

DISCUSS

1. How would you describe the tone of this passage?
2. Who is James addressing in this section?
3. What is he predicting for them? Why will this happen?
4. Do you think this is written to all “rich” people ever, to rich people in that time and place, or just to the rich people who were guilty of exploitation?
5. In James 5:1, what’s the first thing James wants the “rich” people to do? How do you think this compares with their current attitude? (Do they spend a lot of time “weeping and howling”?)
6. Why would this be important? What is there to weep about?
7. How can we use the resources we have, such as they are, to help the poor?
8. What can we do to make sure that poor workers are not exploited, that they get a fair wage for their work?
9. Read Matthew 6:19-21. Where are we storing our treasure? How can we break free from the idolatry of money and all the things it buys? How can we seek first God’s kingdom?
10. James is talking a lot about patience (using the word four times in four verses). According to verse 7, what did people need to be patient about?
11. What analogy does James use there in verse 7? Have you ever planted a vegetable garden? How long does it seem to take from when you first plant the seeds to when you get to bring in the first ripe vegetable and cook it up?
12. How does this experience compare to waiting for Jesus’ return?

13. James says in verse 11 that those who persevere through suffering are “blessed.” What does he mean by that?
14. How does James 1:2–4 fill out your idea of the blessedness of suffering?
15. Have you ever heard suffering referred to as “the human condition?” What does that mean? Is it true? Is suffering part of what it means to be human?
16. What other types of suffering have you seen or even experienced?

LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let’s consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Gut-Level Prayer: Sometimes when you’re suffering, praying can be difficult—especially if you’re trying to mind your manners with God and pray correctly. Remember that prayer is open and honest communication with God. Take Job’s example and let God know just how miserable you are, just how angry, sad, scared, or confused you may be. Tell Him exactly how you feel. You aren’t fooling Him by trying to keep a secret from Him.

Listening: Find out someone else’s story. People become resilient through perseverance. When someone is going through a terrible time of suffering, it may seem like it’s never going to end and hopelessness takes over. Even Job asked God to crush him and cut off his life so that his pain and misery would end. But Job persevered, and so have many, many people. Go to someone in your family, someone in your church, or someone else you know who has come through suffering. Ask to hear that person’s story.

Sit with the suffering: It’s good to pray for those who are suffering, and you should pray for them. But, sometimes they need someone just to be there with them, to comfort them and let them talk and hold their hand. You don’t have to have answers, especially to the question, “Why is this happening?” You can say, “I don’t know, but I’m here for you.”