

Supportive Words to the Weary

James 5:10-11

When Jewish psychiatrist Victor Frankl was arrested by the Nazis in World War II, he was stripped of everything – property, family, possessions. He had spent years researching and writing a book on the importance of finding meaning in life. When he arrived in Auschwitz, the infamous death camp, even his manuscript, which he had hidden in the lining of his coat, was taken.

"I had to undergo and overcome the loss of my spiritual child," Frankl wrote. "Now it seemed as if nothing and no one would survive me; neither a physical nor a spiritual child of my own! I found myself confronted with the question of whether under such circumstances my life was ultimately void of any meaning."

He was still wrestling with that question a few days later when the Nazis forced the prisoners to give up their clothes.

"I had to surrender my clothes and in turn inherited the worn-out rags of an inmate who had been sent to the gas chamber. Instead of the many pages of my manuscript, I found in the pocket of the newly acquired coat a single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, which contained the main Jewish prayer, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.'"

"How should I have interpreted such a 'coincidence' other than as a challenge to *live* my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper?"

Later, as he reflected on his ordeal, he wrote in his book [Man's Search for Meaning](#), "There is nothing in the world that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life... 'He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.'"

Our passage today, **James 5:10-11** continues the theme of patience which began in the opening verses of **chapter 5**. Many of these believers were undergoing persecution at the hands of the wicked rich who exploited them for their own personal gain. James had sharp words for the wealthy.

He then encouraged the suffering poor to be patient and stand firm until the Lord's return, which could be at any time. Don't look at present difficulties but consider the hope in Christ's coming. He gave sustaining words to the weary. They are words of encouragement to all who find themselves going through times of suffering.

In our text, James offers us examples of those who endured suffering and did so with patience. He helps us understand how they could persevere in the face of affliction. It offers us hope and help.

Perhaps you wonder why you are going through some of the afflictions you are encountering.

Someone asked C.S. Lewis why the righteous suffer. "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who can take it."

I was recently talking with someone who has been looking unsuccessfully to move to a place to care for his aging mother. There is nothing. He wondered out loud with me why everything seemed to be against him. He described himself as a good person and said he didn't deserve the kinds of problems he was facing. It's the mindset that if the good outweighs the bad, then life should be free of problems. As the song suggests, everything should be going our way. Job's friends would counter by stating that if bad things happen to you, there must be some sin.

Perhaps the audience to whom James wrote thought that they didn't deserve these afflictions or maybe wondered why they were happening at all or maybe wondered where God was, as if He was somehow either absent or apathetic.

We may think that from time to time as the book title suggests: [Where is God When it Hurts?](#) Ravi Zacharias writes in his book [Has Christianity Failed You?](#): "I think the reason we sometimes have the false sense that God is so far away is because that is where we have put him. We have kept Him at a distance, and then when we are in need and call on Him in prayer, we wonder where He is. He is exactly where we left Him."

How are we to handle suffering? What can help us when we face what seem like insurmountable affliction? I think Ravi Zacharias implies that we need to go and seek after God and restore Him to

the place He deserves so that when we suffer, He is there to help us when we call on Him. So as we come to **verse 10**, James provides us with an example of patient suffering.

I. AN EXAMPLE OF PATIENT SUFFERING – v. 10

Writing to Jews who had been scattered around the nations (**1:1**), James draws from the familiarity of the Old Testament and directs their attention to the prophets. **“For example, in the face of suffering, take the prophets.”**

The word **“suffering”** is a compound word that means to experience or endure hardship, something that is evil, morally wrong or wicked. **Hebrews 11:37** gives us a sense of what the word implies.

The word **“example”** means to copy or teach as a warning. The suffering of the Old Testament prophets serves to teach us and warn us.

Consider first how the prophets suffered.

A. How the Prophets Suffered

When we look back in the Old Testament, it is clear that prophets suffered in two primary ways.

1. They suffered rejection

Keep in mind that the message of the prophet wasn't just something that was going to happen in the distant future like the coming of the Messiah, or about end times. A prophet spoke on behalf of God who had given him a message rebuking sin. The message was a warning and call to repent and return to a right relationship with God or God would inflict some punishment if they didn't. Prophets weren't sent when the nation was obeying the law, they were sent when the people strayed from the law to get them to obey. Generally, the people didn't like the rebuke.

