LIVING A LIFE THAT MATTERS

Part 2

by Glenn Newton and Philip Goad
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Introduction  |  by Glenn Newton

In 2011, I released my second FLEX book titled *Living a Life That Matters*. In the years that have passed, I have been amazed at how many people have told me they have been blessed by it. One elder, whom I had never met, sent me a message on social media, telling me what a blessing the book had been to him and his congregation. I was humbled and honored, but not surprised.

You see, we all long for lives that matter. We want to make a difference in this world. We want to leave a legacy for our children and grandchildren. We desire to hand down a heritage of faith in our churches. But most of us don’t know where to start. God’s Word is always the place to start. That’s why I’m not surprised that the first *Living a Life That Matters* book was a success. God’s Word is full of practical teaching on how to live lives of influence.

In this second volume, I have asked my friend Philip Goad to join me in sharing the stories of lives that mattered. You will likely be familiar with some of the people in this book. Others in this book won’t be as familiar to you. But each of their lives were significant, even if their names aren’t as familiar. You don’t have to have a household name to make a difference; you just have to be willing.

About the Authors

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Key Verse:

We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.  

(James 5:11)

WARM UP

Phillips Brooks was a famous Episcopal preacher from the 1800s and was known as a calm person. It has been said that his demeanor is reflected in hymns that he wrote, such as “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Brooks was, of course, human and could get upset at times. As the story is told, a friend saw him feverishly pacing one day and asked, “What’s the trouble, Mr. Brooks?” Brooks is said to have responded, “The trouble is that I’m in a hurry, but God isn’t!”

Have you been there? Are there circumstances in your life that leave you pacing? Do you struggle with patience? If so, welcome to the club! Many of us do, and that includes your author!

Patience defined

Defining patience often leads us to “churchy” terms like longsuffering and forbearing. However, one of the most powerful definitions for patience can be found in the dictionary of the New Century Bible:
“To handle pain or difficult times calmly and without complaining.”

This simple definition begs an important question: How much of our impatience has nothing to do with real pain or real difficulty?

**WORK OUT**

Why are we so impatient?

First, since none of us were born as impatient people, it stands to reason that we learned to be impatient—possibly in the working laboratory we refer to as the home. I’m sure my impatience behind the wheel was a quality I first learned as a youngster riding in the car with my family! Why waste time behind 10 slow-moving cars when you can pass them all and get on with your day? Yet, driving my car seldom involves a circumstance of genuine pain or difficulty.

Second, since most displays of impatience involve no real pain or difficulty, the primary cause seems to be our own selfishness. Our world has conditioned us not to have to wait long: for food, for news, for sports scores, or even for things we buy. We want what we want, and we want it now. And, when forced to wait, we get impatient. After all, our time is valuable. We also like to be in control. Like Phillips Brooks, when things aren’t going the way we’d like, we might even find ourselves being a bit impatient with God.

**A look at the text**

The name Job is synonymous with the idea of patience. Through no fault of his own, he lost his family, his health, and his stuff. Yet he endured. And, because of Job’s ability to “handle pain and difficult times calmly and without complaining,” he is the example of patience James uses when writing to some Christians who appear to be experiencing real pain and difficulty.
James 5:7-11 begins, “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord...” The first six verses of the chapter provide insight into why the Christians are being called to patience. James calls out the rich people who have been mistreating their employees. He warns that a day of misery awaits them; it’s a reminder that God knows their sinful way of living. Evidently the Christians are these laborers who have suffered at the hands of the rich. Real pain. Real difficulty.

Yet, James calls them to be patient. He challenges them to live like Jesus could return at any moment (v. 8), but it’s also a reminder that they can strengthen their hearts, because it isn’t harvest time yet (v. 7b). In other words, the rich may be getting away with something today, but the day of reckoning is coming, and God will make things right. Plus, James warns the Christians not to take their frustrations with the rich out on one another because the judge is “right at the door” (v. 9). This reference to the presence of a judge seems to serve as a reminder that two wrongs never make a right. Verse 10 reminds the Christians about the patience of the prophets: people who lived lives that were far from acceptance and inclusion. Finally, James brings the patience and endurance of Job into the discussion (v. 11). James reminds them, “…you have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.” In other words, the Lord took care of Job, so He will take care of you, too. Be patient!

**Why is it important for people to see us living patiently?**
**Patience helps people see that we are living with eternity in view.** That’s one of the big teachings from James 5. Our culture promotes instant gratification, and we learn to be impatient when we are forced to wait. As believers, we choose to be patient, because we are waiting for something better. Yes, we recognize that God has
provided us with things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17), but we realize that we are not the center of the universe, and life here isn’t designed to be our heaven. That’s why when things go bad, our goal is to be patient.

Living patiently reflects that we are confident in the outcome of the Lord’s dealings. James wants Christians thinking about Jesus’ return. It is the idea of being able to endure pain and difficulty here because something better has been promised.

Pointers for living patiently

1. **Choose the longest line at the store.** Purposefully choosing to spend more time checking out? Are you kidding? But think about it. Making a choice to declare that it’s okay to take a little longer in line is one way to take control. And, it also serves as a powerful reminder that spending time in a checkout line doesn’t produce real pain or difficulty, and it might even create an opportunity.

2. **Sit quietly for an hour when you have things to do.** Choosing to be at rest is something that many of us need to learn to do. Plus, slowing down can open the door to thinking rather than reacting. Sitting quietly for an hour may even help prevent us from overloading our schedules in the first place.

3. **Pause before you hit “Send!”** One of the big lessons from our text in James 5 is that if any group of people had reason not to be patient, it was these Christians! James had just called out the rich who were guilty of mistreating these Jesus followers. But it’s worth noting that he doesn’t tell the Christians to vent and complain and tell the world how horrible it is to be oppressed. It seems that there is a blessing to be found when we suppress the urge to vent on social media.

4. **Remember that God is in control.** James uses the first six verses to remind his audience that God is fully aware of the sins of these
oppressors. God is in control, and He will deal with sin on His timetable. Everyone will eventually bow the knee before Jesus (Philippians 2:10). This includes the rich who were hurting those in James’s audience, as well as the person who brings pain into your life and mine.

5. **Live with urgency about things that are eternally important.** Impatient people often seem to have an irritating urgency about themselves. Our goal must be not to have an urgency to fulfill our selfish desires. Rather, we should possess a spiritual urgency. We live with urgency about being ready to go to heaven.

**COOL DOWN**

For all who struggle with living patiently, it is worth remembering that growth and improvement is a process. We learned to be impatient, and it will take time to retrain ourselves to live patiently. It’s super important, though. Eventually life will serve up circumstances that require genuine patience! In the meantime, we must remember that the good times can help us be prepared for the times that are less than good. James calls us to remember Job’s patience. Job illustrates the importance of developing a patient mindset before the real suffering ever begins. Job 1 begins, “There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Does this describe the way you are patiently living your life today?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How does the farmer (v.7) help us understand the need to be patient?
2. What could James mean when he writes “for the coming of the Lord in near” (v. 8)?

3. Why would James need to warn his readers not to complain against one another (v.9)?

4. How are the prophets an example of suffering and patience (v. 10)?

5. How does Job illustrate the Lord’s compassion and mercy (v. 11)?

6. What other pointers can Christians incorporate to be more patient?