



## “Faith’s Response to Suffering”

### REVIEW

James serves as a mirror to examine the true nature of our trust in God. How we respond to the various events of life reveal the state of our faith. True trust in God’s provision enables us to respond according to God’s ways. True faith enables wise living. This letter contains numerous life instruction requiring genuine faith in God. Along with those instructions James included divine insights to help us understand the logic behind those instructions. So far, we have explored several life categories requiring a faith response.

- I. **Faith’s response to trials and temptation 1:2-27**
- II. **Faith’s response to partiality and prejudice 2:1-13**
- III. **Faith’s true nature 2:14-26**
- IV. **Faith’s response to conversation 3:1-12**
- V. **Faith’s way of life 3:13-4:12**
- VI. **Faith’s response to God’s will 4:13-17**

Today we continue our exploration of another aspect of life requiring a faith response.

### VII. **Faith’s response to suffering and persecution 5:1-12**

*Patiently endure*

James first seeks to encourage persecuted Christians by calling them to realize the ultimate plight of the selfish persecutor

#### A. **Realize the ultimate prize of the enduring persecuted**

Last time we focused on the persecutors and their ultimate plight.

##### 1. **Their condemnation is certain**

They are storing up a treasure of wrath at the coming of the Lord.

##### 2. **Their crime is clear.**

James exposed the sins of the rich persecutors.

*a. Withholding just wages*

*b. Luxuriously living*

*c. Wanton pleasure*

*d. Heartless persecution*

James encourage them to take heart – consider their end. Remember! Vengeance is mine declares the Lord. James then addressed those suffering persecutions. He penned both instruction and insight regarding faith’s response to suffering.

#### B. **Realize the ultimate prize of longsuffering endurance**

James issued four basic instructions regarding suffering. He included three examples of a healthy response to suffering.

##### 1. **The circumstance**

The context clearly refers to persecution by the selfish rich. The use of “therefore” ties the two passages together. The instruction applies to more than persecution. James expands on persecution specifically to suffering in general. The term suffering has to do with bad feelings or what makes one feel bad.

Considering examples James uses, suffering includes the struggle of everyday life in general to the complete loss of everything.

The Bible extensively addresses the subject of trials and suffering.

## **TERMS**

Misfortune, calamity, affliction

Mistreatment, oppression

Bear hardship, receive or suffer hard blows from without

Distressed by outward circumstances

Distressed by inner emotional upheaval

## **It is no respecter of Persons**

Stress and suffering are experienced by believer and unbeliever alike. Contrary to some teaching, God does not promise the Christian suffering free living. In fact, He promises the opposite.

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Joh 16:33*

*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12*

## **It never arrives announced**

Sooner or later tragedy will march into your own living room. It is only a matter of time until your emotions will be assaulted, and your composure erased by the sound of a siren in the night or a cry or the jolt of a 2AM phone call. You can't choose the time or place or intensity of the pain that penetrates your soul and often shakes the very foundations of your faith. What happens is outside our control. We can choose how we respond. James includes specific instructions for those suffering.

## **2. The Commands (instructions)**

### **a. Suffer Long**

*Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. 5:7*

The command translated "be patient" comes from the marriage of two Greek terms. "makro" meaning long and "thumos" meaning passion, anger, temper. The result is a term meaning long anger, long tempered. The concept has to do with controlling any negative response to a person or event for an extended period of time. It's the opposite of the reaction of the flesh listed in Galatians 5 "outburst of anger." It is one of the characteristics (fruit) of one directed by the Holy Spirit. It describes bearing up or forbearing difficulty by consideration of future events.

James even includes the period of time one should refrain from negative response.

*UNTIL the coming of the Lord.*

He included an example or illustration of long-suffering.

*The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being long-suffering about it, until it gets the early and late rains. James 5:7*

Be like the farmer patiently waiting until the proper time. The farmer realizes that no amount of fretting or complaining will accelerate the growing process. He must submit to the process. He doesn't waste the emotional energy, knowing things happen on a time schedule. James instructed them to be like the long-suffering farmer waiting for the right time.

*You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. James 5:8*

We have no control over certain events or what others do. We do have control over our response. The first response is long-suffering

**b. Strengthen your hearts.**

James used a term meaning to confirm, set, establish, bolster, encourage, build up.

