

“WAITING FOR CHRIST, WORKING FOR
CHRIST” // James 5:7-12//
Practical Faith

If you think about it, every modern invention, every technological progression is designed to do one thing: shorten how long we are waiting. We hate to wait. Think about it.

- Walking was too slow so we invented bicycles.
- They were too slow so we invented cars.
- They were too slow so we invented planes.
- Now Elon Musk is promising an atmospheric rocket that will travel at 18,000 MPH and take you from NYC to Tokyo in 60 mins.

- We don't want to cook our food so we invent microwaves. And then some people are just really weird and impatient and they just eat their vegetables raw— no butter or salt.

- We can't sit and watch a TV show, we need to binge it on Netflix, or DVR it so we can shaft the advertisers.

- Some of you right now are like, “How long is this sermon going to take?” I'm waiting on lunch.

We hate waiting. We aren't good at it. And we never use it as a complement. You never say, “Oh, I wish I was as good at waiting as him.” We want our children learn to wait, but we don't want to learn to be better waiters.

Everyone my age with little children are waiting the day when their children to grow and mature. Everyone with adult children tells me they wish they could go back spend one day with their little toddlers again.

Voltaire said, “We never live; we are always in the expectation of living.”

Darius Rucker, from Hootie and the Blowfish famously said, “There's two times a year: football season and waiting for football season.

So Voltaire, Hootie and the Blowfish, and the Bible. James begins his sermon, “Be patient.”

It's not the kind of sermon we want to hear. We'd much prefer a sermon like “How to Change Your Spouse Overnight,” or “Three Keys to Discovering the New You.” We live in a fast food world, and James serves us a slow cooked meal, and this slow cooked meal takes place over three courses, if you will. James gives us a command: be patient. He follows that command up with three figures. He shows us:

1. THE FARMER
2. THE JUDGE
3. THE PROPHETS

If you and I are going to grow into the kind of mature Christians that James calls us to be we have to attend to these three figures. First, let's see the farmer.

1. THE FARMER (5:7-8)

Fair warning—we're going to spend most of our time here.

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. (Jas 5:7-8).

When James desired to teach his church patience he chose a metaphor that everyone in his congregation would have instantly

understood. Farming. Now, most of us aren't farmers so let's think about what James is saying:

- James lived in a day that understood agricultural patience. You and I live in a time when we can have strawberries year-round. Not so for James.
- Today we have sprinkler systems—but in the first century you had to wait on your water.

You can imagine a father who has spent many seasons planting and harvesting crops in Israel. He knows when to plow, and when to sow. He knows that if you plant seed in October it will get two months of Autumn rain. April and May will bring a second rain.

But, his child doesn't have the benefit of the years of planting and harvesting. He sees his dad sow seed. He watches the autumn rain cause the seed to sprout. But then the season of dryness comes—the child throws his hands up and says, “Well, I suppose this year was a failure.” The dad smiles. The years have developed a patience in him. He knows that another rain is coming.

Illustration: Oliva planting beans.

Recently Olivia and I went down here to Lowes and bought some green bean seeds. We picked a spot in the back yard, turned over the soil and planted the beans. She got her little watering can out and watered the soil, and we went in.

A few hours later she came running up to me saying, “Daddy, let's go pick some beans.” I had to explain to her that we had done all that we could do. Now we had to wait.

Now, I want you to see exactly what James is saying. In using the picture of a farmer he's teaching you that there are **two sides to waiting. There's a waiting side and a working side.** It struck me in my study this week that James uses both **passive**

and **active** verbs to describe patience.

We typically think of patience only in a passive sense. We think patience is learning to do nothing when we want something to get done. We think patience is this passive waiting. **But James says it's working and waiting.**

Patience is Working

Look at verse 8. James says, “**Establish your hearts.**” That's an activity. It's not passive. It means to prop yourself up and be ready. It's the same word used when Jesus spoke to the church at Sardis in Revelation 3:

Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. (Re 3:2)

God does not call us to just sit around waiting. He calls us to serve him. He calls us to action. God created us for good works. Paul tells us:

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared **beforehand**, that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:10).*

What this means is that even when you feel like you're just waiting—God has preordained good works to flow out of your life, and if you are not pursuing him, and pursuing Godliness, and living a life that directs others towards his gospel then you aren't just living in disobedience—you are living in opposition to how you were created!

