

Practicing Patience

James 5:7-11

5-5-2024

John Ortberg writes about a conversation he once had with an airline pilot who told him his favorite story from all his years of flying.

on one of his flights, an elderly couple were flying first class and were sitting behind an extremely rude and impatient businessman who had become very frustrated with them. They had been just ahead of him in line at the gate, and again while boarding the plane. They moved very slowly but he was in a hurry. Of course no matter how impatient or how much of a hurry he was in, the plane was not going to get there any faster, but his irritation grew with each step they took. When the meal was served, they delayed the businessman again by having to get some pills from their bag in the overhead storage, inadvertently dropping a battered duffel bag. It was too much for him, What's the matter with you people? he exploded loud enough for the entire cabin to hear. I'm amazed you ever get anywhere. Why can't you just stay home?

to register his anger, he then sat down and reclined his seat back as hard as he could—so hard that the elderly husbands' tray of food, spilled all over both he and his wife. The flight attendant apologized to the couple profusely: "Is there anything we can do?" she asked. The husband explained that it was their fiftieth wedding anniversary and they were flying for the very first time. "Let me at least bring you a bottle of wine," the flight attendant offered.

she did so. when it was uncorked, the elderly husband stood up, proposed a toast—and then proceeded to pour the entire bottle over the head of the impatient and rude businessman sitting in front of them.

At which everyone in the entire cabin cheered.

thus demonstrating to the delight of everyone on the flight, that old adage, don't get mad, get even.

it's a pretty simple and predictable storyline, a favorite theme for movies

someone is wronged, they get angry, and then they get even.
in the process of getting their revenge, they usually blow up and destroy any
number of cars, buildings and people along the way.

we call it entertainment because anger and revenge sell

but what happens when you are the one who is wronged?
how do you respond when things are not going well?
when you face trials and suffering?
when life isn't moving as fast or in the direction you want?

chances are good that you either get angry, give up, or start grumbling, perhaps
all three

have you ever noticed that nowhere in scripture does it ever tell us to take
revenge on those we feel have wronged us.

**Instead, Paul tells us in Romans 12:19, do not take revenge, my friends,
but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge, I will
repay, says the Lord.**

**1 Peter 2:23 reminds us of the example Jesus set when it says, "*When
they hurled their insults at him, Jesus did not retaliate; when he suffered,
he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges
justly.*" (1 Peter 2:23)**

Scripture never tells us it's okay to grumble and complain.
Remember Israel did it and ended up spending the next 40 years wandering
through the wilderness in the book of Exodus.

and nowhere does it tell us that if things get difficult or we face opposition, just
give up.

Instead, it says things like, Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up in Galatians 6:9.

beginning near the end of chapter 4, James had warned the merchants who in their drive to make money usually on the backs of the poor, were ignoring and turning a deaf ear to God

at the beginning of chapter 5 he then turned his attention to the rich, who were making money their God and in their greed were cheating and mistreating their workers

and now, as we look at James 5:7-11 he turns his attention to the poor, those who were being mistreated and taken advantage of by these others specifically addressing their response to the oppression and injustice they were facing

in the face of their suffering, instead of giving in to their tempers by getting angry, getting even, or giving up, James says,

“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming.

to drive home his point, James uses an illustration from nature

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” (James 5:7–8)

farmers knew the spring and summer rains would come in their own time and there was nothing they could ever do to hurry them
all the frustration and impatience in the world would never change that

just as farmers learn to wait on the rains knowing that fretting over it wont make them come any faster

James says there is no need for us to fret over our lives either when we know they are in Jesus’ hands, so hang in there and be strong he is coming and when he does you have far more to look forward to

impatience is the result of things not going the way or as fast as we want which explains why there is so much impatience in the world which doesn't want to slow down or wait, only go faster and faster

we hear the consequences of this in the parade of stories of people lashing out in anger often over things that are no big deal

James Gleick makes this point in his book *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, where he gives example after example of how we have become addicted to speed and hurry.

in one case he referred to an 8 year, \$434 million project in Springfield Virginia several years ago which caused an additional 30 minute delay on each rush hour trip. After suffering through 8 years of this one hour a day delay, it is estimated that drivers would save somewhere between 90 seconds and 2 minutes in their daily commute.

Salt Lake City felt it was worth it to spend \$1.6 billion dollars over 4 years in order to reconstruct a portion of the I-15 so that drivers would be able to travel about 1 mile per hour faster when the work was done.

and the faster life gets, the more impatient and less tolerant people seem to become

instead of getting angry and plotting revenge when wronged, James says practice patience

the word for patience does actually have a close connection to anger

it is a compound word

makro, which means long or distant

and thymia which means anger or temper

it means put a long fuse on your anger

it refers to keeping your cool, both outside and in, during difficult situations

not letting your anger get the best of you when someone wrongs you

not letting anger and frustration ruin your day or your life

it is sometimes translated as longsuffering

patience doesn't mean ignoring wrong or turning a blind eye to injustice or letting others walk all over us
rather it means not lashing out and letting such things control us or our response
Paul did say be angry yet sin not. do not let the sun go down on your anger
thereby giving the devil a foothold in your life.

the reason we can practice patience is that we know it is not going to last
James says the reason for this is the assurance not only that Jesus is coming, he is near, verse 9 says he is at the door
and when he does he will make all things right

Theologian Cornelius Plantinga Jr said patience is like good motor oil. It doesn't remove all the contaminants. It just puts them into suspension so they don't get in your works and seize them up. He said Patient people, have so to speak, a large crankcase. they can put a lot of irritants into suspension.

suppose the person behind you keeps cracking their knuckles. you put your annoyance into suspension. suppose you can't find your keys and you feel a little scuffed up. Put it into suspension. Suppose somebody is late to your meeting and you feel your anger start to rise. Into the crankcase it goes.

