

Patience and Perseverance

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[0 : 00] Good morning, Watermark. Thank you for inviting me to speak this morning to bring the message from God's Word. It is a great privilege and honor, but it's also a great responsibility.

So I do thank you for placing your trust in me to bring the message from the Bible today. My name is Henry. I'm one of the members here, along with my wife, Florence. She's going to do the reading for us this morning. Just before we get into the reading, we're continuing in our studies in James. We've been looking through James chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and part of 5 last week. We're now in chapter 5. James is a small book in the New Testament, just five chapters, but it has been described as Christianity in overalls because it's so practical and tells us things about implications of how to live, implications for the gospel and how we live, like what we say and how we say it, how we spend our money, whether what we say we believe acts out in the way that we behave.

So those kinds of things are all there in James, and today's passage speaks of another characteristic of living the Christian life, and that is about patience and perseverance. I know the youth are with us today. Well, just a tip. As you get older, patience and perseverance do not get easier, but we all need to learn, and delighted to have the younger ones, the youth, with us today. So as Florence reads, look out for two words in the reading. Look out for the words patience and steadfastness. And Florence now will read from James chapter 5.

Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, 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 and sisters, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of 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.

But above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth, or by any other oath, but let your yes be yes, and no be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

[3 : 26] Thanks, Florence. So, patience and perseverance. Actually, modern living doesn't equip us well to live patiently. We don't like delayed gratification. We want everything, and we want it now. Instagram, WhatsApp, Food Panda, online banking, one-click purchases, even email, all are about quick, immediate responses. Yet, so much of life is about waiting. Waiting for exam results. Waiting for the exam results. Waiting for appointments. Waiting for the bus. Waiting for promotion. Waiting for a wedding date. Waiting for the right person to turn up in your life. Waiting for a baby. Waiting is part of life, isn't it? And here, James has plenty to say about patience, about waiting, about persevering through life as we handle our stresses and our frustrations, our difficulties and disappointments.

But just a caveat, as I start off. I need to say something about the scope of this talk. There are large-scale atrocities and injustices that need to be called out, but patience is not the correct response to those abuses, so I'm not talking about those today.

That isn't the scope of this talk. Neither is the scope of the talk about a proper expectation of high standards or of efficiency, for example, in the workplace. And I'm not talking about how to handle bad behavior or maybe laziness on the part of others. No, today the talk, the scope is quite narrow. I'm looking at it from a personal and an individual point of view and learning, hopefully, what James has to tell us about patience and perseverance from that personal and individual basis. I'm going to do it by asking three questions. Very simple. What is patience? Why should we be patient? And how can we be patient?

What is patience? Can we define patience precisely? Actually, as in many things, it's easier to explain it in the negative. My impatience is on show when I'm irritable, when I'm complaining, grumbling, restless, or giving up too easy, when I'm snappy, ungracious, or full of self-pity. We can spot impatience a mile off, but patience is quite often more difficult to observe. For example, my daughters tell me that they can see any exasperation that I'm experiencing just by one look at my face. I'm working on that one.

[6 : 32] But let's see what James has to say now about patience. He helpfully explains patience by using different words and by giving different examples of both patience and impatience. In verses 7 and 8, James simply says, be patient. This is showing forbearance, long-suffering, with the frequent ups and downs of life. Everyday living is full of frustrations and irritants. That bus that you were waiting for is late. WhatsApp is down. You can't find your keys just as you're about to leave. You caught COVID before an important exam. The money didn't come through. Plenty of irritants in life and frustrations.

James tells us, be patient. Don't grumble. Be quiet and accepting. Be patient with life. To illustrate this kind of patience, this gentleness, he uses the long-suffering of a farmer. A farmer who plants his seed and then just waits, waits for the rains to come, waits for the proper rains to come at the proper time. He had confidence that as he waited patiently, the rain would come.

And for that, he was using his own experience. It happened before. And he was also confident that God would bring the rain. That was James really echoing the broader promise of Scripture that when we live under the authority of God, that God does send blessings to us. And for the farmer, that means rain at the proper season, being confident that God was in control. Like the farmer who waited for the rains to come, James is saying, then you should also wait patiently for the Lord is coming. Wait for the Lord's coming. Wait patiently. So, that's the first kind of patience. Then there's a second kind of patience that James, another word James uses in verse 11 to describe a patient attitude when he talks about the steadfastness of Job. A little bit different, not quite the same. It's more nuanced. It's more about endurance or perseverance. It's endurance in the face of big problems, difficult circumstances.

