

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Faith Reaching Toward Maturity
James 1:2-8, 11-15, 22-27

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #....). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Have a white board or large piece of paper available.

Worship Time Leader:

Make copies of Psalm 119: 30-32 to be read as a group at the end of the Worship Time. A copy is given following the Worship Time materials.

Music Sources:

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Faith Reaching Toward Maturity – 12-32-01-en

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Change My Heart, O God, *The Worship Hymnal* # 529; CCLI # 1565
We Are An Offering, *The Worship Hymnal* # 547; CCLI # 16220
Trust and Obey, *The Worship Hymnal* # 500; CCLI # 3273472 Public Domain

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Faith Reaching Toward Maturity*****Focal Text**

James 1:2-8, 11-15, 22-27

Background

James 1

Main Idea

Our faith reaches toward maturity as we endure through life's trials and temptations, seek God's wisdom wholeheartedly, and do God's word.

Question to Explore

What evidences of a maturing faith do you see in your life?

Teaching Aim

To help the church evaluate their lives by the marks of maturing faith in James 1.

Gathering together:

Sing:

Change My Heart, O God, *The Worship Hymnal* # 529; CCLI # 1565

First thoughts:

A number of years ago some very thoughtful studies were done by Dr. J.W. Fowler on faith development. Both a trained psychologist and a theologian, Dr. Fowler examined how cognitive understanding of faith changed over the life span. Young children often have an understanding of faith in which fantasy and reality get mixed together. Older children are very literal in their understanding of faith experiences and in their understanding of the guidelines of their faith tradition. This grows into an larger belief system which is often dependent on outside authority. Later faith growth involves examination and personal ownership of one's faith.

As Christian believers we examine our faith from various perspectives. The book of James encourages us to look at faith expressed in very practical ways. Faith is not just

about belief; it is about belief in action. For the next six sessions we will consider how our faith is expressed in everyday life.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Faith Reaching Toward Maturity

Focal Text

James 1:2-8, 11-15, 22-27

Background

James 1

Main Idea

Our faith reaches toward maturity as we endure through life's trials and temptations, seek God's wisdom wholeheartedly, and do God's word.

Question to Explore

What evidences of a maturing faith do you see in your life?

Teaching Aim

To help the church evaluate their lives by the marks of maturing faith in James 1.

Introduction to your personal study:

As you prepare to lead this study, focus on spiritual highlights in your own life. What caused you to understand your faith in deeper and more meaningful ways? Both crisis times and spiritual mountain tops cause our faith to grow. A deeper understanding of a particular Biblical passage can lead to growth.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Introduction**” article found at the beginning of this series (Bible Teaching #....) of Bible Study and Worship sessions. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Focusing on the Meaning:

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James 1: 1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

Although the writer does not identify himself as James, the brother of Jesus, who was the head of the church in Jerusalem in apostolic days, early Christian readers would have known that he was the writer.

The term “servant of God” was a very common phrase for a Jew dedicated to God's service. James is also a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. James, as a servant of God, is obligated to utter truths unpleasant to the ears of some readers.

“According to church traditions, James carried the nickname ‘Old Camel Knees’ because of thick calluses built up on his knees from many years of determined prayer” (Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message**, Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002 page 2201). This view of James makes one eager to hear what he has to say.

The twelve tribes must refer to Israel as a whole – not to the twelve tribes individually. Further, it must refer to the whole spiritual Israel – not just to Jewish believers. The “scattered ones” often called “the dispersion” in Judaism was the usual inclusive term for all Jews who were “dispersed” outside Palestine, whose language ordinarily was not Aramaic, but Greek. “The word was wholly appropriate for Christians, who, in one sense, were ‘dispersed’ throughout the Roman Empire (I Peter 1:1) or, in another and deeper sense, were “dispersed” as pilgrims and sojourners on earth, away from their true home in heaven” (**The Interpreter's Bible, James**, Volume XII, New York, Abingdon Press, 1957, page 20).

This understanding thus makes the message applicable to us today. We, too, are pilgrims and sojourners on earth, away from our true home in heaven. Some believers experience this alienation from culture, family and earlier religious beliefs stronger than others.