One author stated that “Bringing God's word to the people to whom it is sent has always been a costly business: prophets have always been persecuted, and this is unlikely to change in the future.”

a. Jeremiah

His words were direct, condemnatory, critical of wrong behavior, and unpopular to the prevailing culture. Both the message and the messenger were

rejected. God told Jeremiah to go to Israel with a message, but they would fight against him.

Jeremiah 1:19 ““They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the Lord.”

Jeremiah describes himself as a gentle lamb led to the slaughter and didn't realize the people to whom he went had plotted against him. (**Jeremiah 11:19**)

b. Ezekiel Ezekiel 2:1-7

God told Ezekiel to take a message to Israel, but they wouldn't listen to him.

By and large, all the Old Testament prophets suffered personal rejection for the message they delivered. Jonah was probably the only prophet who had a measure of success when he delivered his message of repentance to the Ninevites. But bear in mind, when people rejected the prophet and his message, they weren't rejecting the prophet, they were rejecting God.

Maybe you feel like a prophet suffering rejection. You have talked with people about their need of a Savior and your message has been rejected by them. Maybe you have been ostracized from family or friends because of what you have shared with them about their lost condition and need of Christ.

2. They suffered physically

a. Elijah – I Kings 19:1-4

He was threatened with death by the wicked queen Jezebel for his confrontation and murder of the priests of Baal.

b. Amos – Amos 7:10-15

He was insulted by the chief priest in the sanctuary and told to never to prophecy there again.

c. Michaiah – I Kings 22:5-6

He stood up and contradicted the prophecy of 400 false prophets when they said Ramoth Gilead would be defeated by the combined troops of Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Later in the chapter (**vs. 23-27**) he would be slapped and thrown into prison by Zedekiah for saying that he had a deceiving spirit.

d. Zechariah – II Chronicles 24:16-22

He was stoned to death for rebuking the people for

worshipping idols instead of worshipping the Lord.

e. Hanani – II Chronicles 16:7-9

He was put in prison by King Asa for rebuking the king for trusting in the armies of Aram and not God.

f. Uriah – Jeremiah 26:20-23

This is not the husband of Bathsheba whom David had murdered. This is a prophet who served at the same time as Jeremiah, proclaiming the same message. King Jehoiakim hunted him down and put the sword and tossed in a common grave.

g. John the Baptist – Luke 3:19-20; Matthew 14:1-2

He condemned Herod for taking his brother's wife, Herodias. He was thrown in prison and then later beheaded.

The prophets serve as examples of suffering rejection and physical abuse. But James tells us why they suffered.

B. Why the Prophets Suffered

“Take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”

They spoke in the name of the Lord. That means first, that they were in the will of God, doing the will of God. **“In the name of”** means with the authority of the Lord. They came at the direction and command of God, with His message, to give to His people, just as it was given to them. They didn't alter the message in any way, they didn't change the group to whom they were sent, and except for Jonah, they gave the message without delay.

Here's what Jeremiah had to say about it.

Jeremiah 20:9 “But if I say, ‘I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,’ His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.”

Why were they hated so much by the recipients of their message? Because it came from the Lord Himself. The message to forsake sin is always rejected by those who don't want to hear from God. Paul wrote **“Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice**

them.” (Romans 1:32) That's why Jerry Nadler could say what he did in a hearing that **“there will be no mention of God in these chambers.”**

People don't like to be confronted with sin because their thinking is futile and their foolish hearts are darkened. So when the prophets spoke in the name of the Lord condemning sin they suffered.

What lesson does James want to convey to us when we look at the examples of suffering prophets? He's not discouraging us from speaking in the name of the Lord. He's not trying to scare us into thinking that all we have to look forward to is suffering if we speak out in the name of Jesus. It's to encourage us that even when we suffer, God still cares about us. Just as they were to be patient for the Lord's return, they were to be patient in their suffering. It's the patience we talked about from **verses 7-9** which means to be long-suffering. It means to keep our emotions and action in check when we would rather lash back, to keep in mind God cares about our suffering.

After the threat by Jezebel, a discouraged Elijah ran for his life. God sent him to the Brook Cherith where he was told to rest. God provided for him by sending ravens with food for him to eat and be refreshed. After the brook dried up, God sent him into the heart of Jezebel's homeland and there, God provided for him through the aid of a widow.

