

## **Resilience**

*James 5:7-12*

It's been 15 weeks since we've been able to gather for worship. Welcome to those of you who are here in the worship center. Welcome to those of you in the Venue (and Refuge). Welcome to those of you who are joining us online.

Today we are going to talk about **resilience** as followers of Christ. A resilient person is someone who walks with God for the long haul. When trials, suffering, and disappointments come, a resilient person doesn't give up. A resilient person doesn't become angry, bitter, and cynical. A resilient person continues to seek God and do His will no matter what. We all want to be resilient, right?

When I officiate a funeral, I'm aware that most people are thinking, "I wonder what they'll say about me at my funeral. . ." Nobody wants the pastor or a friend to stand up front and say, "Well, I think Steve had one pretty good year quite a while back. I think in 1994 he was moderately faithful to God, he sort of loved his wife and kids, he did his work okay, and was a pretty decent friend to this one guy. . ." No, we all want to be remembered as people who have been consistently loved God and loved others over the long haul.

Today's passage challenges us to pursue that type of resilience. For our purposes today, resilience is basically synonymous with perseverance, endurance, or patience. Even if you haven't been particularly resilient in the past, you can be resilient in the future with God's help.

I would summarize the main command of James 5:7-12 this way:

***Pursue resilience daily for life.*** (James 5:7-8) The vision in these verses is for a type of perseverance that we sustain ***for a lifetime***.

In the previous paragraph James had addressed the "ruthless rich," letting them know that a great reversal was coming. Whereas in this life they had oppressed and mistreated the poor, in the next life misery would come upon them. Beginning in verse 7 James addresses the very poor who were being mistreated in this life, saying:

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. . . 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

When we hear that we need to be patient, we tend to think, "Yeah, I need to be a little less irritable/grumpy and a little more tolerant of annoying people." That's true, but James has in mind something much more comprehensive and much more Christ-centered. The Old English term for patient was "long suffering"; if you are patient, you suffer well for a long time.

James is trying to preempt inappropriate responses to suffering by telling the poor believers in Asia Minor to suffer well. On one extreme, some might have felt like a

violent uprising was justified; on the other extreme, some might have felt like giving up and not walking with God because of the hardships they experienced. Both extremes are expressions of unbelief instead of faith/confidence in God.

Last week we saw how James told the ruthless rich to anticipate the judgement they would experience when Christ returns. Here James tells poor believers to anticipate the relief and reward they will experience when Christ returns.

He says, “Be patient . . . until the Lord’s coming.” When the Lord returns He will defeat his enemies (including the ruthless rich) and will establish His kingdom. Until that day of reckoning (or until death), trust God, suffer well, and persevere. Be resilient for the rest of your life.

In our life group last week we talked about how hard it is to allow the truth that Jesus is returning to affect our everyday life; it’s one of those doctrines we tend to “check off” our list and then file away somewhere. But the return of Christ isn’t some obscure doctrine; it’s mentioned in all but a couple of books in the NT. The nearness of Christ’s return is meant to be a continual motivation to persevere, to do His will as long as we live.

James is telling us ***pursue resilience daily for life***. James tells us two ways to do this. First, he tells us:

***Learn from the patience/resilience of others.*** (James 5:7, 10, 11) The examples that James gives clarify the type of patience he’s talking about. In verse 7 James mentions the patience of ***farmers***:

7 Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

Some of you understand the patience of a farmer 100x better than I do. The simple point James is making is that farmers have to wait on things that are outside their control. Some things simply can’t be rushed. Farmers wait for the land to yield a valuable/precious crop; they wait while the roots grow down and the nutrients come up. In the world of the Bible, farmers also waited for the autumn and spring rains (or the early and late rains); if God didn’t send the rains, the crops wouldn’t grow. (see NOTE #1)

The farmer wasn’t idle or passive while waiting; they “worked while they waited,” right? But they also knew that there were factors beyond their control. And so as they worked, they were patient, waiting, looking, expecting.

How does this apply to us?

8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.

James says that we too, like the farmer, should be patient and “stand firm” (literally “establish your heart” - anchor your heart in God and His word). Why? Because the Lord’s coming is near. Just like the farmer knew that the rains would come, we trust that Jesus will return at just the right time. There’s a sense in which this life is a “growing season” and the return of Christ is the “harvest.”

The farmer teaches us to wait while we work, accepting that many things are beyond our control. You can probably identify things beyond your control in your family, in your finances, in your work, in your health, in the church. A resilient person trusts God anyway, knowing that the Lord’s coming is near.

