

# EXTREME FAITH

WISDOM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

## Discussion Seven:

### *Building Spiritual Muscle: Patience and Perseverance (4:1-12; 5:7-12)*

Exercise discipline is not always fun. Whether it is resistance workouts or cardio exercise, we do not always get a “high” when we do what is best for our bodies. It takes time to see the results of good diet, exercise, and rest. Only later, upon reflection, do we see the benefits. The same goes for our spiritual disciplines, our daily tasks, and other “routine” actions. In these passages, James brings familiar themes of endurance and patience during trials as well as reminding us we are in a spiritual battle. What is evident is that most of the battles rage inside our own hearts and that victory begins with humility! Satan has no weapon against true humility.

Notice how often James returns to the subject of our speech: he warns against quarreling and slander, and exaggerated swearing of oaths before God. Both ungodly speaking and overblown religious talk reveal pride that needs divine correction.

James does have good news amidst his critiques: God gives grace and lifts up the humble, and the same Lord who answered the prophet’s prayers and restored Job after his sufferings lives in us! Opening conversation: We are told all the time to, “Be patient!” How does patience develop? Share some examples of things that are easy for you to be patient about and things that are hard to tolerate.

## Reading #1: James 4:1-12

### Key ideas:

There are so many rapid-fire insights here. Once again, James encourages humility and challenges our motivations behind certain prayers. It is OK to ask for God’s blessings – but are they only for our pleasures or for his glory and the good of others? James addresses some of the superficiality and calls for deep lamentation and repentance as we consider our own hearts as well as the world around us. “Friendship with the world” does not mean we have no unbelieving friends or withdrawal from daily life. It means the world of rebellion against God. As we endure trials and develop godly character in community, we will see the Lord’s provision.

- Parallel scriptures: Ephesians 6:10-20; I Peter 4:12-19; 5:5-9
- Question: How does the devil attack us? What are the resources we have to resist these attacks and be victorious?
- Question: How has the Lord helped an area of your character to change for the better?

### Insight:

Our adversary is powerful, but not an equal to our God!

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## Reading #2: James 5:7-12

### Key idea:

Patience is not passivity and trusting the Lord's promises will yield great peace, in eternity and in this life. Notice that James has a lively expectation of the Lord's return. This is not escapism, but deep assurance that all our days are in his hands. James is not predicting a date but encouraging endurance.

- Question: How does the Lord's return actually influence our lives today?
- Insight: We must avoid two extremes about the return of Jesus: 1) cynicism; and 2) gullibility. Cynicism is well-revealed in 2 Peter 3:3-4 where scoffers mock our faith and hope. Gullibility means we become obsessed with headlines and signs, predictions, and "experts" peddling their latest theories. Our job is to occupy fruitfully until the Lord comes, living godly lives, and leading as many to Christ as we can. We can expect his return and plant trees. We can expect his return and prepare a better world for our grandchildren.

### Prayer exercise together:

Pray by name for unbelievers in your family and among your colleagues at work and neighborhood friends. Ask the Lord to draw them to Christ and use you if possible, in their coming to the Lord.

Sometimes our rewards for faithfulness will only be revealed after Jesus returns. Ask God for contentment and wisdom.