

Staying Up In Down Times

James 5:7-12

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

The title of my message today is: **Staying Up In Down Times**

Wouldn't it be great if when you became a Christian everything in life got easier...got a little more comfortable? It would be a great selling point for Christianity:

- Come to Jesus and all your problems will go away...
- Come to Jesus and you'll no longer experience conflict at your job or in your home...
- Come to Jesus and you will recover faster from your illnesses...heck, you come to Jesus, you won't ever get sick again...

Tragedy will never touch your home...you won't ever have to overcome adversity. Come to Jesus and down times in life will become a thing of the past!

If **ONLY** it worked that way! The reality is though we all know that it doesn't...and anyone who believes this or teaches knows deep within it's NOT true and if they do believe it, it's only a matter of time before they will find themselves deeply disappointed in God for believing something he never said would be the case in the first place.

It's a fixed law that as followers of Jesus, we are just as susceptible to curveballs in life...to times of testing...to facing hardship and undergoing trials as anyone else is.

- This week, I heard from a man in my past that means so much to me...was one of the first people back in my time in Dallas to take me under his wing. Mid-fifties now, they just found a brain tumor and the diagnosis is not optimistic – it's a down time for this family right now.
- I prayed with a family recently...members of our church – faithful that can't get on the other side of a recent surgery and they're struggling. They're walking through a down time right now.
- Another family in our church...the wife was just diagnosed with cancer and they are in the beginning stages of their "new normal" for a season and learning what this fight is going to look like as they start chemo and radiation and perhaps have to face a surgery. It's a down time for them right now.

It is a **FACT** that sometimes we'll walk through down times in life simply because we are a part of humanity walking in a fallen world. **AND** sometimes, we'll go through some painful experiences and walk through some down times **BECAUSE** we are followers of Jesus.

This has been ONE of the many themes of James letter to his congregation. They have been persecuted...ostracized...removed from their homes and dispersed – MAINLY because they are believers.

And James writing the portion of scripture we are looking at today shares with them how they can move forward...remain faithful...and stay up in the down times in life.

Now, remember the context. Last week, part of the target audience was those being oppressed and taken advantage of by the wealthy. They were in a down time, and James told them in previous verses (v. 4) you cry out to God if this is you!

God will hear your prayers...he has your back. He continues his exhortation to them:

James 5:7-12 – “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord (he mentioned the “last days” in the last part of (v. 3) we talked about that in last week’s message. This is the first time James mentions the Second Coming of the Lord. We’ll work it out here shortly). **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. ⁸ You also, be patient.**

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 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. ¹² 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.”

In this passage James gives us two pieces of advice on what we should do and what we should not do in down times. I say pieces of advice, but they are given as commands.

They are two imperatives of what TO do...and he gives two imperatives of what NOT to do. What’s interesting is James is going to give four reasons for both...and they are the exact same reasons! And in them we will see how we can stay up in down times of life.

Let’s look at the commands in the positive first. If we are going to stay up in down times, James gives us command number one and that is: **Be Patient**

Notice, two times this command is given. We see it in (v. 7) – “Be patient. We see it again in (v. 8) – “You also, be patient.”

Now, the word “patient” here is a word that means to be long-tempered or we may say, “long-fused”. It’s the exact opposite of having a short-fuse or being quick-tempered.

illus. Black-cats – When I was growing up, we’d get fireworks to set off on the 4th of July holiday or New Years Eve. And we had those black-cats. And we’d light them and throw them out of our hands as quick as possible and we had some close calls growing up because some of those fuses could burn quick...they weren’t very long.

Charles Swindoll gives some helpful insight into this word in his commentary. He writes: **“Together** (two Greek words that make up the word patience) **these terms refer to the act of holding back one’s anger. We might say such a person has a long fuse and can avoid sudden outbursts of rage. It also implies the ability to keep calm and cool for a long time, without exhibiting frustrations with circumstances.”**

So, the idea is, here you are:

- being oppressed...
- taken advantage of...
- you are in the middle of a trial or trouble that’s not even your fault...

