

WAITING WELL

Week 4 | James 5

Day 1 - Wait like a farmer

Read: James 5: 7-8

Deeper Dive

As we read through the book of James, it's important to understand the context during this time of the New Testament. James was written by Jesus's half-brother. James was leading the early church in Jerusalem at the time. This was a community of Jewish followers that had accepted Jesus as their savior. Of course, this community was heavily persecuted by the Jewish leaders. In addition to the persecution, there was also a famine in the region so they were struggling with severe poverty. James was eventually killed by the Jewish leaders because of his faith in Christ and leadership of the early church.

The book of James starts like a letter, however, it's doesn't address specific "church related" concerns like Paul's letters. Instead it's an overall practical application of Jesus' teachings largely based on the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5-7) and the book of Proverbs. It's short, direct, and meant to challenge us all. It should serve as a reminder of how we should be living in accordance with God's Word & teachings.

If you have ever grown a garden, or worked on a farm, you know that cultivating crops is slow, intentional, hard, patient work. You can't rush the spring rain or the summer sun, you can't rush seeds into sprouting, and you can't rush crops into being ready for harvest. Everything happens in its time. Farmers naturally learn the art of waiting well if they want to be successful. Even when they can't see the results yet, they have to keep working in faith. Some crops take years or decades to cultivate into a healthy harvest. Of course, the farmer's time while waiting is anything but passive. There is much to be done during the seasons of patiently waiting on crops to harvest. Even when everything looks dead and dormant in the winter, or when a field needs to lay fallow for a few years to rest and regain it's nutrients, the farmer has work to do while waiting for the harvest. This is waiting well.

In our scripture for today, God tells us to have patience while we wait, just like a farmer. Let's take a closer look at how farmers wait:

1. **Farmers don't dig up seeds, they water the growth they cannot see** - Many times God is working in ways that we cannot see. Give God space to work, and have faith without trying to control outcomes or anxiously get ahead of God in your search for proof of His goodness. Ask yourself - *Am I demanding God show me proof that He's working BEFORE I am obedient in the plans He's given me?*
2. **Farmers sow plenty of seed, embrace the rain, and guard against weeds** - God calls us to obedience, even when life gives us unexpected delays and circumstances feel overwhelming. Ask yourself - *Am I putting my faith into action by doing what God has called me to do no matter the weather, the season, or the obstacles that might come my way?*
3. **Farmers don't expect fruit before it's time, and they don't pick unripe fruit** - Some things like healing, maturity, or restored relationships take time to produce good fruit. Trust God in the process of waiting on His timing. Ask yourself - *Is there something I am expecting before it's time for harvest? Am I trying to pick fruit that's not ready yet?*

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 5:3-4** ~Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope
- **James 1: 2-4** ~ Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.
- **James 1:12** ~Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.
- **Philippians 2:14-15** ~Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.
- **Numbers 14:2** ~All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, 'If only we had died in Egypt or in this wilderness!'"
- **1 Corinthians 10:10** ~And do not grumble, as some of them did

Day 2 - Waiting without complaining

Read: James 5:9

If you've been stuck in heavy traffic, gotten behind a slow person in line, or sat at the DMV recently you might have complained at least a little. While no one really likes to wait, psychologists recently did a study that found specific factors impact our levels of impatience more than others. The factors in a situation that make us the MOST impatient are: when something is unpleasant or painful, when the outcome is highly important to us, when someone else is to blame, and when the wait is longer than expected. Interestingly enough, the amount of time spent waiting was not as much of a factor. This might explain why waiting on God can be difficult for us. Asking God for help in a situation could lead us to blame God for our wait. This is especially true when His timing is not what we expect. Of course, we could look at this two very different ways.

