



Suffering Faithfully  
James 5:7-11  
June 28, 2020

The coronavirus has brought much suffering to many people in various ways. And it is starting to seem really long, right? We'd love to hear that God will spare us from suffering, but that simply isn't true. Yet, God does provide guidance and help to make it through suffering.

The general message of this part of God's word is "be patient" and "steadfast" (vv. 7, 8, 10, 11). Notice that the end James points to is not the suffering running its course but the Lord returning (7, 9). We will likely suffer until he comes. The gist of faithful suffering is enduring the difficulties and looking forward expectantly to the Lord's return.

Farmers are a good *illustration* of waiting patiently, both for the rains and the harvest (v. 7). Generally planting season is March-June and harvest is September-December. Every year farmers wait longer for the rains and harvest than we have so far waited for this virus to end. I often need to adjust my expectations about how long something "should" take.

A good *example* of patience in suffering is the prophets (v. 10). They were often ignored, silenced, opposed, threatened and persecuted. Some of them complained some, and we may well be at least as human as they were. Jeremiah is a prime example of both suffering and complaining. But he and most of the other prophets persevered and are now considered blessed.

Job is another good *example* of patience in suffering (v. 11). Life was good for him but then Satan persuaded God to remove his blessings. He lost his possessions, family and health. He also suffered from some well-meaning friends. He complained and said a few things that were not appropriate, but he kept his faith in God. In the end, God peppers Job with questions to show that his wisdom is vastly superior to Job's. He never explains why Job had to suffer but simply presents himself as one far greater than anything. Job humbles himself before God, relents and displays a more authentic faith than he had before (42:1-6). God's purpose is merciful and compassionate. Though Job's story is more involved and complicated than James 5:11 spells out, that is the gist and take-a-way from it.

God's word here tells us that faithful suffering entails being patient until the Lord returns. Here are some things we can focus on while we wait. First, establish our hearts (v. 8, lit., cf. ESV, RSV, NASB). If we establish our hearts in the right direction, we will be patient and faithful.

Second, don't grumble against each other (v. 9). It is interesting that this statement appears in this context. When times are difficult, we may turn on those we love. James reminds us that doing so makes us subject to God's judgment. Part of suffering faithfully is refusing to turn on our brothers and sisters. We ought to encourage each other instead.

Third, taking a cue from Job (v. 11), we should humble ourselves, not try to explain everything, focus on God and his greatness, and worship him.

Resources from this passage for Suffering Faithfully:

- Be patient because the Lord is compassionate (the gist)
- Look not to the end of suffering but to the Lord's return
- Find some good illustrations and examples that help you
- Establish your heart to be patient and hang on
- Refuse to grumble about others lest you be judged
- Don't worry about *why* we suffer, focus instead on *God*