Jesus used this term when he told Peter to strengthen his brothers after he turned back to the Lord from being sifted like wheat. Luke 22:32

Paul used the term in a prayer “to Him who is able to **strengthen** you.” Rom 16:25

Paul sent Timothy to **strengthen** and exhort in the faith. 1 Thess 3:2

Paul prayed that God would **strengthen** their hearts blameless. 1 Thess 3:13

Paul declared that the Lord is faithful and will **establish** you and guard you against the evil one. 2 Thess 3:13

Peter asserted the Lord would Himself restore, strengthen and establish you after experiencing trial and testing.

1 Peter 5:10

Here James instructs them to strengthen their hearts. The use of the plural here perhaps instructs them to strengthen each other in the time of trial. Part of the heart strengthening comes from a conscious awareness of Christ’s return.

*While the wealthy turn to their riches and hedonistic pleasures, believers will find the courage to turn to God and wait for Him to act. Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*

There is something about hard times that increase our longing for Christ’s return.

**c. Don’t complain**

The third instruction is to no complain or grumble.

*Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. James 5:9*

James warns them to strengthen one another instead of complaining against one another. True long-suffering maintains a positive attitude and outlook. How easy it is for Christians to turn on one another when things get difficult. If you are patiently waiting for God to judge your persecutors, be aware that the same Judge will also deal with your grumbling and fussing. It is easy in today’s social and political climate to complain.

Paul instructed the Philippians regarding the “favorite” past time.

*Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding forth to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Philippians 2:14-16*

Refusal to lapse into grumbling and complaining demonstrates to the world a superior source of hope and faith. It is like a shining light in the dark world in which we live.

**d. Pay attention to the prophet’s long-suffering.**

*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 5:10*

James called those familiar with the Scriptures to recall how the prophets responded to trial and persecution. Even though God commissioned them to proclaim His word he did not always exempt them from pain and suffering. They didn’t suffer for wrong doing but for boldly proclaiming God’s word. Hebrews 11 contains a summary of those who suffered; some with immediate positive results, others delayed blessing.

*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— who through faith conquered kingdoms, 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. 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— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Hebrews 11:32-38*

Most of the prophets suffered at the hand of the ones they came to serve. Elijah, Elisha, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Stephen. The suffering of God's servants through history abounds. Reading those stories helps us realize the power of faith under fire. James calls us to pay attention.

#### ***e. Endure***

James implies this instruction by calling them to remember the example of Job.

*We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. James 5:11*

Most every Jew was familiar with the story of Job. James called them to consider the endurance of Job and the blessing that resulted. James already wrote about the blessing of endurance in chapter 1. The term endurance means to "remain under". Bear up, remain under.

Here is the description of endurance I suggested then.

*Faith generated endurance is the decision to continue pursuing and doing what we know is right before God (God's will), despite my feelings, or fatigue and despite any impulse to escape, grumble, or crumble under the test.*

By faith we continue on without questioning what God is doing but trusting that whatever come my way somehow works out for my good and His glory. We entrust our soul to a faithful Creator. The story of Job is monumental. The book has more to teach about God's sovereign activity in this world than man's suffering. Job became an object lesson of genuine faith. Since James call us to remember Job's endurance and consider the outcome of his faith let's take a moment to review the story.

Here is how the inspired Word describes him.

*There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually. Job 1:1-5*

*And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:8-12*

Satan proceeded to strip Job of all his possession along with his beloved children.

Here was Job's response to this horrendous turn of events.

*Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Job 1:20-22*

That wasn't enough for Satan.

*And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life." Job 2:3-6*

*So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. Job 2:7-10*

The next 36 chapters records a conversation between Job, three of his friends and Elihu trying to make sense of it all. Job continued to maintain his basic innocence. He affirmed his trust in God yet still demanded answers from God.

*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him. Job 13:15*

Job insisted on a face to face audience with God to plead his case. God finally granted that audience and laid Job out with a barrage of pointed questions regarding His sovereignty over all creation and the events of history. In the end, Job recognized his arrogance and repented.

James told them to remember the outcome of God's dealings.

*And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Job 42:10*

*And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. Job 42:12*

*He had also seven sons and three daughters. And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days. Job 42:13-17*

James zeroed in on the compassion and mercy of God.

### ***f. Pray***

If you drop down to verse 13, we find a fifth response to suffering prescribed.

*Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. 5:13*

Is any individual suffering? Let them pray.

There are other responses to suffering prescribed in the Bible. Next week I want to draw together some of the other passages concerning suffering and offer an overview of the Biblical teaching on suffering and tribulation.

## **3. The insights**

I already mentioned some of these.

The coming of the Lord is near.

The Lord is ready to judge the complainers.

God blesses those who endure.  
The Lord is full of compassion  
The Lord is merciful.

Do I respond to trials and suffering like the farmer, the prophets and Job?