
Impatience: Characteristics, Causes and Cures

James 5:7-11

- 7 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.
- 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.
- 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.
- 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
- 11 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.

Today's message is on the topic of patience and I suppose that some of you are saying to yourselves, oh, no, I don't have a lot of patience. I know I need patience, but I really don't know how to get it. I suspect that it involves me going through a lot of stuff that I don't want to go through, so, no, thanks. I mean, if I had been born with patience, then great. If God just wants to zap me and give me a load of patience, that would be wonderful, but if patience means going through trials, then I would rather pass.

It is important for us to consider the situation that James is addressing in the verses above. James is encouraging Christians to be patient. He is talking to a group of believers who are in the midst of being persecuted. As a group of people, they are being persecuted because they are Christians.

Last week we looked at a passage where God announces a judgment, a severe judgment, on wealthy unbelievers who were using their resources to persecute Christians. He speaks to that group where judgment is going forth in James 5:6. "You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you." The righteous person doesn't resist as James describes this judgment that he was announcing on this particular group.

The question is, James, what does the righteous person do? How does he respond to persecution, affliction, and suffering? The big answer that James gives us is to "be patient." He repeats it four times in five verses — be patient. This word appears and reappears. It becomes clear that James sees this not as just the response to suffering but it is the call of God for every Christian.

This is the main theme for today's sermon. I want you to see that patience is a paradigm for living the Christian life. It's a way of looking at the Christian life. It's important for us to see that because James will unpack it. He will give us characteristics of what patience looks like. He will give us causes for impatience and then he will talk to us about its cures.

I think that sometimes when we think about the topic of patience, we think it means longsuffering — passive in nature. When someone tells me to be patient, it sounds like they're just telling me to stop it, stop misbehaving, because I am not going to get what I want. Just stop it. Be quiet. Be patient. It's normally not what we want to hear, is it? But James helps us to see that patience is not just a passive virtue. This is not where we sit and do nothing and that's what patience is what is all about.

Before I get further into this, I want to give one huge disclaimer; I am not qualified to preach this message. In fact, I was thinking how it could really be tough for my wife and my children to hear me stand up and talk about patience. But it's the word of God. It is the word of God that goes forth in power and truth and creates. I want us to have faith today to understand that patience is a way of viewing what it means to be a Christian; patience is what the Spirit of God is producing in our lives. Patience is not just something we do — it is an exercise in patience, but this is what God is making us to be. This is, in a sense, our identity in Christ as we reflect his nature.

Characteristics

What are the characteristics of an impatient person? What are the symptoms of this disease? I think it will help us to flip it and to conversely look at what it means to be patient, because James shows us four components of patience. You can actually look at this section as a list of how to develop patience in your life. We have already identified our tendency to see patience as something that's passive — we just do nothing. But that's not how James presents it. He gives several specific items for the believer to put into practice.

I think you are going to find this helpful. I find it tremendously helpful that perhaps God would just lift us to a place where we get faith for this. You've heard the phrase, "don't ever pray for patience;" if you pray for patience you pray for trouble. As if you are going to go to God, your heavenly Father, and say, God, help me to be patient and God's going to start striking you with as much trouble as possible. It's contrary for the nature of God for us to see God in his goodness as someone who uses the occasion of our seeking virtue as a means to make life miserable for us. So what is patience, how do we do it, and what does it look like?

James 5:7 — Waiting

There is a rich biblical tradition that describes faith as waiting. In Acts 1:4 Jesus orders his disciples “...not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father...” Then he goes forward in that conversation with his disciples. You find this idea over and over again: God telling his people to wait for the fulfillment of a promise. In this case, the promise is that the promised one will be given. Hebrews 6:15 describes Abraham, the father of the faith, the pattern for all who believe: “And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.” Do you know the story of Abraham? God tells him he is going to have a child; he is going to be the father of a great nation. Twenty-five years he waited — 25 years.

In James 5:7 we read about the example of the farmer. He has to wait for his fruit. There is the early rain, the rain that comes in Palestine in the late fall, right as the seed is being planted. It prepares the soil to soften, to receive, and to nurture the seed. Then the latter rain comes in the spring right about harvest time, to bring the grain to maturity. So James takes that illustration and effectively says the farmer can’t control that. He has to wait for it. He waits patiently for that to come. He is waiting for the fruit and he uses that as an everyday picture for how we live and walk with God. We wait. We bring the promises of God before God and we wait for their fulfillment.

When we bought this church building, we had sold a building in Coral Springs. We wanted to enlarge our space; we wanted to do something unique. We had a vision and a model: to buy a shopping center and retrofit part of it. We planned to rent out the rest of it to pay for the mortgage. We had a unique opportunity to sell our building. We sold it. Then we waited. We waited. We thought when we sold it that we had a place and that deal fell through.