Have you established your heart? Have you set your course upon Jesus? Or, are you living in the wishy washy no commitment gray area that everyone else inhabits? Being patient doesn't mean just being passive. It means work.

Patience is also Waiting

Why does the farmer in James story wait? Because he knows that having done all that he can do, he must trust the harvest to something greater than himself. The seasons are working. The rain will come. The crop will grow. He trusts in something greater than himself.

James is saying the same thing should be true of your life. Having done all that God has called you to do, do not overstep your boundaries. Know the limits of what you can and cannot accomplish—and wait on something greater than yourself.

Just like the farmer can wait because he knows the rain is coming, so you can wait because the Lord is working and his return is soon.

I believe you and I need to hear this command to wait twice as often as we hear the command to work.

If you are someone who cannot sit still and wait, to a degree it shows that you don't trust God. You don't trust that he's working. You're self-reliant.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Ps 37:7)

The way God created the world, it takes a season to grow something. God could have made a world in which you could harvest beans the same day you planted them.

Listen friend, God has designed your life so that it takes a season to grow and mature and harvest spiritual fruit. It takes waiting.

My dad used to say, all the time, "Buddy, it takes a lifetime to make a disciple."

God created our church like a orchard, and every one of you is

like a tree that God wants to bear good fruit. And God is like a patient farmer. He's working on him, and he's working on her, and he's **really** working on that guy, and he's got overtime with this guy, right? He's got a lot of work to do.

And there are seasons where he's pruning, and there are seasons where he's nourishing, and there are seasons where he's feeding, and then there are seasons where we're growing and we need to be patient. You can't rush fruitfulness. You can't rush fruitfulness in your own life.

Here's the key: you are called to live in the tension between waiting and working. Do you hear me, church?

Some of us are simply "waiters"

We are not engaged in God's mission. God says to you, "Don't just stand there, do something!"

Some of us are impulsive control freak workers.

There's an old saying that goes like this:

"Pray as if everything depends on God, work as if everything depends on you."

Friend, if you work as if everything depends on you, you'll kill yourself. You'll never sleep. True Christianity prays as if everything depends on God, and works as if everything depends on God.

There are some things that God can only accomplish in you when you are passive and submission and you simply consent to his grace.

There are some things God can only accomplish in you when you, by his grace, engage and commit to disciplined action.

Right now, in our church, we are in a season of working. We're getting kid's ministry rolling. We're search for a worship person.

We're calling one another to greater faithfulness as we renovate our facilities. We're inviting people to church. We're discipling one another. That's all work. And it's good work. Let me just tell you—we've got a lot more ahead. We want to be a church that never settles for less than what God has called us to—and we believe he's called us to a high standard. We believe he's placed us on this hill because he has chosen our church to be light in this neighborhood. So, just get this now—we aren't slowing down. We aren't resting on our laurels. We want everyone within driving distance of us to come and hear the good news that Jesus saves. That's work.

Let me talk for a moment about waiting. As we work, as we spend our time and energy and money pursuing this mission that God has given us—we **must carve out a place for patient waiting on the Lord.**

The farmer does all he can. He tills, he sows, and he waits. There are so many things you and I can produce. We can paint rooms. We can start new programs. We can invite. But let me make something clear: **there are somethings only God can do.**

- We can preach and share the gospel but only God can work in the hearts of our lost neighbors to bring them to saving faith. I can't save anyone. So, you and I are to never measure our success by how many conversions we see in church. We can't control that. We must wait on him.
- We can form discipleship groups and Sunday School classes and teach one another how God requires us to live, but only God can mature people into Christ following disciples. You must patiently wait for God to mold and shape your brothers and sisters in Christ.

There is so much work left to do. There is so much that God has already done and only he can do as we wait. That's the farmer.

2. THE JUDGE

Now, James is a great pastor, and he knows what happens when people wait. You know what we do when we're forced to wait?

