

Instead, Be Patient

James 5: 7-12



Preparation: Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 168-178. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.

Beginning the group study: Pray for patience

Read aloud from James 5:7-12

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

From Stulac (pg. 168-169), printed here:

“Be patient? What an incredible command to give after the preceding portrayal of offenses (rich people exploiting the poor, condemning and murdering innocents)! ‘Be outraged’ is more what we would expect. But James has not lost his moral perspective in the midst of his moral passion. He has already expressed his outrage, but his concern is still for purity among the Christians, and he discerns the danger of falling into sin here. James is practicing his own counsel from 1:9-15, recognizing the danger of temptation in the midst of trials inflicted by rich oppressors. He does not tell his readers to compete with or fight against the rich for their wealth, because it would be horrible to become drawn into the materialism of the rich and so to come under the same divine judgment.

James’s other alternative might be to say, ‘Give up in despair, for the situation is hopeless; all the power is in the hands of the rich.’ This, too, would be falling into sin; it would be an affirmation of the values of the rich, saying that their materialistic power is the only goal to live for.

‘Both giving in to the world and attacking the world are wrong,’ concludes a commentator on this text (Davids 1982:182). Instead, James says, *Be patient*, and he spends these next few verses explaining that patience.

[James uses the] analogy of the farmer who also ‘waits.’ The farmer is patient ‘over’ one thing and ‘until’ another thing. The text says the farmer waits for the valuable fruit of the earth, being patient ‘over it,’ that is, over the fruit. [The farmer] is patient ‘until’ it receives *the autumn and spring rains*. The description of the crop as *valuable* would help the persecuted readers to identify with the farmer as not a wealthy landlord but a small farmer who depends on a good harvest for survival. More important, it reminds the readers that there is something to be patient ‘over,’ something that is of more value than riches or ease.

James is telling the brothers and sisters to be patient over their trials to gain maturity and completeness until that process is crowned with the glorious coming of the Lord. The parallel is that farmers must be patient over their labor to gain the fruit of the soil until that

fruit receives the coming of the rain. Do you want to learn patience? The first step is a choice of values. Set your heart on becoming 'mature and complete.' ”¹

Getting started:

- Talk about the areas of your life where you need to practice patience.
- If you are willing, share about the areas of your life where you are suffering (where all you want to do is say, “Enough! I can’t take it anymore!”)

These verses mention several times the importance of practicing patience in the midst of suffering. But this isn’t easy to do, because our suffering may produce a lot of pressure, pain, or doubt. Stulac thinks James is encouraging readers to hold onto belief in the midst of suffering. Trust God’s grace. You can be honest and real with how you are struggling – but continue to rely on God’s grace, and don’t give up on your faith.

- What’s your initial reaction to experiencing trouble or suffering? Anger? Pushing it down so that no one can see it? Running away? Be honest with your answers.
- Trusting God’s grace in patience doesn’t mean that you can’t be honest about the pain you are experiencing. How has your pain affected your faith?

James is writing from hope and confidence. It’s as if he’s saying, “be patient, because Jesus Christ has the final say. Jesus has conquered sin and death. This is not the way it will always be – there will not always be suffering. The Lord is coming near.”

- “The Lord is coming near...the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” These are the words of James. Talk about the hope that comes with the patience James describes.
- Sometimes reminders of patience can produce more frustration than hope. And telling other people to simply be patient in the face of loss is *not* something you should do. But as a Christian community, we can pray for them – especially when they feel like they can’t pray. Take some time now to pray for those who may be facing trouble, but can’t pray.

Have patience with each other. Allow the other to mourn a loss; allow the other to make changes (remember, changes aren’t easy, and rarely are they quick). Care for each other well in the long-term; but don’t give up in despair. God delivers us, and in this we can rejoice.

- Consider reading Matthew 5:11-12 and talk about how Jesus’s words connect to our text today from James.
- Also, consider reading Psalm 37. Discuss how God calls us to faithfulness, and how we can trust in God as our deliverer.
 - Those who do evil may succeed for a time, but those who put their hope in the Lord will be blessed eternally.

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.



This week you may experience difficult things – events that cause you suffering. What practical ways can we try to practice patience in those moments? How can you invite your community to pray with you?