

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. 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.

James 5:7-12

A story is told of a man who walked into a medical clinic and the receptionist asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." So she took down his name, address, medical insurance number and told him to have a seat. *Fifteen minutes* later a nurse's aide came out and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." So she took down his height, weight, a complete medical history and then took him wait in an examining room. *A half-hour later* a nurse came in and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." So she took his blood pressure and drew some blood for the lab and then told him to take off all his clothes and put on an open-in-the-back gown and wait for the doctor. *An hour later* the doctor came in and asked him what he had. He said, "Shingles." The doctor said, "Where?" The man said, "They are outside in my delivery truck. Where would you like me to put them?"

Patience. The Cambridge English dictionary defines patience as “the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties, or to suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed.” That would surely define the patience of the man who patiently endured, as he was treated as a patient with shingles rather than a delivery man who sought to deliver shingles. While this story that is told is most likely not true, *what is true* is that life is full of situations that test our patience - and it is also true that, for the most part, we as individuals and as a culture are not very good at patience. We like things to be done fast or at least according to our time frame – whether it be waiting in a doctor’s office or waiting for a traffic light to change or waiting in line to be checked out at the grocery store or waiting for a promotion at your job or waiting to hear your test results from the hospital or waiting for an apology from the one who hurt you or waiting for God to answer your prayers.

As fallen created beings who live in a fallen world, *waiting* is our collective common experience. God is the creator and keeper of time and He has ordained that life on earth measured in seasons of time. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that, “*there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*” We read these words and think about all of the seasons and times that we all experience in life – but then we also must consider all of the seasons and times of waiting *between* all of the seasons and times spoken of here. Seasons and times of waiting are where the rubber meets the road between the providence of God and our human expectations of not only *what* will happen to us in life, but also of *when* things happen to us in life - which is often the cause of great disappointment, frustration, and anger on our part, *because* it exposes the reality that we are really not in control of the things in life that really matter. This is the context of today’s passage which flows out of last week’s passage where James told us we’re not to live out our lives pridefully thinking that we are in control every detail and every event of every day.

Last week we learned in James that we must constantly and consistently battle against our common propensity to seek after the comforts and securities and possessions that the world offers us. We were also reminded that we are to always rely on God as a God-dependent people and reject the arrogance of independent self-sufficiency, and humbly consider what our hearts do truly treasure and what our lives reflect as we walk through the times and seasons of our days on earth. We see the context of last week's message as James opens today's text by saying: *"Be patient, therefore"* – the *"therefore"* pointing us back to James' warning of God's future judgment on those in the church who arrogantly believed they were in control and loved the treasures of this world more than they loved God: *"Weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days"* (James 5:1-3).

The mood changes in our text for today as James moves from warning those who were causing the struggles and conflict within the church with their prideful attitudes and actions - to those who were humbly suffering the effects of the relational struggles and spiritual war that were ongoing within the body of Christ. Here again, James exhorted them to pursue the spiritual maturity of a *living faith* in Jesus Christ when he says right up front: *"Be patient."* Remember that this was James' counsel to these folks at the beginning of his letter: *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing"* (James 1:2-4). Now, at the end of his letter, James reminds them to *"Be patient."* And what that means, in the context of the warning of God's future judgment on those in the church who believed they were in control and who loved the treasures of the world more than they love God, is that those who pursue and embrace a spiritually mature living faith in Jesus Christ can "be patient" in times of struggle and suffering, *because* even though God is not currently making right all the things that are wrong in this world, someday God will do so on the day of His judgment when Jesus Christ returns.