Then something happened in that approximately two-year time period. Interestingly, I looked at this property in the first month when we were looking for property and it didn’t fit our profile. It wasn’t what we were looking for. We had another property that we thought we were going to. I remember as that deal was falling through, sitting at a table across from the city manager and city attorney. It was a different city other than North Lauderdale. They looked me right in the face and said, “We don’t want you in our city.” Basically, go away. You are going to take property off the tax rolls. We promise you, you found a loophole, but we are changing our legislation. You will never buy a warehouse. You will never buy retail space. You are not going to buy a stand-alone building. You might buy property and build on it, but we don’t want you here.

Well, we had by that time already hired a city attorney specialist. He was a Jewish man. He wasn't a believer in Christ. He came out of there and said, "Hey, that's it. We're calling the ACLU. This is not right." I said, Sam, this may surprise you, but I'm not used to partnering with the ACLU. That's not the first call I make when I'm in trouble.

Here's the picture I want to paint for you. I want you to see this. It began to look absolutely impossible. These shopping centers are expensive. When we buy it we have to pay for it then we have to retrofit it and that's going to take a long time. Now the cities are not even letting us do that. We are being told to go away. So we wait — wait — wait.

Some of you went through the period we called *the wilderness of Coral Springs High School*. Do you remember that? Then in a moment, in an instant, we bought this property and not only did the city allow us to do it, the city said, "Listen, we need you here. We need to rent back your Sunday school rooms from you to put in a charter school. We'll expedite the permits. We will give you several hundred thousand dollars to help you build it out. We need you to buy this. We need you to buy it now. We want to get you in as soon as we can."

Here's what happens. You wait, and you wait, and you wait. You think, God, I thought this was you. I've got these promises that I'm bringing and now, it's impossible. I'm going to be the father of a great nation? I'm a hundred years old! Sarah is 90 and barren! Then the promise of God brings forth fruit. Here's what happens. We not only in that moment receive the promise, we encounter God in a way like we never imagined. We know God like never before.

Some of you are in a period of waiting. That is what patience is about. It is holding to the promises of God. My favorite passage on waiting comes from the Old Testament. Isaiah 40:31 says "...but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." The great promise is that we will be renewed as we wait for the Lord. The word here for waiting in the Hebrew is a word that originally meant to twist. It was a word that talked about taking strands and twisting them together to form a rope. The stress of that twisting would unite the strands into a rope. When we are waiting we feel like we are under stress. We begin to think that it is going to break us. But instead, it's binding our hearts to the promises of God and like a rope, tethering us to the Lord through his promises. God has a purpose in his waiting. Specifically here he tells believers; wait for the coming of the Lord. Wait for the Lord.

In every promise that's what we are waiting for. We are saying, Lord, I need you to show up. I need you to fulfill your promise.

James 5:8 — Establish Your Hearts

James says, "You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." He is talking about the coming of the Lord as the event when everything will be made right. There is no more tribulation, no more difficulty. Be patient and in the meantime establish your heart. That means to fix your heart, to give it support, to put yourself in a position where you are not wavering. The opposite of that is a fickle heart, a double-mindedness.

I loved the old King James version where Psalm 57: 7 is translated like this: "My heart is fixed O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." That describes something immovable. Ephesians 6 tells us to stand firm in the Lord. That's part of how patience looks.

Dads, it looks like this in your life; husbands, it looks like this: you try to lead. You are trying to initiate what you believe to be the will of God and it doesn't always go well. Sometimes you think, well maybe I don't have the goods. Maybe I'm doing it the wrong way. You might meet resistance. You might go through a season in life where your wife doesn't seem to be blessed by your leadership. Or a child emerging into adulthood is resisting your leadership. There are moments for every dad, for every mom, for every emerging adult child where you say, you know what? I'm done. That's it. I'm through. I'm through trying to help people who don't want to be helped. I'm through, just no more. That's the opposite of standing firm. That's the opposite of establishing your heart.

We patiently wait for the fulfillment of God's promises. It may not that we are having success in our role as a manager, as an employee, as a dad, as a child, as a pastor, or whatever it may be. In those times, you go to God and say "I'm tempted to quit, but my heart is fixed and I'm going to stand firm."

