from James were people struggling with their own impatience. The context of these verses implies that James’ readers may have been poor, working-class people who were being mistreated by the rich. Under these circumstances it would have been very understandable for them to be impatient and angry, for they were being abused and they were being denied their rights—at least, from a human perspective!

Lesson

James is very concerned about how you react to the pain and suffering that comes into your life. He wants to help you learn how to respond to injustice, suffering, delay, and difficulty in a godly way. And so in James 5:7-11 he gives you God’s prescription for patience.

I. The Promise of the Lord’s Coming (5:7-9)

First, James reminds you of the promise of the Lord’s coming.

Note in verses 7-9 James’ link between being patient and knowing that the Lord is coming back: “**Be 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. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!"

God means for you, as a believer in Jesus Christ, to find great comfort and practical encouragement in the promise of Christ's return. To the person who suffers in this life, Christianity offers the only true hope. And that hope rests in the return of Christ and God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth, a place where there will no longer be pain or suffering or injustice.

But I'm afraid the return of Christ is seen by many people today as nothing more than a fascinating futuristic concept, fun to discuss, debate and study, but the truth is that it has little or no real effect on our daily living or struggles. It is usually written off as irrelevant "Pie in the Sky" theology, or seen as a form of religious escapism. But the truth is that the return of Christ is meant by God to undergird you and strengthen your faith, especially during times of adversity and hardship.

The great theologian, G. C. Berkouwer, once wrote, "Pain can be seen as the great 'not yet' of eternity. It reminds us of where we are, and fans in us a thirst for where we will someday be."

Some of you listening today are feeling the sting of some very serious pain. For some of you it is physical pain. No matter what you do, you just can't seem to rid yourself of that pain. And it seems so unfair!

For others it may be an intolerable working situation, or the pain of rejection.

It may be that a husband, wife, parent or child is taking advantage of you—even though you treat him or her kindly.

It may be that a friend has turned against you due to a misunderstanding of something you did with only the purest of motives.

Or it may simply be that ongoing pressure of not being able to pay all your bills when the ungodly around you continue to prosper.

Such feelings can grind away at your peace so severely that you sometimes wonder how you can continue. Now it is important to know that all your present suffering has a divine purpose. But the point that James is driving home here is that it's just as important to know that your suffering is *temporary*!

Think about this: If you discover that you have cancer but you also know that, without a doubt, one day you will be completely healed and back to normal—even though you don't know how long your period of suffering will be, that knowledge of your future recovery will dramatically affect your attitude during the painful process.

Similarly, though at a much higher level, you as a Christian are meant to find great patience and hope in the promise of the Lord's return. You see, because of Christ's death and resurrection, although you are experiencing great pain in this world, you must never forget that you are awaiting a world where every tear will be wiped away and all forms of pain and suffering will disappear (cf. Revelation 21:1-4).

The Bible gives us unusual metaphors to picture this new world that is coming. Streets of gold and gates of pearl seem to picture splendor and beauty. Whatever heaven is, it will banish all of the discomfort of this life and usher in new, unimagined pleasures. We have shadows of it now. Fleeting longings for some profound joy, which escape us so quickly here, will one day fill us.

It's as if we are now in a dark room but little chinks of light are seeping through—brief glimpses of virtue, glory, and joy, subtle hints of truth and justice—all convincing us that beyond the walls there exists a world worth all of our endurance.

James tells us in verse 7 that until that new world breaks in on us at the return of Christ—we are to be like a patient farmer who **“waits for the land to yield its valuable crop.”** We are to see **“how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.”**

Every farmer knows that the time for harvest just cannot be hurried. There are natural laws in the physical world to which he must be in submission. So the good farmer is not anxious and he

does not fight the sometimes painful process required of him. Instead he draws strength in his present sufferings by always keeping the big picture in mind, by looking ahead to the coming rains and that final harvest day.

Similarly, you must learn to find comfort in the fact that God's plan is always on perfect time—not only for this world but also for your life.

So why is it that tires go flat when you are in a hurry to keep an appointment? Or, why does the vacuum cleaner suddenly stop working the very day when company is coming?

A much more important question than these is, “Why are you so impatient and angry when those things happen?”

In essence, your impatience and anger at such times is ultimately anger directed against the timetable which the sovereign God has assigned to you. You see, all the events of your life, including flat tires and broken vacuum cleaners and so on, are divinely scheduled according to the plan of God for your life, which, I might add, you and I are usually unaware of, and a timetable that we don't normally appreciate.

The reason why impatience and anger is such a serious sin in the eyes of God is because it always leaves God out of your thinking. It's a manifestation of practical atheism. It is a snub directed at God's sovereign plan and timetable for your life.

You just thought you needed to be at that appointment. God knew that you needed to be somewhere else. You just thought you needed to have your carpets vacuumed for the company. God knew that you needed a dirty carpet for some other reason—maybe your visitors needed to be encouraged by your lack of perfection! And you needed to be humbled!

II. God's Servants Have Always Grown in Patience through Suffering (5:10-11)

Second, James shows his readers that God's servants have always grown in patience through suffering.

