

James 5:7-20 ~ Patience and Prayer ~ Leader's Guide

1. In Verse 5:7, several translations read, "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord." Why does James start this section with the word "therefore" or "then?"

It ties it to the previous section. This is his conclusion to the warnings just before. "Therefore, since there is no future in speaking against each other, making plans on your own, or clinging to your wealth, what are you to do when pressed and discouraged in the midst of ongoing or difficult trials? You are to be patient until the coming of the Lord."

2. When a farmer patiently waits for his crops to grow, does he do nothing?

No. A farmer doesn't just go on vacation after spring planting and hope for the best. There is much work to be done to ensure a good harvest: weeding, cultivation, fertilization, thinning, irrigation.

3. What is the parallel between the farmer waiting for the harvest and us waiting for the coming of the Lord? (Galatians 6:9)

We must wait patiently, but while we are waiting there is much work to be done to advance God's kingdom. Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith looking toward an unseen future reward for their labors.

Galatians 6:9 – Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

4. When James says in Verse 5:8 "the coming of the Lord is near" (or at hand) does this mean that James thought that Jesus would return in his lifetime and was wrong? (Hebrews 10:25, 1 Peter 4:7, Romans 13:11)

We don't know. But this verse means that Jesus' second coming is always, eternally at hand and that his coming back should be closer, nearer, and more real to us than any other event that we have planned for or are waiting for. It is the reality around which we should orient our lives. His coming truly has been near (or at hand) throughout Christian history.

Heb 10:25 – Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

1 Peter 4:7 – The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

Romans 13:11 – And do this [love one another], understanding the present time. The hours has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

5. In discussing patience, why does James insert a seeming incongruous thought about grumbling against one another in Verse 5:9?

When things don't come to pass as you hope or expect, it's tempting to blame someone else. Blaming others is easier than taking responsibility. Furthermore, when we are grumbling against one another, our focus is not on God's reality and work in our lives but on the inequalities we see as we focus on those around us.

Note that James doesn't qualify this command. He doesn't say, "don't grumble unless you have a good reason to." When we are grumbling, we are unable to receive God's peace and we are unable to give (or receive) a blessing from another person. When we grumble we are not content with God's work in our lives and in those around us. Here, James is calling for us to have patience toward believers as well as unbelievers.

6. "Grumbling" is not specifically prohibited in the ten commandments. What does James say will happen if you grumble against a brother? (Matthew 7:1-5).

By "grumbling" James means blaming someone else and not taking responsibility for your actions (or lack of action—remember Verse 4:17). Your grumbling will be judged and Christ the judge will not let you get away with shifting the blame to others.

Matthew 7:1-5 - "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

7. Why does James connect suffering (Verse 5:10) with being patient until the coming of the Lord? (2 Chron 24:20-22, Jeremiah 26:20-23, Acts 7:51-58)

As we've discussed, being patient and waiting for the Lord implies preparing for the harvest and advancing the kingdom of God. It means speaking out. It often means taking an unpopular position. It means doing something, not just standing idly by. There are three kinds of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who wonder, "what happened?" Christians are (or should be) in the first group.

2 Chron 24:20-22 - Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, "This is what God says: 'Why do you disobey the LORD's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.' "

But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the LORD's temple. King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, "May the LORD see this and call you to account."

Jeremiah 26:20-23 - (Now Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord; he prophesied the same things against this city and this land as Jeremiah did. When King Jehoiakim and all his officers and officials heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But Uriah heard of it and fled in fear to Egypt. King Jehoiakim, however, sent Elnathan son of Acbor to Egypt, along with some other men. They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people.)

Acts 7:51-58 - You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”

The Stoning of Stephen

When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

8. In Verse 5:12, why does James speak out against taking an oath?

James is actually not condemning taking a solemn oath such as God’s to Abraham (Heb 6:13) or Jesus before Caiaphas (Matt 26:63-64) or Paul’s (Romans 1:9 and 9:1). [Rom 1:9 - God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you] Rather he is condemning the flippant use of God’s name or a sacred object to guarantee the truth of what is spoken.

A person with a reputation for exaggeration or lying often can’t get anyone to believe him on his word alone. Christians should never be like that. Always be honest so others will believe your simple “yes” or “no.” By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as a trustworthy person. When we do not let our yes be yes and our no be no, we are double minded. This does not reflect God’s character. God is never double minded about us.

9. What earlier verse does 5:13 connect with? (Think “suffering.”)

Remember one of the first verses in James, Verse 1:2-3, “Consider it pure joy my brothers when you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” So here we are again with the idea of praying and going to God with our troubles and suffering.

Recall also verses 4:7-8, “Surrender to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from

you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” James is very consistent with this message: if you have problems, take them to God; if things are going well, praise God. No matter what your situation, communicate regularly with God.

10. In Verse 5:15 (READ VERSE), James refers to a prayer “offered in faith.” Whose faith?

This does not refer to the faith of the sick person, but to the faith of the people praying.

11. Verse 5:15 seems to promise guaranteed instantaneous answers to prayers offered in faith. Does that mean when there is no healing, we lack real faith?

First of all, God heals, faith doesn't. Second, all of our prayers are subject to God's will. Third, to God, healing might well mean something different than it does to us. Fourth, God's ways are not our ways. Fifth, a prayer of faith is one that hands everything over to God, confident in his character and purposes rather than our answers. Sixth, by not answering a prayer in the way that we hoped or expected, God may actually be testing or building our faith.

12. Why does James talk about confessing your sins to each other in Verse 5:16?

Although we can go directly to God for forgiveness, don't forget that the only petition in the Lord's prayer with a catch to it is forgiveness. “Forgive us our trespasses [or debts] AS we forgive others.” So confession is an important part of the Christian life. We confess to others and hopefully others will forgive us. Conversely, when others confess to us, we must forgive them. In Paul, we find the rule that if our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publically. Also, if we need loving support as we struggle with a sin, we should confess it to someone who can give us that support, basically an accountability partner.

13. Why does James emphasize bringing someone back to the faith in verses 5:19-20?

God does not want to lose a single person to the devil so James urges Christians to help backsliders return to God. By taking the initiative, praying, and acting in love we can meet the person where he is and bring him back to God and his forgiveness.

14. What's the bottom line in the book of James?

Faith in action. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. Believers ought to be an example of heaven on earth drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other. If we truly believe God's word, we will LIVE it day by day. God's word is not merely something to read or think about, but something we DO. Belief, faith, and trust must have hands and feet—OURS!