And in this case, James links it to suffering, where he says, as an example of suffering and patience, we consider those who remain steadfast. Verse 10. So, this is about not losing heart, not giving up.

I've used the word endurance, perseverance, steadfastness. Where I come from, and many of you will know from my accent where I do come from, it's Northern Ireland, and they've got a word called stickability. You don't hear it much, but stickability is a really good description of this kind of patience that James is talking about here. It's not about losing heart. It's being patient and resilient when facing bigger issues that involve suffering. James's readers had been dispersed from Jerusalem and are now living throughout the known world, and he sends this letter to different groups of Christians who were suffering persecution from others, from the rich and from the powerful.

[9 : 56] But of course, your suffering could be a long illness. It could be a setback at work. It could be a family's estrangement. It could be not achieving your dreams. But in this kind of suffering, whatever the reason, James wants us to know that we should endure our hardships, persevere, and show patience.

In verses 10 and 11, so the example of the first kind of patience was the farmer waiting for the rains. The example of the second kind of perseverance or endurance is the Old Testament prophets and Job.

They were models of perseverance and endurance in the face of extremely difficult circumstances. Even through their extreme suffering, Job and the prophets remained steadfast. They didn't give up. They didn't lose heart. They didn't buckle under pressure. They saw it through to the end, and James says they were blessed. So that's another kind of patience. Tim Keller in one of his sermons on James says that these verses overall, this section, speaks to patience in life, patience with suffering, patience with others, and even patience with God. Patience with life, with others, with suffering, and with God. And I think he's right. And to properly handle what comes at us, we need to be patient both in the small things and in the bigger things too, to be long-suffering and steadfast. We need to be able to handle deliveroo getting the food order wrong or the flat tire on the car, as well as bigger issues, disappointments at work, or a serious medical diagnosis, or a relationship breakdown.

So as I've said, James describes patients in two ways, two types of patients. First, gentle, serene, long-suffering, and the second, perseverance and steadfastness despite our circumstances.

[12:04] So if that's what patience is, then it brings us to our next question, why should we be patient? One reason James gives for being patient is straightforward enough. He says, be patient until the coming of the Lord. And again, and that was in verse 7 and verse 8, he says, be patient for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Put simply, Jesus is coming back again, and that should affect the way that we live. Let me say that again. Jesus is coming back again, and that should affect how we live. You know, as Christians, we don't talk much about the Lord's return. We celebrate Christmas, so we think of his birth. Easter, we think of his death and resurrection, and we do that when we celebrate communion as well. We're all familiar that the Lord left earth and ascended, so we've got his ascension, but we don't talk much about the Lord's return, that Jesus is coming back again. Yet he said to them, I am coming back. The angels told his disciples as they stood there looking up into the sky when he left them, that he's coming back again.

And the last chapter of the Bible in Revelation 22, Jesus is recorded as saying three times, I am coming. I am coming. Surely, I am coming, he said. I am coming soon. Now, in that book, the book of Revelation, it's a strange book for modern readers. It's full of language. We're not used to apocalyptic literature. We're not used to its astonishing energy and imagery like red dragons and a slain lamb and a throne surrounded by a rainbow or four horses that are colored differently or a rider on a white horse with a sword in his mouth or golden streets in a city and gates of pearls or a nuclear type war. Revelation is a strange book. It reminds me of a story that Daryl Johnson, preacher and pastor, wrote in his commentary on Revelation. And he says, he tells a story about some seminary students, so some theological students who were renting out a gymnasium at a high school, and the janitor or the caretaker, the cleaner at the school, used to wait for them to finish their basketball game in the gym. And while he waited, he would borrow a Bible from one of the students as they played. So one day, one of the students thought, I'll ask him what he's reading. So he asked the janitor, oh, what are you reading? And he was surprised by the response he got, which was

Revelation. So then he thought, well, oh yes, you're reading Revelation. Do you know what it means? And the older man said, oh yes. So then he said, well, what does it mean? And he leaned forward and looked in his eye and whispered in his ear, it means Jesus is going to win.