1. Opportunity to exercise patience - What better time to use and strengthen our muscles of patience and faith? God says that trials produce perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope (Romans 5:3-4). We know from God's word that exercising patience will grow our character, mature our faith, and increase our faith & dependence on Him. Waiting is an opportunity for growth.
2. Opportunity to wallow in self-pity, impatience, and complaint - When we allow ourselves to become impatient, then anxiety, frustration, bitterness, and negativity follows. Impatience will always lead us to disobedience. We might try to regain control and make decisions outside of God's Will in our own strength. We can easily become anxious, bitter, short fused, critical and negative about our lives. In fact, when we complain about our circumstances it has been scientifically proven to make the wait feel even longer. Countless studies have shown that negativity adds stress to your situation

Of course, God calls us to wait patiently, trust in Him, turn away from negative thoughts, and have faith in His goodness. Which of these scenarios do you find yourself in today? Do you see waiting as an opportunity for you to focus on God, or to focus on self?

- Do you notice a difference when you focus on the negative aspects of waiting, verses the positive? Ask yourself today if you are spreading peace or impatience in the ways that you speak about your circumstances?
- Who in your life have you experienced waiting with patience, hope, and without complaint during a hard circumstance? How did their attitude towards waiting affect the outcome of the situation?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Psalm 77: 11-12** ~I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.
- **Psalm 143: 5** ~I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands.
- **Psalm 66:16** ~Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.
- **Hebrews 11:11-13** ~And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.
- **Hebrews 11:24-25** ~By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Day 3 - Waiting well by looking back

Read: James 5:10-11

It's easy for us to forget God's goodness, and all the ways He's blessed us. This is especially true during long, hard, and painful seasons of waiting. This is why keeping a prayer journal can be such a powerful tool. It can be encouraging to look back and see past seasons where we waited, persevered, and God delivered us through hard seasons. Even if you don't have specific examples in your own life, we can look to God's Word to find plenty of examples that can give us hope. In our scripture for today, James does this exact thing as he reminds us of the prophet Job. Job went through unimaginable hardship while waiting on God to deliver him, but he remained faithful through it all. Let's take a look at a few other examples in scripture, and what each example can teach us about waiting well:

- **Abraham:** Teaches us the importance of faith & patience
Waiting - 25 years - Waiting on God's promise to provide a child through his wife Sarah.
Outcome - Sarah gave birth to Issac and fulfilled God's promise even in their old age, and even after they sinned because of their impatience.
- **Joseph:** Teaches us how waiting can lead to unexpected blessings.
Waiting - 13 years - Joseph was betrayed and sold into slavery by his brothers, and then put in prison due to false accusations. He was waiting for God to rescue him.
Outcome - Joseph was rescued by God's gift of interpreting dreams. He became the second most powerful man in all of Egypt and was able to save many of his people during a famine.
- **Moses:** Teaches us to be faithful during the waiting, even if the fulfillment might not be in our lifetime.
Waiting - 40 years (past his lifetime) - Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, and guided them in the wilderness even though he knew that he wouldn't be able to enter the promised land with them.
Outcome - Moses stayed faithful to God during this difficult period of waiting. This was crucial for the eventual fulfillment of God's promise to the Israelites.

As you read over these examples, take some time today to think back over your life, or maybe even the lives of you parents or grandparents.

- Are there times of waiting on God in your past that could offer you encouragement and hope for the future?
- Have there been people in your life that have powerful testimonies of God's goodness during a season of waiting that you could learn from?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 6:25-27** ~

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

- **Matthew 6:34** ~ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- **Philippians 4:6-7** ~Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- **Matthew 6:11** ~Give us today our daily bread

- **Ephesians 5:15-16** ~Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity.

- **Zechariah 4:10** ~Who dares despise the day of small things?

Day 4 - Waiting well through prayer

Read: James 5:13-20

You may have heard the saying, "worry is just counterfeit prayer".

Many times in our waiting, we can spend more time worrying about our situation, than bringing it to God in prayer. As it says in Matthew 6 worry won't add anything to your day. Prayer takes those panicked moments of rehearsing our fears, and replaces them with peace & refuge in God's presence.

