

# WHICH ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

## A STUDY IN JAMES

### *Spiritual Harvest Requires Patience*

**2 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *preach the word;*

*be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

The purposes of God often develop slowly because His grand designs are never hurried. The great New England preacher Phillips Brooks was noted for his poise and quiet manner. At times, however, even he suffered moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw him feverishly pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What's the trouble, Mr. Brooks?" he asked. "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!" Haven't we felt the same way many times? Some of the greatest missionaries of history devotedly spread the seed of God's Word and yet had to wait long periods before seeing the fruit of their efforts. William Carey, for example, labored 7 years before the first Hindu convert was brought to Christ in Burma, and Adoniram Judson toiled 7 years before his faithful preaching was rewarded. In western Africa, it was 14 years before one convert was received into the Christian church. In New Zealand, it took 9 years; and in Tahiti, it was 16 years before the first harvest of souls began. – Our Daily Bread

**Read James 5:7-8 (ESV)** <sup>7</sup> *Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.* <sup>8</sup> *You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

James addressed patience at the beginning of his letter when he encouraged his readers to have patient endurance and as he brings his letter to a close, he does the same thing. God is not going to right all the wrongs in this world until Jesus returns, and we believers are called to patiently wait and endure.

So often our attitude towards patience goes like this, "Lord, give me patience, and give it to me now!" We need to focus on the truth that the Lord of heaven desires His people to be patient. **1**

**Corinthians 13:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant.*

James reminds us that we need to be patient even until the Lord comes. Why? The coming of Christ will right all wrongs in the world. Be patient, the harvest is coming. James relates patiently waiting for the coming of the Lord to the life of a farmer.

The farmer's life is never easy. One day the field is a virtual swamp and the next thing you know it has become 'dry as a bone'. No crop, other than weeds, appears overnight. No human controls the weather. We see this played out in the weather news. It begins with farmers complaining about the floods which seems to turn almost immediately to complaints about drought – all in the same year.

The farmer must also have patience with the seed he sows since it takes time for plants to grow. The farmer waits many weeks for his seed to produce fruit. How long-suffering the farmer must be as he waits for harvest!

Why does the farmer willingly wait so long? Because the fruit is *precious*. **Galatians 6:9 (ESV)**<sup>9</sup> *And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

We must never forget as Christians we are ‘spiritual farmers’ who are called to plant seed and water the crop in our Lord’s harvest fields. And if we are not doing that, we should be planting and watering. Jesus explained the parable of the sower in **Luke 8:11 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> *... The seed is the word of God. We must never forget what Paul said in **1 Corinthians 3:7 (ESV)**<sup>7</sup> *So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.**

A spiritual harvest is the result of God’s work in the heart of man. Part of working in the Lord’s harvest fields involves sowing and watering in the lives of others. But, it does not end there. The LORD of heaven wants the "fruit of the Spirit" to grow in each of His children. (**Galatians 5:22-23**)

The spiritual harvest comes forth when we possess a heart that is *established*. An established heart is NOT a heart that is *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine* (**Eph. 4:14**) Paul knew the importance of working to help others to establish their heart. He wrote in **Romans 1:11 (ESV)**<sup>11</sup> *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. We establish our spiritual growth by taking to heart God’s Word and depending on prayer.*

We all realize that good farmers must be hard workers. The farmer does not sit in the house all day watching TV doing nothing. The spiritual farmer does not sit in the pew on Sunday and forget about the Lord’s harvest field the rest of the week. We must be about our Father’s business every day. Like the old hymn says ‘we will work till Jesus comes’! Keep working and waiting. (**Luke 12:42-43**)

**Read James 5:9 (ESV)**<sup>9</sup> *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

The rice crop has a tendency to soak up metals from the water it so desperately needs. One of those metals found in river water is arsenic. Consumers have already become alarmed over reports of rice-borne arsenic in everything from cereal bars to baby food. Some may say, ‘oh, it is just a little bit of arsenic’ but who wants to consume even a little bit of arsenic? Rice farmers and their harvest of arsenic infected rice draw a parallel to grumblers who infect the spiritual harvest. Who needs even a little grumbling? **Philippians 2:14 (ESV)**<sup>14</sup> *Do all things without grumbling or disputing.*

Complaining and grumbling can prove toxic to the spiritual harvest. Times of hardship can cause us to be less than loving with other Christians and even our families. We need to stay on guard that the ‘grumbler in the house’ is not us! All of us should do our best to avoid hindering the work in the Lord’s harvest field. If we are not careful, our tongue can be our biggest detriment to the work of the kingdom of God.

