



# AWAKEN TO PATIENCE

May 23 | Devotional

## Day 1 – Devotions

At the beginning of our text this week, James tells us to, “Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming.”

Patience. Patience does not seem to be one of the virtues our culture esteems highly. Actually, patience is one of those things like forgiveness. We love to receive it but we hate giving it to others. At least, I know that that has been true for me in my own life.

We live in a culture that makes patience hard. Not only are our bodies hardwired for instant gratification, but the way our society has been built lends itself to satiating that desire within us. We have movies on-demand. We have Amazon’s two-day, sometimes *same day*, shipping. We have every kind of food imaginable right at our fingertips. Information, entertainment, travel, even relationships can be had with the touch of a button (or the swipe of a finger!).

And while there are obvious benefits to this kind of convenience, there’s also a part of us that recognizes that anything worth having can’t be had unless one is willing to undergo a strict diet of patience. If you want to be healthy, you need patience to develop a workout routine and healthy eating habits. If you want good relationships, you need patience to muddle your way through the complexity of relating to another human being with all of its ups and downs. If you want money for retirement, you must have enough patience to forego short-term purchases so that you will put your money where it needs to go for success in the future.

Do a quick thinking session and you’ll soon see that we choose to wait for things because the goals we have and their rewards we’ll attain “later” are better than the rewards we’ll get in the here and now. As just one example, most people would say that being able to roughhouse with your grandkids when you’re older > donuts every morning for breakfast.

For the early church, patience was their most talked about virtue (outside of love). Early church leaders like Origen, Justin Martyr, and others all talked about the need and the necessity of Christians to be patient. This makes sense given the jeering early believers often faced. But their patience wasn’t just patience for the sake of patience alone. The early church had a very real sense of God’s imminent return. And it was that return that provided the fuel for them to be patient. That’s what James relays here in **5:7**. We’re exhorted to, “Be patient...until the Lord’s coming.”

“The Lord’s coming.” That’s the reward or the goal that allowed the early church to forego sensuality and instant gratification. It’s also what persuaded them to endure being mocked, ridiculed, laughed at, and even harmed for their faith. As Paul says, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we ***eagerly await a Savior*** from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...” (**Philippians 3:20**). And as the writer of Hebrews relays, “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time...to save those who are ***eagerly waiting for him***” (**Hebrews 9:28**).

I don’t know about you, but I wonder what having a deeply internalized expectation of Christ’s imminent return would do to my desire to grow in and practice patience. I’m sure it’d do a lot to my pursuit of personal holiness, to my ability to let things out of my control go, and to my ability to endure whatever micro-persecution I should face today for my faith.

Questions for reflection:

1. How does your heart, mind, body, and soul feel when you are in a patient disposition? What do you feel going on in your heart, mind, body, and soul when you are hurried?
2. What sorts of things tend to make you impatient? What sorts of things do you tend to have a lot of patience for?
3. In what ways do you think that a deeply internalized expectation of Jesus’ return might strengthen your ability to be patient in the here and now? What might that tangibly change in your life (think in terms of your personal holiness, your relationships)?

## Day 2 – James Study Breakdown

Today, we'll be doing a bit of a breakdown of some key words and phrases in this section of James. Hopefully, this will equip you with some linguistic, cultural, and historical context so that you can better understand what James is trying to convey to us as followers of Jesus.

In this section of James (**James 5:7-12**), the conversation that James has shifts in a way that differentiates it from the preceding verses. James switches his language from “you who say” and “you rich” (**5:1-6**) to “brothers and sisters” (**5:7**) and “we” (**5:11**). He takes a more pastoral, fatherly tone with his hearers. Why the shift?

Well, James has just finished admonishing the rich persons in the local Christian community who he knows were accumulating wealth and exploiting people. So, James warns these rich individuals about the impermanence of their wealth, about how evil it is to be exploiting people loved by God, and how judgment is coming for actions like these.

The switch comes because James switches from admonishment of the rich to consoling the poorer Christian community probably suffering under these abusers. He counsels those being oppressed by the rich to “be patient” and to wait until the Lord’s coming (**5:7**).

Yesterday, we touched on patience, but what exactly is the patience that James is exhorting us to? Well, maybe a definition and some extra verses will help. The word used for “patience” here indicates the idea of “longsuffering.” It’s the kind of thing that is needed for one to be “slow to anger” (**James 1:19**). This “patience” is the same word Jesus uses of the unforgiving servant in **Matthew 18** who begs for forgiveness from his master only then to withhold forgiveness from someone who needed it from him. This is also the same patience that Paul uses to describe love in **1 Corinthians 13:4**, the same patience Paul uses when he advises the Thessalonians on how to treat one another in **1 Thessalonians 5:14**, and the same patience that Peter uses to describe God’s disposition towards us (**1 Peter 3:9**).

