

James 5:7-12

Discussion Group Questions

6. Often, we don't recognize the temptations we face in the midst of our suffering. While our passage specifically addresses the temptation of grumbling during oppressive trials, what other temptations do we face in light of suffering? (mistrust of God's goodness, demanding spirit toward God or others, complaint or harsh criticism, entitlement—I don't "deserve" this, etc.) What happens to us, and those around us, when we engage in these sins?
7. Our current American culture of health, wealth and prosperity sets up expectations that suffering is "out of the ordinary," not "supposed" to happen to us, and "unfair." How do these underlying beliefs impact your response to suffering? How do you guard against accepting and engaging these attitudes and embrace and live out the call of this passage?
8. As you consider Job, how do you feel about God's intervention and final restoration in Job's life? What was God's greatest accomplishment in Job's life? Should we expect God to restore wealth/health/lost relationships for us after loss like he did for Job? Why or why not?
9. In what ways have you experienced God's compassion and mercy during suffering? What did he do? Over time, what has changed in you?
10. Jesus said anything more than "Yes" or "No" comes from evil. James says, "Above all, my brothers, do not swear...or you will be condemned." Why do you think this teaching is so important?

² NIV Study Bible

June 22, 2008

LESSON 12

Joel Smith

For discussion following the sermon on June 22, 2008

The Church Crisis and The Second Coming

Key Points

In light of the previous text regarding the use of our resources and the unfair treatment of the disadvantaged, James turns our attention to the "brethren"...to believers who have suffered injustice at the hands of others. A natural response is to grumble and complain to one another, which results in division and relational sin. However, we are challenged to respond differently. Enabled by the Spirit, we are to be:

- patient, and to persevere in suffering
- aware of the temptations we face under trials
- aware of dangers we face in our criticism of others
- hopeful in the imminent return of Jesus Christ and God's perfect judgment and justice in all circumstances.

What is a godly response to personal injustice? When we are slandered, falsely accused, cheated, marginalized, work for inadequate wages, or suffer from any number of unfair practices, what do we do with our disillusionment, frustration, and even anger? Do we tend to lift those needs, desires, and disappointments to the Lord for his intervention and his provision and leave them there, or are we prone to simultaneously lift our voices of complaint (grumbling) to others? Is there ever a place for voicing our dissatisfaction at our present circumstances to those around us?

We often don't realize it, but the pressures of these trials produce great temptation to sin. Among others, there is a temptation to verbally grumble about our misfortune, to complain or criticize, or demand that others respond to our hardship (physical, relational,

financial, etc) and take up our offense. Even minor infractions of injustice, voiced with a critical spirit, cause division. This can be especially harmful in the church.

James knew that our response to injustice will not only test us and change us, our response will impact those around us. We are called to patience (v. 7) and perseverance (v. 11) which is modeled through the Old Testament prophets and through the life of Job. Such trials will yield God's great blessing—the blessing of “unalterable approval and reward of God”!¹

Suffering of any kind produces fruit. It tests our theology. What we truly believe about God is demonstrated in our responses to life's circumstances. If our knowledge doesn't penetrate our hearts, resulting in changed lives, suffering may yield the fruit of bitterness, resentment and frustration, which results in relational sin against others and against God. However, if our knowledge of God results in a deep trust in his character, this trust will eventually produce the sweet fruit of patience and perseverance under pressure. James challenges our response to injustice, and here we find yet another indication of the kind of authentic Christianity that we have been confronted with throughout this series.

May the Spirit of God grant us an awareness of our temptation to sin in the midst of suffering, and enable us by his Spirit to respond in grace.

¹ James by Doug Moo, pg. 171

Leader's Guide

Personal Preparation

Read Psalm 37 in light of present or past difficulties. How has your response to personal injustice changed over time—how has the transforming work of the Spirit changed your thoughts, attitudes, and actions (specifically, what you say to others)? Did this process produce “stillness” before the Lord (Psalm 37:7)? Recalling personal transformational change is advantageous to spiritual leadership. As trials deepen our trust,

dependence, and ultimate gratitude (worship) to God, that trust will allow us to lead others who may be struggling with the temptations to sin in the midst of the fiery trials of injustice. Take time to thank God for changing your heart attitude and responses to people when they have hurt you or have been unfair.

Group Preparation

You might want to begin this lesson by asking the group to give examples of injustice (either personal examples or stories from the news). How does the world respond to injustice? How do we respond to injustice? Are our responses much different? You might want to end your discussion by recalling the ways God has carried your group through times of testing and hardship and guarded their hearts and words against temptation. End in worship with statements of affirmation regarding God's character and goodness.

Discussion Questions

1. James 5:7 begins with a challenge to respond to the injustice and oppression of the rich with patience (patience: to resist resentment and retaliation²). When we suffer from injustice or oppression, how are we likely or tempted to respond? What happens as a result of responding this way?
2. Do you consider that “the Lord's coming is near” and “the judge is standing at the door” in light of your response to present unjust circumstances? How do these biblical truths gain greater influence in our lives, and ultimately, in our responses to those around us?
3. What is the correlation between Christ's imminent return and our call to patience under trials?
4. What do we learn from the analogy of the farmer? How does this encourage you in your endeavors to wait expectantly for the Lord's timing, especially when you don't experience immediate results or “answers” to prayer?
5. How do you define grumbling? Is it ever appropriate to speak to others about situations that frustrate or anger us?