

## The Book of James

### Session 11: James 5:7–12

#### OPEN

What do you hate to wait for?

What waiting experiences have tested your patience?

Are there some things you feel have been worth waiting for?

#### READ

Read James 5:7–12.

**Leader:** *Read it aloud yourself, or ask someone you know who is a confident reader. Ask the others to listen carefully and/or follow along.*

#### WATCH

Show Session 10: *James 5:7–12* (8 minutes).

## **DISCUSS**

James is talking a lot about patience (using the word four times in four verses). **According to verse 7, what did people need to be patient about?**

Remember that this was the first generation of Christians. When Jesus ascended to heaven, some surely expected Him to return in a week or a month. When the delay stretched on for years, some were losing hope—especially when life was getting more difficult for Christ-followers.

**What analogy does James use in verse 7?**

**Have you ever planted a vegetable garden? How long does it seem to take from when you first plant the seeds to when you get to bring in the first ripe vegetable and cook it up?**

**How does this experience compare to waiting for Jesus' return?**

### **PEEK AT THE GREEK**

The word James uses for patience is *makrothumia*, which literally means something like “long-tempered.” You know what it’s like to be short-tempered, when any little thing can set you off. Patience is the opposite.

The word for “grumble” in verse 9 (*stenazo*) is used elsewhere for a similar situation. Paul talks about all creation “groaning” with us in anticipation of God’s final redemption and about our own “groaning” as we look forward to our heavenly home (Romans 8:22-3; 2 Corinthians 5:2,4). It’s the same word that’s translated “grumbling” in James. It’s a deep longing for a better future, but when we turn it “against one another,” it can become toxic.

But these believers weren't just waiting, they were suffering. We know from history that there was growing opposition to the Jesus movement from Rome and from those Jews who did not follow Jesus.

James says in verse 11 that those who persevere through suffering are "blessed." **What does he mean by that?**

**How do you feel about that idea?**

**Flip back to James 1:2–4. Would someone read that for us?**

How does that fill out your idea of the blessedness of suffering?

Here's what Francis Chan said about those verses in the first video of this series:

What God wants to do is not just to make you happy—he wants to make you holy. He wants you to be a reflection of him. And it's the trials, the sufferings, that make us more like Christ. He says he wants us mature, complete, not lacking in anything. Have you ever thought about that as the goal of your life?

**GO DEEPER**

Learn more about suffering in the following Bible verses.

2 Corinthians 4:7–10; Romans 5:3–5; 1 Peter 4:1–2; 1 Peter 4:12–13

**What do these passages teach about suffering as a Christian?**

**What similarities do you see between Romans 5:3–5 and James 1:2–4? According to these verses, what are the benefits of suffering?**

**Does it help to think of our mortal bodies as “jars of clay”? What does Paul mean by that?**

**Peter suggests that suffering actually frees us from “human passions” (1 Peter 4:2). Why would that be?**

**What does it mean to “participate in the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 4:13)? Do people who suffer get to know Christ better?**

**Have you ever heard suffering referred to as “the human condition?” What does that mean?**

**Is it true? Is suffering part of what it means to be human?**

Suffering is such a common, but certainly not trivial, part of life that it’s everywhere you look. There are all types of suffering in the world. The large-scale suffering of war and hunger and poverty and persecution, but also the personal suffering of the death of a loved one, having your heart broken, or having a life-altering disease.

**What other types of suffering have you seen or even experienced?**

The Bible is full of encouragement for those who suffer, whether that suffering is coming in the form of persecution or from some other force. We can even bring suffering upon ourselves. But Scripture keeps reminding us that God still cares, He has not abandoned us, that He sits with us in our suffering, and that we will come out of this stronger than before.

**What encouragement does James give us here?**

He provides two examples. First the “prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” Jeremiah is the best example of a prophet who suffered for speaking the truth. (Also, if you’re counting up allusions to the Sermon on the Mount, here’s another. Check out Matthew 5:11–12.) The second example is Job.

**What do you know about Job?**

**GO DEEPER**

Learn more about Job in the following Bible verses.

