



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Real Faith. Real Life.

Part 14: Burdened Yet Blessed

James 5:7–12 | Tim Badal | April 23, 2017

Our passage today is one I think every one of us could use. The book of James was written in the first century by Jesus' half-brother, who was a pastor in the city of Jerusalem. He had a lot of oversight of the early church there. This book not only challenges us, but we'll see also that James wants to comfort us by reminding us of some truths as we carry burdens and endure trials and tribulations in our lives. How are we to live faithfully amid the struggles and sufferings that come our way?



James has been honest with us, showing us that real faith in real life means we don't just talk about what we should do in our walk with Jesus Christ, but rather we must actually live it out—even when hardships come our way. Today we'll read James 5:7–12. Let's see what he has to say to us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

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. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. ¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Growing up, I heard words and phrases that I would classify as "old person" words or phrases—things only my parents would say. Because of the kind of child I was, one thing I heard my parents say quite often—probably more than I wanted to hear it—was this, "I am sick and tired...." It would always come on the heels of my doing something dumb. My dad was always more angry about it than my mom. Mom, out of exasperation would say, "I'm sick and tired, Tim." It was never "tired and sick." It was always "sick and tired." I don't know why—maybe you're always sick before you're tired. I would hear that, and I would think, "Man, Mom and Dad are sick and tired a lot." I would wonder why they didn't go to a doctor to figure out this sickness and tiredness. Then I hit the age of 40 and had three kids of my own—and now I'm sick and tired. I don't know why. I'm waiting for a pill to come along that takes care of sick and tired.

Isn't it the way of life that we start losing our patience? The daily ebb and flow of life can erode our patience and even our faith, to the point where we can become angry, or as James points out, we start to grumble. We start to say things. We can make oaths to God. Mom used to say, "As God is my witness...." She was sick and tired, and because she wasn't changing me, she thought maybe God could.

James is writing to a group of people who I can imagine were sick and tired. They had endured a great deal of persecution. We know from James 1 they had experienced trials of many kinds. They would come to church bringing their burdens. But when everybody has a burden so they can't help each other, it creates friction in the body and tension between people.

As a loving pastor who is wise beyond his years, James says, "I know life is hard. I know you're sick and tired of the things going on in your lives. I know your masters are being rough on you. Some of you have had your wages withheld. You don't know where to

turn or what to do. I know some of you have had beatings and other assaults against you. You thought coming to Jesus would remove these troubles and burdens, but instead your struggles and trials have multiplied.”

So James has a word for the people in his church: “Be patient.” That’s a hard word for us in the instant world in which we live. Have you ever noticed when you’re on the internet and the web page doesn’t open in that nanosecond you thought it would, how frustrated you get? We don’t remember the days of the old dial-up connections, because we’ve become accustomed to the Burger King motto, “Your way, right away.” If it doesn’t happen instantly, we get angry.

Let me challenge you. Go to Aldi to pick up some things today, then step into the check-out aisle. If it takes more than 3.4 seconds to get through—if someone has 21 items in a “20 or less” lane—all kinds of bitter thoughts enter your mind, right? “Who is this guy? Don’t they know how important I am—how much in a hurry I am?” We are an impatient people. But James says, “In the middle of your sufferings and your burdens, I want you to be patient.”

There’s no one among us who would deny that life brings burdens. Sometimes we get frustrated. Sometimes we’re overwhelmed and can’t handle them. You’re thinking, “If one more thing gets put on my plate, I’m going to scream. I can’t take any more of this.”

I believe the truths James is going to bring us here are things he saw lived out in the life of his half-brother Jesus. He watched Jesus endure trials, tribulations, temptations and all kinds of burdens with patience, setting His eyes on a hope and prize that gave Him the ability to endure, even seeing burdens as blessings. Remember that Jesus was given the title “Man of Sorrows” or “Man of Burdens.” Scripture tells us He had joy in His heart even as He looked forward to the cross.

So how are we to deal with the burdens of life? If we want to live under burdens and still understand that we are a blessed people, we need to recognize three things.

1. Burdens are a common part of life.

When James uses the word “suffering,” he’s not just referring to the huge, once-in-a-lifetime sufferings we either have faced or will face. Rather, these are the little run-of-the-mill things that continue to pile up in our lives. They’re the things during the week that add to your stress and frustration, creating impatience with the different strands of your life’s fabric.

