

Explore the Bible: With Anticipation

November 6, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 25 focuses on James 5:7-9, 13-20.*

Do these verses sound familiar to another part of James's letter? If you remember, the writer introduced himself briefly and in the next breath gave this audacious statement: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:2-3).

Life brings challenges (and joys), so we need to remember that living into Christian maturity means we need patience and endurance. Ask your group: *What does it look like—and what does it not look like—to live through challenges with patience and endurance?*

As you discuss these verses, keep in mind that living with anticipation does not mean we simply "ignore" difficulties, and we certainly do not make light of them with a "get tough and get over it" attitude. Instead, we focus on Christ and his coming with a greater hope.

Patience (James 5:7-9)

What is it like to wait for something that you know is not far away, but you still have to wait? With Christmas only a month away, kids (from 1 to 92) offer a great illustration—watching with anticipation and lacking patience. The closer the day gets, the more difficult it is to be patient.

James uses the example of the farmer who knows if he or she wants to

harvest, then patience for each season is required. “Be patient and stand firm” is expecting something you believe will happen. The same is for believers and Jesus’s return: wait patiently and do not waver in faith.

What might verse 9 have to do with this point about patience? When Jesus returns as the King of kings, he will also return as the righteous Judge. He is and will show himself to be both equally, so we should not be distracted by bickering or nagging as we wait; instead, be patient with one another while patiently waiting his return.

Prayer (James 5:13-18)

It is interesting how patience and prayer often are linked: to be patient, we need prayer, and when we pray, we need to be patient. Living this life, we will experience trouble, happiness, sickness and sin. In all these, prayer is our needed companion.

The communication point of prayer is something that is part of maturing as a Christian. *Consider having your group name people (biblical personalities or not) they know who had effective prayer habits. How do people with prayer habits live differently? Elijah’s example is one of many that could be discussed.*

Be sure to spend some time discussing verse 16. Confession is healthy, and righteousness makes one’s prayers that much more powerful. Since this study mostly is being read by those from the Protestant tradition, be sure to clarify what confession is compared to how we typically envision it. *What would communal confession look like in your church’s context?*

Protecting (James 5:19-20)

This seems like a quick and “cut short” conclusion to a practical manual on

faith, but do not miss the communal focus and how it completes all that has been said. Christian maturity is experienced and worked through in groups, not just individually. Accountability, then, is central to what James wants to communicate.

“Christians must care for each other by working to restore those who wander from the faith” (Jim Samra, *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude*, 89). We anticipate that Jesus will come to judge the earth, but that is not our job in the meantime; instead, we need to focus on restoring people into the faith community.

Do any of your group members have a story of someone (or themselves) that portrays this kind of restoration? We should not take lightly the powerful potential of restoring someone who has left the faith. This is something we should all anticipate with a sense of urgency for the fast-approaching return of Jesus.

Conclusion

Movies and stories have a way of talking about anticipation and endurance. Consider how the animated film *Up* portrayed a lonely widower who anticipated many dreams that were now dead with his wife’s memory. But an unlikely little boy and dog took him on an adventure that far surpassed his dreams. *What might this story—and others like it—tell us about how endurance and anticipation work well together to form us?*

If there is opportunity, allow members of your class to talk about how they are anticipating Jesus’s return. Some are more eager and impatient, while others may feel more fearful. For all people and with all responses, we must find a way to “be patient...until the Lord’s coming.” We do not quit, nor do we lose heart; instead, we look forward with anticipation to the day that will be better than Christmas, when Jesus returns to make all things right. Until then, be patient!

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