

- 2. Verse 4 speaks about workers who not been paid by their wealthy employers. In our own society, have you heard of workers not being paid for the hours they have worked? When this happens to the poor, what redress do they have? What responsibilities do we have to address these problems? (see Psalm 12:5)**

The press reports this sort of things happening to for example fast food workers and housekeepers in motels. Poor people usually cannot afford to hire legal counsel. Proverbs 14:34 reminds us that “*Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people.*” Sometimes Christians need to take a stand on behalf of those who are exploited.

DAY 3: Read James 5:5-6

- 1. James is quite critical of wealthy people in these verses. What reasons or justifications do rich people offer for treating people—including other Christians—this way? How would you answer if a homeless person made this accusation today?**

Someone might say, *I earned it – I am entitled to spend my money as I want to.* People can forget how interrelated we are and how dependent we are on others for everything we do. Amos is critical of irresponsible wealth in 4:1 & 6:4. See also Ron Sider’s classic book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, which is an urgent call for more biblical thinking and action about economic inequalities.

- 2. How can we be implicated in misdeeds done both intentionally and unintentionally? What light does James 4:17 shed on this?**

See Amos 8:5-6. We read in the press that the life expectancy of those living in poor neighborhoods can be 10 to 15 years less than those living in affluent areas. Or think of those found guilty for crimes they did not commit partly because they could not afford counsel. The *day of slaughter* probably refers to the day-of-judgment at the end times. These verses are a vigorous wake-up call for those outside the church.

James 4:17 is relevant because the Scripture affirms that every human being (we would except some handicapped) has a conscience, and therefore knows the difference between right and wrong. And this truth obtains regardless whether she listens to her conscience or not, and regardless whether she is Christian or not. (Of course, we have learned that under adverse circumstances a person’s conscience can be trained for the worse.) So, the non-practicing business people to whom these verses were directed would have had, in some sense, an inner feeling that what they were doing was not completely right. See Proverbs 20:27 where *the spirit of a man* “as indicated by its ‘searching’ activity, is conscience”. (Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, p. 418.)

DAY 4: Read James 5:7-9

- 1. Why does James counsel us to be patient in our suffering? If you were among the oppressed referred to in verses 4-6, what Christian resources would be available to you?**

See also James 1:2-4. The Lord God gives us faith when we sincerely knock on the door. One of the greatest tests of faith is the strength we receive when we are in a period of sustained oppression, or a trial of sickness or family disaster. We read in Acts 1:7: *It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.* But the Bible does tell us that the Lord is coming soon. In the meantime, however, this fact does not let us off the hook. We remember Martin Luther on this 500th anniversary of his nailing 95 these to a chapel door. Luther said, *Even if the Lord were coming tomorrow, I would plant a tree in my garden today.* Being alert and ready includes right now making God’s kingdom more and more real, especially for those hungry, thirsty, of immigrant status, sick, poorly dressed or imprisoned. (Matthew 25:35-36)

2. **What does James write about the time factor related to the Lord's coming? How should your answer to this question affect your hope in a time of trial? (See also Matthew 16:27 and Titus 2:13.)**

The Psalms in particular, and many other places in the Scriptures, describe God coming to us and helping in time of trial. James is hinting that if we are grumbling, then we may not be calling upon the Lord for help, but simply be grieving over our not having our own answers readily at hand. Today we might call this a *control* issue. (Philippians. 4:4-7)

3. **Once again James peers into what we are talking about, even in a time of trial or oppression. In such a time, how can we avoid complaining, griping, or blaming someone for our misfortune? How is this verse an illustration of James 1:26?**

Being patient and standing firm when in a time of trial includes not quarreling against or blaming others. We need to keep a tight rein on our tongues especially when suffering pushes our emotions to the limit.

DAY 5: Read James 5:10-12

1. **Why would James use “*the prophets*” as an example of those speaking in the name of the Lord who had to be patient? Why would “*those who have persevered*” be considered blessed?**

The prophets were often solitary characters, and speaking or acting out teachings few could understand. (Jeremiah 9:1, 11:18-20) They were God's preachers in the Old Testament, drawing people back to their covenantal responsibilities at times of slack-heartedness. They were often persecuted for it. While they had visions of the coming messiah, and waited patiently for salvation, the messiah did not come in their day. They persevered in the name of the Lord, and were blessed because of their obedience.

2. **Why did Job have to persevere, and what “*did the Lord finally bring about*”?**

Job is an amazing story of the suffering of the righteous. Job, believing he was innocent and seeking vindication, persevered. It turned out that Job was being tested by God. Rather than smacking him down for his brashness and spiritual pride, the Lord had *compassion and mercy* towards Job, gave him a personal audience, restored him and gave him a second chance.

3. **While verse 12 seems like a non-sequitur, can you find a connection with the preceding verses? Why is the integrity of your word so important to James?**

James has inserted a proverb here, and it is not altogether clear why. It is a close parallel with Matthew 5:34-37. Some Anabaptists have taken these verses to mean that no oaths are to be taken, even official oaths in court. Others make a distinction between *official* and *voluntary* oaths, and say that the teaching refers only to the latter. What James may be affirming is that while Christians (and the poor generally) may be at times under the heavy hand of oversight by the rich and powerful (James 2:6), and as a consequence be discounted or mocked, nevertheless, the weak have their character and should make every effort to stand on it. The Lord does not abandon us regardless of circumstance. (See Naboth's Vineyard, I Kings 21)

4. **Why would James begin verse 12 with the words “*above all*”?**

The words *above all* give priority to standing on one's character and not making false promises or dicey half-truthful commitments in times of oppression.

DAY 6: Reread James 5:1-12

1. Think of one of God's teachings in these verses that is of special meaning to you personally and memorize the verse.
2. James always wants us to move from Bible study to incarnational action. What are you moved to do as a disciple of Christ because of this passage?