Let's take a look at a few important prayer focuses during seasons of waiting. These are prayers we can use while waiting well:

1. **Pray for patience** - How many times has a well-meaning Christian warned you, "don't pray for patience"? While it is often said in jest, it's just bad theology. Throughout scripture God calls us to ask for help when we need it. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, and we need to ask for His help, strength, and presence to have it in our lives. Pray ~ *God give me your patience, strength, and endurance to get through this season. Help me to feel the presence of your Spirit in my life while I wait for you.*
2. **Pray for presence** - When you are in a season of waiting, it's tempting to live in the future place where the waiting is over. We can be so focused on the end goal that we don't allow the journey to mature or transform us along the way. As Paul Tripp wrote "waiting is not about what you get at the end of the wait; it's about what you become as you wait". Everything that God does has a purpose, including His timing. Pray ~ *God show me what you're trying to teach me, or change in me, during this the waiting process. Help me to remain present to what you have for me each and every day.*
3. **Pray for perseverance** - We love to take shortcuts, right? When we have been waiting for a long time it's tempting to try and end the waiting on our own time. We need God's strength to persevere and wait on His timing. Pray ~ *God give me the strength to persevere when I'm tempted to give up and try things on my own. Help me to trust your timing and keep waiting on you in faith.*
4. **Pray for purpose** - Many times, in seasons of waiting, God changes and transforms what we are waiting for in the process. Sometimes part of the waiting journey is for God to change our hearts desires towards His. The God who saved the world through a rugged cross and an empty tomb can absolutely take our hardest seasons and turn them into something beautiful for His purpose and glory in our lives. Pray ~ *God remind me of your purpose & promises behind what I'm waiting for. Help me to trust you in the process, allow my heart's desires to be more like yours, and strengthen my faith in your good plans and purpose for my life.*

Deeper Dive

- **Philippians 4:11** ~I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.
- **2 Corinthians 12:10** ~That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:18** ~ Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- **2 Timothy 1:8** ~So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.
- **Philippians 4:19** ~And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.
- **Proverbs 16:9** ~In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.
- **John 9:4** ~As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work
- **Galatians 6:9** ~Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Day 5 - Waiting with purpose

For many of us we live in the "someday". This can sound like: "I'll serve more at church in a few years when I retire", "Let me get through this job change and I'll start giving faithfully again", "I'll join a small group as soon as our schedule calms down", "Once I convince my spouse, then I'll come to church regularly". We all have a "someday" if we really stop and think about it. It could be a painful and long-suffering "someday", like waiting for an illness to heal or a financial hardship to resolve; or it could be simple "someday" of waiting on a season of life to change. Ask yourself, where have you put God's purpose for your life on hold to wait for "someday"?

God wants us to put our faith into action everyday, even WHILE waiting on the "somedays". It's important to remember, especially in hard & exhausting seasons, that God's purpose for your life doesn't cease when things get hard. No matter what you are going through, God has a plan and a purpose for you each and every day. There was a famous comment made by John Piper when he was battling cancer, he said, "don't waste your cancer". This might sound strange, but what he meant was - God has a purpose for your life and can still use you, even if you are laying in a hospital bed.

When we look at the apostle Paul's life, he was a great example of this. He didn't take a break from God's purpose each time he got thrown into prison, beaten, or left for dead. He actually used his time in prison to write a good portion of the New Testament, and he continued to support the early church even while being persecuted, beaten, and driven out of towns. Paul's time waiting didn't go to waste. In fact, God used Paul's obedience in those harsh circumstances to spread His glory even more. God can do the same through us as well. As you read through these examples, ask yourself - Where are you struggling to put your faith in action through God's purpose in your waiting?

1. **Purpose in today** - God's purpose is often in today's responsibilities verses tomorrow's opportunities. Don't delay obedience, start where you are with what you have. Practice faithful obedience over performance or perfection. Pray ~ *God, what are you asking me to do today? - Then do it!*
2. **Purpose in character** - God's purpose is always to transform our character first, before He expands our opportunities. Pray ~ *God, show me the person you want me to become and help me to spend this time waiting allowing your Spirit to grow and mature my faith.*
3. **Purpose in hope** - God's purpose for asking us to practice worship, gratitude, and contentment while waiting is to grow our faith instead of our worry. You can be hopeful for tomorrow, while being grateful for today. Pray ~ *God help me to faithfully worship you with gratitude, contentment, and joy while I'm waiting. Keep me from wasting my time waiting with worry and negative thoughts.*