You didn’t cause it...you certainly didn’t ask for it - you’re being squeezed – and the command God gives us here through his servant, James is, “if you can identify with this and in the middle of a tight spot...a down time, be patient...be long-fused...don’t go off on God...don’t go off on others. Don’t give up and throw in the towel!

An old school Bible word we could use, and it’s translated as this in other places is the word “long-suffering”. Paul mentions this as a fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5. He tells us in Col. 3 that this is a quality that we have to “put on” just like we put on our clothes each day.

So, the first command given – how to stay up in down times is to be patient. The second command given is to: **Be Firm**

James 5:7b-8a – “...See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts...”

Now, the word “establish” here means to stabilize or support. It can be translated as “strengthen”. The NIV translates this word “establish” as “stand firm”. It’s this idea of having a fixed heart...a made up mind!

When Jesus was going to Jerusalem, Luke uses this word to describe the determination of Jesus.

Luke 9:51 – “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

In other words, there was no stopping him. He was determined. James is calling for a set heart when it comes to down times. We are resolved to be faithful...to endure...to stay strong. We’re not going anywhere...we’re not going to waver!

We will be patient and we will be firm. An example is given of that of a farmer. The farmer determines to do all he can do (plant the seed, cultivate the soil) and then patiently waits for God to do what only he can do (send the rain)!

Now, James is going to give four reasons we can be patient and be firm in down times, but before getting into those reasons, let's look at what NOT to do in the down times of life.

James shares two commands...two imperatives in the negative. We know what to do, let's look at what NOT to do!

First are not to: **Be Negative**

James 5:9a – “Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged...”

James has already told them not to “speak evil against one another” (4:11) and now he is telling them not to grumble...not to complain against one another...not to get cynical.

It's a good word for these Christians to hear because this a real temptation, is it not?

Something happens to us...life throws us a curveball. We don't understand why it's happening. We get frustrated that we're being squeezed. We get short-fused because we don't have the answers and what do we do? The temptation is to kick those closest to us!

This is one of Satan's oldest tricks in his book! Turn people against God – that's his number one plan...and doesn't this happen. Many people will rule out following God because something has happened to them and the thought is, “If God really loved me, he would not have allowed this to happen to me” OR “If there was a God in the first place, he would have been powerful enough to stop this from happening.”

And Satan has caused a many a person to grumble against God and turn from following or believing in him. If that doesn't work, then his goal is to turn us against one another.

Illus. Numbers – this is the story of Israel. They are in a tight spot...down time wandering around in Israel and what do they do? It's on every page? Grumble against God and more than that grumble against Moses and Aaron – they turn on one another.

James, writes in down times, “Don't grumble”. Don't be negative. Secondly, he writes don't: **Be Irreverent**

James 5:12 – “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 big idea here in all this oath talk and swearing is NOT show irreverence toward God. Oaths were a big part of Jewish life and an oath was considered binding if God's name was brought into it.

Essentially what James is calling for here is to not get out over your skis and start swearing by God that you're going to do something or not do something. Just let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be 'no'.

We've mentioned in this series that James models his book after the Proverbs and the Sermon on the Mount. This statement James makes in (v. 12) about oaths and swearing is lifted straight from the Sermon on the Mount.

Matt. 5:33-37 – “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.’³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

The lesson here is, are not to “invoke God's name in an irreverent way.” In our modern day vernacular, James might would say it like this: “Don't say things like:

- “By God, that's not going to happen again!”
- “God forbid that happen to me or my family because I will...”
- “I swear to God if he or she does that again...”
- “God, if you do this, then I'll do this...”

Don't play let's make a deal with God. This is the type of language James is speaking out against.

One commentator put it like this: we should really think about and avoid at all costs “the thoughtless mention of the Divine name in general conversation.” It is a form of breaking the third commandment – taking the Lord's name in vain.

So, look what we have here so far. In order to stay up in down times we are to **Be Patient** and to **Be Firm**. We are not to: **Be Negative** or **Be Irreverent**

Now, James is going to give FOUR reasons in this passage that we can live like this. They are motivations if you will to be patient and be firm, while at the same time motivations/reasons to NOT be negative or irreverent – they're the same reasons!