The word suffering in the Greek is *patheia*. It’s where we get our English word pathetic. So suffering is anything that makes you feel or look pathetic. These are things that drive us crazy, that change our countenance. James is saying something that’s repeated over and over again in Scripture: trials and burdens are a common part of life. In fact, there is an entire book dedicated to this theme: the book of Job. It focuses on one man who had lots of burdens, afflictions and struggles. As his life is chronicled for us, we can see how God is working in these afflictions, how Job responds, how his friends and his wife react. He is the example of life being full of trouble.

Jesus told His disciples, *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). We can hope in the middle of trouble because He is in our lives. James also says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds”* (James 1:2), because these trials make us grow spiritually, building in us character and perseverance.

How much weight can I handle?

In a world of affliction and great burdens, how do we find God’s blessing? When burdens come, I want you to ask yourself a couple questions. First, because burdens are a part of life, ask yourself: how much weight can I handle? We need to understand that not all of our burdens come from the outside. Many of them come from within. We often build our own burdens. We create our own problems. Some of us were afflicted this past week because we did not create enough margin in our lives, and as a result we became frustrated and angry. We allowed our tops to be blown because we took on more than we could handle. We put more on our calendar, more on our plate, more on our shoulders than we ever should have.

Behind me I have two wheelbarrows, which are an illustration of life. The first one is empty. It’s easy for me to move with one hand. Some of us had a week like this—no problem, life’s good. But as we make decisions, we start putting stuff in our wheelbarrow. “Okay, the kids need to go here. Sure, I can help with that ministry. Oh, yeah, we can buy that new car. You know, we’re going to create that argument with someone, because we’re angry with them.” We just keep adding in burdens.

Some of us grabbed burden upon burden this past week. These didn’t come because of someone else. We grabbed them. We took these things on ourselves. Here’s the problem: some of us can only handle a small burden. It’s all we’re able to take care of. We can carry this one burden from here to here. There’s nothing wrong with carrying burdens. God has created each of us to carry

different burdens. Some can carry one bag, if you will. Others can carry a lot. It doesn't make one person better or worse than the other. We're just created differently. But because we can't say no, because we don't create margin in our lives, some of us create our own problems. This wheelbarrow is a lot heavier. I know you can't tell, because I have such bulging biceps. This one is a lot heavier than that one.

But it's a very practical to ask how much weight can you handle? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Have you ever looked at your schedule and asked, "How much can we take as a family?" Some of you are dealing with marital strife, family conflict and all kinds of struggles because, quite frankly, you have filled your calendars with a whole bunch of burdens your family can't take care of, creating family issues.

Amanda does some substitute teaching in our local school system, but we have a hard and fast rule. Amanda can sub three days a week. The second she goes to three and a half or four days, the house is on fire and we're in trouble. Things start falling apart. Three days are okay, but we came to that realization the hard way. When the kids started yelling, "I have nothing to wear—I can't go to school naked!"—we knew we had a problem. Or when little Luke looked malnourished because there was no food in the refrigerator, we needed to think that through. We had to ask, "What amount of weight can this family carry?" Others of us need to ask this question regarding our job or our relationships. As a young man looking toward being a pastor, I had to ask, "Can I carry my load and take on others' burdens as well?" I ask young pastors, "Do you want to live the rest of your life with other people's stuff in your wheelbarrow? Are you willing to take on their burdens? Because the pastoral ministry is not just you walking around with your one bag of mulch, but a whole bunch of other people's mulch as well."

You have to ask how much weight you can handle. But that doesn't mean if you decide, "I'm a one-bag-of-mulch kind of guy. That's what I'm capable of," that God will never give you more.

And that leads us to the second question: what about the burdens other people bring into our lives, and the burdens God may bring for His purposes? Let's think about this. If two bags are the maximum weight you can carry, what happens if someone comes along and throws another burden on you? You'll be overwhelmed. You won't be able to lift it. Then what if God decides to add a trial into your life, and you've not created any margin—any room—to see God's purposes? You'll be frustrated and overwhelmed. We have to stop and ask: how much of a load can I bear?

How am I going to respond?

Not only should we ask how much we can handle, but we also should ask: which way am I going to respond? As burdens come into your life, there are four ways you can respond:

1. **Flight.** You're going to run away from it. If God allows some burdens, or people bring burdens to you, and it's more than you can handle, some of you will say, "I'm outta here." You want nothing to do with it. You think, "If I get as far from the wheelbarrow of my life as I can, I won't have to worry about these burdens." Some of us deal with burdens like ostriches—we stick our head in the sand and forget about them.