**Jesus knows all about our struggles
He will guide till the day is done
There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus
No not one, no not one**

Church leaders gathered in the 4th century at the Nicene Council to discuss important doctrinal matters. Perhaps the greatest debate was about the deity of Christ. Although not unanimous, the council affirmed that Jesus was both God and man. That is so important to our salvation. What you may not realize is that of the 318 delegates attending that meeting, over 300 of them had lost an eye or a hand or limped on a leg due to torture for their Christian faith, having spoken in the name of the Lord.

Those who choose to live godly in Christ Jesus, who choose to speak in the name of the Lord, will suffer persecution of some kind. These prophets serve as an example of patience in the face of

suffering. **Do you look at the patience of the prophets when you suffer for the sake of Christ?** Such suffering requires strong faith, being confident of what we hope for and certain of what we don't see. (**Hebrews 11:1**)

Charles Spurgeon gives us something to consider when we suffer. The words of **Isaiah 48:10** hung on his wall. **"I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction."** He wrote: **"God's choice makes chosen men choice men... We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares His choice."**

Hebrews 5:8 "Although He (Jesus) was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him."

Jesus didn't become perfect through His suffering, in the sense that He was somehow less than perfect up until that time. Being made perfect means He was made complete in His humanity when He suffered and died on the cross out of total obedience to the Father in becoming our sacrifice for sin.

Jesus and the prophets are examples of patient suffering.

James offers us another example of suffering, but instead of patient suffering, this is persevering suffering.

II. AN EXAMPLE OF PERSEVERING SUFFERING – v. 11

Most of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written in prisons. The book of Job is all about his suffering. I'm not sure if he suffered more from all the events that happened to him or from the accusations of his so-called friends.

Job is our example of someone who suffered immensely. The NIV is preferred here. In the KJV, the word patience is used in both **verses 10 and 11**. But in the original it is more accurately translated perseverance. James uses two different Greek words. The word used in **verse 11** means to not easily succumb or give in. It literally means to abide under. It is patience that grows out of trials and keeps on going in spite of the suffering. It's the

same word used in **James 1:3-4** where the testing of faith develops perseverance, which matures us and makes us complete, lacking nothing in our spiritual walk of faith. It can also mean endurance, to bear under or stand courageously in suffering.

Matthew 10:22 "All men will hate you because of Me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

In **I Corinthians 13:7**, perseverance is a character trait developed from love.

James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

Job was anything but patient. Just read **chapter 3**. **Job 3:26 "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil."**

He was not patient with his friends' words of wisdom or efforts to comfort him (**12:1-3; 16:1-3**). He even stated in **21:4** that he was impatient.

But that said, while he may not have been patient, he was persevering. He may have complained in his suffering, but he never denounced God even at the suggestion of his wife.

Job 1:20-22

Job 13:15

Job 19:25

Job tells us the reason he could persevere, why he could stick it out. **"But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed His steps; I have kept to His way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread."** (**Job 23:10-12**)

From these verses, Job gives us a lesson on why we suffer and how to persevere. Suffering purifies us like gold, removing the impurities as we learn to depend on God. The closer we are to God in following Him, obeying Him, treasuring His Word, the better able we are to persevere.

Psalms 1:2-3 says that when we meditate on the Word of God, we will become like a tree planted by the river with deep roots and leaves that do not fade. In other words, when our spiritual roots are deep

through meditation on God's Word, suffering won't uproot us from our faith, it won't knock us over because we are firmly planted in the Word of God.

A man once visited an orange grove where an irrigation pump had broken down. The season was unusually dry and some of the trees were beginning to die for lack of water. The man giving the tour then took the visitor to his own orchard where irrigation was used sparingly. He said the trees could go without rain for another 2 weeks because when they were young, he frequently kept water from them. The hardship caused them to send their roots deeper into the soil in search of moisture. They were the deepest-rooted trees in the area. While others were being scorched by the sun, those trees found moisture at a greater depth.

Never forget that God has His hand on the thermostat of suffering and that it is only temporary. Though he didn't know it at the time, Job's suffering was temporary and then God's blessings came to him. They demonstrate His compassion and mercy.

In his book [Where Is God When it Hurts?](#), Philip Yancey wrote about a 17th century poet named John Donne. He had experienced great suffering. It began when he married the daughter of Lord Chancellor who disapproved of her marriage to Donne. Yanked from his wife and locked in a dungeon, he wrote the following poem:

John Donne
Anne Donne
Undone

He endured a long illness that almost took his life. During this suffering, he wrote devotionals that rank among the most poignant meditations on the subject. He wrote that the sickness which kept him in bed forced him to think about his spiritual condition, concluding that suffering gets your attention, forcing you to look to God, when we might otherwise choose to ignore Him.

