

# Steady Your Heart In God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, I want you to think for a moment of your heart as a ship or a boat. And as you know, ships or boats, they are out on the ocean, they're out on the sea, and when the storms come, the ship can be rocked, it can be thrown from side to side and so on.

And so what a boat or a ship needs in the storm is ballast. It needs something heavy in the bottom of the ship or the bottom of the boat that's going to give it stability, it's going to steady the ship.

And so as we think about our hearts in those terms, we realize that we need ballast for our hearts that will steady our hearts, that will make our hearts firm and strong and steady in the midst of the storms that life brings at us.

And the question is, where do we find this ballast? Where do we find those things that steady us and give us strength and stability? And of course, we will find ballast in different places. God has given us many good gifts, such as friends or family or other things that can help us through difficult times.

And yet at the same time, we recognize that none of these good gifts are intended to be fully sufficient for us. And in fact, our hearts are big ships. They're big boats. When the Bible speaks about our heart, it's not just thinking about our emotions, it's thinking about our personality.

[ 1 : 3 0 ] It's thinking about our intellect. It's thinking about our memory. It's thinking about our emotions. Yes. It's thinking about our desire and our will. And so James, as he speaks to these Christians in the first century who have been scattered around the place as a result of persecution, he wants them to have steady hearts that have ballast. And you'll see that in verse 8 of chapter 5, that Stacey read for us.

In verse 8 of chapter 5, James says, Stand firm. Stand firm. Stand firm. And when James says, Stand firm, that phrase is translating a phrase from Greek, which James was writing in, that literally means establish your hearts. Establish your hearts. And James is going to explain to us how we might establish our hearts.

And what James does in this section is he speaks to three different groups of people. Three different groups of people. But it's interesting with the first two groups of people, he's speaking to them, but he's looking at the church family.

So he's speaking to them, but he's looking at the church family. As he speaks to the first two groups of people, he actually is more concerned for protecting brothers and sisters in the Lord.

So he's speaking to them, but caring for the church family. And so the image I have in mind is, if you're familiar with the Gospels, you'll know that there's a point where Jesus is speaking to a man called Simon the Pharisee.

[ 3 : 1 2 ] And as he's speaking to Simon the Pharisee, he's looking at a lady called Mary. And he says this. He turns towards the woman and says to Simon, I can't even do it because it wrecks my head to try and multitask like this.

He turns towards the woman and he says to Simon, do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water. She wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet.

You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.

And what Jesus is doing as he's speaking to Simon the Pharisee is he is caring for this woman. He is protecting her heart, protecting this act of devotion that she has done.

And so that is what Jesus does. And all that to say, it is similar to what James is doing here. James speaks to two groups of people first, and then he'll turn to the brothers and sisters and speak to them directly.

[ 4 : 25 ] But let's have a look at what he says about steadying hearts or establishing our hearts. The first group of people he speaks to is in verse 13. Now listen, you who say today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.

So this group of people are those who make plans for the future. And so they say, we're going to go here. This is what we'll do. And this is what the outcome will be. They have plans for the future.

They have plans for profit. And you get the sense, as this is being said, that these people are trying to establish their hearts in their plans.

That they're wanting this to be what gives them certainty. This is what we're going to do. And this is what the outcome will be. Now, making plans is not a problem.

Jesus, in one of his illustrations, describes how foolish it is to not plan well if you're going to build a tower. The problem is not making plans.

[ 5 : 33 ] The problem is trusting in those plans, establishing your heart in those plans, wanting those plans to be what gives certainty or stability or ballast to our hearts.

And so the problem is that these people are allowing this good God-given ability to make plans to take the place of God in their lives.

They are planning in a way that implies that they know everything. And yet they are not all-knowing.

James says in verse 14, Why do you do not even know what will happen tomorrow, let alone in a year's time?

You're trusting in something that is not certain. You're saying it will happen, but it might not happen, James is saying to them. I remember some years ago being at a party.

[ 6 : 39 ] It was in our house, actually. It was a birthday party for a kid. And there was a child running around with a golf ball in their hand, three, four years old or something like that.

And he was kind of bouncing the golf ball. And as you know, golf balls are very bouncy. And so I thought it would be good to speak to him and say, You realize that this golf ball might break a window.

And he, without hesitancy, said, But it mightn't. And I thought, Well, he has a point. But my heart did not feel established or steadied in that moment.