2. **Fright.** Some of us look at the wheelbarrow and we hang around—but we think, "There are four bags of mulch in there, and I can only carry one. Maybe two for a little bit. There's no way I can carry this. I don't know what I'm going to do. Suppose I try to lift it and my arms fall off? That would be ugly. Or what happens if the wheel falls off. Oh, no. And if it tips over, then all the mulch is going to be on the ground. I just don't know what to do. This is bad." Some of us are looking at our burdens right now and we won't lift them because we're scared to death. Then the what-ifs starting playing out: "What if I fail? What if I drop it? What if I let people down? What if...what if...what if...?" That's the response of fright. We don't carry the burden because we're too afraid.

3. **Fight.** This is the one I fall into, because I'm not a guy who runs away and I'm not usually a guy who sits and frets. I say, "Bring it on. Yeah. Add another bag. I can handle it, God." This is the John Wayne approach to burdens. Don't worry, your wheelbarrow won't break. I lift it and whoo! I love showing people what I can do. I can do deep knee bends while I carry it all. Some of you just love this, too. You know you're sweating profusely, but think, "Oh yeah, the joy of the Lord is my strength! I've got these burdens. I count it all joy! These burdens are good." So some of us fight.

But I'm going to tell you, these three responses are not the way to deal with burdens. They sound good. Some of them look good. Some of them will make us feel real good. But as James says, the problem is that flight, fright and fight are human approaches to a spiritual issue. What does he say is the right approach?

4. **Faith.** Whatever the nature of our burdens is, however heavy they are, James says to approach our burdens with faith. We see our burdens and we say, "There's a lot there. I could try to pick them up, because I'm a strong guy. I've got some muscles. I can handle it." But I don't need to handle it. God can. Or maybe, "Wow, that looks like a lot and I'm scared to death. I don't know what to do. I know there's no way I can handle it."

Faith says, "Don't worry. I'll never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Go ahead and try. With My strength and help, you'll be able to do it." Flight tells us to run away, but God says, "Don't run from your problems—run into them. Not with reckless abandon and foolishness, but run to your problems knowing that greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

To whom am I going to turn?

By faith we take our burdens and ask, "To whom am I going to turn?" When things get rough, we can turn to Jesus. Some of you John Wayne types will say, "I don't need anybody else. I'll do it myself." Others will say, "I'll run away and not worry about it." But the Christian response, as we'll see in our text, should be to turn to Jesus. James is saying, "In your suffering, you can be patient. What I've learned is that I can rely on my brother Jesus, Who is the Author and Finisher of my faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus invites us to "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" I thought about bringing in two oxen and a yoke, but Pastor Keith said, "No live animals unless it's Christmastime." So the only way I can explain it is that our burdens are hard to carry, and Jesus is offering to share our load. He says, "I'll take one handle; you take the other." When Jesus says, "Bring Me your issues. Cast your anxieties on Me, because I care for you," it doesn't mean you sit down and say, "Okay, Jesus, it's all Yours. I'm just going to watch." Some of you do that, and James addresses that in a moment.

Jesus tells us that when we have a load that's too big to bear, we shouldn't get angry or run away or put on our "strong man" hat, thinking we're invincible. Instead, we should use both hands to lift up one side of the load, and the God of the universe will grab the other handle. We're going to lift this thing together. When a load was too heavy for one ox to pull, they would use a yoke and pair two oxen together. Jesus offers to be yoked together with us, so He can help carry our struggles and burdens. We don't have to carry them alone.

So the questions are these. How much weight can you handle? How are you going to respond? And to whom are you going to turn? When burdens come and your life's wheelbarrow is filled up, these are the questions we have to ask. As James and Jesus and all of Scripture tell us, burdens are a common part of life.

2. We must cultivate patience.

We see in James 5:7–12 that the word patient or patience is used multiple times. That always tells me that there might be a theme here. James uses the word four times in these verses. Do you think he wants us to know something about patience? You bet. At the beginning of this passage, "*Be patient.*" At the beginning of verse eight, "*You also, be patient.*" Verse ten, you have seen "*the example of suffering and patience.*" James also gives us the picture of the farmer who is being patient.