Job 1:1; Job 1:8–12; Job 6:2–13; Job 42:10

This Go Deeper section is a little different. It's an attempt to quickly get a sense for the story of Job. Read Job 1:1 and 1:8–12.

Over the next few chapters, Job has all his livestock taken and his house blown down, killing his sons and daughters. His wife leaves him, urging him to “curse God and die.” But Job does not curse or blame God even when further bad things happen to him. He does, however, speak of his sufferings (often lamenting about them for chapters and chapters!). Read Job 6:2–14 as an example.

Finally, he enters into a lengthy debate with three friends about why all this is happening to him. They frequently insist he must have done something to deserve this. Job says he did not, but asks the very human question, “Why me?”

In the end, Job may have moaned and wailed and asked “Why me?” but he did not turn against God or curse him. The end result of his all his perseverance is found in Job 42:10.

When people are discussing suffering, Job is the go-to Bible book. Why God allowed all of Job's suffering can be an unending debate. But James doesn't get into the why. He wants us to see Job and other prophets as examples of those who have been blessed as the end result of suffering.

## **GO DEEPER**

Learn more about yes, no and swearing in the following Bible verses.

Deuteronomy 23:21-22; Mathew 5:33-37;  
Colossians 4:6

“Swearing,” as James means it, isn’t about using bad words, but good words. People would use elaborate vows to prove the truth of their words. While good Jews were careful not to use the holy Name of God, they might swear by heaven or angels or the Temple.

It seems that this swearing made a mockery of legitimate vow-keeping. **What did Deuteronomy teach about making vows?**

Compare James 5:12 to Jesus’ statement on swearing in Matthew 5. **What similarities do you see?**

**What is Jesus’ main argument against such elaborate swearing?**

So Jesus says, “Just be honest, Say yes or no and mean it.” There may be an underlying theme here. People were using religious language to impress others. They were showing off with their heightened expressions of what spiritual forces were vouching for their truthfulness. As Jesus (and James) emphasized, what’s most important is the reality of your heart, not the show you put on for the rest of the world.

**In Colossians 4:6, how does Paul describe the kind of conversation we should have?**

## **LAST WORD**

Countless books have been written about suffering. Sermons have been given, songs have been sung, and millions of dollars have been spent making movies about situations in which people suffer. And yet, there are no easy answers to the question of suffering because it often seems unfair.

James doesn't get into the unfairness of it. He doesn't get into why suffering is allowed. What he seems to do is acknowledge that it's going to happen and says, "Here's what we can do with the suffering."

We can make sure it doesn't divide us ("don't grumble against one another").

We can trust that being patient, persevering, and riding it through till the end will result in our being blessed.

We can look to others in the past who have persevered, like the prophets and Job, as examples of those who have gone through profound suffering and come out on the other end. Because of Job's example, we can know that sometimes verbalizing the anguish and misery are part of going through it.

We can know that throughout suffering, God is always "full of compassion and mercy."

## **LIVE IT OUT**

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

**Gut-Level Prayer:** Sometimes when you're suffering, praying can be difficult—especially if you're trying to mind your manners with God and pray correctly. Remember that prayer is open and honest communication with God. Take Job's example and let God know just how miserable you are, just how angry, sad, scared, or confused you may be. Tell Him exactly how you feel. You aren't fooling Him by trying to keep a secret from Him.

**Listening:** Find out someone else's story. People become resilient through perseverance. When someone is going through a terrible time of suffering, it may seem like it's never going to end and hopelessness takes over. Even Job asked God to crush him and cut off his life so that his pain and misery would end. But Job persevered, and so have many, many people. Go to someone in your family, someone in your church, or someone else you know who has come through suffering. Ask to hear that person's story.

**Sit with the Suffering:** It's good to pray for those who are suffering, and you should pray for them. But, sometimes they need someone just to be there with them, to comfort them and let them talk and hold their hand. You don't have to have answers, especially to the question, "Why is this happening?" You can say, "I don't know, but I'm here for you."

**Research and Support:** In various parts of the world, Christians are suffering for their faith. Research their struggles. Pray for them. Connect with an organization that helps them.