In verse 10 James mentions the perseverance of the **prophets**:

10 Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

You could take almost any OT prophet as an example of patience in the face of suffering. Jeremiah, for example, was given an incredibly **difficult** assignment. His basic message to Judah’s kings and priests was that they shouldn’t resist the invading Babylonians because God had irrevocably decided to send them into exile. Because of this message Jeremiah would be considered a traitor. He would therefore be put in stocks in the public square, he would be beaten, he would be thrown into a cistern where he sank down into the mud. Because of his suffering as a prophet, God forbid him from marrying and having children (16:2). Jeremiah was given a difficult assignment. And through it all, he was patient in the face of suffering. He did not give up. He continued trusting God, believing that one day God would vindicate him. Here we are 2,800 years later talking about his resilience.

The prophets teach us to “speak in the name of the Lord” (whether it’s speaking the gospel or speaking out against sin and injustice) **and** to suffer well. We shouldn’t be outraged when people mistreat us; Jesus promised that people would treat us the way they treated Him. Perhaps you can identify ways you’re suffering in representing Christ in your family, in your work, in the church, or among your friends. If so, learn to suffer well from the prophets.

In verse 11 James mentions the perseverance of **Job**:

11 As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Being “blessed” doesn’t mean having a comfortable life; rather, being blessed means that you experience the favor of God. James has us consider Job’s perseverance and his experience of God’s favor. His world was shattered; he lost his kids, his wealth, and his health. But he didn’t curse God. He did eventually say too much and had to repent. But he’s still an example of someone who persevered (remained faithful to God) when

most would have given up. Job is also an example of someone who experienced God's blessing in the form of compassion and mercy.

We can learn resilience from Job. We can also learn from each other. I could give you many examples of people here at Faith who have experienced great loss in their lives and yet they have persevered. I can assure you that I don't feel sorry for them one bit; I count them blessed because the favor of God rests upon them!

First, if we want to ***pursue resilience daily for life***, we need to learn patience from others. Second, James tells us that we need to:

***Put away sins of the tongue (evidence of impatience and unbelief).*** (James 5:9, 12)

Given everything James has already said about "the tongue," we shouldn't be too surprised that James felt compelled to talk about sins of the tongue in relation to resilience. In chapter 3 he wrote that "the tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." James, like his half-brother Jesus, understood that sins of the tongue are evidence of a deeper problem, a problem of the heart. Jesus said that "the mouth speaks from whatever fills the heart." This means that when James tells us to put away sins of the tongue, he's also telling us to deal with the heart issues behind these sins that can hinder our resilience.

James mentions ***grumbling*** in verse 9:

9 Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

This verse is very similar to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:1 where He says, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged." But instead of "do not judge," James writes, "Do not grumble against one another." Grumbling is really a form of judging other people (see James 4:11-12). There is nothing redemptive or helpful about grumbling. Grumbling is actually the opposite of patient endurance. Instead of God-centered, faith-filled endurance, grumbling is self-centered and an expression of unbelief.

When James says, "The Judge is standing at the door," he's saying that the coming of the Lord and therefore the day of judgment is at hand. Again James has us live and speak in light of the day when we'll stand face-to-face with Jesus.

In verse 12 James mentions ***oaths/swearing***:

12 Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

Notice again how James says that we are accountable to God for the words we speak ("you will be condemned"). James isn't talking about profanity when he says "do not swear." He's probably saying that we shouldn't try to convince others to believe lies or half-truths by invoking the name of God or saying something like, "I swear on my

grandmother's grave." Some commentators think that the poor believers receiving this letter were being tempted to alleviate their suffering by shading the truth (such as promising "I will repay the money I owe you" when they really had no real intention or ability to do so). Whatever the case, James echoes Jesus in saying that we should have such integrity of heart that we can answer a question with a simple "Yes" or "No." (see NOTE #2)

We pursue resilience by learning from the resilience of others and by putting away sins of the tongue (which express the unbelief in our hearts). This means that resilience is a matter of the heart. If you want to walk with God for the rest of your life, you need to love the Lord your God daily with all your heart.

I will now pray, inviting God to work in our hearts so that we'll learn patience from others and so that our words will express faith, not unbelief.

## **Prayer**

### **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament mentions numerous times how God gives the autumn and spring rains, or the late and early rains (see Deuteronomy 11:14, Jeremiah 5:24, Joel 2:23, etc.). Interestingly, later in the chapter James will mention a time when Elijah's prayers both stopped and started the rains.

<sup>2</sup> In a couple of his letters Paul wrote, "I am telling the truth, I am not lying. . ." That wasn't a violation of this or Jesus' teaching about oaths; it was simply a way of stressing the truth of something his readers would have found hard to believe. See Romans 9:1 and 1 Timothy 2:7.