James 5:9 — Do Not Grumble

Do not grumble against one another. We all recognize this in ourselves, but isn't it interesting that we seldom think of this as a serious matter because culturally we kind of accept grumbling? We think that it is okay to grumble, especially if we live in an urban area with a lot of people and a lot of traffic and a lot of activity. It just seems to be the way we interact and converse. We mumble and grumble at one another and it's expected. In fact, if you go up to buy something at the counter, you may not get a warm greeting but you'll get a grumble like,

“oh, what a day I’m having.” You say, “Yeah, I know.” There you go. You just grumbled back and forth about how miserable life is. We seldom think of it like it is described biblically; it is sin; ultimately, it is complaining against God. The opposite of it scripturally is giving thanks. It’s one of the very few things biblically that we are told we should *always* be doing: giving thanks, in *every* circumstance. We are told to pray all the time and we are told to give thanks all the time in every circumstance.

I find it very convicting when I get around people who are very positive. They are just grateful people. It helps us to see that we don’t want to go through life grumbling and we definitely have some motivation here in verse 9, because James says don’t grumble so that you won’t be judged. He is identifying there that grumbling is an activity of judgment against others. Do you remember Matthew 7:1-2, where Jesus said, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you?” It sounds very similar to that here in James 5, but it’s talking about grumbling. The connection is this: When we grumble we are judging others, we are judging circumstances, and ultimately we are judging God. God tells us that it is not our place to judge. That’s not what you are supposed to be doing. You are in a place of giving thanks.

Now this is an important distinction. I’m going to give a really short parenthesis here. There is a good kind of judging and a bad kind of judging. There is a judging in scripture where we are told to discern when a brother or sister is in big trouble. They are in sin, they are going off the rails, and they are doing what’s wrong. We are to make a judgment and say, no — that’s wrong. We work to retrieve that brother or sister. But then there’s a kind of judging where we are judging others on important, but not essential matters. Let me say that phrase again: important but not essential matters.

The best passage in scripture that illustrates this is Romans 14. Paul talks about what we eat and what we drink and how we celebrate holidays and certain days. Romans 14:17 says “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but a matter of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” In that verse he makes some interesting statements. He tells us this: It’s good you’ve got conviction about these important matters. You should obey your conscience. You should do it with your whole heart. You should be fully convinced. It’s an act of worship how you eat. You do it to the glory of God.

Let’s use the controversy of diet soda to help us understand this. We have a choice as to whether we drink diet soda or not. Some believe that diet soda is bad for us, that it will hurt our bodies. Let’s say that I am fully convinced that it will not and I am comfortable drinking it, even though my body is the Lord’s. But God gives us more instruction. He tells us that if we are around someone who is offended by drinking diet soda that we

should not do it, because that person is more important than our freedom. But then he says this, this is at the heart of the passage, right in the middle of the chapter. *Do not judge*. Why? You will be judged. Your place is not standing in a place on secondary matters announcing judgment. Purpose not to make others stumble; obey your conscience, but don't get into a position of pronouncing judgment on others.

That is at the root of grumbling. Grumbling often is about important stuff, but it is judgment. We are basically saying you don't please me right now. I'm going through a tough time and you know what? It is really convenient just to blame you. If you were doing things differently, I would be happier. Ultimately we are grumbling against the Lord. Do not grumble.

James 5:10-11 — Remain Steadfast

James writes, "...we consider those blessed who remained steadfast." So the call here is a call to endure, to not give up. It's a little repetitive, but it's a different image and he gives here the example of the Old Testament prophets who often had very difficult ministries where they would do what was right, they would present the word of God, it wouldn't be accepted, and they were to keep being faithful and to endure. Famously, there is the example of Job, who didn't quit.

I have read a number of teachers and commentators who said that actually Job wasn't a great example of endurance. He did grumble. If you read the book of Job, he complained to his friends. I'm telling you, when I read that I wanted to say, give me a break! He loses everything. He's sick, sitting there scraping the sores on his body. He's still trying to find God. You have to remember Job didn't have the book of Job. He did not have the benefit of knowing what was going on in the court of heaven. Job is actually an encouraging example. He was wrestling with God. He was struggling with the circumstances of his life. He was reasoning with God and arguing with his friends in a severe trial, but he persevered. He remained steadfast. He did not give up.

We like to imagine growth always like a steady incline, always going up. Sometimes that happens, but other times it's like a staircase where we have a growth spurt and then we just try to protect that growth. We try to preserve it. We endure until another growth spurt comes, then we endure. I think that's true for churches. I think it's true for marriages. I think it's true for organizations. It's certainly true at times in our own lives. Sometimes it feels like every day I feel like I'm making a little progress, but clearly some days are not as good as yesterday, but we are growing, protecting, growing, and enduring.

We've examined four characteristics of patience: waiting, establishing your heart, not grumbling, and remaining steadfast. Let's now look at causes.

