

Faith Brings Patience

Dear Ones, we've reached our final week's homework! I can hardly believe we are fast approaching the end of our study together. This has been a tough study! The things we see when we peer closely into our soul and compare to the Law of Righteousness can be fearful to behold! But, dear one, God is so faithful. He reveals these things to us gently so that we may repent of them, change our ways and move forward in faith. His Grace is greater than all the human weakness in our heart. His goal is to walk us forward into spiritual maturity – not so much a final destination, but a process. His goal is to transform us into the likeness of Christ and in order to do so there is some work that needs to be done, and not just a little on this soul! We have just a little bit to go in our study, but I hope that this time in the Word has started you down a serious path of self-reflection, seeking God and allowing him to fill your heart with an over abundance of compassion, mercy and love for all who are in need.

Suffering “the Slings and Arrows of Outrageous Fortune”

*“To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune,
Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep
No more; and by a sleep, to say we end
The Heart-ache, and the thousand Natural shocks
That Flesh is heir to?”¹*

Our first lesson this week addresses the very human response to suffering: grumbling. When times are hard and we are feeling the effects of the oppression of suffering – the wearing down of our strength and patience, the temptation to grumble begins to grow. James exhorts us to patiently endure these trying times. Before we begin our scripture lesson for today, let's take a few minutes to pray. *“Heavenly Father, help us to understand the undermining effects of grumbling. Help us instead to stand firm in faith. Open our hearts and minds to your Word today that we may learn to trust and follow you in the midst of the slings and arrows that come our way. Amen.”*



Read James 5:7-9 and answer the following questions.

¹ Shakespeare, William; *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 1.

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As I think of all the things we are prone to suffer in this life – from the smallest frustration or insult to the life altering prolonged heartache of watching a loved one battle life threatening disease (or fighting that battle yourself). Name some of the things from which people suffer. (This topic came up previously in *Homework 2: Perfecting Faith*, you may find it helpful to review some of the commentary on pages 2, 3, and the bottom of page 5 of that homework packet.)

What do verse 7 and 8 tell us to do and for how long?

What are we not to do and why?

What appears to be imminent according to these verses?

What is grumbling? What do we do when we grumble?

*They forgot God, their Savior, who
had done great things in Egypt,
wondrous works in the land of Ham,
and awesome deeds by the Red
Sea.
Therefore he said he would destroy
them— had not Moses, his chosen
one, stood in the breach before him,
to turn away his wrath from
destroying them.
Then they despised the pleasant land,
having no faith in his promise.
They grumbled in their tents, and did
not obey the voice of the LORD.
(Psalms 106:21-25)*



What affect does grumbling have on not only the one doing the grumbling, but those around that person? Consider the affects of grumbling. Read Psalm 106: 1-33.

- What did the Israelites do in verses 21 and 25?

- What did the Israelites grumbling do to Moses (Psalm 106:32-33)?

- Where does our focus shift to when we grumble?

- What can happen to the individual and the group with long term grumbling?

- What happened to the Israelites when they made a habit of grumbling against the Lord? See Psalm 106:24-25; Numbers 14:26-45?

James begins our passage in verse 8 with the image of a farmer who has toiled in the fields planting his crop. He has worked hard to plant and now he must wait patiently for the rains to come in their seasons so the crop will grow and thrive. Suffering can be equated with both the toil

of the planting and the enduring the season of waiting. Sometimes suffering requires persistence and hard work; sometimes it is the slow painful waiting in the knowledge there is nothing else that can be done but wait upon the Lord. In either case the patient endurance is rewarded with the blessed rains. The times of suffering seem to be a drought where God appears absent or inactive in our lives. But it is those times that he is working behind the scenes.

Giving into grumbling, blaming others, arguing or criticizing one another draws our attention away from God and directly upon ourselves and the immediacy of our situation. Psalm 106 tells us about the sins of the Israelites. Verse 25 says, *“They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD.”* The word grumble is translated from the Hebrew word *“rāgan”*² which means to “murmur against, to rebel”. Murmurings and grumbings against Moses started in the tents of the Israelites and swelled to cause the beginnings of widespread rebellion. They did not put their trust in Moses or in God to meet their needs. Verse 24 tells us, *“Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe his promise.”* The Israelites did not believe that God would give them the land, they didn’t trust the Lord’s promise, and they scorned his gift. Instead they chose to go their own way in disobedience and rebellion.

