

Series: Faith Works-James
Sermon 11 "Patience\Impatience"
August 7, 2016

Carey Nieuwhof wrote an article recently titled Why Christians should stop saying "prayer works" (and 2 other things).

He begins by asking the question "should we really stop saying that prayer works? Well, yes and no. Most people who say prayer works these days really mean God did what I wanted him to do. As if prayer was a button to be pushed to release exactly what they wanted from the vending machine. Prayer is not a button to be pushed; it's a relationship to be pursued.

Prayer does work; but it works very differently than we'd like. It still works:

- When we can't trace out any direct result from our prayer.
- It works when the opposite of what we prayed for happens.
- It works in those moments when we feel very distant from God.
- It works when we banged on the door of heaven for years and are not sure anything is going on up there at all.

There are scores of people inside and outside the church who spirits are crushed because they prayed fervently and: they didn't get the job. Their mom died of cancer. Their child was born without a heartbeat. They ended up in a car crash that left them permanently disabled. Prayer doesn't work because I got what I wanted and they didn't. The parade of saints across the centuries would have been shocked to see prayer reduced to God doing what I ask him to do what I ask him to do it.

Do things happen supernaturally when we pray? Well, yes they do. But often in ways we cannot understand or even trace out. So pour your heart out to God. Pray about the things Scripture says are close to God's heart. And when something goes your way, be grateful and offer it back to the God gave it to you. And when things don't go your way, I understand that God is still very much in control and very much loves you. Just because God is silent doesn't mean God is absent.

James Dobson says in his book When God Doesn't Make Sense. "How can God explain within our human limitations that our agony is necessary,

that it does have a purpose, that there are answers to our tragedies? I wonder if God anticipates the day when he can make us understand what was occurring in our time of trial."

Until that day, James says, "Be patient...". We are in this series called Faith Works and we have been going through the book of James. We are coming down to the end and James says, "Be patient..."

Who wants to be patient? Last week we talked about money and now we are talking about patience. You guys may not show up next week. How many of you have ever said, "I am not the most patient person." We say it like, that's the way it's always going to be.

Right now, I am working with a lady named Susan. She is been hurt by someone in the worst way. When we first met, she told me "Todd, I am not a forgiving person. If you hurt me, I get angry and mean. That's just the way I am." Susan has been a follower of Jesus for at least 30 years. Somehow following Jesus hasn't transformed her heart in the areas of anger and forgiveness. So I asked Susan, "Do you think God wants to use this difficult time to make you less angry and more forgiving?" I have to tell you. She has been fighting. Every day she sends me a devotional that she's reading about anger or forgiveness.

Some of us are like Susan when it comes to patience. We have accepted that we are not patient. Some of you may be asking, "What's the big deal?" Look back at verse 7. He expands his idea by saying, "Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming."

The end, when Jesus returns is a big idea in James 5. Last week, in verse 3, it mentions "you have hoarded wealth in the last days." In verse 8, it says, "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." You see it again in verse 9, "don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters; or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door." Why all this focus on the end when Jesus will return? I think it's because the end can either be a scary thing or an exciting thing.

In all of these sermons, throughout the book of James, there have been 2 options that we have in front of us. We can play favorites or we can show mercy to all. We can build people up with our words or we can tear them down. We can depend on God's wisdom or we can try to do it ourselves. We can be humble, thinking of God and others or we can think only of ourselves. You can be generous with your money or you can be very selfish.

Today, you can either be patient, which is a characteristic of something the Holy Spirit is trying to develop or you can do the opposite, which means your focus is on what happened to you, the person that hurt you or how difficult the circumstance is.

I think there is a reason that James mentions money and patience in the same chapter with regards to the end. When I mention money- does it scare you to death because you know it has been all about you and it has not been about others? Or, are you excited that God would celebrate how you used your finances by being generous toward others?

