

“THE AGONY AND ECSTASY OF WAITING”
Part 10
James 5:7-11

(Available on Cassette Tape)

“To live is to wait”, and to wait is to sometimes suffer and sometimes to rejoice. The agony and ecstasy of waiting is real. To wait patiently is a virtue (a godly characteristic). Patience is a character trait exemplified supremely in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures declare Jesus learned patience through postponement, patience in training his disciples and patience under opposition. 2 Peter 1:5-8 encourages us to add to our faith, perseverance, and in order to persevere, we must learn patience. The apostle Paul says one evidence of the Holy Spirit is patience! (Galatians 5:22-23)

Biblical Teaching Made Relevant in Today’s World
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I. The Power of Patience

In contrast to the ungodly rich Christians James wrote to in chapter 5:1-6, James now changes his focus and addresses poor and oppressed believers. He encourages them to “be patient”, to endure suffering and trials by reminding them to keep focused on the Lord’s Second Coming. He uses three examples to challenge them to be patient and persevere: the farmer (verse 7), the prophets (verse 10) and Job (verse 11).

“Be patient” is James’ counsel. God is not going to right all the wrongs in this world until Jesus Christ returns. The words James used helps us realize as we suffer we are to ask God’s help to: “endure”, be “long-tempered” and “remain under.”

Patience means to stay put and stand fast when you’d like to run away, but “how?” is the all-important question. How do we endure in stressful situations without exploding and running away?

The three illustrations (farmer, prophets and Job) in verses 7-12 give six instructions to oppressed believers: be patient, stand firm, don’t grumble, don’t judge, persevere and talk straight.

The farmer does not stand around doing nothing; he is constantly at work. The prophets moved ahead in the face of opposition. Job is an example of patience. He didn’t lie down and die as his wife suggested. Patience doesn’t have to mean passivity. Job was vocal – he resented his plight in life, he questioned his friends, and he wondered if God had forgotten him.

The biblical response to mistreatment should be long-suffering. When we exercise control over our words when provoked, we learn patience and our character becomes more Christ-like. A patient Christian will tolerate the shortcomings of others.

God is patient with us. He is long-suffering, slow to anger, abounding in love. God's patience is his power to control himself, to be slow to bring judgment on sinners. God wants us to be long-suffering, slow to anger, abounding in love like his Son.

II. The Agony and Ecstasy of Waiting

James tells his readers while striving to be patient, keep focused on the Parousia – the Second Coming of our Lord.

The coming of the Lord is the blessed hope of Christ's return written about by Titus in chapter 2:11-14. James is not saying ignore reality, he is saying real justice will come when Christ returns. Endure suffering and hardship – this is not all there is. Eternity awaits those who are eternally secure through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who cleansed us from all our sins.

“Be patient” in your trials and “Don't grumble.” More precisely, James is saying don't groan. Do you “groan” and shift the blame to your partner, ex-wife, co-worker or boss? Transference is what James had in mind, i.e. “It's all his fault”, “It's all her doing.” Blaming others is easier than owning our share of the responsibility. Before we judge others for their shortcomings, remember that Christ the Judge will come to evaluate each of us. (Matthew 7:1-5; 25:31-46)

SUMMARY AND APPLICATION FOR OUR LIVES

How do we become more patient? The portion of scripture we considered today says stand firm, don't grumble, don't judge, persevere. It calls for an act of the will.

We can change! But, only by yielding our will to the leading of God's Spirit on a daily basis. May God help us to learn patience.
Amen