Reason #1: The Lord is coming

James 5:7a, 8 – “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord... You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

300 times in the New Testament, the “Parousia” of the Lord – the Second Coming of Jesus is mentioned. All total it’s about one in every thirteen verses.

I mentioned this last week and we’ll say it again, here. The prophetic “last days” clock started ticking when Jesus ascended to the Father and the Holy Spirit descended to live in those who follow Jesus. For 2,000 years we have been living in the last days and we are eagerly awaiting the return of Christ.

This is a core doctrine – we believe in a literal, physical return. We don’t know WHEN Jesus will return, but we do know from scripture that it will happen in a moment! The Bible says in the twinkling of the eye. It will come, the scripture says, “like a thief in the night”.

And we are told over and over again that we are to be ready! We are to be Motel 6 Christians – “We’ll leave the light on for you!” – we are to be up and waiting (patiently and firmly). We are getting ready VERY soon to celebrate the Advent of Jesus – the arrival of Christ into the world. That’s what Christmas is all about! And while we celebrate and look back at his first advent, we realize there is another future advent!

Let me give you a text that speaks to the return of Christ. Paul writing in **1 Thess. 4:13-17** – **“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.”**

The fact that our Lord is coming should encourage us! It should encourage us to be patient.

Listen: if we are being treated harshly, enduring suffering, going through a trial, in a down time in life, the coming of Jesus should extend our fuse! We can be long-fused (patient) because the Lord is coming and when he comes, our suffering will come to an end!

Listen to the words of Peter in: **1 Peter 5:6-10** – **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”**

The coming of the Lord motivates us to be patient and to be firm...to pass whatever test God is sending our way because he is coming and he is bringing his rewards with him! More on that in just a moment.

The return of Christ motivates us to be patient and be firm, but it also should motivate us NOT to be negative or irreverent as well. How does it do this? Because don't want to be doing any of that when Jesus returns!

2 Peter 3:8-12a – “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness (NOT grumbling complaining, swearing and using God's name in vain!), ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...”

Illus. When I get back room clean – first question, “When is she coming back? Live ready.

Reason #2: The Lord is Judge

James 5:9 – “Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

Here is another reason...another motivation to be patient and be firm in the down times in life as well as not to be negative or irreverent. God is Judge.

Now, let's work this out practically. A judge is in total control of his courtroom. He's got jurisdiction over everything that happens in that courtroom. He determines the rules and parameters one plays by. The Judge gets the final word.

Well, God is Judge over the world. And look, he's not just a Judge, he's a sovereign Judge! There is no one higher and no one greater! He makes the rules...he determines what goes on in his courtroom called the world.

And listen what takes place in our lives...we can have confidence today that NOTHING is touching us without him signing off on it! We'll see an example of this in Job in just a moment, but before going there, just consider what we're saying here: HUGE implications!

If I'm in a trial and KNOW God, the Judge has allowed it into my life, I can be patient – this is God's doing!

If I'm in a down time and the struggle is real and it's wearing me out...and I'm fearful of the unknown future and I don't know what my next steps are, I can be strengthened and be firm in my faith because I KNOW God is the Judge and he has ultimate say over my life.

Knowing God is Judge removes grumbling and negativity from my life. How could I grumble against another person and take my frustration out on someone else, when God has chosen by his grace to work something out in me – even if it causes me pain and is uncomfortable. He is conforming to the image of his Son – his hand on my life and in my life is proof of his divine love!

I'm not going to try to manipulate God and control the situation by attempting to make deals with him. I'm not going to make rash statements and invoke God's name in a dishonoring way – me fear of the Lord (holy reverence) won't allow it!

He is Judge and according to this passage he is (v. 9b) “standing at the door”. It's another reference to his soon return.

And what's he going to do when he returns? He's going to make some judgments...it's what Judges do!

Heb. 9:27 – “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...”