God’s children love the picture of Jesus standing at the door in **Revelation 3:20 (ESV)**<sup>20</sup> *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* James reminds us that the One standing at the door is the Judge. And what

does the Judge say? **Matthew 7:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> “Judge not, that you be not judged. Jesus will judge our resentful attitudes toward fellow believers at the judgment seat of Christ. Let repent and turn from judging before we arrive at the throne!

**Read James 5:10-11 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> *As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.* <sup>11</sup> *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

James reminds his readers that even though the prophets were in the will of God, they still suffered and were persecuted. Satan’s lie to the faithful Christian is that his or her suffering is the result of their own sin or unfaithfulness. The truth is their suffering might be because of their faithfulness! **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* We must never think that obedience automatically produces ease and pleasure. Jesus followed His path of obedience, and it led Him to the cross!

I have always loved the way the writer of Hebrews ends the roll call of faith. **Hebrews 11:39-40 (ESV)** <sup>39</sup> *And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,* <sup>40</sup> *since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.* Whether we receive good or bad in this life, there is something better coming for those who put our trust in the Lord.

Job exhibited tremendous patience and refused to curse God despite his severe and mysterious suffering. Little did Job know that his actions were setting in motion a picture of patience that still works for good in the Lord’s spiritual harvest today. When we understand that God has a good purpose, even painful things are put into a different perspective.

**Read James 5:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

The *swearing* that James condemns is not ‘dirty’ language. There are other verses that condemn foul language for sure. (**Eph. 5:4, Col. 3:8-10**) In this verse, James is speaking of using God’s name, or substitutes for it, to guarantee the truth of what we say. Jesus said something very similar to what James said when he gave His Sermon on the Mount. (**Matthew 5:34-37**)

In the Old Testament, the law does not prohibit oaths, but demands that a person be true to any oath he has sworn. **Leviticus 19:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.* Truth and honesty in speech are essential to an established heart.

The Bible forbids a *false oath*. A false oath is one that the person making it does not intend to keep, but he makes it either to impress or deceive others. Jesus and James were directing these commands toward these kinds of oaths. The Jews had elaborate rules.

Bible.org explains that if you swore by the temple, you weren't bound by your oath, but if you swore by the gold of the temple, you were bound. It was kind of like, "I had my fingers crossed, so I really didn't mean what I said." If people said what they meant and meant what they said, there would not be a need for any such oaths! The Jews of that day were playing games, but more importantly, they were not being truth-tellers. You may be able to fool someone with a deceptive or misleading contract, where they don't understand the fine print. But you didn't fool God. He knows the thoughts and intents of your heart, and if you were practicing deception, the fact that you did it "legally" doesn't matter to God!

Some interpret the words of Jesus and James to mean we should never take an oath on the witness stand. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:33 (ESV)** <sup>33</sup> *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'*

When we testify in court, we are asked, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?" If we tell the truth as we swore to tell it, the LORD will not have a problem with us affirming an oath in His name.

Jesus wants His children to keep our word and make good on our promises. For example, don't tell someone you are going to do something if you already know you are not. Don't say yes when you mean no and don't say no when you mean yes. Be honest. Be a Christian with integrity.

A spiritual harvest requires patience. Jesus said in **Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV)** <sup>37</sup> ... *"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."* I think most of us hesitate to pray this prayer because we know **we will be called** into His harvest field.

We had a CRA meeting at the Max on Saturday. The theme of the meeting was that through all the roadblocks and difficulties we have faced this past year in our various ministries at the Max, we are still here! When we first think of going into the harvest field, our heart's desire is to immediately serve in the capacity of the 'harvest reaper'. But, that is not always the case. Most often, we will be sowing seeds and watering and cultivating and fertilizing the spiritual crop for harvest and the work will go on year after year. It is one thing to be 'gung ho' about a ministry in the beginning and then fall away when the ministry becomes difficult and we are not seeing fruit. However, it is something else to remain steadfast, patient and faithful throughout the years.

In our work for the Lord of the Harvest, let's keep the big picture in mind. Christine Hoover says, "If we don't give up, one day we will enjoy the final harvest and its bountiful rewards. Unlike our farming friends, this harvest, one cultivated by faith, is *absolutely guaranteed*." In the meantime, let's be patient and continue to serve where the Lord has placed us and if we have no place to serve, remember this: **Matthew 7:8 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*