And the uncertainty of what he was saying will or will not happen. And James is saying that those who say, We will do this or we won't do that, it's a faulty place to put our trust.

Or it's a faulty place for them to put our trust. They're not all-knowing and they're not all-powerful. In the second half of verse 14, James says, What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

[ 7 : 53 ] So I don't know if you've been out on a cold winter's night in Ireland, you'll know as you're speaking to people that you can see their breath on the air.

And their breath appears for a moment and then just, it's gone. And it's as if James is saying, As you hear these people telling you what they're going to do and their certain plans for the future and the profits that they will make, that it's actually just like listening to them on that cold, frosty Irish evening and the mist that is evaporating out of their mouth is as solid and substantial and certain as the plans that they are going to make.

James says, They're not all-powerful. There are so many factors outside of their control. I don't know if you've had one of those days where you have your schedule lined up before you and by 10.30 in the morning it just feels like it's slipping through your hands and you're wondering, What is going on here?

I have planned it out. And James is saying, Well, what's going on there is a realization that you're not all-knowing and you're not all-powerful.

And so James says, For these people who establish their hearts or try to establish their hearts, give ballast and steadiness. to their hearts in planning for the future like this, he says it just won't happen.

[ 9 : 30 ] It can't be done because God is the only one who knows the future. He's the only one who has the power to carry out the plans that he has put in place.

And so in verse 15, James says, You ought to say, If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that. Now the difference between what James is highlighting as a problem and what he advises us to do is this phrase, If it is the Lord's will.

They still make plans. We will live. We will do this. We will do that. But it's done in light of the fact that God is the one who knows all things, who has the power to fulfill his will perfectly.

And so James says that is where they are to find ballast for their hearts. And so if we find this bubbling around in our hearts, we need to hear what James is saying to us here.

And it might be that you say this out loud to somebody, your plans for the future and the way your career will unfold and how the savings will look in 10 years' time and so on.

[ 10 : 50 ] We might say that out loud or we might just think it. I don't know if you have this mental map in your mind, as I do, of how the next 10, 15, 20, 30 years are going to unfold.

And you think, yeah, that's how it's going to be. But James says, Don't establish your hearts in your plans for the future. Apart from the Lord, there is no certainty whatsoever in us saying this is how it's going to unfold.

James doesn't want us to steady our hearts with our plans apart from the Lord. How do we know if this is bubbling around in our hearts?

Well, there's the easy way and the hard way. The easy way is to acknowledge it now and to recognize that this goes on in all our hearts from time to time.

And to take James' word here and to start practicing, keeping in mind it is if the Lord wills. And perhaps saying that out loud, which is helpful, but certainly having that heart attitude, that mindset, that I can plan out the next week, the next month, the next year, but it is only if the Lord wills.

[ 12 : 14 ] That's the easy way. The hard way is when our plans fall apart and we realize, wow, I've been trusting in what I planned because now I'm despairing over my plans falling apart.

I don't know if you've had that experience where you had it all mapped out and suddenly the rug is pulled out from under you. And it drives you to despair. If that happens to us and we have been acknowledging that it is the Lord and His will that will make certain our plans, what happens then is rather than us being driven to despair, we are driven to the Lord.

Okay, God, I had planned this all out and I had thought that this was how things were going to unfold. But clearly this isn't what you had planned. And so I'm back to the drawing board.

But more importantly, I'm back to you, God, because you are the one in whom I find ballast and stability for my heart as I look to the future.

And so sometimes we will experience this in our own hearts. But we want to keep in mind that what James is doing here is he's speaking to those who plan like this while looking at the brothers and sisters, looking at the church family.

[ 13 : 49 ] See, James' concern is that the church family, the brothers and sisters who see other people making these kinds of plans or promises or predictions, it can seem so visionary when you come across somebody like this who says with certainty, this will happen.

And we've experienced it in Ireland at many different levels. If you're familiar with the children's hospital that they're building up in Dublin at the moment, they've had 15 revisions of the planned timeline.

We heard it at times during COVID. This is how the next few months will play out. We've heard it with housing. Sometimes we'll hear it in churches where a church will say, we're going to go to this town, we're going to set up a church where this is the outcome.

This is who will come to know Jesus. And you hear that and it is well-meaning and you long for it to be true. But James says, it is if the Lord wills.