Read Matthew 25 – three parables about the Judgment our Great Judge is going hand down at the end of time. He's going to separate the sheep from the goats...believers from unbelievers. For believers, he's going to judge what we did with our lives with ALL that he entrusted to us – we will be held in account!

2 Cor. 5:10 – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

1 Cor. 3:13-15 – “each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

We're going to be judged for how we endured in this trial we are in...for what we did in the down times in life. We're we patient? Did we remain firm in our faith?

The Judge knows and he is standing at the door! Let this be motivation today to be patient and be firm...to not be negative or irreverent.

Reason #3 – The Lord is working a plan that is for his glory and our good

I get this from **James 5:10-11a – “As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ 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...”**

We can be confident that God is always working in our lives...when we can see it and when we can't. And we can be confident that whatever he is working is FOR our good.

Now, I didn't say what happens to us in life is always good.

- A cancer diagnosis isn't good...
- The loss of a child isn't good...
- The breakup of a family isn't good...
- Losing your job isn't good...

There are things that happen to us that are NOT good. James gives Job as an example. He lost everything! His children...his home...his livestock...his health...lost it all! It wasn't good! James mentions other prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ALL of God's prophets suffered – I can't think of one who didn't!

- Jeremiah was a weeping prophet rejected by his people...
- Isaiah rewarded for his preaching ministry by being sawn into...

Read Hebrews 11 and the names that are offered up as examples of what James is talking about here! Not everything that happened to God's prophets was good in and of itself, but it was ultimately for their good and for God's glory – he was working a plan in their life.

What could fuel being patient and firm, saying 'no' to negativity and irreverence MORE than knowing God is working a plan - even though we might not like what we're going through – to see by faith that God is working something in us. We trust the words of Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:8-9 – “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

God is working a plan that is for our good and his glory.

John Blanchard – Biblical patience is not rooted in fatalism that says everything is out of control. It is rooted in faith that says everything is in God's control.”

Reason #4 – The Lord is compassionate and merciful

Where do I get this? **James 5:12b – “...the Lord is compassionate and merciful**

I can be patient and firm when I understand that even in my tough times in life, the Lord sees me. He hears me when I pray. And he is compassionate toward me and merciful to me.

This helps me be patient and it strengthens my heart. It helps me to stand firm in my faith – I can go through anything knowing that the one in control is characterized as compassionate and merciful.

If God was mean...stern...unloving...didn't have my best interests at heart...wasn't a sovereign Judge – NO WAY we could make it through...NO WAY we could endure.

But our God – compassionate and merciful.

The scripture says it's his kindness (Rom. 2:4) that leads to repentance. It's what will motivate me not to chew on others when life is chewing on me. How can I grumble when he is full of compassion and mercy – that's how I need to be to others and the posture of my heart should be one of gratitude – ALWAYS.

How could I use God's name in a dishonorable or unholy way when he is as compassionate and merciful as he is?

So, let's look at it one more time (**SHOW MAIN SLIDE**)

Let me give you some practical application in closing because I know this isn't easy! Most all of the reasons and motivations given deal with the future...the unknown!

- we don't know what God is doing...
- when he is coming...
- it's hard to see his plan...
- to trust that what is taking place is for our good...

And the spot you are in right now, if it's a hardship or a trial is **PRESENT DAY** – and it's the unknowns that are killing you. All those things in the middle are hard to grasp when you are **IN** it.

So, let me give you a four words of application as we close:

- 1. Look Up** – Hope! Christ is coming.
- 2. Look Back** – God has been faithful. Look at the Saints of old. If they can be steadfast, we can too. They weren't super human. People just like us!
- 3. Look In** – Concentrate on what God is forming in us – we look on the outward, but Jesus is way more concerned with purifying our faith and it's the heat that does it!
- 4. Look Out** – Could be God is using this trial in your life to show his glory off to others...to give you a future ministry to others. God wants to use this downtime to reveal himself to others – let him! His glory is what we want!
- 5. Look Forward** – This is a season – “this too shall pass!”

(**SHOW MAIN SLIDE**) – I'm praying for us, Champion Forest – that we will stay up in down times.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.