

## Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. *(Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one).*

## Prayer and Praises

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## Introduction

Last session we discussed the fourth chapter of James. Specifically we talked about how faith will be seen by others in our passions and pursuits. It was essential to James that his readers understand that our number one passion and utmost pursuit is God and God's Divine will. Today we will read the fifth chapter of James and discuss the oppressive heart, faith through patience and faith through prayer and praise. First, let's discuss how we have been doing at putting it into practice.

*We were given several focuses to begin implementing in our lives;*

- 1) Identify your choices, why you make them, and the consequences of those choices. Would you make a choice to do something different in any of these choices?*
  
- 2) Consider your pursuits; focusing on verbs in 4:7-10 that should be better represented in your life and apply one of them; identify your judgements that need to be surrendered to God, consider any changes you have been procrastinating.*

*How did you do on one or more of these challenges?*

## Faithlessness Shows When We Oppress Others

**Read James 5:1-20**

*<sup>1</sup>Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on*

*you. <sup>2</sup>Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. <sup>4</sup>Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup>You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.*

James begins this chapter with the phrase 'now listen' or, if we were talking today, 'listen up!' His heed to pay attention was directed specifically at his rich readers. In our previous study we read a similar 'pay attention' to those who say they will go to another city, spend a year, do business and make money - trying to arrange their future and lives without considering the will of God. It seems that James is quite concerned with the prioritization of money in our life, both in how we plan for it and how we use it if we have it. Not whether we accumulate money - but how we accumulate it (seeking the will of God) and not if we have it, but how we treat others when we have it.

In the many studies I've read that address this portion of scripture many scholars assume that here James is talking to non-believers in this portion of Scripture. Which, to me, would indicate that he is 'preaching to the choir' here - since he opened saying, "To the twelve tribes scattered." Assuming that James is preaching to the non-believers here would seem to alleviate our responsibilities as Christians, assuming that we cannot be oppressors because we are believers. We all know this is far from the truth!

- *We may not be rich (at least in American standards), but how can we apply this portion of scripture to our lives?*

## Faith Shows in Our Patience

### Read James 5:7-12

*<sup>7</sup>Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.*

*<sup>8</sup>You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup>Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

*<sup>10</sup>Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

*<sup>12</sup>Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.*

- *Discuss anything that stood out to you in these verses. Share your first impressions. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*

The first time I heard Rev. Terri say, "I will never pray for patience," I laughed out loud. But

the more I thought about it the more since it made. You cannot really have patience unless you have an opportunity to use it. Who really wants to have their patience tested? But, in reality, as believers in Christ we most assuredly will. We need to be patient with our crops (God's provision in our lives), patient with each other, and patient even in the face of adversity. Basically, let God be our planner, our provider and our providence.

Patience, mind you, is not just a characteristic some possess and some do not. Note here, in verse 8, we need to be patient and **stand firm**. Patience alone may elicit a tendency to become discouraged or fall into self pity. So James says, "Stand firm - literally, strengthen your heart," God will come and give you comfort and peace. Also, in the scheme of eternity, the return of Christ, where everything will be set right, is near. If we are confident in this, it should strengthen our hearts.

- *Do we really live like Christ could be coming today?*

Here is a great summary of the passage above taken from advice offered by Chuck Swindoll:

- Be patient: Don't focus on the situation you'll become angry
- Stand firm, strengthen your heart: Don't focus on yourself, or you'll become filled with self-pity
- Don't grumble against each other: Don't focus on someone to blame, or you'll begin complaining
- Let your yes be yes and your no be no: Be so honest in all your speech so that when you say 'yes' or 'no' people will know it is unquestionably the truth.

- *Is there any further discussion before we move on?*

## Faith Shows in Our Prayer and Praise

### Read James 5:13-20

*<sup>13</sup>Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup>Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup>Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

*<sup>19</sup>My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, <sup>20</sup>remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

- *Share your first impressions of this passage. Was there anything that struck you as profoundly inspiring or difficult?*

If you are in need, pray; if you are happy, praise; if you are weary or sick, go to appointed people in the church for even more prayer; if you have sinned, confess and prayer will lead to forgiveness. Are you noticing a theme here? Prayer and praise are the power and sustenance of the Christian life. Prayer not only sets the tone for our behaviors and insights, but it also

brings Christ into the picture with us more powerfully and effectively. Every Christian is called to prayer; it is not a talent, a special ability, or a spiritual gift. It is not just to begin a meal, for certain occasions, or to be accomplished with certain postures. Rather, it is the foundational communication through which we encounter our Divine Creator.

- *What can you do to make your prayer life more time invested, more exciting, more powerful, and more fulfilling?*

## Putting it into Practice

Throughout this series each session has ended with a few practical focuses. I hope that each person who has been a part of these studies will continue to put these practices and principles into practice.

- Check your heart - are there any oppressive attitudes? Is there anything you need to do differently?
- Choose patience and stand firm
  - Identify areas in your life where your patience is being tested.
  - What does it mean to stand firm in this situation?
  - Now stand firm!
- Choose to pray and praise in all situations.
  - Consider areas in your life that you have not taken to God in prayer and pray about them.
  - Are there areas that are difficult to take to God in prayer? Try to identify why and bring your concerns about this to God - it's a first step.

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