Take patience, when you think about the end, does it make you uncomfortable because you held grudges, you have made excuses about your circumstances or your attitude has been really bad? Or, do you have a level of confidence that you have patiently try to wait on God and trust Him? Your focus has not been on those who hurt you, but on the faithfulness of God.

When there is an excitement and a celebration about meeting Jesus in the end, we probably understand what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 "So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever."

Guys, this patience is a really, really big deal. We tend to blow it off; James doesn't. When patience is not present, it corrupts us, and hurts the people around us. So, for the next few moments, I want us to try to understand patience. When James says, "Be patient," what does he mean? It sounds good, but what does it really look like when I choose patience? James gives us some specific examples. Let's look at a few.

In the second half of verse 7, it says, "See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains." I think James is trying to tell us that Patience is needed for the long time of hardship. James doesn't just say, "Be patient" without any context or definition. His illustration takes us from the fall all the way to the summer. The time frame is at least 8 to 9 months. Patience is easy for a short time - but James tells us it is needed for the long time.

The second illustration is found in verse 10. "Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." The prophets were chosen to take God's message of repentance to a people who had often wandered off. They needed to be brought back. The prophets would be God's voice.

All of them had a difficult message to convey that the people needed to return to God. Not only was the message difficult, but some had challenging circumstances. Amos was a good ole farmer, who had to go the city. Hosea was asked to marry a prostitute and even in her unfaithfulness in marriage, he was asked to take her back, again. Isaiah was told that you are to be my messenger, but no one is ever going to respond to your message. Rarely did anything go right for these guys, yet God asked them to be faithful and obey and stand firm. Sometimes patience is needed when others cause us hardship.

Don't miss this. In verse 7 and 10, when James says be patient, the Greek word means long or slow to anger. Be patient with others is the focus. Have a high tolerance for what you put up with. Don't take revenge.

We can be impatient with people. James could have said, "When people harm you, be patient. Don't get revenge and don't punch them in the face."

That would be easy to follow, but James says, "Don't grumble..." when it comes to people. Grumbling is complaining, zinging people, griping and always finding fault. James doesn't say try to avoid this. He says, "Don't grumble against one another ... or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!" This is serious.

Grumbling is a seed that is terrible and toxic, yet we feel like we have been pulled over for a rolling stop at a stop sign and we say, "What's the big deal!"

If you want to rid your life of grumbling and if you want to be patient, just think of how patient God has been with you. Tim Keller says this is the only way to become more patient. I think that is why he mentions the prophets. Over and over, God had to send his messengers when his people would turn their backs on Him. It is not just the Israelites. How many times have you turned your back on God? How many times has God grumbled against you? If anyone has the right to grumble, complain or find fault in me ...I have given him plenty of opportunities. He is challenging us to be slow to anger with others like He is slow to anger with us.

The final example James gives is in verse 11. "You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." Have you ever heard someone described as having the patience of Job? This example teaches us that patience is needed because life is hard and can seem unfair. Life can be hard. Sometimes it can be hard for a very long time. One of my favorite bumper stickers is "Life is hard, get a helmet."

The Greek word used for patience in verse 11 is a different than the word in verse 7 and 10. That is why a different word is used ... perseverance. The idea is not patience with people, but patience with God.

When Jesus was on the cross, I think most people were thinking, "This makes no sense." For those who believed that He was God's Son, they had to be thinking why doesn't he do something? They were amazed by his wisdom. They had seen him do miracles, but I'll bet a lot of people went from belief to unbelief that night.

Do you know why we don't get upset about Jesus dying? It is because we have a whole book telling us why he had to die and what happens after? Do you remember those guys I mentioned: Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Job ... they didn't know the end of the story? The patience that is needed is one that stands firm no matter what the circumstances. Your obedience becomes immovable no matter what changes in your world.

What does it mean to "Be Patient"? I have one suggestion. Maybe I should have a lot more. Honestly, this topic could be a series.