This repeating theme raises some questions to be answered. If the group of believers to whom James is writing needs to be patient, then there are a couple truths we can learn.

1. Being a Christian doesn't exempt us from problems. Jesus doesn't say, "Come to Me and you won't have any more problems." That's not going to happen. He's already told us, "In this world, disciples, you'll have trouble. But take heart, I've overcome the world" (John 16:33).

We as a church have seen this. I believe we're a healthy, Bible-believing, God-honoring church. But each week we gather here and what do we do during our prayer time? We pray for people's burdens. Dozens upon dozens of small groups meet throughout the Fox Valley area almost every day of the week, and I can assure you—as I have visited many of these groups—they are no different from the group that meets in my home on Tuesdays. Every week when we get together, people have burdens. Life is beating them up. They have issues and concerns.

So not only Jesus' words, but also our own experience, reminds us that even Christians who are striving to live for God, who want to serve and honor Him with our lives, are not exempt from trials. James has also said that these trials come "in various kinds."

This week in our church we've seen emotional burdens, occupational burdens, spiritual burdens, physical burdens, financial burdens, temptation burdens. All of us as Christ-followers, at some point or another, have burdens.

2. Burdens will not end as long as we're in this world. James tells us, "Be patient..." 'til when? He doesn't say, "Christians, be patient for a year, because after that your burdens will be over." He doesn't say, "Be patient. After you get your ten-year Christian 'loyalty to Jesus' pin, then your life of burdens will be done." No, he says, "Be patient until the coming of the Lord."

That reminds us that the entirety of this life will be filled with burdens. You're not going to get away from them. That is a certainty—burdens and taxes, right? You're going to have them. You're going to pay them. They're part of life. It will be part of your entire flight. It's like you're getting on an airplane, ready to fly, and Jesus and James are the flight attendants. They're telling you, "Buckle your seatbelts, because this entire flight from start to finish will have turbulence. We're not even serving drinks on this flight, because we're going to be buckled in ourselves." So we need to be ready for the trials and tribulations, because they're going to come.

3. Being a Christian may mean, not the exemption of troubles, but the enhancement of trials in our lives. Some of the people in James' day had left paganism, had left the world's way of life, and now had devoted themselves to the calling of Jesus Christ. This meant living counter culturally, and it brought persecution. We live in a country where very little persecution is taking place, yet based on the ebb and flow of human society around the world, at some point our Christianity will be a problem here as well. In fact, rather than subtracting burdens, being a Christian may very well add the burden of persecution.

This means examining the concept of patience.

James therefore tells us we need to cultivate patience. What does the concept of patience entail? The call to patience for Christians in the Greco-Roman world of that day stood in opposition to their culture. That society had a high view of self, which often meant being prideful or arrogant. Remember back when we talked about worldly wisdom? One aspect of that kind of wisdom says, "There's a god—and you're him." If you think you're god, then why should you have to wait? Why is it not right in any circumstance, whether on the express lane or the express aisle, to expect that the world would open up like the Red Sea for you to go through? Why would you have to wait on people? Why do you have to wait on tests? Why do you have to wait on answers? Why do you have to wait on any of the myriad things we normally wait for? If I'm god, I should have what I want right now without any question.

For the Greeks, virtue meant you were so great that you should refuse to tolerate any insult or any injury from anyone or anything. You should never have to be inconvenienced in any way. But James says that out of humility we should realize, "I'm not as big as I think I am. I may have to wait. I may have to wait on God. I may have to lower myself and wait on others. I may have to say goodbye to dreams and ideas, because they might not happen in this decade. I'm going to have to be patient."

First of all, patience is built out of a heart of humility that says, "I'm not number one. I'm not demanding that things be done my way right away. I realize I'm a small part in a huge universe. I might have to wait for a while." The word James uses is the Greek word *makrothumia* which literally means to have macro-heat. *Makro* means long or big. *Thumia* means heat, as in thermal. So macro-heat implies a long fuse. You need to have a long wick on your bomb before you explode. You don't light it like a little firecracker and within 3/10 of a second you have to throw it in the air or you'll blow your hand off.

James is saying that in a world of struggle, strife and burdens, the Christian needs to have a long fuse. He's already said this in James 1:19: "*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*" Be patient. Don't lose your cool. Don't blow up too quickly. Why? Because, James continues, "*The anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.*"

Now, you would think we would know this. I can assure you that in my times of anger, I'm never happy with the outcome. I feel better. I feel a lot better. But I always have to go back and apologize to that individual for the things I've said. I'm usually far more abrupt than I want to be and say things I would never say if I really thought about it. So James urges me to be patient, to extend the wick of my life so it doesn't explode.