We grumble. James tells us to be patient, then he tells us not to grumble. Look at verse 9:

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. (Jas 5:9)

We grumble because our spouse hasn't yet become the person we want them to be. We grumble because our nation isn't the way we want it to be. We grumble because the traffic on HWY 49 won't speed up when they see us coming. Don't they know!? That's Jonathan! Let's part the Red Sea so he can come through.

You see, beyond being a good pastor, James is also a great theologian. James warns us about grumbling while we are waiting because the low rumble of our displeasure reveals a heart that thinks, "If I was sovereign, I'd run things better than God."

Paul Tripp puts it this way: "If you embrace the theology of the sovereignty of God, **then you would have to say that every moment of grumbling is, in fact, grumbling against God. You've never had a neutral grumble in your life.** Your grumbling is deeply theological. And it evidences a dissatisfaction with the sovereign plan of Almighty God."

You see, we dismiss grumbling lips as a sin of the mouth, while James is saying that grumbling is a deep sin of the heart. And we're in danger because the judge is at the door. His hand is on the latch.

3. THE PROPHETS

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.

¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. (Jas 5:10–12).

Having examined the farmer and the judge, James reminds us of the prophets generally, and Job specifically. You can read Job's story in the Old Testament. There's an entire book just dedicated to his story.

Job was a righteous man. He's constantly praying for his family. He was a healthy man. No sickness. No illness. He was a wealthy man.

And he was a man that God allowed, and even chose to suffer. Satan came to God and said, “Job only loves you because all the stuff you've given him. Take all that stuff away and Job will curse you to your face.” And God removed his hand of protection from Job's life.

Job had 7 sons and 3 daughters. In one day, he lost them all. Imagine that for a moment. You have a funeral and 10 coffins.

Next, he lost all his wealth. His portfolio shriveled. Imagine the loss of reputation he suffered in the city.

Finally, he loses his health. Boils break out all over his body.

The only thing he didn't lose was his wife. And she came to him and said, “Job, why don't you curse God and die!” Not an encourager.

Then all of his “friends” come to him and tell him the same stuff the stupid prosperity preachers say on TV today:

“Job, obviously, you've offended God. You haven't been faithful. You need to repent and have faith and God will restore your health and your wealth and your prosperity.”

Job rejects that foolishness and he struggles with God. If you go read Job you'll see that he isn't the most relaxed person as he waits on God. He struggles with God. He questions God. After chapters and chapters of struggle, God finally answers Job:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

² “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

³ Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

⁴ “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone,

⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:1–7).

And for a few chapters God dresses Job down. Two undeniable truths come out of Job's story:

#1 God has chosen for us to suffer.

I realize that for some of you, what I just said is tough to hear. Notice I didn't say that God has chosen for us to sin. But, he has chosen for us to suffer. He chose to allow Job to suffer. **He chose for us to live in a fallen world.** He chose to create a world that would require the suffering of his only Son to redeem it.

What this means is that your suffering isn't outside the powerful grip of God's sovereignty.

#2 Your suffering isn't an interruption to his plan—it's part of it.

Suffering doesn't halt the growth God desires for you—it's the very seedbed of that growth!

And listen, God isn't foreign to your suffering. He isn't distant. He isn't unaware. You see, in Christ, you have a God who takes his own medicine. On the cross, he actually bears **our** suffering.

Behold the man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers

It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection

Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

Church, because Jesus has suffered for your sin and mine—we'll never suffer for it. And that means that any suffering we do endure can actually become a blessing. Look at verse 11:

Suffering Can Be a Blessing

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. (Jas 5:11)

James says that those who suffer and persevere are to be considered blessed. Why? What kind of blessing could come to those who suffer and persevere?

Job actually tells us. At the very end, when God has questioned him up and down here's what we see in Job 42:

*Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' **I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.**" (Job 42:1-6 ESV)*

What is the blessed condition that patience and suffering produces? Here it is.

It's a blessing that you cannot purchase, and **it can only come to you through suffering.**

Patience is not just about what you will get at the end of the wait. Patience is about what you will become as you wait. Job never received an answer to "why", but he received something greater— a more intimate relationship with his God.