Don't establish your hearts in your own plans. Don't establish your hearts in the plans of others. Some of you will know of Tim Keller.

[ 15 : 08 ] He was a pastor in New York. Pastor of a church with many hundreds, thousands of people. And people would say to him, how were you so sure of your plan to come to New York to establish this church and for this to be the outcome?

And he would say, I wasn't sure. I didn't know this was going to happen. We prayed. We planned. We sought wise counsel. We discerned as best we could.

But we had no idea what would happen. We had no idea what would happen. And what he was reflecting in how he spoke about that was the humility to say, we can plan, but it is only if the Lord wills.

And so James speaks to this first group of people with this clarity. It is only if the Lord's wills, we will live or do this or that.

The second group of people that James speaks to can be found in verse 1 of chapter 5. Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.

[ 16 : 22 ] So James speaks to the first group who are establishing their heart, giving ballast to their heart in what they will do. And then James speaks to this second group who are giving ballast to their heart, steadying their heart in what they already have done, in what they've already achieved, the money that's already in the bank, the food that's already on the table, the business that has already been built.

And as he speaks to them, he's again looking at the church family because he's already told us back in chapter 2 that it is the rich who are bringing people from the church to court, who are exploiting them.

And so James here, what's the issue? Well, the issue is not so much just about being rich, as he says in verse 1.

The issue he has here is that these rich people are hoarding wealth. And so in verse 3 it says, you have hoarded wealth in the last days.

The issue here is rich people who exploit others. In verse 4, look, the wages you fail to pay, the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you.

[ 17 : 53 ] The issue here is the rich who indulge themselves. In verse 5, you have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. This is the attitude to life that when faced with abundance, you consume abundantly.

As one author puts it. And you know, it's not always the case that rich people will hoard and exploit and indulge themselves.

You think of Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world. He has given away \$100 billion of his money. And he's committed to giving away \$200 billion more in the next 20 years.

But what's so surprising and striking about that is that's not norm. That's not the norm. That is the exception.

And so James here, he doesn't have a problem with money and comfort. These are good gifts from God. Our Heavenly Father knows that we need these things. He knows that we need food on the table.

[ 19 : 06 ] The problem is that these people are trusting them, are steadying their hearts with them, are establishing their hearts in them.

And in order to do that, they will do anything to keep it so, whether that's hoarding money, whether it's exploiting others, whether it's self-indulgence.

And the tragic irony here that James draws attention to is that these rich people that he has in mind, what they are using to try and steady the ship is actually going to sink the ship.

He speaks about gold and silver in verse 3. And you think, if you have gold and silver in your possession, surely that should give security and stability and steadiness.

They'll tell you to invest in gold because it holds its value through the ups and downs. But James says, it's that very thing that will be corroded and will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.

[ 20 : 20 ] It's the wages in verse 4 that they fail to pay the workers that are crying out against them. It is the fattened heart in verse 5, this life of self-indulgence.

And they would have had this glow of prosperity and health about them. And James has this incredibly vivid phrase in verse 5, you have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

It is as though they are preparing themselves for death. There's this tragic irony that the very things that they were trusting in to give them a steady ship, a steady heart, is actually what's going to be their downfall.

Some years ago, a friend of my dad's bought a new car. It was a Mercedes and he'd never had a Mercedes before and he was driving from Tipperary to Dublin, which is about 100 miles.

And as he drove, I mean, I've never driven a Mercedes, but you could imagine the comfort, the steadiness and the sense of solid car all around you and the security and the safety of it.

[ 21 : 43 ] And as he was driving up the motorway, he glanced down at the speedometer at one point and realized that he was actually doing well over the speed limit, maybe 140 in 120 zone.

And it scared the life out of him. He didn't realize he had been driving so fast that the very thing that was supposed to be giving him safety and security and stability was putting him in such danger without him realizing it.

The next day, he gets rid of the car. And James is saying, you rich people, speaking to these rich people who are exploiting the poor, who are hoarding wealth, who are living self-indulgent lives, it's these very things that will be your downfall because you will be answerable to the Lord.

Verse four, the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty and the Lord Almighty is a just and fair Lord.

This is in contrast to a man I heard about some years ago who, when he graduated from college, and when he started a new job, he worked out for himself what it had cost him to live while he was in college, what his budget was when he'd eaten, put clothes on his back, put away some money in savings and so on.