Yes, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Yes, he died and rose again outside Jerusalem. And yes, he is coming back. And when he comes back, he will come back as king and savior and as judge. You see, whatever wrongs need to be put right, whatever justice needs to prevail, whatever oppression needs to be overthrown will happen when Jesus returns. Christians look forward to that day. Jesus is going to win. And this is the next event in the historical salvation timetable. We've had Jesus' birth. We've had his death. We've had his resurrection. We've had his ascension. And now we wait for his return. Jesus is coming back. And that's why James wrote, the coming of the Lord is at hand. And Revelation assures us that when he comes, he will make all things new. And James says, that's a reason why you can be patient, why you can endure and live in the face of difficulties, suffering, persecution, and oppression. We don't have to take revenge on people that have done wrong to us. We don't have to get our own back or get even because Jesus is coming back. We're on his side.

[17:01] He's going to win. One author has put it like this. Sam Albury writes, the coming of Jesus will not merely be an in-house event for his own people by which they're able to join him for eternity. It will be a global and cataclysmic event. It will herald the judgment of all sin and the righting of all wrongs.

Knowing the end with confidence makes it possible to bear something otherwise unendurable. James writes, be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Verse 8. Then in verse 9, James gives us another reason for being patient. It's not quite so obvious, yet it's very relevant. Here we have the example of grumbling against another as a serious form of impatience. Grumbling. But everybody does that. It's part of being human. Yes, I get the bit about being more patient or gentle or gracious, but what's so bad about grumbling? It's human nature after all, isn't it? Why does James say that it will be judged and the judge is standing at the door as if it's just about to happen? Grumbling? I think James is putting his finger on something really important here, and we'll get to the bottom of it if we think of a few examples of our grumbling.

What do we grumble about? The MTR doors closed just as I got there. That guy, he cut in right in front of me. I deserved a better grade after all the work I'd done. She doesn't understand me. He just ripped me off, that guy. Those kinds of things, everyday problems, and we grumble about them because we see them through our own lens. We see them about how it affects me, how I'm being treated, how I lost out, how I'm being disrespected, how this puts me at a disadvantage.

[19 : 22] Now, Jesus said that the two most important commandments were to love God and to love others. And when we grumble, we're not loving God or loving others. Who are we loving? I'm loving me when I'm grumbling. We're loving neither God or others. Grumbling is all about me. I'm not thinking about the other person. I'm not thinking about God's interests. When I grumble, I'm only looking after myself. I'm self-absorbed when I'm grumbling. And the more we grumble, the more we develop that pattern of looking out for our own interests instead of looking out for the interests of others.

Did we even think about the other person that we grumbled about? Maybe it was their first day on the job. Maybe they're new to this. Maybe their child is sick or being bullied at school. Maybe they inadvertently sent that email when they were sitting in the doctor's surgery waiting for a report. Maybe their husband is having an affair. Consider the other person. I'm not perfect either. So James says, don't grumble. Don't concentrate only on me. Because when I grumble, it really asks the question, so who is Lord of your life, Henry? Who's in charge? Who do you say owns you, Jesus?

And you're grumbling like that? Or have I taken Lordship back and now I'm in charge of my life. I'm in control again. Always finding fault. Nitpicking shows who's really in control of your life. It's you. So don't gripe all the time. Don't plot revenge, James says. Don't complain. Don't be self-absorbed. Instead, be patient. Do not grumble. The judge is standing at the door. In a nutshell then, being impatient says that I'm the most important person here. Others should be looking out for my interests. I'm the top of this pile. Don't get in my way. Bring the food on time. Make sure it's hot.

[21 : 38] And by the way, open the MTR doors again so I can get in. But that's not how a follower of Jesus ought to live. And so this brings us to the third question. How can we be patient? How then can I be patient? James says, remember the examples of Job and the prophets who showed patience in the face of suffering and opposition? The key principle here is steadfastness. Steadfastness. Other translations, English translations use the word perseverance or use the word endurance. And I've suggested we could use the word stickability. The prophets remained on the job and didn't give up. Think about Jeremiah. His job was to tell faithless the nation, faithless Israel, that God was going to judge them.

And what was worse, they were going to be judged by their sworn enemies, the Babylonians, and they were going to be carried off into captivity. And the Israelites didn't like that message from Jeremiah. They thought he was a traitor. They threw him in prison and put a death sentence on his head. And James says, think about the prophets when you want to think about being steadfast. Or who else? Think about Hosea. He had the shame and pain of discovering that the woman that God had told him to marry went back to a life of prostitution. The prophets didn't have it easy.

