

Why and How Can We Be Patient?

James 5:7-11
James, Day 23

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. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 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.

- James 5:7-11, ESV

I have to admit that patience is one of my least favorite words. It's also probably the fruit of the Spirit I struggle most to consistently display. (Ask my kids, they'll tell you. Actually, don't ask them; just take my word for it.) So, when I come to a Bible verse that says, "Be patient," I confess my immediate reaction is to feel ashamed and inadequate and then to start making mental excuses for my lack of patience.

One of the reasons why impatient me finds James 5:7 helpful is that it tells me right up front that patience has a point and an end. It's easier to wait if you know why you're waiting and you know you won't have to wait forever. In this case, what we're waiting for will bring with it an end to all need for waiting: the coming of the Lord.

In this life, too often, waiting is just followed by more waiting. The old military motto of "Hurry up and wait" applies to many areas of life, and sometimes it feels like "Wait for a while, and then wait some more. After that, it'll be time for more waiting." But when the Lord comes, we will receive everything we've been waiting for and all need for waiting will come to a glorious end in the consummation of the all things in the glory of Jesus Christ.

The more we understand it, the coming of the Lord becomes both the goal and the fuel of our waiting. Because we know what we're waiting for and we trust who we're waiting for, it makes waiting with steadfast patience and faithfulness easier. James uses the analogy of a farmer: A farmer knows what seed he's put in the ground and what crop it will produce, and this helps him to be patient as he waits for the seasonal rains.

Similarly, we know that the Lord Jesus is the firstborn from the dead, the first-fruits of the resurrection, and when He returns and we see Him face-to-face, we know we will be like Him in perfect holiness and righteousness forever. As if seeing Him were not enough, knowing we will be like Him is even more powerful incentive to wait patiently.

We don't know when the Lord will return, and it may not be in our lifetimes, and so James points us to the example of the prophets of the Old Testament, who had to wait beyond their lifetimes for the coming of the Promised One. And while we're waiting, we often have to endure suffering, so James points us to Job, who had to suffer more than any of us can imagine and yet trusted in the Lord. So, whether our waiting is long or hard or both, we have good examples in His word that God can apply to our hearts by His Holy Spirit.

As much as I lack patience, I don't mind waiting as much if I know what I'm waiting for is worth the wait. So, really, could anything be more worth waiting for than seeing our Lord and Savior face-to-face and being fully and finally transformed into His perfect likeness?