[ 23 : 09 ] And then that college budget was what he kept for the rest of his life. And everything else, he gave away. And I say that not because we need to do the exact same as that.

I say that as an illustration of a man who was not looking for ballast in his wealth or self-indulgence or luxury.

And so James says to these rich people that those things that they seek steadiness and security for their hearts in can never provide.

And as he says it to them, he's actually looking to the brothers and sisters. He is concerned for them. They are the ones who are being persecuted by the rich that James is addressing.

These dear brothers and sisters, beloved in the Lord, believers in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ are being persecuted by the rich. And the temptation for them would be to think, well, I'm following Jesus.

[ 24 : 14 ] Surely something has gone wrong here because it is the rich who have the easy life. And you know, this is still a temptation. And so you will have people who will preach a gospel that says if you follow Jesus, your life will look like this.

Luxury and self-indulgence and never in need or want of anything. That is tempting and understandably so if you're struggling to make ends meet.

Turn to Jesus and he will turn your rags into riches. James is saying no. He speaks so directly to the rich people.

In order to comfort the dear brothers and sisters who are wondering where is the justice in this? Where is the Lord in this? Their hearts would be so easily shaken by what they see going on and James says, don't let your hearts be shaken.

Realize the truth of the situation in which these rich people find themselves. And so James speaks to these two groups of people, those who put their trust in planning for the future and their plans apart from the Lord, those who amass wealth for themselves and live self-indulgent lives apart from the Lord and then he turns to this third group of people in verse 7.

[ 25 : 46 ] Be patient then, brothers and sisters. And now he's speaking to the church family directly. These ones who have been scattered all over, away from Jerusalem as a result of persecution.

And he turns to them and he says, establish your hearts in the Lord. Establish your hearts in the Lord. Establish your hearts in his return.

Verse 8. You too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. And it's interesting that James strikes this note of patience.

Verse 7. Be patient. The end of verse 7. Patiently waiting. Verse 8. Be patient. This is part and parcel of being a follower of the Lord Jesus.

that he will return but that we need to be patient as we wait for him. And the image that James gives us as he strikes this note of patience is the image of a farmer in verse 7 waiting for the land to yield its valuable crop.

[ 27 : 08 ] Patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. a farmer who is worth his salt knows that why he is a farmer is for that valuable crop or you can translate it as that precious crop.

And he also knows that that crop will take time. and in fact if he tries to short circuit the process by going out and digging up the crop too soon it will be disaster.

He knows that the crop needs the rain in autumn the rain in spring as James says in verse 7 and so he waits patiently because this precious crop it's coming but there's good reason why it's not here yet and as followers of Jesus we have to wait patiently for the return of Jesus.

We'd love for it to be now. We would but we wait patiently because we know that there is good reason why he hasn't returned yet. One good reason is because he wants more people to come to him in repentance and faith that they might know the joy of their sins forgiven and perfect salvation in him.

And so James says we are to establish our hearts in the Lord's coming to be patient for that but also to recognize that it is at hand in verse 8 he says the Lord's coming is near and so you have this strange kind of tension going on here that we have to be patient because it's not yet and yet it's at hand it's near James says and what he's saying here is that we are so close God has done so much when you think about the big acts of salvation that God has achieved primarily in the incarnation and the crucifixion and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus he's ascended to heaven in one sense he's done at all we are so close and this is the note that Jesus himself strikes isn't it watch watch watch the sense of eager expectation that even as we are patiently waiting and trusting his timing we are steadying our hearts with this eager longing knowing that he is near he is at hand we don't know when it will be but we know that it will be and we know that it will be far more precious than the crops that the farmer is patiently waiting for and so

[ 30 : 07 ] James wants us to establish our hearts in the Lord's coming he also wants us to establish our hearts in the Lord's ways in verse nine don't grumble against one another brothers and sisters or you will be judged the judge is standing at the door or in verse 12 above all my brothers and sisters do not swear not by heaven or by earth or by anything else all you need to say is a simple yes or no otherwise you will be condemned you know the temptation is to think that if Jesus isn't coming back anytime soon or if he's far away he's gone to a distant land or something like that then we lose sight of living for him that's when the grumbling sets in that's when we start speaking or thinking or acting in ways that are not his ways you know when we grumble against one another in some ways it gives us stability doesn't it it's a strange thing by putting somebody else down we feel built up