They endured in the face of suffering, but despite their personal suffering, they stood firm. They stood faithfully with God in their task. They were solid. They didn't shrink from their responsibility. They didn't lose heart. They didn't give up on God when the going got tough. What about you? What about me? When things don't go as I hoped or as I expected or as I even prayed, prayed for, do I stand firm or do I slink off? Maybe I think God has let me down, so I'll just abandon the whole thing. I'll just walk away from it, turn my back on it. But we can think about those difficulties and frustrations in another way. Perhaps this testing time, this relationship breakup, those financial losses, that illness, they're supposed to strengthen you and me.

Didn't James earlier say in chapter 1, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds? For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Maybe those things have been given to you for a purpose. Sebastian gave us a very graphic example of that just a few minutes ago. Now, this isn't stoicism. This isn't gritting your teeth and tightening your tummy.

[24 : 43] This isn't fatalism or resignation because here God is in the picture. That's the difference. He knows what's happening. The prophets were serving God. Os Guinness, one of my favorite authors, wrote what I think is going to come up on the screen in a moment, one of my favorite quotes.

It says, faith may not know why, but it knows why it trusts God who knows why. That's the difference.

God is in it. We don't persevere because we're strong. It's because God is on the throne of the universe. He's sustaining us and He is with us. Therefore, what's happening is an opportunity, an opportunity for me to develop patience and endurance and steadfast under God's direction and care and love. This trial by fire, this difficulty, this relationship that's problematic, this conflict at work, this frustration, they've been measured by God and they're for my good.

Paul wrote something similar when he wrote his letter to the Roman Christians. We rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope. Maybe that's why some of these things come your way so that you can have the hope that's been produced from your character, that's been produced by showing that endurance, perseverance that has been, that has come out of the suffering. And so along with the prophets, then James uses another example of perseverance and that is Job. We just had a whole series on teaching on Job. So just a quick summary here, I suppose. We discovered that Job complained a lot, but although he pleaded his blamelessness, he's a model of patience. We talk about the patience of Job after all, don't we? And he protested to God. He protested a lot. But his most outspoken utterances, while there were protests, who were they protesting to? It was to God. He was praying to God. He was asking God for help. He was asking God to intervene. He laid hold upon God. Job never abandoned God or walked away from him. In fact, Job is the one person in the Bible that tells us that it's okay to complain to God, to protest, to say, what is happening? Be with me. Give me a sense of your presence.

Let me know you're here, God. Let me know you're real, because I'm going through a difficult time. But don't let go of God. It's okay to protest to God. And if you must complain to anyone, then complain to God. Listen to what Job said. These are wonderful, wonderful words.

[27 : 46] They should grip our hearts this morning. Job said, but he, God, he knows the way I take. When he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. He knows the way. God is in this. I'm involving God.

I'm not being stoic or fatalistic. I'm a believer in God. And when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. That's patience. That's endurance. Trusting that God is in control and that under God, things will turn out for the best. Timothy Keller puts it like this, the only things faithful people can lose in suffering are things that are finally expendable.

The real you, the one God is creating, cannot be harmed. That idea is steadfast faith.

It's not being stoic. It's surrendering to God. Now, maybe you're thinking, oh, well, that's all good, Henry. Yeah. Take, take, take. I agree. Yeah. I'll go along with all that. When it comes to patience and perseverance, yeah, I'm not really very proud of myself. I'm like the school report that says must do better. So we think that with a bit more effort, with a bit more intentionality, a bit more self-discipline, that we, a bit more effort that we'll get there. But that's not how it works.

This is not a talk on self-help or self-actualization. Patience and perseverance in life with others in suffering and even with God needs God's intervention. We can't do it by ourselves. That's why we pray when we're irritable and unpleasant and impatient, when we lose it with our children, when we say some horrible things to our spouse, or when we feel like chucking the whole, chucking the whole thing in.

[29 : 58] That's when we need to pray. That's when we need to process our struggles through prayer. And when we talk to God about it, we need to ask Him to give us the right attitude, that we will grow in gentleness and love and peace and kindness and patience. Do those words seem familiar? They're the fruit of the Spirit, aren't they? And we need God's Spirit to help us grow in patience and kindness and gentleness and goodness. In other words, in changing our attitude from self-absorption to the way God wants us to be, we need God's help. We need God's Spirit to come and act in our lives.

