

The Family of God

Personal Breakthroughs:

James 5:7-20

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We are down to the final two messages on personal breakthroughs. Have you had a breakthrough? I've found that most all of us have challenges we'd like resolved. Some of us can not name what we hope for, but most of us hope.

Historically, some breakthroughs are obvious. D-day was an obvious breakthrough in World War II. However, there were also breakthroughs not so obvious. Did you know that intelligence reports about Germany led to victory over Japan? The Manhattan Project, which produced the bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, was initiated because of rumored work in Germany. That word and subsequent decisions brought an end to our war with Japan.

Which word of God will lead you to make breakthrough decisions? What does it mean to you that this is the time of God's favor when everything is possible? What does God's forgiveness mean to you? What does God's love do to you? What has God's truth done in you? What does God's family hold for you? According to the Bible, it holds much.

The Bible reveals that our choices and our relationships affect our hearts. Our choice to humble ourselves is critical. When God showed his power in Egypt, Pharaoh resisted because of pride and the counsel of his advisors. When the son of King Solomon began to rule, he acted in pride guided by his young advisors. Civil war resulted. In contrast, breakthroughs come when we choose to humble ourselves before God and walk with his people.

We see that important call in the book of James. It calls us to choose five actions in our fellowship with the family of God; and fortunately for me, each can begin with the letter P.

The first P is *patience*.

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. (James 5:7, NIV)

We are called to be patient until Christ returns. That is when vindication comes. We are to act like farmers who, believing they will reap, plant and work until the time comes. We also need to be patient in suffering. Christ suffered and so do his followers. Furthermore, we must be patient with one another. As a Christian family, we benefit from one another's gifts and suffer from one another's weaknesses. As a result, we will hurt from time to time because of each another. You're going to hurt from me. I'm going to hurt from you. You are going to hurt from one another. We can either grow from the hurt, or we can sin; and we do sin, especially against God and one another, when we grumble about each other. What does that say about God who gives us one another? Isn't our grumbling an act of unbelief rather than faith? Isn't it an act of selfishness rather than love? The Bible says:

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
(Ephesians 4:2-3, NIV)

It says:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13-14, NIV)

It says:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
(1 Peter 4:8-9, NIV)

It says:

Love is patient... (1 Corinthians 13:4, NIV)

In love, God is patient with us. In love and patience, God forms us and grows us.

Breakthroughs occur when we are patient because genuine love builds people.

Breakthroughs also occur when we walk with people who *persevere*. James wrote:

Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. (James 5:8, NIV)

The call to stand firm is a call to persevere. James reminds us that the prophets and Job suffered greatly but were blessed because they persevered. They trusted God's judgments. They trusted God's word. God honored them, and soon God will honor them and us together.

Breakthroughs come as we choose to be *patient, persevering* and *purposeful*. James writes:

Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned. (James 5:12, NIV)

Since God is trustworthy, we must become trustworthy. Any wavering and debate must come before we give our word. Our pattern must honor our word so that oaths are not necessary.

We must hold ourselves accountable. God does. That is the path of breakthroughs.

We are to be *patient, persevering, purposeful* and *praying*. James writes:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:14-16, NIV)

There are times when we benefit from getting away for private prayer and fasting, but most of the time God brings help as we open up our heart, our hurt, our hope to one another and wait on the Spirit of Jesus. God gives us the privilege of helping one another experience breakthroughs.

I think this is exactly why I've seen more personal breakthroughs in the past 7 years at Bethany than in the 19 years previous to that. There is power when you walk with a people who are patient, persevering, purposeful and praying. There is life-changing power.

A couple months ago a woman walked into my office. She told me how God led her to Bethany and how her fellowship here dramatically changed her vision of Christ's relevance and power and consequently her life. I too cannot overestimate how life-changing my fellowship with Christian people has been. It is difficult for me to see any health in my life that hasn't in some way come from the ministry of Christian believers.

Indeed, I've been shaped by one more aspect, one more P in God's family. James wrote:

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20, NIV)

I've been *pursued* by God, especially through his family. God's family has pursued me in my sinful attitudes and actions. They've shared their concerns and brought gentle correction that has changed my life and prevented a multitude of sins from having their full effect. We are given a spiritual family that pursues us. Have you been pursued? We are to pursue one another.

If you fellowship in the family of God, you've already had breakthroughs. Victories have already been secured, but some await your decisions. Be patient and persevere. Be purposeful and let's pray for and with one another, opening our hearts and lives to each other. Let's pursue one another because sinful attitudes can carry us away. We are a breakthrough family.

So many of you have gone through such difficult times and then turned around and blessed us in our painful moments. That's family. We pull together in hardships and that is the stuff of breakthroughs. Don't isolate or stay aloof. God has given you his family.