Philippians 3: 20-21 reminds us ***But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.***

James 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James begins immediately to teach. He combines two seemingly contrasting ideas – pure joy and trials.

Believers can rejoice in different kinds of trials. “Paul (Romans 5:3-4) and Peter (1 Peter 1:6-7) taught the same thing. Paul, Peter, and James got this teaching from Jesus Himself” (**Broadman Comments 1995-96, 52 Ready-to-Teach Bible Study Lessons**, Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, page 301).

Joy is here defined not as the avoidance of difficulty, but the achievement of a Christlike attitude in the midst of life’s difficulties.

James was martyred in AD 62. Early histories indicate that he was stoned when he refused to deny his faith in Jesus as Saviour. The thirty years of his ministry in Jerusalem had its share of trials as Jewish Christians came to terms with including Gentiles in the kingdom. The teachings of James most likely address issues that the early church in Jerusalem experienced. These were real people with real difficulties. They had been saved in amazing ways, but they continued to battle the issues of human self-centeredness that are common to all people of all ages.

Perseverance is not a commonly used word today. The concept is one of staying with a task or a commitment when it is not easy to do so. Endurance, patience and steadfastness are words used in some translations. Today’s world of easy access to information; speedy communication and many and varied forms of entertainment may make it hard for one to value perseverance.

However, any task worth achieving requires perseverance. The trained athlete must spend years achieving excellence. The student does work day in and day out to complete a desired course of studies. A scientist seeking a cure for a disease may spend a lifetime in research.

Good relationships require perseverance. Parents raising responsible children spend hours helping with homework, preparing school lunches, driving children to lessons, sports events, and birthday parties.

Marriage requires perseverance. Romantic love must deepen into a sacrificial giving of self for the good of the other. Aging marriages may deal with sickness with one partner dependent upon the other for even the most basic of life needs.

The result of sticking with it is personal maturity and completeness in addition to the degrees earned, cures perfected, children raised and spouses loved and protected.

In the area of faith, perseverance in the face of difficulties leads to more faith, greater impact on others and a contribution to kingdom growth.

All around the world today, Christian believers are being persecuted for their faith. Some, like James, will die for their faith. These words, written so long ago, are completely relevant for today's world.

The word trial here is a Greek word meaning testing directed towards an end, and the end is that he who is tested should emerge stronger and purer from the testing. "The idea is not that of seduction into sin; the idea is that of strengthening and purifying and proving and testing" (Barclay, William. **The Daily Study Bible, The Letters of James and Peter**. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, page 49.)

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. "These words remind us of our Lord's challenge, '***You, therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect***' (Matthew 5:48). Here and in Matthew "perfect" is the same Greek adjective. The evident impossibility of human attainment of the perfection of God, the certainty that none of us can reach the level which James suggests – perfect and complete, lacking in nothing – has caused most of us to dismiss this challenge as fantastically impractical. This is to miss the point completely. It is this transcendent goal that keeps us from ever settling down in complacent self-righteousness, from the false satisfaction that we have at last arrived at holiness"(The Interpreter's Bible, James, pages 22-23).

James 1: 5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But, when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Of course, we lack wisdom. Therefore, we must ask of God. And the mighty God of the universe will give wisdom without finding fault.

Jesus taught in Matthew 7: ***7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.***

In order to use the experiences of life which are trials or testing times, we need wisdom. And the way to find wisdom is to ask it of God Himself. "In Christian wisdom there is, of course, knowledge of the deep things of God; there is, of course, the seeking and the goal of the questing mind; but Christian wisdom is essentially practical; it is such knowledge turned into action in all the decisions and the personal relationships of every day life" (Barclay, page 53).

God gives generously to those who ask in faith. James speaks here of the one who has two minds. One mind believes; the other disbelieves. There is a continual mental battle between belief and unbelief.

"If we are to use aright the experiences of life to beget a sterling character, we must ask wisdom from God. And when we ask we must remember the absolute generosity of God, and we must see to it that we ask believing that we shall receive that which God knows that it is good and right for us to have" (Barclay, page 54).