Causes

You can break this passage down into two main sections: *people*, in James 5:7-9 and *circumstances*, in James 5:10-11.

In the people section, James takes us to a point of climax where he tells us, don't grumble against one another. Most often the Greek word for patience here is a word that calls us to be longsuffering with other people. Ephesians 4:2 would be an example of that if you want to jot that down in your notes.

We are in a place where we need to be long-tempered in how we relate to others. People are slow to change. People are slow to make the progress that we might think they should be making. We are even at times frustrated with our own lack of progress.

In the circumstances section, he uses Job, the prophets, and again Job, to talk about how difficult their circumstances were and how they had to be patient in what we would describe as extremely difficult circumstances. I see both of these areas in my life as challenges, for me it is really circumstances that sometimes get me so frustrated.

We have a pitcher in the refrigerator; it's a water-filtration thing. You put water in it and the water filters down. I suspect that it is actually demon-possessed. It is just such a pain! You go to pour it and the flap doesn't open and the water goes everywhere. Then you think you fixed it and then you turn it over and the whole top comes out. Then the filter comes out. Beth will sometimes walk into the kitchen and she will hear me talking to it. "You are a moron, you stupid water filter!" I know you are thinking, "This man's a pastor?"

We can get very impatient with silly circumstances. I get terribly impatient when I get lost or I can't find my keys. Some of you are facing circumstances where my trivial examples are rather insulting. Your circumstances are a terminal disease or a broken relationship, prolonged unemployment, or a child who is far from the Lord and you are really scared. There is a gift that God wants to give to you, a gift of patience, because the book of James, in particular, tells us that if we try to do on our own what only God can do in his Spirit, we will just make it worse. So, we find here a very plain description and dissection of the things that irritate us, which leads us to needing a cure.

Cures

The causes point to the cures. Let me just say this: I think theologically, the great truth that James unfolds here is to look to the coming of Jesus. He says when Jesus comes back, when the second coming of Christ takes place, well, everything will be golden. Tribulation will be over. So, what I want you to do is, I want you to be patient and wait for the coming of the Lord. But as he holds out that big truth, he works in some application for us that I think we will find very practical. Let's revisit verses 7-9.

Here's the truth: a great reversal takes place in Jesus Christ. A great reversal takes place in Christ. Now, what do I mean? When you get to the end of these verses, there is something very disturbing that happens. James tells us not to grumble against other people because you will be judged. He ends that section with this phrase: "...the judge is standing at the door." It's the final door of history and the judge of the universe is about to walk through it and it's all over — then we stand before him and give an account. Now that picture should trouble us. But James is working with the knowledge of the gospel and this assumption: that Jesus Christ died on the cross and that if you trust in him the penalty of your sin has been paid. The judge himself has paid the penalty of your sin. A fantastic reversal has taken place so that now you are in a position where your sin is paid for and he has taken your place.

Friends, that leads us to a completely different understanding of how relationships work. It means I no longer view people as strictly resources for myself: I want you to meet this need, what can I get from you? No, Jesus Christ has done this for me. He has come and taken my place. He has given himself for me. Now I have everything in Christ, and that frees me now to live in a place where I am considering others. It's not about what others give to me; it's about the Christian spending his or her life to help other people. That's what Jesus said. If you invite someone to dinner, don't invite the person that can repay you. When you give a gift, do for others when they cannot do for you in return. That's the difference the gospel makes.

I want to illustrate that by going to 1 Timothy 1:15. This chapter illustrates for us in a beautiful way this truth of how there is this great reversal for us in Christ. 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...." If you are here and you are a Christian, when you hear that statement you should say, yes that's true. I fully accept that statement. Jesus came to save me from my sin. If you are here and you do not know Christ, I just want to push you toward that statement to say, accept him, accept this truth: Jesus Christ died on the cross for all who will believe in him, such that they might be forgiven of their sin.

We agree with this statement, but what follows is rather stunning. The apostle Paul continues in version 16, “But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience...” — what is our topic today? — “...as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”

Here is what Paul is saying. He says that his conversion was the greatest example of the patience of God because he was the greatest sinner. Consider just for a moment what Paul is saying. Here’s God: Infinite God. Infinite in power and wisdom and love and he creates mankind made in his image. And mankind rebels against him. We say, no, no, no, we are going to do it our way. We are going to be God. And we are separated from our maker.

And God says I am going to redeem them. I am going to buy them back. I am going to pay for their sin. He gives promises to a man named Abraham and he promises through a group of people called Israel; that he is going to send a Messiah. Then that Messiah comes and that Messiah is his own son: fully man, fully God, representing man, representing God. He lives a perfect life in the place of all who will be saved. He is crucified a cruel death. God waited patiently, waited — waited — waited, against all of the sin and offense against him, giving his own son to pay the penalty of that sin: crucified, raised.