This means following the right examples.

As we look at this, consider the examples James gives us in James 5:10–11:

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Job and the prophets are two examples we can follow. Notice that James chooses not to use his brother Jesus as our example, the one man who was perfect and sinless, Who never lost His cool or flew off the handle. If James had done that, I would think, "Well, He's Jesus and I'm not. There's no way I can be like that, so I'll just ask for forgiveness." Instead, James mentions Job, a normal man like us, and the prophets—a whole group of people who were serving God. These men had it tough, but they didn't lose heart or give up or get angry at people. They knew God was going to use their trials and burdens to build character and perseverance.

Let's think about the example of Job. I don't have time to go through his whole life, but right at the beginning we learn a couple things about him. He was a man "blameless before God." That doesn't mean he was perfect, but he was a holy guy who honored and served God. He was loving and kind, praying for and confessing the sins of his children. How many of us have ever done that? When he's done asking forgiveness for his own sins, he brings his children up before God. "I know my children are sinners, so I'm going to confess their sins to You as well. I'm concerned about their spiritual wellbeing." What does he gain for that? He gets sick. He gets boils. He loses all his riches. His kids are together at a family party and the house caves in on them. He loses everything—it's now just Job and his wife. Everything else is gone.

As you read about his struggle, you will see the ongoing conflict in his heart. "What do I do in the middle of all these afflictions?" His wife says, "Curse God and die. Get angry at God." Some of us are getting angry at God today. "Why did You allow this? How can You say you love me and allow these things to happen? This makes no sense. This burden You've caused me to carry makes no human sense and so I'm angry with You."

The prophets could say the same thing. They were serving God, honoring God, doing what they were supposed to do—and what did they get? They would preach the words God gave them. I would think, since these words were from God, that people would be happy to hear them. But no, there wasn't any, "Amen, Jeremiah! He's our man." No. Instead it was, "Let's grab that guy and beat him up." Poor Jeremiah writes a whole book called Lamentations. You think he had burdens? He lamented. And story upon story upon story of the prophets tell us that although they honored and served God, they took a beating for it.

Turn back a couple pages just for a moment, to Hebrews 11, to get some perspective. We'll begin in verse 32: "*And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.*" He wishes he had time to tell you about the prophets. Well, what did the prophets do? Through faith, they conquered kingdoms. That's Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel. They "*enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.*"

These prophets did great things. Amazing things. Things you would think would make them receive the key to the city for all the good they've done. But notice what happens: "*Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated.*" They were filled with burdens, yet they served God. These examples show us that the Christian life will be filled with all kinds of burdens. But those burdens don't exempt you from a couple things.

First, they don't mean you can now live sinfully. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, "Because someone has hurt me, I now have the right to hurt them." "If you only knew how bad they hurt me, then you would know how angry and frustrated I am, and why I'm taking a pound of flesh from them—because you would do the same thing." That's probably true. But the problem with that reaction is it's not Tim's standard we're living by. It's Jesus' standard and He says, "Bless those who persecute you (Matthew 5:10). Pray for those who attack or seek to kill you (Matthew 5:44). Heap burning coals on their heads with love (Romans 12:20). Kill them with kindness." God says, "It's mine to avenge—I will repay" (Romans 12:19). Burdens don't give you the right to take sinful actions against others.

Second, burdens don't allow us to sit and feel sorry for ourselves, or to give up fighting or working or serving. Remember what the prophets did. Remember what Job did. They believed there was a purpose for suffering, and that God wants us to be patient so we can see the outcome.

This involves exercising patience.

We must choose to exercise the virtue of patience. James provides us with a picture of how this works. In addition to the examples of Job and the prophets, he calls us to remember the farmer. James 5:7-8: "*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. You also, be patient.*" Farming takes waiting. We all need to be

farmers. But James is not asking us to be fatalistic. Some of you find yourself with burdens, and you're ready to give up. "I'll go along for the ride, but I think God hates me. He wants to beat me up." Or, "People want to beat me up and knock me down, so I give up."