James 1: 11-15

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

When tempted, no one should say "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Two dramatic pictures are contained in these verses. One is of the person who stands up under trial and testing and thus receives the crown of life. The character of this person is strong; he/she is like metal which is cleansed and purified. This is the joy of this life.

Both in this life and in the life to come, there will be a crown of life. Crowns were worn in times of joy; crowns were a mark of royalty; crowns of laurel leaves were given to the victor in athletic events and the crown was the mark of honour and of dignity. All of these concepts exist in the picture of the "crown of life".

"Then James says that if the Christian meets the trials and the testings and the temptations of life in the steadfast and unswerving constancy which Christ can give, the life becomes an infinitely more splendid thing than ever it was before. The struggle is the way to glory, and the very struggle is itself a glory" (Barclay, page 58).

We are not to blame God for the temptations and trials that come our way. It is an amazing reality of human nature that people who seldom or never credit God with the many good things in their lives are quick to blame him for difficult things.

James gives a clear picture of how we fall into sin. We desire something we do not have – position, money, illicit sex, relief from stress through alcohol or drugs. That desire leads to action and all too soon we are mired in situations which cause pain and suffering to ourselves and to those we love. When that sin is not confessed to God and forgiven, the ultimate result is death of all hope for happiness on this earth and eternal life with God. James draws a clear contrast between those who will receive the "crown of life" and those whose destiny is "death".

“What are we to do about temptation? We are to pray about it (Matthew 6:13), asking to be delivered from it; we are not to blame God for it (verse 13); we are to identify its source (Luke 4:13); we are to shun lust that draws us into temptation (verse 14); and we are to cultivate a strong faith in God, believing His power is sufficient to keep us from sin even in the midst of the severest temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)” (**Broadman Comments**, page 304).

James 1:22-27

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James here describes a very common human condition. Parents give instructions to children who respond “Yeah, Mom” and walk out the door without their lunch or their homework or ignore the instructions to clean their room or put away their clothes.

Husbands may agree to bring home a loaf of bread, but the information about that agreement may not remain for long in their mental “to do” list.

Even employees may seem to hear instructions, but fail to carry out the tasks assigned.

And teachers and pastors preach the word of God and see little change in the attitudes and life styles of their hearers.

Listening and not doing what one has been told to do is self-deception. Faithful attendance at church and listening, but not applying the scriptural teachings is to fail to see that there has really been no point to being in church and hearing the word.

The picture here is of one who looks in the mirror and sees that his/her hair is uncombed or a smear of food is on one’s cheek. The reasonable thing to do would be to correct these things, but James describes one who looks in the mirror, notes the corrections to be made, but goes off to work or an important engagement with disheveled hair and a smear of food on the face.

The hearer who does not act sees what is wrong and sees what needs to be done to put it right, but if he/she is only a hearer; there is no change of behavior. Widows and orphans and other needy people are ignored and sinful behavior is tolerated.

This, sadly, may be the reality of many Christians on a regular basis. There is a call for ministry to one's neighbour, to sacrificial giving to mission causes, to sharing with a family member and there is an intellectual assent that these things should be done. But there is no ministry, no sacrificial giving, or sharing of the message of Christ.

James refers to the "perfect law". The demands of the Old Testament laws have been transformed by our relationship to Christ, but the demands of ethical living still exist. The Ten Commandments still guide to healthy living; the ethical teachings of Jesus place goals for right living which we must constantly seek to reach. James sees no conflict between Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2: 8-9 ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast.*** Salvation does not come by the good works we do, but salvation results in our desiring to do those good works which honor God and serve Him.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

To help the church evaluate their lives by the marks of maturing faith in James 1.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Faith Reaching Toward Maturity

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

James 1:2-8, 11-15, 22-27

Background

James 1

Main Idea

Our faith reaches toward maturity as we endure through life's trials and temptations, seek God's wisdom wholeheartedly, and do God's word.

Question to Explore

What evidences of a maturing faith do you see in your life?

Teaching Aim

To help the church evaluate their lives by the marks of maturing faith in James 1.