In verses 10-11a James writes, **“Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.”**

James reminds us here that patient suffering has always been the mark of God’s people. He illustrates this by drawing our attention to the Old Testament prophets. There is hardly a prophet about whom we have any information in the Old Testament who could not be shown to be in some way or another an example of suffering and patience.

I think of Jeremiah, sometimes called the weeping prophet, whose messages were so unpopular that he was beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned in a dungeon and thrown into a cistern. His life was one of almost perpetual physical and spiritual suffering. But he always persevered! In his perseverance, Jeremiah seemed to foreshadow Jesus like no other prophet, for he was reviled and beaten but always responded with patience.

Jesus never reviled in return. Why? Jesus knew that all his sufferings were ordered by God according to his perfect plan.

But if we were asked to name a person from the Bible who is an example of patience, we would most likely pick Job. He was James’ pick in verse 11b. Here James writes, **“You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.”**

You remember the story. Job lost everything! His family, his business, even his personal health. And when he called out to God for answers God never answered him for a long time. So what did Job do? Verse 11 tells us he persevered! The Greek word translated **perseverance** here literally means “to abide under.” Job rested and endured under the load of suffering that God sovereignly brought his way. He determined that he would abide under the blast furnace of affliction regardless of the heat. The result of Job’s willingness to persevere in the face of his suffering was patience!

Under the intense heat of heartache, grief, and suffering, patience formed like the purifying process of raw gold. You see, Job didn't just sit down one day and make up his mind that he would be a patient person. He never tried to bargain with God for that virtue. In fact, the term "patience" doesn't even appear in the entire book of Job! Even verse 11 doesn't say he was patient but that he persevered! From that we know he was patient.

The story is told of a young man who came to a godly old pastor one day and asked him to pray that God would make him a more patient person.

The wise old pastor said, "I'd be happy to pray that God would make you more patient. Come and kneel down with me."

The young man knelt down on the floor. The pastor put his hand on him and prayed, "Dear God, please bring many trials and tribulations into this young man's life."

The young man jumped up and said, "No, no! I asked you to pray that God would give me more *patience*, not more *trials*!"

The pastor responded, "Son, kneel back down. That's exactly what I'm praying for!"

Left to ourselves, we would think that a lack of suffering and ease would produce patience in us. But that is not God's prescription for patience. Although many of us may not realize it, God's prescription for patience is produced by trials, tribulation, suffering, and difficulty.

Conclusion

James concludes this text by reminding us of the outcome of the Lord's dealings, "**The Lord is full of compassion and mercy**" (5:11c).

God does not always tell us all we want to know about our circumstances. He doesn't tell us why the plane is delayed or why the reservation is lost or why there is a traffic jam or why you are not healed or why you lost your job or why you lost a loved one.

There are many secret things in life that belong only to the Lord. At such times you must simply believe that God is a God of compassion and mercy who orders all things for your good and his glory.

During those difficult times remember that God does not expect you to understand all your circumstances. He only expects you to persevere—to abide under them—no matter how difficult they may be when they come your way.

Insight usually does not come now but later. It's usually at the end of your experience, sometimes years later, you will look back and say, "Now I see why that was happening and now I see how that was a display of God's compassion and mercy towards me." In the meantime James says in verse 11, "**We consider blessed those who have persevered.**"

In Romans 5:3-4 the apostle Paul says that trials and tribulations are ordered by God to bring about patience and perseverance in us: "We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Instead of following Jefferson's advice or Twain's and counting numbers, why not try James' advice next time you're surprised by some sort of trial. Remember that God is in charge of your day—not you! God is not so concerned with accomplishing all the things you may have in your *Day-Timer* as much as he is concerned with the development of your inner character.

He charts growth toward maturity in terms of the depth of your daily walk with him. He is primarily concerned about the cultivation of priceless, attractive qualities that make you like Jesus Christ deep within. And one of his preferred methods of developing that character is through adjustment to irritation.

The message of James is simple. When you are wounded by all kinds of trials, interruptions and delays, be sure to respond with perseverance. If you do, God will develop in you the fruit of the Spirit called **patience**. Amen.

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and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAYER:

I have no idea how God is going to use these truths in your life. But I want you to be very attentive this next week to situations that God brings your way for you to use these truths.

It may be that your schedule is about to be thrown way off by someone. It may be that you are summoned to court and you don't deserve it. It may be an employer who deals with you in an unfair way. It may be your spouse or a good friend. I don't know.

It may be that you are facing something right now. Whatever your situation, learn to say to God now or then, "Lord, I see this trial not as an enemy but as a tool. I see this situation as the machinery you are using in my life. Thank you for making me the object of your handiwork."

If you're here today and you have never received Christ personally, know that receiving Christ is as simple as turning from your sin, acknowledging to him that you need his forgiveness and then believing that he died and rose again from the dead for you. If you have never received Christ, trust him now. God promised that to all who receive him, to them he gives the right to be children of God.

CHARGE:

Realize today that your trials are always God given opportunities to cause you to grow in the grace of patience—if you will only persevere! As you do may, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all forevermore. Amen.