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord" (James 5:1). The power of patience available to us in times of pain, struggle and conflict is the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ who ascended into heaven, and who will someday return to this world take those who possess a living faith in him to their eternal home with him in the glory of heaven, as by God's wrath and by God's grace God not only makes everything right that has been wrong, but also glorifies everyone who joyfully loves Him as their greatest treasure. This is the *"blessed hope"* we read of in Titus 2:11-14: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."* The reality is, we who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior should *not* expect to have everything easy and comfortable in our lives. The apostle Paul spoke of this in Acts 14:22 when he reminded us that *"through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."* We see also this in John 16:33 when our Lord Jesus said: *"In the world you will have tribulation"* - but he then also went on to say, *"But take heart; I have overcome the world!"*

The patience we can have in times of trials, struggles and suffering *is the power of the living faith that we have been given in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.* James uses the word *"patient"* or *"patience"* four times in our text for today (James 5:7-8, 10) all of which come from the Greek word that means "to be long-tempered" in respect to people. The words *"steadfast"* and *"steadfastness"* in James 5:11 both reflect the concept of patience in that in the original Greek the words mean "to remain under" in speaking of endurance under great stress in respect to conditions or situations.

The New Bible Dictionary defines patience as “God-given restraint in the face of opposition or oppression.” What this means is that patience is only necessary in the face of conflict. This is why seeking patience, in its greatest biblical sense, is a *battle* - and our only hope is knowing that our patience is a God-given restraint. God is the only one who can provide us with the spiritual armor we need to go into the war that is opposing us, both from within us and from without. What this also means is that patience is more than just mere endurance, because we are not able to exercise God-given restraint in our own strength, and so we must *actively exercise* our living faith in God through Jesus Christ, so that we might have the strength to hold on, in times of opposition and oppression.

How is this God-given restraint of patience in times of opposition and oppression given to us? The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5:1-5: “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” By the grace of God, we receive the God-given restraint of patience when we come to a living faith in Jesus Christ and then are filled with the Holy Spirit. The ultimate source of the God-given restraint of patience in our lives *is within us!* Our role in all of this is to give our lives to God by obediently surrendering our hearts to Jesus, so that God would then pour His love “*into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” – so that in times and seasons of trials or struggles or pain or conflict or opposition and oppression we can know that the reality of our ultimate hope in all of life is not in ourselves and not in people and not in any of our circumstances but rather in power of the God-given restraint of patience that trusts in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, who will someday fulfill the promise of God to right all wrongs, to restore what’s been lost, to heal what’s been broken, and to cleanse all of creation from its sin.

And so as we take a closer look at our text for today, we again see have seen all throughout this letter, that James is once again one of the most practical and pragmatic writers in the Bible, as he answers an unasked but implied question: How can we as born-again followers of Jesus Christ experience the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance as we wait for the second coming of Lord? James answers the question by sharing with us three encouraging examples of the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance that come from the Word of God itself.

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. James 5:7-9

The first example of one who reflects the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance is person whose work is spoken often throughout from the Bible, and that person is a “*farmer.*” If you are impatient, you had better not become a farmer. Farmers must have patience with the seed and the crop, for it takes time for plants to grow. No crop appears overnight (except for the weeds), and no farmer has control over the weather. Too much rain can cause the crop to rot, and too much sun can burn it up. An early frost can kill the crop. Jewish farmers understood this even more so in that in Palestine they would have plow and sow in what to us are the autumn months. The “early rain” would soften the soil. The “latter rain” would come in the early spring (our February–March) and help to mature the harvest. The farmer had to wait many weeks for his seed to produce fruit. The agrarian picture here reflects that we are to be spiritual farmers working and waiting for a spiritual harvest. There are seasons to our spiritual life just as there are seasons to the soil. Sometimes, our hearts become hard and God has to plow before He can plant the seed of His Word. And when He does He then sends the sunshine and rains of His grace to water and nurture the seeds He’s planted.

And it's here where we need to seek the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance. You see if we are truly patiently pursuing a spiritually mature living faith in Jesus Christ, God will ultimately produce a spiritual harvest in our hearts and lives. He wants the *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"* of the *"fruit of the Spirit"* to grow (Galatians. 5:22-23) - and the only way God can plow, plant and water the seed of God's Word into the cold, hardness of our fallen hearts is through the opposition, oppression, trials, struggles, pain, and conflict He sends and allows to come into our lives. Instead of growing impatient with God or with ourselves or with one another, we must patiently wait and humbly yield to the Lord and let His fruit grow. Just like farmers, we must patiently live, work and wait by faith - looking toward the future spiritual harvest that we will know in part here on earth, but fully know when Jesus returns.