Without the white heat of the furnace, porcelain will remain nothing more than a clay pot.

Let's reshape our thinking. Instead of asking God why He is allowing us to go through suffering, let's remember that in the suffering He is turning us into gold, transforming our character to that of

godliness. It is through joyful perseverance that we are allowing God to finish His work of maturing us.

Notice what James says we receive when we persevere in suffering.

A. We Receive Blessings In The Suffering

Job's friends believed that he was being judged by God because of some sin, but instead we see that in the end he was richly blessed. He was given double what he had before he lost it all.

Job 42:12-13, 15 "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, a 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters."

Those who have persevered are blessed. The word can also mean happy. It's the same word used in the beatitudes.

Matthew 5:10-12

Blessings always come after the suffering, not before. But remember James also said that in the suffering we are to be joyful. John MacArthur reminds us that God's blessings do not come to those who do great things, but to those who endure. We receive blessings in the suffering. We receive compassion in the suffering.

B. We Receive Compassion In The Suffering

The word compassion means pity, to have a feeling of distress because of the sufferings of others. Think about the Lord's compassion for us. **Where would we be without it?** We would be undone, filled with despair, overwhelmed by hopelessness.

Lamentations 3:22-23 reminds us that God's compassions never fail because His faithfulness is great and new every morning.

Psalm 86:15 "But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth."

Exodus 34:6 "And He (God) passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness,

rebellion and sin.”

God looks on us and sees our suffering and knows what we are going through. He has great compassion. It’s something we receive from Him when we have endured suffering.

One more thing we received in suffering is mercy.

C. We Receive Mercy In The Suffering

Again, from **Lamentations 3:22-23**, mercy is something we receive from the Lord. If it weren’t for His mercy we would be consumed or destroyed. It’s a word that carries with it the idea of kindness, affection, and good will. We understand it to mean that God withholds what we would otherwise deserve. Even in the sufferings God allows us to go through, He has our best interest at heart. They mature us and grow our faith.

While suffering is temporary, blessings, compassion and mercy are permanent and are so because God is faithful. On the one hand, God uses suffering for our good. On the other hand, suffering, trouble and hardship can never separate us from God’s love.

When you persevere through suffering, you will receive God’s blessing.

When you persevere through suffering, you will receive God’s compassion.

When you persevere through suffering, you will receive God’s mercy.

Job serves as our example.

Martin Luther once said “If we consider the greatness and the glory of the life we shall have when we have risen from the dead, it would not be difficult at all for us to bear the concerns of this world. If I believe the Word, I shall on the Last Day, after the sentence has been pronounced, not only gladly have suffered ordinary temptations, insults, and imprisonment, but I shall also say: "O, that I did not throw myself under the feet of all the godless for the sake of the great glory which I now see revealed and which has come to me through the merit of Christ!"

We have discussed in previous weeks some benefits of suffering. Let me suggest some additional ways we can feel the effects of suffering.

III. THE EFFECTS OF SUFFERING

A. Suffering Demonstrates God’s Comfort To Others – II Corinthians 1:3-4

B. Suffering Displays God’s Strength In Our Weakness – II Corinthians 12:7-10; I Peter 5:10

C. Suffering Determines The Genuineness Of Our Faith – I Peter 1:6-7

D. Suffering For Doing Right Is Commendable – I Peter 2:19-21; 3:14

E. Suffering Develops Joy and Godly Character – Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4

Leading up to the time of His betrayal, arrest and crucifixion, Jesus told the disciples that He would be leaving them. In the middle of their distress about the news of His departure, Jesus said He wanted them to experience peace. In **John 16:33** He said that in this world they would have trouble, they would suffer, they would be persecuted, there would be hard times ahead, but then He gave them words of hope, comfort, and reassurance. In the middle of the suffering **“be of good cheer I have overcome the world.”**

His words to them are words to us in our suffering. They are words that offer encouragement, hope and strength to persevere, to keep going. Remember, this is just temporary. **II Corinthians 4:17-18 “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”**

James gives supportive words to the weary who are going through suffering. Be patient, persevere, stand firm in faith and look to the glory that awaits each one of us while we wait for His return.