So we sit down and simply endure this thing, kind of like what I do on amusement park rides. I get on them. I don't want to be there. I feel like I'm going to throw up. Everybody wants to see a big bald guy look as sick as possible and be totally uncomfortable. I get on the stupid ride and I hate it. I endure the ups and downs, the sharp left turns, the sharp right turns....and then they have the audacity to say, "Wasn't that great?" I'm thinking "Unhuh. That was great. I'm glad I paid \$100 to come here and do that a whole bunch of times."

Some of you are looking at life that way. You're buckling in and saying, "I'm just going to grin and bear it. This is all God has for me. I know I can't quit, so I'm just going to go through life." But that's not what the patient farmer does. He works hard with the things under his control. He plants; he weeds; he fertilizes. He doesn't sit on his hands and expect a crop in the fall.

He also has to depend on things that are entirely out of his control. James mentions rain. A farmer can't make it rain. A farmer can't make sure the sun is going to come out. A farmer can't hold back the winds. There are things outside his control. So he has to wait. His patience doesn't come from doing nothing; it comes from knowing his limitations. He understands what he can do and he understands what God can do. He separates those things and he doesn't get frustrated about the things only God can do. He just waits.

Some of us are frustrated with other people because we think we can change them. But we can't—only God can. Get out of God's way. Just duck so God can hit them. You're encumbering God's ability to change them because you think you're in control. You're not. Let go of that burden. Give it to God so He can make the changes that need to be made.

James also tells us that there may be no visible indication that anything is taking place. The farmer has tilled his soil and planted his crop, but will he wake up the next morning to a full harvest? No. Day after day after day he's wondering, "Did the seed take root? Is it going to grow?" About a month after he plants, some green starts showing—a confirmation that something is growing. But that doesn't mean he knows what kind of harvest he'll get. That takes more waiting and watching as the plants go through different stages of growth. Patience is the virtue we have to live by, as the farmer shows us.

Another thought: the farmer can have a bumper crop growing one year, but then the next spring he'll have to start another crop. Some of us think life is good right now, therefore we can sit back on our laurels. But patience says, "Just because it was good behind you doesn't mean it's going to be good in front of you." I have to keep working and serving and resting in God, because I have no idea of the drought or trouble that may be coming my way.

Finally, we need to realize that no farmer plants a crop and thinks, "I did this." A lot of us carry burdens—especially you "fight" guys like me. We carry burdens and love the badge of honor that says, "I carried that wheelbarrow full of mulch this many miles. Look at me. Look how strong I am." The farmer says, "I could never have done this without God, because I can't turn on the sun. I can't turn down the wind and I can't turn on or off the rain. So God, You're the One Who did this. I had a small part in it which You allowed me to have, but really it's You Who made this possible."

So how do you get this patience that the farmer has? James uses the word endurance, or steadfastness—*hupomone*. It's the ability to endure when circumstances are difficult. It is not a passive sitting, but bearing things for a triumphant future that is to come. This patience recognizes that life is hard right now. I may not see any progress, or any good coming out of what I'm dealing with right now. But based on what I've been promised, based on what God has told me will take place, I'm going to trust, I'm going to hope, I'm going to rely on Him. And until it happens, I'm going to work every day of my life to move closer to that result.

3. We must continually practice patience until Jesus comes!

Where does James go next? The farmer looks to the harvest. Is that what we're looking for? Notice that James says we are to cultivate patience and continually practice it until Jesus comes. In James 5:8 he says, "*Establish your hearts*"—why? "*For the coming of the Lord is at hand.*" Jesus is coming! He has promised to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-7), and after that He will receive us to be with Him forever. There will be no more crying, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more tears. He's going to wipe away the tears from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). Everything is going to be different.

But until we get there, we are to work. We are to strive, yet we are also to rest in God and His ability to help us carry the burdens in our lives—because Jesus is coming. He's coming. But how long before the coming of the Lord will happen? It seems to be taking

a long time. When James wrote his letter, it had been 15 years since Jesus said He was coming back. That's a long time. But they had no idea that we'd be standing here 2,000 years later. That's why Peter reminds that we shouldn't think we're on the Lord's time schedule, because a day for us is like a thousand years for Him, and a day for Him is like a thousand years for us (2 Peter 3:8). God is on a different time table. The phrase James uses is that the coming of the Lord "*is at hand.*" He says, "*The Judge is standing at the door.*" He's ready to come in. There's an immanence here. In fact, over 300 times in the New Testament Jesus or the disciples talk about His second coming. That's one out of every 13 verses. He's standing at the door.