Patient people have a big capacity for absorbing irritants without seizing up. they get annoyed, but they have a place to put their annoyance.

patience is listed as one of the primary traits of love in 1 Cor 13
it is also included among the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Ephesians

and instead of getting angry and getting even, Paul said in Colossians that along with compassion, kindness, humility and gentleness, we are to clothe ourselves with patience. bearing with each other and forgiving whatever grievances we may have against one another. we are to forgive just as the Lord has forgiven us. and over all these virtues we are to put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:12-17)

for no matter where you are and what you may be going through, no matter how difficult the circumstance and trial, God is with you.

or as one Hawaii based marine wrote in a letter to his mother after he was deployed to Iraq, “well the sun is setting over the desert sky, and it will soon be dark, so I must close this letter. As I said, don’t worry about me. I walk with the hand of God on my shoulders, and have no intention of losing his companionship.

in the face of trials and suffering James said be patient

because, as the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, “*When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*” (Isaiah 43:2–3)

in keeping with what he had already written about the importance of learning to tame our tongue in chapter 3, James then follows this up in his discussion on patience by pointing out that one of the first places patience is seen is in learning to control our tongue

our words are often the very first place our anger is revealed, the things we say to or about others

:9 says, “*Don’t grumble about each other, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.*”

the reason for not grumbling is again a reminder that the Lord is near

For look—the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9)

learn to practice patience and in your patience stop grumbling and griping, complaining and criticizing.

acting as judge in condemning others

remember what you’re going through isn’t going to last

don't say something you will later regret
the true judge is standing at the door.

God has said it is my place to avenge, I will repay

so don't get in the way!

in the words of one writer, we need to stop telling God how big our storms are, and start telling our storms how big our God is.

As James continues, he then points out that patience is seen in not giving up and walking away but perseverance hanging in there especially when under fire for that too is practicing patience

He uses two illustrations to make his point the first is the prophets who may have faced suffering and persecution but they didn't give up. Like Jeremiah who almost died after he was thrown in a cistern in the courtyard of the palace guard in an effort to keep him quiet. yet that didn't stop his message after he got out

or like Amos who refused to be silenced even after being slapped in the face, ridiculed and scorned in front of the king for the message he proclaimed

they hung in there even in the face of opposition

the other example James gives is Job who's own wife encouraged him to just end it all, curse God and die, she said, yet he refused and held onto his integrity.

like patience, the word James uses here for persevere is also a compound word it literally translates to stand up or abide under

a good illustration for it would be one of those small Mexican burros carrying a heavy load

to persevere means to be able to stand up even when weighed down by a heavy load

James had already written in chapter 1:3 that it is the testing of our faith which develops perseverance. and perseverance must complete its work so that we might be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Paul wrote, “Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” (2 Thessalonians 1:4)

patience and its corresponding perseverance, are seen by not giving up in difficulty hanging in there, as James said in chapter 1, so that it can complete its work so we become mature and complete, not lacking anything

There is another important aspect of this which we often miss
God frequently will use our perseverance to turn our trial into an advantage

some may remember the old Paul Newman movie, Cool Hand Luke. Newman plays a character who is sent to a prison camp and almost immediately becomes the target of the camp bully. for whatever reason the bully doesn’t like him and picks a fight. then one afternoon for fun, the corrupt warden gathers up all the prisoners in a big circle in the prison yard and put Luke and the bully in the center to fight it out. As expected, the bully beats Luke to a pulp, but Luke refuses to quit. every time he is knocked down, he gets up, over and over again even when he could hardly stand. Finally, the bully had enough, turned his back and walked away. But Luke followed him and kept pounding on his back.

That perseverance ended up winning the respect of every man in the camp, even the bully. and in the end, they all recognized him as their leader.

That’s perseverance.

It turns trial into an advantage

Just like Jesus whom Hebrews 12:1-3 says “let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and*

perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:2–3)

he turned even something as evil as the cross into his and our advantage

and that is what the early church became known for even though they were largely poor and abused, persecuted and hated, they remained faithful in the midst of it and the world took notice they couldn't understand and were drawn to these people who were hated and despised yet still demonstrated love for those in need. their patience and love in the midst of trial conquered the hatred

In the Ragamuffin Gospel, Brennan Manning wrote, What makes authentic disciples is not visions, ecstasies, biblical mastery of chapter and verse, or spectacular success in the ministry, BUT A CAPACITY FOR FAITHFULNESS. Buffeted by the fickle winds of failure, battered by their own unruly emotions, and bruised by rejection and ridicule, authentic disciples may have stumbled and frequently fallen, endured lapses and relapses, gotten handcuffed to the fleshpots and wandered into a far country. Yet they kept coming back to Jesus.

That's perseverance inspired by patience!

It's what the farmer waits for, the prophets were known for, and Job refused to turn his back on

in his study on the Mind of Christ, TW Hunt said the proof of our faith is not success or even answered prayer. It is enduring/persevering

so instead of getting mad, complaining and giving up, James says practice patience, stop grumbling and hang in there, don't give up because Jesus is coming back for those who wait.