
Spiritual Formation Part 12

Discipleship Tools www.discipleshiptools.org

James 5: 7-12

Patience in Suffering!

This passage is about standing firm, which we can do all the way from sowing the right seed to receiving the greatest harvest of the highest quality. It takes patience to work the land; one must clear the field, plow the dirt, plant the seed, thin the sprouts, clear the weeds, fertilize, irrigate, constantly take care of the plants, trim, pollinate, engage in the on-going endeavors of cultivating the soil, including measuring and evaluating, and then, glean the final harvest. Then, it is time for the next season. This all takes effort and time; it does not just happen overnight at a whim.

It is the same with our spiritual formation. We receive Christ into our lives, but that is not the end of the matter. Rather, it is only the beginning! Jesus plants the seed, the Spirit waters it, and then we embark on our great adventure, the cultivation of our own lives by the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, learning, sharing, devotions, fasting, fellowship, and the like. Then, we are honed and trimmed so we can grow. This is a slow and glorious process; yes, this is what the Christian life is all about on this earth, as it is about the journey and not the destination. Our destination is already booked and secured; now, we are to concentrate on what to do while we are on our way to His Way! Even when others come against us to exploit and betray us, our purpose is to grow in our security in Christ. It must be His Way and not our circumstances. Then, our faith will flourish, even in times of adversity and sickness.

The call is for patience. God is still in control, even when we do not see it. He will return. And, even if it does not happen in our lifetime, He is still on the throne and has our very being in His hands. When our eyes are on Christ, then our eyes are not overwhelmed by what we are going through in life. As the farmer looks to the rain, we are to look to the Ultimate Farmer, our LORD. He is our hope because He is our courage!

- *Patient* means “waiting.” The context infers waiting for the correction of injustice. We do not automatically receive God’s promise, except for our salvation; we have to wait for His timing, which is the best timing (Luke 18:1-8)! Those who transgress—who sin—will be judged! We can wait because we have hope in the greater purpose which is unfolding for us.
- *Coming of our Lord*, also called in Scripture the “last days,” means the “Messianic era.” It does not necessarily mean that time is running out. It is not a “time” reference but a period in time. Because of the phrasing in the English, a lot of spurious doctrine has been read into this phrase that is just not there in Greek syntax or meaning. *Last days* was inaugurated by the incarnation of our Lord

(Matt. 1; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 2:18). This refers to the new and unique “covenant” (some call this *dispensation*) in contrast to the period of The Law. The point is that God’s unfolding revelation for us is His grace, giving us His fullness and the finality that is to come. Whatever eschatological view you have, all biblical views look to Christ's second coming as the next great event in our redemptive history. Nowhere in the Bible are we given a timeline of when it will take place—just that it will. We are called to always be watching for it, but not be so obsessed by it that it takes us away from the main call of building His Kingdom and discipleship! Most of the Disciples, including James, expected the impending return of our Lord in their lifetime.

- *Farmer*, and his work of cultivation and harvest, are images of growth and the Day of Judgment (Matt. 12:36-37; 24:36; 25:31-46; Mark 13:32; Acts 17:31; 1 John 2:28; 4:17). This parallels the parables of Jesus in Matthew 13. A farmer was totally dependant (back then) on the rain, soil, and such for his crop. In like manner, we are totally dependant on God for our salvation and assistance in our spiritual growth. However, both we and the farmer still toil in the efforts to make it come about.
- *Precious/valuable* means very important and valuable, as it is a fruit of the earth to give us sustained life.
- *Fruit of the earth/yield its valuable crop* is an image of harvest, referencing judgment; it is good for the elect, but bad for those who reject Christ (Matt. 13).
- *Latter/Autumn...Spring rains*. In Israel, these rains come in October and November which amounts to three-fourths of the total yearly rainfall after the grain is planted. If these rains come early, the crop cannot be planted in time and the seeds will wash away. The spring rain comes in March and April just prior to harvest. Without it, the seeds never germinate. If it comes at the wrong time, such as the harvest time in June, the crop is ruined (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:24).
- An illustration from agriculture is so appropriate for us and our faith development because the example parallels the cultivation of a harvest as the culture of our faith; the efforts, requirements, and obedience, as well as trust in the Farmer—our Lord—is paramount. Without any effort, we will yield no results—no harvest. Yet, when we are being cared for and cultivated in Him, we will yield bounties of abundant, contagious faith that spurs on the cultivation in Christ of others!

Being a farmer in James’ day was a harsh, life-and-death occupation, where one was dependant on and at the mercy of the rain and ground. There were no modern irrigation methods, fertilizers, or pesticides, just hard work and waiting; it is a perfect image of what it means to grow in Christ at times, as sometimes, all we can do is wait. We desire retribution and vengeance; He desires for us to wait expectantly, seeking Him with confidence. But, we do have irrigation, fertilizer, water, and pesticides in Him

which are His Word, prayer, fellowship, and His Spirit! If we do not learn and practice patience, we will quickly become impatient, bitter, and bow to self-pity. When we wait, we are not in a hopeless, meaningless holding-pattern, for we are learning and growing in Him! While we wait, God is working, He is in control! He is compassionate and will intervene, heal, restore, and bless in the fullness of His timing (Gen. 50:20; Psalm 37:7; 130:5; Isa. 49:23; Jer. 29:11; Lam. 3:26; Mic. 7:7; Hab. 2:3; Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 8:28-39; 13:1; Gal. 4:4; Phil. 1:6; James 1:2-18).

Questions

1. What are some of the things that cause you to lose patience? What has really tested your patience to the breaking point?
2. What does it mean to you to be able to stand firm in your faith with distinction, regardless of what you feel or face?
3. What does it mean to you that God is in control, even when you do not see it?
4. How would your life improve with more development in showing patience?
5. What kind of encouragement would you need in order to have “staying power” if you were facing persecution?
6. How can you have confidence that God is still in control, even when you do not see it?
7. God desires us to wait expectantly, seeking Him with confidence. How does it give you perseverance in your life knowing that someday, you will see His purpose and marvel at how it made you better?
8. What can you do to make sure your circumstances—whether they include toxic family members, disgruntled work situations, spiritual warfare, or a debilitating illness—do not derail your faith or take you off God’s path?
9. What happens when your purpose in life is not lined up to His? What can you do about it and keep your “cool?” Remember, you can do it!
10. What do you need to do to cultivate greater depth in Christ? How can spending more time in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, learning, sharing, devotions, fasting, and fellowship help you? When and how will you do this? Who can help you?

To see the entire James series go to www.intothyword.org and then Bible Studies

© 2005, Rev. Richard J. Krejcir, *Discipleship Tools* www.discipleshiptools.org