And so that's the example of Job, the example of the prophets, like those who James refers to as waiting for Jesus' return, for the farmer who waits for the rain, then we should be all able to say, like Jeremiah, the words that are coming up now, because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed.

For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, the Lord is my portion. Therefore, I will wait for Him.

The Lord is my portion. Therefore, I will wait for Him. And so after answering our three questions, I want to just pivot a little bit here to consider a Bible verse that says this, Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Looking to Jesus. What do we find when we look to Him? How did He counter the taunts, the ridicule, the badgering, the scorn, the intimidation, the derision, and the torture that He faced? [32 : 17] And so this is our last question today. How did Jesus respond? We read just immediately afterwards in Hebrews chapter 12 that it was for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.

He didn't call those 10,000 angels that He could have done to rescue Him from the Roman soldiers. He was patient. He endured.

He was long-suffering. He fully acted out God's character that is mentioned over and over and over again in the Bible. He was slow to anger.

And why? Why was Jesus like that? For the joy set before Him. What joy? What joy is there going to a Roman crucifixion?

What joy is there to be brutally put to death? What joy did He anticipate? The joy of having you and me by His side in heaven, in His kingdom.

[33 : 32] The joy of redeeming a multitude of people for Himself. The joy of bringing many sons and daughters to glory.

He showed patience, restraint, endurance for you and for me. And perhaps in the end, this is the greatest reason of all for showing patience and perseverance.

For not being impatient and not losing heart when it comes to life and to others. And to suffering and to God. When we're impatient, restless, grumbling, complaining.

We've allowed our ego. It's all about me. To have the upper hand. What do our spouses, our children, our colleagues, our neighbors, our casual acquaintances think when we have a meltdown?

When we lose it? When we swear? When we can't keep our tongues from saying toxic things? Well, they certainly don't think there's someone that belongs to Christ.

[34 : 44] There's a person who shows Christ's humility, the kindness and love of Jesus. Verse 12, and this is the last verse and we're coming toward the end. Verse 12 in our passage today.

James says, Let your yes be yes and your no be no. So that you will not fall under condemnation. There's the judge standing at the door again.

Condemnation. Hey, it's just what I'm saying. It's just the odd grumble. It's the... It's... But what is it? Rash speech.

Swearing. Harsh, angry words. And impatient grumbling have the capacity to spoil everything. Jesus said that as we speak out of the abundance of our hearts.

So what comes out is what is really inside. What do your words say about you? James is trying to get us to look inside and to see ourselves. To self-examine.

[35 : 42] To see why we are impatient and why we lose heart. Is my trust in God or have I taken over control of my life again? To see why... To see that what is inside isn't really very nice.

It needs to be changed. And it needs God's help and God's intervention to change it. And so, am I looking forward to Christ's return?

Am I one of the redeemed? If I am, my life should show it. As we finish, let me just summarize what we've learned from James this morning.

We know that the big picture is that Jesus is coming back and he will set everything right. Jesus is going to win. We know that on the cross, Jesus was slow to anger when he prayed for his executioners.

We know that in the face of frustrations and suffering and stress, we should be long-suffering and steadfast. That we're not the most important person on the planet.

[36 : 51] We know that we need to process our disappointments and our frustrations, our stresses, and our suffering through prayer. And most of all, we need to want to become like Jesus.

To be patient and steadfast like him. And so, we look to him if we belong to him. To be patient like he was and endure.

Because in him we see love and patience and kindness and goodness and gentleness. And we want to please him. I don't know where each of you is on your spiritual journey.

Whether you would say, I've known Jesus all my life and I trust him. Or whether you're still on that journey wondering about faith in Jesus.

Or whether you've been there and you're thinking about abandoning it. I don't know where you are in the journey. James tells us to be patient and to be steadfast.

[37 : 58] So, I'm going to put up some reflection points on the screen. And then after that, Julian will come and lead us in another song. Points for reflection.

Whether you're on that journey of faith, just started out on it, or aren't quite there yet. How am I doing in patience and perseverance? Will I pray to God for help and transformation in my life? And lastly, am I looking to Jesus, eagerly awaiting his return? One final word. The second last verse in the Bible, in the book of Revelation, is the word Maranatha.

And it's John who is writing. And John is saying these words. Come, Lord Jesus. May that be our prayer today as well.

Thank you. Thank you. Thanks, God.