Here is the one suggestion ... Adjust your thoughts, desires and tendencies to God's thoughts, desires and tendencies. Last week, when we were talking about money, Doc said there needs to be a growing gap between income and our standard of living. Does that make sense? As your income increases, maybe our standard of living doesn't have to. Maybe we learn to be more generous with the gap that grows between the two.

This week, with patience, I think it's just the opposite. Can we close the gap between our impatience and the patience he desires in our lives? Are we willing to adjust our ways to his ways?

This week I was talking to Randy Kirk, Doc's preaching partner. Each week you hear a lot about Randy, but many of you have never seen Randy. I actually had one person ask if Randy was a real person or just Doc's imaginary friend. Here is Randy. This is Randy. He is a real person. Randy preaches in Corydon, IN and they meet in Louisville every Tuesday to talk about their sermon.

Randy asked me what I wanted you to take away this week. When I told him, he said, "That is no good. That will leak as they walk out the door." He said, "Give them something to take home." We have talked about 2 areas, patience with people and patience with God.

Now as we talked about patience with people, I am sure somebody came to mind that drives you crazy, makes you mad or gets on your nerves. It is easy to avoid or be critical. It is easy for the gap between impatience and

patience to widen instead of close. I am going to ask you to take one step toward that person instead of one step away this week. Maybe you say hello, instead of ignoring in the morning, maybe you try to encourage instead of tearing down, and maybe you choose to have a patient attitude instead of letting every word and action drive you crazy. Take a step toward instead of a step away.

When it comes to patience with God, I have to give you the same challenge. Take a step towards God and not a step away. It is easy to get mad at God or feel betrayed by God. Let me remind you of the article I started out with today. Carey Nieuwhof said, "Just because God is silent does not mean he is absent. Maybe you haven't prayed in a while. Talk to God. Maybe it has been a long time since you have read the Bible. Read James 5:7-12 that we have talked about today. Grab a trusted friend and ask them to pray for you. Do you remember what we talked about a couple of weeks ago in James 4. James 4:8 said, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you."

Let me try to wrap this up. I read about a documentary that was made of 3 patients with cancer. They captured on film the moment each of them learned they were afflicted with a malignancy in its later stages. Their initial shock, disbelief, fear, and anger were recorded in graphic detail. The documentary team followed these three families through the treatment process with all the ups and downs and the hopes and disappointments. Eventually all 3 patients died and the program ended without comment or editorial.

Two of the three people fought the disease with a lot of anger and bitterness. They were not only at war with cancer, but seemed to be at war with everyone else. The third individual was a black pastor of a small inner-city Baptist church. He had a humility about him that was inspiring. After learning that he had a few months to live, the documentary team followed him back to his car with his wife where they prayed and recommitted their lives to the Lord. He continued to preach at his church and the cameras were present on his last Sunday. He talked openly about his impending death and said the following: "Some of you have asked me if I'm mad at God for this disease that has taken over my body. I'll tell you honestly that I

have nothing but love in my heart for my Lord. He didn't do this to me. We live in a sinful world where sickness and death are the curse man has brought on himself. And I'm going to a better place where there will be no more tears, no suffering, and no heartache. So don't feel bad for me." "Besides," he continued, "our Lord suffered and died for our sins. Why should I not share in his suffering? Then he began to sing, in an old broken voice:

- Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
- And all the world go free?
- No, there's a cross for everyone,
- And there's a cross for me
- How happy are the saints above,
- Who once went sorrowing here,
- But now they taste unmingled love,
- And joy without a tear.
- The consecrated cross I'll bear;
- Till death shall set me free,
- And then go home my crown to wear,
- For there's a crown for me.

▪ **Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone** *Text: Thomas Shepherd and others* *Music: George N. Allen* *Tune: MAITLAND, Meter: CM*

When James says, "Be patient". Maybe that is a glimpse of what he is talking about. Do you remember the guy named Paul? Paul had something difficult in his life and he asked God to take it away 3 times, and 3 times God said, "No." This is the same guy that writes "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again-rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:4-7