I put them in their place James says no dear brothers and sisters don't grumble against one another don't get the dig in just so you can feel better about yourselves and he warns them of this by saying you will be judged and when he says that or when he speaks about the condemnation in verse 12 he's not speaking about their salvation he's speaking about the loss of the reward that would go with walking in God's ways Paul talks about this as well doesn't he that on that day when we all face Jesus those things that we have done that have not been good that have been wrong or sinful they'll be burned up but if we trust in the Lord we will be saved that is certain and James here says don't grumble don't swear in the way that he speaks about in verse 12

James says establish your hearts in his ways and he says to establish our hearts in the Lord's compassion and mercy at the end of verse 11 the Lord is full of compassion and mercy mercy it's not that the Lord is like the Amazon warehouse up in Dublin where there's little parcels of compassion and mercy that he sends out to people and some are small and some are big and we all smile when we get them and then the smile fades 30 minutes later the Lord is full of compassion and mercy this is his character this is who he is it's not going against his nature to be compassionate and mercy to us this establishes our hearts like nothing else

James gives us the example of the prophets in verse 10 brothers and sisters as an example of patience in the face of suffering take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord they suffered but they knew the Lord to be compassionate and merciful verse 11 as you know we count as blessed those who have persevered you have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about if you're familiar with the book of Job you will know that Job suffered unthinkably and if anything was going to unsteady your heart you would imagine that it would be what Job faced the loss of his children the loss of his health the loss of his livestock the loss of his house it seemed like he'd lost everything how is his heart not submerged under that suffering how did he keep going and then you've

Satan in the book of Job saying to God well Job is only trusting you God because of what he can get from you and then you've Satan whispering in the ear of Job metaphorically speaking Job God only loves you when there's good things in your life and then you've God who says take it all away Satan take everything he has and you will see in the end that Job loves me for who I am and more importantly Job will see that I love him whatever life brings and guess what God's plans are fulfilled verse 11 you have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about you have seen the

[ 35 : 33 ] Lord's purposes and as you reflect on that you wonder what does James mean because at the end of the book of Job everything is restored to him and more materially speaking and you wonder is that what James meant that this was God's purpose to restore all this to Job is that all that Job was to learn well I think that's part of it but the deeper purpose that God had for Job was that Job's heart would be so established in the compassion and mercy of God that nothing could shake him nothing could drown him nothing could submerge him not even the suffering that he faced and so you have Job saying things like I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand on the earth and after my skin has been destroyed yet in my flesh will see

God I myself will see him with my own eyes I and not another how my heart yearns within me isn't that amazing that Job could say this earlier on in the book he falls to the ground in worship and says naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away may the name of the Lord be praised there is a man whose heart is established in the Lord and James wants us to to have our hearts so established in the Lord in his return in living for him and in his compassion and mercy and you and I know that our redeemer lives right Jesus died and lives again and such is his compassion and mercy that he did this for us the

Lord gives and the Lord takes away blessed be the name of the Lord for Job what his life had become on the surface was this desolate barren wasteland that had been burned there was nothing left on the surface of his life and yet under the surface there was these thriving vital roots that were plunged deep into God and his promises so that one day he would flourish again and the same can be true of us if we find the ballast that we need in the Lord's compassion and mercy whatever our lives look like on the surface one day we will see our redeemer face to face and one day what

Job has at the end of the book will pale in comparison when we enter into heaven as Jesus has prepared it for us and the main reason is because we will see our saviour face to face and it is he who gives our heart ballast and so as we reflect we want to consider where are we finding to steady our hearts is it plans that we make for the future thinking that we can make decisions and make plans apart from the Lord is it what we have already achieved in our lives or is it in the compassion and mercy of the Lord it's only in the Lord that we will find the ballast that we need to persevere through this life and so let's pray and ask him for his help in doing what he has called us to!



hearts how they can be shaken at times by some of the things that Job has experienced Lord for some here they know grief ill health or the loss of livelihood or Lord other suffering that Lord is so real and so hard to get through Lord Father we recognize that it is in you that we can find what we need it is in your compassion and mercy and we pray Lord that you help us Lord help us to steady our hearts in our redeemer Lord help us to have the ballast that we need to weather the storms Father we look forward to seeing our Savior face to face Lord that will be a precious day in Jesus name Amen