Connect with Life:

Share the following with the group: In one home church, members of the group were encouraged to choose the music to be sung each week. One seven year old always chose the old hymn, **Trust and Obey**. The group loved to sing it with him and even after he had moved away, the group often chose the hymn and remembered the sweet faith of the young child for whom it was a favorite.

Leader: Read the first and last stanzas of the hymn devotionally as you begin the lesson. You may sing it later in the Worship Time.

When we walk with the Lord

In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our Way!
Let us do His good will:
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at his feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do
Where He sends we will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus
But to trust and obey.

Trust and Obey, *The Worship Hymnal* #500; CCLI # 3273472 Public Domain

Guide the Study:

Have someone read James 1: 2-4.

Use the background material to explain who wrote the book of James and to whom it was written.

Ask: Are we also to consider ourselves as recipients of this letter?

Explain: Yes, we are part of the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. That is, we are part of the believers since the time of Jesus who live across the entire world. This speaks to our being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Have someone read Philippians 3: 20-21.

Comment: Although Christian believers are scattered across the entire world, we have the common reality that our true citizenship is in heaven.

Ask the group to define joy.

Urge a discussion: Does facing trials fit into our concept of "pure joy"?

Comment: James considers joy, not as the absence of difficulty, but the achievement of a Christlike attitude in the midst of life's difficulties.

Give the group the opportunity to share examples of how this has been true in their own lives or in the life of someone they have known. (Watch time here since there is much more to be studied in this lesson).

Introduce the word “perseverance”. Write other definitions on a white board or large piece of paper. (These may include endurance, stick-to-itiveness, hanging in there, not giving up, continue steadfastly and determinedly, persist).

Discuss with the group why perseverance is necessary in daily life.

Inquire: What does James say is the result of perseverance during trials to our faith? (Maturing faith; strengthened faith)

Have someone read James 1: 5-8

Seek a consideration of this: What is the relationship between the trials of life and the need for wisdom?

Ask: Who can give us wisdom?

Share this quote:

“If we are to use aright the experiences of life to beget a sterling character, we must ask wisdom from God. And when we ask we must remember the absolute generosity of God, and we must see to it that we ask believing that we shall receive that which God knows that it is good and right for us to have”. (Barclay, page 54).

Have someone read James 1: 11-15.

Involve the church in discussing how we blame God for our temptations or difficulties.

Use the following quote to lead a discussion of how we are to deal with temptation:

“What are we to do about temptation? We are to pray about it (Matthew 6:13), asking to be delivered from it; we are not to blame God for it (verse 13); we are to identify its source (Luke 4:13); we are to shun lust that draws us into temptation (verse 14); and we are to cultivate a strong faith in God, believing His power is sufficient to keep us from sin even in the midst of the severest temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)” (**Broadman Comments**, page 304).

Request someone to read James 1: 22-27.

Share James 1:22 from the following three versions of the Bible:

The King James Version of James 1:22 was a familiar memory verse for older generations. ***But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.***

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Faith Reaching Toward Maturity – 12-32-01-en

15

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Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says is the more modern New International Version.

The Message by Eugene H. Peterson expresses the verses in this way: ***Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear!***

Inquire: How do we deceive ourselves by listening to the Word of God and not acting?

Ask: How does James' illustration of the mirror explain our failure to not act on what we hear?

Have someone read Ephesians 2: 8-9.

Say: Consider how the passage in Ephesians and James 1:22-27 address two aspects of the Christian faith: salvation as a free gift of God and salvation to be expressed in righteous living.

Now present this: Is there conflict in these two ideas? (No, true salvation results in ethical living and sacrificial actions).

Add: There will be more teaching on this concept in the Worship Time.

Encourage a discussion: What is meant by the perfect law that gives freedom?

Share this explanation: James refers to the "perfect law". The demands of the Old Testament laws have been transformed by our relationship to Christ, but the demands of ethical living still exist. The Ten Commandments still guide to healthy living; the ethical teachings of Jesus place goals for right living which we must constantly seek to reach. James sees no conflict between Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2: 8-9 ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast.*** Salvation does not come by the good works we do, but salvation results in our desiring to do those good works which honor God and serve Him.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Summarize how the teaching of James 1 address the issue of maturing faith with this: We must stay faithful during difficult times; we can experience joy in difficult times; God

gives wisdom when we ask for it; we must take responsibility for our own failures; we need to understand that just hearing about living the Christian life does not lead to maturity – we must act on what we know to be required of us.