We develop a sense of entitlement and an elevated opinion of ourselves where we demand what we think we rightfully deserve. We stop listening and waiting upon the Lord, and as the habit forms we lose the ability to hear his call to patient obedience, steadfastness, endurance. We lose sight of those whose needs are great and we lose compassion and mercy in the demands for self-centered justice. Our eyes become blind and our hearts become hard

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James tells us to “be patient”. In Greek the word patient is *makrothymia* which is a compound word of *makros*, meaning “long”, and *thymos* which means “temper”. It means to have a long temper, not a short fuse. It means to be slow to anger with your eyes on the long term, not the immediate period of suffering or trial. The time of suffering is but a season in life, it too shall pass. James says, *“be patient...until the Lord’s coming”*. Not so much because he anticipates an immediate return of the Lord, but rather to put one’s faith in the Lord’s return and time of judgment. Allow Him to judge the oppressor or wrong doer. If our focus is on awaiting the Lord rather than attempting to vindicate the unjustness of our situation, we are looking at the long term in obedience to God, and not allowing ourselves to fall into the sin of grumbling for which we too would be judged. James repeats this concept again verse 8: the suffering Christian must wait patiently just as the farmer waits for the rains to come, not focusing on the day to day worries, but watching for the rain to come in its season. In patience we must also *“stand firm, because the coming of the Lord is near”*. We must be resolute in our patience, embolden our hearts for the long term and guard against grumbling and criticizing one another. In order to stand firm, the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ is needed.

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and the seas of trouble that embattle our daily lives are the anvil on which God forges and perfects our faith. These are the things that God uses to teach us patience, perseverance, endurance, steadfastness, all the qualities of mature faith. But

² —Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

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it is his strength, faithfulness, compassion and mercy upon which we can rely in the midst of the battle. Unlike Hamlet who thought he had no options but death, we have someone promising life, abundant life despite the suffering. In Deuteronomy 31:6 Moses promises the Israelites: *“Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of [the enemy], because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”* We cannot be assured of victory over our sufferings in this life. Sometimes those slings and arrows meet their mark and deprive us of future days. When we’ve lived all the days allotted us, and stand before the Lord in the knowledge we have steadfastly stood the tests of this life, he promises his mercy and compassion and the blessings of the life to come, even if those blessings do not come in this life.

Examples of Patience and Endurance

*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 5:10-11 - NIV)*

As James draws his epistle to an end, he brings us examples of those who have suffered with patience and endurance until the end and have received the blessing of the Lord. Today we will spend some time exploring who some of the exemplars are, and how and what they achieved for the kingdom of God. We will be spending most of our time in the New Testament book of Hebrews in the chapter often called “The Old Testament Hall of Fame”, chapter 11.



Read Hebrews 11:1-40 and answer the following questions.

In the first 3 verses of Hebrews, the writer defines then gives an example of faith. In your own words define faith and give another example of how we believe something by faith without the benefit of physical proof.

In verses 8-10 what did Abraham believe, do, and look forward to but not receive in his lifetime?

According to verses 13-16, what promise did Abraham and his descendants live by faith and die knowing without experiencing? What was the promise they saw and welcomed from a distance?

According to verse 22, what did Joseph do in faith of God’s promise? (See also Genesis 50:24-25)

According to verse 24, what did Moses esteem more?

What was Moses looking forward to?

Going back to verses 13-16, what were all these people looking forward to, although none received during their lifetime?

On what do verses 14-15 tell us they had their eyes focused?

According to verses 32-35a, what were other great men and women of faith able to accomplish?

According to verses 35b-38, what did others suffer on account of their faith? This summary pertains directly to the prophets like Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel who suffered greatly at the hands of the corrupt kings and priesthood suffering ostracizing, beatings, imprisonment, starvation, and murder attempts, all for obediently speaking the word of the Lord.

What were the Jewish Christians suffering for their faith?

For what were they waiting?

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-11

In his sermon on the Mount, what did Jesus say about those who would suffer oppression and persecution? See Matthew 5:10-12.



How are the prophets and heroes of the faith and example to the Jewish Christians to whom James was writing? Why would James exhort them to remember these men and women of God?

As James concludes his epistle to the Jewish Christians, he reinforces his exhortation to endure trials and suffering with patience and perseverance. He reminds them of the heroes of the faith who endured similar oppression. He calls them “*examples of patience*”. The Greek word *hypodeigma*³ translated as “example” means an “exemplar to be emulated”, or “a pattern to follow”. These men and women of the faith endured to the end, and are worthy of emulation. They serve as a model for the believers to emulate. The believers to whom James was writing (and in fact all believers everywhere facing persecution) and the prophets of the Old Testament share similar experiences of suffering and persecution.

These role models suffered persecution because they faithfully obeyed the Lord, even when inconvenient to do so. Abraham left the comfort of his homeland to live as a foreigner in a land that he would never own. Jacob, at the end of his life saw his family move out of their home, the land of their inheritance, and into Egypt to live as foreigners and later become an oppressed people. Moses traded the comforts of being an Egyptian prince for the oppression of the life as an

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outlaw and leader of an exploited and enslaved nation. While the Book of Hebrews leaves out the names of the prophets who endured much persecution, the Old Testament records the stories of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Elijah and many others who risked their lives because they believed the promises of God outweighed worldly comforts and rewards. The prophets patiently endured suffering while waiting for God to accomplish his plan for Israel.