And then this incredible expression of the love of God, the Spirit of God himself is poured out and the church is born in Acts 2. God is dwelling in people in the person of the Holy Spirit. Here is this little group of Christians, working, building, and along comes a Jewish rabbi named Saul. He’s young. He’s arrogant. He’s from God’s chosen. And he begins killing and persecuting these precious Christians redeemed by the blood of the son of God.

If you are God, do you not in that moment wipe out Saul? How do you not say, “That’s enough?” God in his mercy saves this man. While saving him he struck him blind for three days. He fills him with the Spirit of God. He writes half of the New Testament! The mercy of God!

Paul says his story is an example of your story if you believe in Christ. There you are, going along in your sin. God gives his son for your sin, pays the penalty. You repeat the sin, you are forgiven. You repeat the sin, you are forgiven — you are forgiven — you are forgiven. Attitudes, heart dispositions, you are forgiven, paid by the blood of Jesus. Then what? You are going to say to this person next to you, I’ve had enough, I’m done with you! It’s crazy. That is the cure. It’s the gospel coming in and saying, no, no, no. You’re never done, because I was never done with you. I redeemed you with the blood of my son.

I think in many cases God might give grace under the right circumstances for us to give our lives for one another. But I hate to say this: I don't know that I would ever give the life of one of my children for anyone. God has given the life of his son to redeem us. This reverses for us our whole treatment of people. We must be longsuffering. It takes time for people to change.

The Cure for Impatience in the Midst of Circumstances

God has a glorious and merciful purpose in your circumstance. That's his point here as he draws the section to a close. We know Job; we know how he remained steadfast and look at the glorious purpose that God fulfilled in his life. God had a purpose for Job. Then he highlights the mercy of God and ends with this description of the compassion and the mercy of God.

That's encouraging. I read the book of Job and his friends are debating with him. Basically Satan has an opportunity to take everything from him — everything. And he does, except his wife. It's probably not a good thing if Satan can take everything from you to persecute you and he leaves your wife. It's like the demons are taking everything and they go to take the wife and then say, no, leave her. It's not a commendation. I think God allowed that and that Satan left his wife, not because she was an evil woman, but because I think sometimes the hardest part about a trial is going through it with your loved one. You can't help and they can't help. It's a helpless feeling and it creates an incredible strain.

So here is Job going through all this trial, all this conversation, gets to the end, and do you remember the last few chapters of Job? Do you remember what God says to Job? Job meets with God and God talks about the stars, he talks about the elephants, and the whales, and the ostriches, and he goes through all of creation. What are you thinking if you are Job? What about me? But God is doing a glorious work of purpose that is actually a work of his mercy in Job's life. We will see it when Christ comes again. We won't always see it before Christ comes again. Sometimes it's not clear what we are going through, how it will end in the mercy of God.

I end with a story of a lady I met recently and her name is Beth Chase. Her story began with a man and a woman falling in love. They fell in love, they got married, and they had one boy and one girl. He was sent off to war in Korea. He had some devastating experiences there in Korea. He came back and was unable to adjust. Tragically, he took his own life. This woman, this single mom was left with two children. She moved to Seattle where she met a godly man, she met a Christian man. She was engaged to be married. Then one night in her home a stranger broke in and brutally beat her to the point of death and raped her. She survived only to

discover six weeks later she was pregnant. This woman decided in that moment that she belonged to God and that this child, though the product of a terrible sin, belonged to the Lord. So she put her life on hold. She postponed her wedding. She waited nine months, gave birth to a child, and put that little girl up for adoption in home of two wonderful Christian people.

That little child's name is Beth Chase. She lived a wonderful childhood, grew up, had a godly marriage, had children, had grandchildren, but incredibly, I met that woman because she led a planning retreat for Hope Women's Centers. Beth Chase today works with 1200 women's centers. She is one of the most prominent national figures in the fight for life, helping women overcome the trauma of abortion, helping abortion-minded women give birth to their children. The mercy of God! That he would take something so evil, so wicked, and bring something so glorious. I want to tell you, when this woman told me her story, she just started moving on and I said, "Wait, please stop!" That is incredible! The mercy of God!

Christian, some of you today are looking and you can just not make sense of the circumstances of your life. Wait on the Lord. Be patient. For you who are here and who have not found the joy and the mercy that are in Christ, I want to urge you — come to him today. He wants to bring about a reversal in your life to turn impatience into patience.