But why is He taking so long? Doesn't He know the burdens we're carrying? Second Peter 3:8–11 tell us the reason is that God is being patient with us. He doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to come to a saving knowledge of the truth. God is saying, "Child of Mine, I want you to be patient—because I am patient. I'm asking you to do what I'm asking of Myself. I'm being patient."

Think about how offended God is right now by all the junk that the world does. We shake our fists at God. We take credit for things for which only God deserves credit. Surely He has a long wick. His *makrothumia* is incredible. And He waits. But He also says, "One day, I'm coming." What will happen in that day? Why are we to be patient?

At His coming we will see God right all wrongs.

First of all, on that day God will right all wrongs. I usually don't read from my notes, but I was very specific in what I wanted to say. So forgive my dismissal from eye contact so I can read this to you, because I have some important pastoral words for you.

Some of you have suffered some amazing and horrific traumas in your life. You've have parents who have been emotionally, physically, maybe even sexually abusive. Some of you are perhaps currently suffering in an abusive marriage. You live daily under the barrage of verbal and emotional abuse; maybe even the threat of physical harm or actual physical abuse. Perhaps your mate has been unfaithful and you've struggled with the bitterness of being betrayed. Some of you have been victims of fraud or theft. Others have been victims of violent crimes such as rape or assault. Perhaps a loved one has been murdered.

What James tells us when he says the Judge is at hand and at the door is a reminder, Village Bible Church, that God has seen what you've gone through. He has seen and shared and participated in every tear that you have shed. He knows your disappointment. He knows your heartache. He knows that this is not the end. So don't grow sour. Don't grow bitter. Recognize and know that a great evil has been done to you. Don't diminish it. Don't push it away. But recognize that God is the God for those who have been served with injustice. God says, "Let Me deal with the injustice. Let Me deal with the abuse. Let Me deal with the punishment. Let Me deal with the revenge. You stay on the high road and be patient."

God knows what has been taken from you and if you let Him settle your case, God is going to make the enemy pay. He'll bring it about better than you could ever do on your own. Because God is still on His throne, He is in complete control. God is the God of justice. God always makes the enemy pay. It may not happen overnight. It may not even happen in this world. But one day in the future, a day of God's choosing—and He knows exactly when that is—He will take care of what has been done to you.

He is the God of justice Who is going to show Himself strong, not only in the life of your enemy on the day of judgment, but He wants to show Himself strong in your life. You're not just going to get out of this by the skin of your teeth. God promises that if you rely on Him and trust in Him, no matter what you've experienced, you have the hope that you can come out better than you ever would have without Him.

God will right the wrongs. I don't have an answer for it. I don't know how He will do it. But on that day, when we stand before the great Judge, every wrong will be addressed, and God will do it perfectly. So give it to Him. Don't grumble. Don't complain. Don't fight against people. Don't try to get your pound of flesh. Is there justice we can get in this world? Yes, there are means that we can address for some of the injustices that take place, but I'm talking about letting go of the personal, vengeful things we would like to do when trouble comes our way.

At His coming we will see it was worth the wait.

Here's the final thing I want you to see: it will be worth the wait. Notice that James says "*the farmer waits for the precious fruit.*" The valuable fruit, the glorious fruit—these are synonyms for that. We're waiting for something awesome. The great preacher Jonathan Edwards put it this way: "Our bad things turn out for good. Our good things can never be lost. And the best things are yet to come."

The Bible is clear that we've not seen anything yet. In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul writes, *"No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."* One day, God is going to come and right every wrong, and we're going to be blown away by the good God brings to our lives.

A couple years ago we took our two youngest boys to an NIU football game while Noah was on fall retreat. At the end of the game, my boys said, "This was a great day. This was awesome. I wish life could be like this every day." An NIU Huskie game really means a lot to little kids. So they were really excited. Little did they know it had already been planned that after the game we were going to pick out our new puppy. I said to my boys, "Listen. If you think this was great, you ain't seen nothing yet." When they walked in to that place, one of my boys said, "I never want this to end. I never want this to end."

I know life is hard and I know some of you are dealing with horrific things. But stay true to God, be patient, don't lose your cool, rely and rest on God—and when you stand in His presence, you will say, "I don't ever want this day to end." And here's the great truth: it never will.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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