

With Anticipation
November 25, 2018
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James 5:7-9; 13-20

What good thing are you anticipating right now? Here is a truth I've learned about myself: Anticipation can be the fuel that propels me forward, or the weight that bogs me down. Positive anticipation can help pull me through some tough days. Hope is the key to which kind of anticipation I have, and God's promises are the true source of hope.

As we finish up James's letter to persecuted Christians, several "P" words come to mind: PROBLEMS, PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, and PRAYER. Here's another "P" word that comes to mind: PRACTICAL. This entire letter is extremely practical for followers of Christ, and this last chapter is no exception.

The Big Idea: Problems call for PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, and PRAYER, which are motivated by the PROMISES of God (as revealed in His word.)

James 5:7–9 (ESV)

Patience in Suffering

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

- Verse seven: **What motivation does James give believers ("brothers") for being patient in the midst of problems?**
- The word patience here means to *be long-spirited*, i.e. (obj.) *forbearing* or (subj.) *patient*:—bear (suffer) long, be longsuffering, have (long) patience, be patient, patiently endure.¹ In other words, take the "long view" of things.
- James uses a relatable illustration for that day: the patience of a farmer waiting on the harvest. **Is this waiting passive or**

active? How can a believer practice “active waiting” in the midst of problems?

- Like the farmer waiting on the harvest, it's not passive, it's active waiting – doing what we can do and trusting God to do what ONLY He can do.
- The farmer tills the ground, sows the seed, pulls the weeds, but at some point the farmer has to patiently trust God for the harvest.
- It's the same in spiritual farming. The seeds are in my hands but the harvest is in God's hands. I do what I know to do and trust God to be God.
- Years ago, Elisabeth Elliot popularized an old poem that speaks to this concept of doing our part and trusting God in the midst of problems.

*Many a questioning, many a fear,
Many a doubt, hath its quieting here.
Moment by moment, let down from Heaven,
Time, opportunity, and guidance are given.
Fear not tomorrows, child of the King,
Trust them with Jesus, do the next thing*

*Do it immediately, do it with prayer;
Do it reliantly, casting all care;
Do it with reverence, tracing His hand
Who placed it before thee with earnest command.
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,
Leave all results, do the next thing.ⁱⁱ*

- Verse nine might seem an odd shift: While you're in a trial don't grumble with other believers. **Why would James go there?**
- When our problems are big, our fuse can be short and sometimes we take it out on other brothers and sisters.
- James says, grumblers will be judged by Jesus, the real Judge standing at the door. Remember in school when the teacher would leave the room? How did the behavior change when the teacher was in the doorway?
- We're called to work for a spiritual harvest. When Jesus returns will He find His children farming or fighting?

- “Well James, being patient, persistent, and peaceful in the middle of problems is easier said than done. How can I do it?”
- Verse eight: While we wait “establish our hearts.” Some translations say, “strengthen your hearts,” or “take courage.” How we do that?
 - Jesus promised in John 16:33 (ESV) ³³ *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*”
 - Psalm 55:22 (ESV) ²² *Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.*
 - Paul prescribes in Romans 12:12 (ESV) ¹² *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*
- Problems in life call for PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, and PRAYER, which are motivated by the PROMISES of God. Let’s talk about prayer.

James 5:13–20 (ESV)

The Prayer of Faith

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

- “Suffering” in verse thirteen refers to hardships. If you’re in trouble – pray!
- If things are going well – sing, in other words, praise the Lord!
- When things are going well I don’t have to be reminded to have a song in my heart, but when things are tough I sometimes forget to pray.
- Followers of Christ can have a song of praise in our hearts even in the midst of problems. It’s not easy, but it’s possible thanks to His promises.
- If no other song comes to mind in trouble, how about this old hymn?
*“He is able to deliver thee,
 He is able to deliver thee;
 Tho’ by sin opprest, Go to Him for rest;
 Our God is able to deliver thee.”ⁱⁱⁱ*
- What do we do when the problem is serious illness?

¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

- The words here indicate someone who is bed-ridden by illness.
- The term “elders” originally meant older believers who were spiritually mature. Later the church used that term for mature church leaders.
- One of the roles of church leaders and spiritually mature believers is to pray for the sick.
- Is anointing with olive oil combining prayer with medicine, or is this symbolic of the power of the Holy Spirit? That’s debated, so why don’t we interpret this both ways and apply both faith and medical science.
- Praying in “the name of the Lord” makes it clear God does the healing.
- Verse fifteen: “Save the one who is sick” or “make the sick person well” can lead to misinterpretation.
- **Why is it NOT a formula for guaranteed healing?**
- Guaranteed healing would contradict scripture. Paul prayed for God to remove his “thorn” (2 Cor. 12:7-10) but that wasn’t God’s will. Jesus prayed in the garden for the “cup” of bearing the sins of mankind to be removed, but it was God’s will for Him to die for our sins.
- Only God decides how He will heal, but we know He will provide grace that is sufficient for the illness. Either here or in Heaven, He will heal a believer who is in the midst of a major health crisis. That’s why spiritually mature believers are called to pray for those who suffer.
- A good comment on the prayer of faith: *“Those who pray should be unwavering in their confidence that God will always do what*

is right. Having prayed the prayer of faith, we can cheerfully commit our lives into God's hands."^{iv}

- Verses 15b and 16a may again seem like an odd shift as James talks about confession and forgiveness of sins. The fact is that some illness is the result of sinful or careless choices or unconfessed sin.
- Confessing your sins to one another is another command that needs to be handled with care and maturity. This isn't license for a "tabloid testimony" of airing dirty laundry that isn't appropriate. Here's a good rule of thumb: *"We confess our sins first of all to the Lord (1 John 1:9), but we must also confess them to those who have been affected by them. **We must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin's influence. Private sin requires private confession; public sin requires public confession.**"*^x
- Verses nineteen and twenty describe another matter of prayer for believers, praying for other believers who have wandered away from the truth of scripture.

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- As Galatians 6:1 told us, ...if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. (ESV)

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Problems in life call for PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, and PRAYER, which are motivated by the PROMISES of God (as revealed in His word.)

Warren Wiersbe writes: *"Here, then, is a secret of endurance when the going is tough: God is producing a harvest in our lives. He wants the "fruit of the Spirit" to grow (Gal. 5:22–23), and the only way He can do it is through trials and troubles. Instead of growing impatient*

with God and with ourselves, we must yield to the Lord and permit the fruit to grow. We are “spiritual farmers” looking for a harvest.”^{vi}

- As followers of Christ, when we’re in the midst of problems (and we will be) we need to ask God for the patience to do what we can do and trust Him to do what ONLY He can do.

ⁱ Strong, J. (2009). *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament*

ⁱⁱ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/do-the-next-thing/>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://hymnary.org/text/tis_the_grandest_theme_through_the_ages_

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/prayer-of-faith.html>

^v Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 383). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{vi} *ibid* (Vol. 2, p. 378).