James then, like a good pastor, illustrates this for his readers in three ways:

1. A farmer in **verse 7**

James uses the farmer as an example of patience because of their willingness to plant seed and *wait* on ground to yield its fruit. Farmers, who stake their lives on being able to produce food, are great examples of what it means to do something that you don’t see immediate returns on. If a farmer tries to rush his crop or do something too fast, he could put his whole project in jeopardy. No, good farmers show us what it looks like to wait patiently for the Lord.

2. The prophets in **verse 10**

James uses God’s prophets from the past to paint a picture of what godly patience looks like. Many times in the history of the Israelites, the prophets would speak a word to the people of Israel and, not

only would they be chastised for their word, they would many times have to wait long periods of time before they had any indication that the word they spoke had come true.

Take Jeremiah for example. In **Jeremiah 25:11**, Jeremiah prophesies that Israel will fall into the hands of the Babylonians for 70 years (**see also Daniel 9:1-2**). For this prophecy (and for prophesying against the Israelite people in general), Jeremiah faced persecution from his contemporaries (**see Jeremiah 26:11**). Jeremiah shows us what godly patience looks like because, despite ridicule and doubts and the harsh reality of the news he delivered, he stood firm and waited on God to come through for him!

### 3. Job in **verse 11**

Finally, James uses an illustration of Job, an Old Testament figure who waited patiently for God to come through for him when everything he held dear had been taken away. Job is a character who lost his children, his wife, his livestock, his wealth, and his health – for no conceivable reason. His friends admonished him. His wife criticized him. They all thought that he must have sinned in some grievous way for all of this to happen to him. They told him to curse God (**Job 2:9-11**), but he refused. He waited patiently for God to intervene and God did. Job shows us what patience looks like even when our circumstances are beyond difficult.

These three examples serve to spur us on as followers of Jesus and encourage us to pursue patience. Over and over again, it is God's patience with both sinful Israel and sinful humanity that we see on the pages of Scripture. He chooses to exercise his forbearance. He chooses to be slow to anger and exude His mercy and compassion.

Might we, despite whatever comes our way, exercise patience (be it with rich oppressors or our kids!) like God has been patient towards us.

Questions for reflection:

1. Which illustration of patience resonates with you most? The farmer, the prophet Jeremiah, or Job? Why? What specific insights about patience does this bring you?
2. What new questions do you have as a result of today's thoughts?
3. How do you think God is challenging through this passage now that you've been through two days of devotions?

### **Day 3 – Scripture Survey**

Today, we'll be looking at a few verses that will help us dig into what James is talking about in **James 5:7-12**. For today, read through **James 5:7-12** and then look up the following passages. Under each passage note any similarities you find between it and our James passage this week. Finally, ask, "God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?"

**Exodus 32:1-35**

**Psalms 27:7-14**

**Proverbs 14:29**

**Galatians 5:16-24**

**Colossians 3:12**

## Day 4 – Story Work

You have a story of awakening. Maybe for you that looked a lot like James or Paul where Jesus changed everything in your life in an instant. Or maybe you've always had a constant awaken-ing. As you've gotten older, you've had your eyes opened more and more to who Jesus is and how that impacts your life.

Just like last week, we're going to lean into how God has been writing and shaping our stories – this week, with an emphasis on PATIENCE.

Read and reflect on your story using the questions below. Use them as prompts as you remember how God has been cultivating a heart of action and service for others.

1. As you look back over your life, have there been opportunities to be patient that you didn't take advantage of? What were they? Remember back to that situation - what feelings were present that made you not want to be patient?
2. When has *not* practicing patience cost you something? When *has* practicing patience gained you something?
3. In what ways has God's patience towards you shaped your view of Him? What might it look like to reflect on God's patience towards you in deeper ways?
4. As Jesus has become more real to you, how have you seen patience grow in your life? Is there any growth? Why or why not?

## **Day 5 – Hear & Do**

For this last day, let's slow down and pay attention to what God has been inviting us into as a result of this week's passage. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. We want to be hearers of God's Word and we want to be doers of God's Word. Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions:

**As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?**

**Where else outside of your devo time did you notice "these things" pop up in your week?**

**What is God inviting you to DO as a response to this week's reflections**

**Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:**

- Set aside one day to note anytime you feel impatient that day. Bring your impatience before God.
- Talk to your kids about patience.
- Apologize to someone you've been impatient with.
- Experiment using phrases like "When you are ready" or "At your convenience" when making requests of people.