Close by asking a person to pray for faithfulness by each person to remain faithful to live for Christ.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Faith Reaching Toward Maturity

James 1:2-8, 11-15, 22-27

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

A Super Verse

If you have not memorized James 1:22 already, choose one of the following versions and memorize the verse today. Then act on what it says this week!

The King James Version of James 1:22 was a familiar memory verse for older generations. ***But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.***

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says is the more modern New International Version.

The Message by Eugene H. Peterson expresses the verses in this way: ***Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear!***

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Faith Reaching Toward Maturity*****James 1:2-8, 11-15, 22-27****Beginning the Service:**

Sing:

We Are An Offering, *The Worship Hymnal* # 547; CCLI # 16220**Trust and Obey**, *The Worship Hymnal* # 500; CCLI # 3273472 Public Domain**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

Isolated from the rest of the world by the thick Amazon jungle, by rivers raging through rapids and waterfalls, and by guerrilla soldiers, the Yucuna people of Colombia live in spiritual darkness and fear. Those who manage to leave and move to the city are overwhelmed with worldly distractions and find it almost impossible to return to their home.

Until recently, there was no evangelical work among the Yucuna. They are spiritually hungry and weary of living in fear and poverty. Pray that the Yucuna will hear and understand the message of hope that they can have in Jesus.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

The Perfect Law – the Way of Truth Psalm 119: 30-32

***I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set my heart on your laws.
I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord;
Do not let me be put to shame.
I run in the path of your commands
For you have set my heart free.***

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does. James 1:25.

The beautiful words from Psalm 119:32 ***I run in the path of your commands*** is a good summary of our emphasis on faith reaching toward maturity.

Faith is a free gift of God. We have examined Ephesians 2: 8-9 ***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.***

We are so glad for this gift of God for we know we could never earn salvation by the things we do. Our motivations for good works are often diminished by the wish for human praise. We often do that what is expected of us as members of a community of believers rather than act with pure motives. Our selfishness leads us to think first of our own needs and only secondarily of the needs of those around us who are lonely or ill or poverty stricken.

So we rejoice in the reality that it is by grace that we are saved, through faith – and this not from our own good works.

But Paul continues in Ephesians 2:10 ***For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.***

God's plan for us is to do good works. We are God's workmanship – in fact we are created in God's image. The natural result of that would be a capacity and a desire to do good works.

The Psalmist wrote:

***I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set my heart on your laws.
I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord;
Do not let me be put to shame.
I run in the path of your commands***

For you have set my heart free.

He did not have the teachings of Jesus to show him the way of truth. But the teachings of Moses and the prophets and stories of faithful Jewish leaders were adequate for him to understand that there is a way of truth and that way leads to freedom. ***You have set my heart free***, he proclaims.

That was true for the Psalmist. It is incredibly true for us who have experienced the free gift of God's grace through Jesus Christ. James wrote ***Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.***

Jesus taught:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Matthew 5: 6-10.

These teachings are only a few of the many ways in which Jesus taught that we are to live out our calling to do good works. And in that faithful living out of our salvation we grow into maturity – we are blessed.

We want to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. We want to be steadfast in our faith. We want to receive the crown of glory prepared for us. We choose the way of truth. We set our heart on the teachings of Jesus. We run in the path of his commands. And in that path we have a heart set free.

Call to Commitment and Concluding the Worship Time:

Have copies of Psalm 119: 30-32 for members of the group. Read the verses together as both commitment and promise for the week.

***I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set my heart on your laws.
I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord;
Do not let me be put to shame.
I run in the path of your commands
For you have set my heart free.***

Psalm 119: 30-32. Read the verses together as both commitment and promise for the week.

*I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set my heart on your laws.
I hold fast to your statutes, O Lord;
Do not let me be put to shame.
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