James speaks of the second coming of Christ three times in these three verses - the last of which he speaks of our Lord Jesus returning as the Judge about to enter the hall of justice: *"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door."* He says this to us to warn us that a critical, judgmental attitude toward *"one another"* cuts the power off the power of the God-given restraint of patience from being fed by the Holy Spirit. The word "grumbling" here means "to groan within oneself" which describes an attitude of criticism and involves the development of faultfinding against one another. God is telling us here that he will judge and punish "grumblers" because such things are in direct contradiction to spirit of God. In some parts of Mexico hot springs and cold springs are found side by side. The women often boil their clothes in the hot springs and rinse them in the cold springs. In one such place a tourist, who had been watching this procedure, remarked to his Mexican friend, "Guess they think old Mother Nature is pretty generous." His friend replied "No, senor. There is much grumbling because Mother Nature - she supplies no soap." Most often it does not take very much to make us grumble, even in light of the all the blessings we all have from God. Benjamin Franklin once said: "Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain, and most fools do." God help us from becoming grumbling fools!

Some years ago, a study was done by an agricultural school in Iowa. It reported that production of a 100 bushels of corn from one acre of land required 4,000,000 lbs. of water, 6,800 lbs. of oxygen, 5,200 lbs. of carbon, 160 lbs. of nitrogen, 125 lbs. of potassium, 75 lbs. of yellow sulphur, and other elements too numerous to list. In addition to these ingredients are required rain and sunshine at the right times. Although many hours of the farmer's labor are also needed, it was estimated that only 5 percent of the produce of a farm can be attributed to the efforts of man. This is even more true, in a spiritual sense, when it comes our own efforts in producing spiritual fruit. In John 15:4-5 Jesus said: *"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* In Ephesians 2:8-10 the apostle Paul said: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* A farmer plows and plants and then patiently waits for God to send rain and sunshine to produce the harvest He desires for the farmer. May we faithfully work and patiently wait for God to produce His fruit in us.

*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke
in the name of the Lord. James 5:10*

James shares with us a second example of those who reflect the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance in God's Word - which are the *"prophets."* All throughout the Old Testament we read of the suffering and patience of the prophets who pursued a spiritual mature living faith in God by speaking on behalf of God. The prophets well illustrated the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance in times of opposition, oppression, trials, struggles, pain, and conflict.

In Matthew 5:10-12 Jesus used the prophets as an example of victory the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance over persecution, opposition, oppression, trials, struggles, pain, and conflict: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness 'sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* Biblical history tells us that the prophets of God were instrumental in proclaiming and fulfilling the greatest work of God in all of history – which is the redemption and restoration of fallen humanity, through the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, on a cross, in our place, for our sins, so we might be forgiven and given a new life and live with God in heaven forever. But biblical history also tells us that the prophets of God were opposed and persecuted and put to death – reflecting the reality of what would ultimately happen to Jesus, the greatest prophet of all.

The same is true for us, as followers of Jesus. In John 15:18-20 Jesus said: *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”* The prophets obediently followed the will of God, yet they suffered and were persecuted; when we obediently follow the will of God, we will suffer and be persecuted also. Many of the prophets endured great persecution and suffering, not only at the hands of those who rejected God, but also at the hands of those who professed to love God. If we are following Jesus, the same thing will happen to us also. The prophets knew the presence and power of God in times of persecution and suffering. The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God is not with us. The apostle Paul wrote of this very thing in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 when he said: *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”* Regardless of our circumstances, we can patiently trust God is with us.