James challenges believers to practice “prophet-like” faith obediently persevering through their trials with their eyes focused on the completion of God’s plans, both individually, as well as, for the benefit of the Kingdom. Like the prophets they must set aside the benefits of the world to uphold the needs of the poor and oppressed. Like the prophets they must set aside the ways of the world in order to not to be corrupted and soiled by its filth, allowing them to be instruments of God’s voice and presence calling back the lost to a relationship with the Lord. Like the prophets they could not be friends with the world and friends of God because they would become double-minded, ultimately calling God’s judgment upon themselves as eventually the allurements of the world leads to aligning themselves with the world – an easier life, in the face of persecution. And finally, like the prophets whom Israel oppressed and murdered, the believers of James’ day are called to endure patiently similar suffering and

³ Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

persecution (even unto death) for their faith receiving the same divine vindication promised by the Lord:

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt 5:11-12)

Consider Job

*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 5:11 - NIV)*

As we pick up our lesson today in James, he calls our attention to Job. The book of Job is considered one of the earliest recorded stories of the Old Testament. Its themes of trials, suffering, faith, and blessing are an encouragement to all of us – if we can persevere through the reading! Job's story is tragic, but through the tragedy is God's faithfulness to the one who puts his faith in Him. *Lord, you have recorded and preserved the stories of your faithful that we may benefit from them. Help us to see what you have brought out of the suffering of your faithful servants in the past so that we will know that suffering we face today will ultimately bring blessing to those who love you. Amen.*



Read James 5: 11 and answer the following questions.

In order for us to study the example presented by Job, we need a little refresher on his story. Read Job 1:1-2:10.

How does God describe Job in verse 8?

What did Job suffer? (see also 2:7)

*The LORD said to Satan,
"Have you considered my
servant Job? There is no
one like him on the earth, a
blameless and upright man
who fears God and turns
away from evil. He still
persists in his integrity,
although you incited me
against him, to destroy him
for no reason."*

Job 2:3 (NRSV)

How did Job *not* sin?

After receiving all of Satan's afflictions, what does God say Job still maintains in Job 2:3?

What does Job say about his testing in Job 23:10-12?

What does this tell us about Job's attitude towards God?

Does Job understand why he is suffering?



Why do you think God allows suffering?

At the conclusion of Job's testing he is rewarded for his perseverance and faith. Read 42:10-17. How is Job rewarded?

Returning to James 5:10-11, what word is repeated twice in verse 11?

- What does that word imply?
- What is promised in the end?
- What is promised in James 1:12?

If you are at all familiar with the book of Job, you know he has suffered great loss and physical pain. His supposed "friends" add to his burden with their insinuation of sinfulness on Job's part and their so-called advise. But God has found Job to be "*blameless and upright*". Job complains bitterly, but he does not blame God. Job's wisdom is revealed in that he *knows* his God. He knows his God is sovereign. He knows that God's ways are beyond his understanding. He knows that God is just. He endures his trials because of his faith. Throughout Job's testing, he turns to God, bringing his anger and grief to God. He sees that through his suffering he "*shall*

come out like gold"(Job 23:10). He will withstand the refiner's fire; his faith will be tested and found pure and strong. He does not accuse God of bringing suffering and hardship upon him. He does not grumble against the Lord. Instead he brings his complaints and lamentations directly to God, not against others. God says that though Satan incited him to ruin Job without any reason, Job *"still maintains his integrity"*. His faith and loyalty to God are intact. He recognizes the sovereignty of his Creator to do as he pleases for His own reasons. God allows Job's testing in order to prove Job's unwavering faith. That unwavering faith is what pleases God the most, and results in the outpouring of blessings at the end of Job's story and the reversal of his estate.

What God brought about through Job's suffering was patience and endurance, a refined and mature faith.

James says to his audience, *"You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about."*(James 5:11). What God brought about through Job's suffering was patience⁴ and endurance, a refined and mature faith. And, the Lord, true to his character was full of compassion and mercy, blessing Job's life beyond what it had been before the season of testing. Times of trials and suffering refine our faith and shape our character to reflect the character of the Lord. James brings up two attributes of God: compassion and mercy. Through our suffering we develop these traits. Through our suffering we become more compassionate and merciful to others because we know what it is to suffer.

We know not what effects our endured suffering will have on the kingdom of God. One day his full plan will come to perfection – all will be complete and then we may see what part we played. But God is faithful, his promises are true and we too one day will receive a crown of life. I look forward to that day with longing for the suffering here and now to be at an end. But until then, James' words will continue to resonate in my mind as it calls me to a life of practical holiness, my eyes focused on the Lord and my heart open to the needs of those around me. In writing this study, it is my prayer that James' words have opened the eyes of your heart to truly living faith -- in humility, patience and compassion.

⁴ Again, the word "patient" is the Greek "*makrothymia*", being "long-tempered"