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, 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. James 5:11–12

The third and last example James shares with us regarding those who reflect the power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance in God’s Word is “*Job*.” James introduces Job by first saying: *“Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.”* In other words: “Think about this: we cannot patiently persevere unless there is a struggle, conflict or trial in our lives.” What this means is that there can be no victories without battles; there can be no high mountain peaks without deep valleys. If we want the blessing of God in the midst of persecution, opposition, oppression, trials, struggles, pain, and conflict - we must be prepared to seek the power of God to know the patience of God, to carry the burden of God to, fight the battle for God. In this context, James points us to Job. The power of the God-given restraint of patient endurance of Job under severe trial is legendary. The Book of Job is a long tedious book, the chapters filled with God and Satan and people and pain and loss and accusations and anger and sorrow and lament as at first Job loses his wealth, his health and his family, except for his wife, who told him to commit suicide; and then Job debates three of his friends addressing their false allegations against him; and finally we read of his deliverance as God honors Job’s faith and gives him twice as much as he had before. In studying the experience of Job, we need to remember that Job had no idea about what was going on behind the scenes between God and Satan that caused all the pain in his life. When Job’s life disintegrated, his friends saw it as God’s just punishment and accused him of being an unfaithful hypocrite. In the end God himself rebuked Job’s friends because the purpose of Job’s pain was *transformational* rather than *punitive*.

It is difficult to find a greater example of suffering than Job. Yet, Job patiently endured. Satan predicted Job would get impatient with God and abandon his faith, but that didn't happen. While Job did question God's will, he never abandoned his faith in God; We see that in Job 13:15 when he said: *"Though he (God) slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face."* But we also see the faith of Job in Job 19:25-27: *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me."* The foundation of Job's questioning of God's will and his friend's accusations of his unfaithful hypocrisy was the covenant God had made with Israel that He would bless them if they would obey His Laws (Deuteronomy 11) which led to the belief that wealthy and comfortable are blessed of God, and the poor and suffering are cursed of God. The Book of Job refutes that; Job was a righteous man, and yet he suffered. Job teaches us God has His higher purposes in suffering than the punishing of sin.

"Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast." God did not answer Job's questions regarding *why* he was suffering for 37 chapters. But in chapter 38 Job's suffering ended when God appeared and spoke to Job - and in humble repentance Job grew to know God in new and deeper ways. In the remainder of the book we read God *"blessed"* Job's patient endurance by restoring his friends, family, health, and fortune, - and he lived another 140 years and saw four generations of his family. It's been said that "the wings of transformation are born of patience and struggle." Job found that to be true; James is telling us that is true for us also. Every follower of Jesus will be blessed when we seek the power of God-given restraint of patient endurance offered to us by the Holy Spirit who lives within us. From the beginning to the end Jesus is powerfully with us!

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. James 5:12

These words seem strangely out of place. What does "swearing oaths" have to do with the patient endurance in suffering? Well, if you have ever suffered, you know the answer: when you are going through pain and suffering, it's easy to say things you do not mean or try make bargains with God. In speaking again of the danger of the tongue, James reminds us that in his struggles Job cursed the day he was born, but he never cursed God or bargained with God. *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* May the words of our mouths at such times be like the apostle Paul: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God"* (Romans 8:18-19).

The explorers Lewis and Clark faced incredible hardships during their famous expedition across the wilderness of North America. Upon reaching the Missouri River they thought the worst was over - then they saw the Rockies. Instead of the easy ride downstream they'd expected, they faced their biggest challenge. They wondered if they should just go back or if they should start climbing. Well, history tells us they just went on and climbed ahead. And when they finally reached the ocean they realized that conquering the Rockies gave them the confidence they needed for what they faced later on. God sovereignly allows and divinely ordains hard, painful, difficult circumstances, people, and things to come into our lives, so we might grow to know God in new and deeper ways. *"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord"* (James 5:1). Like the farmer, we are to patiently plow, plant and water as we wait for the fruit of God's spiritual harvest. Like the prophets we are to patiently endure opposition when we share and live out the Word of God. Like Job we are to patiently allow God to do His deeper work within us for His greater purpose in times of suffering. May we each, as individuals, and all of us together, come to know the power of the patience of God-given restraint in the midst of all of our struggles, knowing that Jesus is with us and he will return!