

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Foolish Living
James 4:13—5:6

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:

Make copies of the reading to be used in the Gathering Time. A sheet for copying is available at the end of the Worship Time.

Bible Study Leader:

Use magazine and newspaper ads to prepare a demonstration of luxury items which are available in the area where you live.

Have a white board or large piece of paper available for listing the teachings of the session.

Worship Time Leader:

You will use the reading which is used in the Gathering Time. Copies will given to participants during the Gathering Time.

Music Sources:

He Leadeth Me! O Blessed Thought, *The Worship Hymnal* # 81;

CCLI # 62762 Public Domain

God Will Make a Way, *The Worship Hymnal* # 85; CCLI # 459620

Shine on Us, *The Worship Hymnal* # 89; CCLI # 1754646

On Eagle's Wings, *The Worship Hymnal* # 92

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Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Foolish Living

Focal Text

James 4:13—5:6

Background

James 4:13—5:6

Main Idea

Arrogantly presuming that one can make plans without God and accumulate possessions by mistreating others is a foolish way to live.

Question to Explore

What is your life?

Teaching Aim

To help the church describe current ways people live foolishly by making plans without God and seeking to accumulate possessions by mistreating others.

Gathering together:

Sing one or both of the following:

He Leadeth Me! O Blessed Thought, *The Worship Hymnal* # 81;

CCLI # 62762 Public Domain

God Will Make a Way, *The Worship Hymnal* # 85; CCLI # 459620

(Make copies of the call to worship for each participant. Use the copy which is found at the end of the Worship Time. The reading will be used again during the Worship Time).

Worship Leader: **I raise my eyes to the mountains. Where will my help come from?**

Worshippers: **My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
The Lord is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in Him.**

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***Foolish Living* – 12-32-05-en**

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Worship Leader: **Do not those who plot evil go astray?
But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.**

Worshipers: **But the noble man makes noble plans,
And by noble deeds he stands.**

Worship Leader: **Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer
and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.**

Worshipers: **And the peace of God which surpasses every thought, will guard
your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

(Psalm 121:1,2; Lamentations 3:24; Psalm 14: 22; Isaiah 32: 8; Philippians 4: 6,7)

First Thoughts:

Today's study is certainly applicable to us today. Making plans without God and seeking to accumulate possessions is the way society lives today just as it was in the past. We may or may not deliberately choose to mistreat others in the process, but that is often the result of our actions.

Making plans is necessary, of course. Students must carefully plan their course of study if they are to complete whatever degree they are pursuing. People plan carefully for retirement so that they will have the resources they need to live from twenty to twenty-five years beyond their working life. Planning a trip takes time and energy.

The focus today is not on planning, but on planning with no consideration for asking God to direct our plans. We must also consider the impact our plans have on others.

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.

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

Foolish Living

Focal Text

James 4:13—5:6

Background

James 4:13—5:6

Main Idea

Arrogantly presuming that one can make plans without God and accumulate possessions by mistreating others is a foolish way to live.

Question to Explore

What is your life?

Teaching Aim

To help the church describe current ways people live foolishly by making plans without God and seeking to accumulate possessions by mistreating others.

Introduction to your personal study:

Prayerfully consider how you go about making plans for your future, your holidays, and your expenditures. Do these reflect your understanding of God’s constant and consistent direction in your life? What attitude changes do you need to make as you prepare to teach this lesson?

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:

James 4: 13-17 – Boasting About Tomorrow

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.

James was writing during the time of the expansion of the Roman Empire. New cities were founded. The Jews were the great traders of the ancient world. They were welcomed to practice their commercial activities in the new cities. Citizenship was offered freely to the Jews because their presence brought goods and trade.

James is thinking of a trader who is considering which of the new cities he will move to and spend a year with the purpose of making a great deal of money. The gospel spread quickly in New Testament times because the Jewish people were spread across a large area. But this story speaks of one who has no consideration for God’s purpose in his life; he is only interested in making money. He does not consider how his presence in a community could be a Godly influence. The Jewish people knew that their purpose as a nation was to be a blessing to others. The Christian believers had a greater mandate – to share the good news of Christ.

A parallel in today’s world would be the Christian business people and professional people whose jobs take them around the world. They often have an opportunity for a Christian witness in places where no other witness is possible.

James reminds his readers that they have no right to make firm plans without God’s leading because life is short and uncertain. ***Now listen*** is a strong command to take seriously what he is saying. Certainly these words are an ominous reminder of how fragile our lives are - ***You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

In addition to a failure to ask God’s direction, there is an obvious pride in one’s own abilities exhibited in the passage. We can easily imagine the boasting and bragging being done. That boasting is evil because it is totally self-centered. Proverbs 27: 1 warned ***Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.***

We are reminded of the story which Jesus told about the rich, but foolish man. In Luke 12: 16-21, we read of the rich man who had a plentiful crop. He determined to build bigger barns in which to store his crop. He said to himself, “***You have plenty of good***

things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

Jesus said ***“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”***

James applies this teaching to all of us. ***Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.***

We could easily see how a big businessman would fit the picture James has painted. But he is teaching all Christians that knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it is a sin. Sometimes that is called a “sin of omission”. Sins of commission are those things which we actually do which can be deemed wrong – stealing, cheating, coveting etc. But the “sin of omission” refers to the many things we could have done to share the gospel or help someone in need and we failed to do so because we were too busy or too preoccupied or just didn’t care.

Obviously, we cannot meet every need which presents itself. Therefore, we must God’s direction as we make our plans. “James was not suggesting that all future planning is wrong because life is short and uncertain. He was not advocating a passive fatalism that waits around for sure death. He was condemning worldly presumption that falsely assumes that life is under human control” (**Broadman Comments 1995-96**, Nashville: Broadman and Holman, page 333).

Nor was James advocating a flippant adding of “If God Wills” to our plans for the future. He is saying that we must prayerfully consider what we are to do. We must live in such close communion with God that He directs our daily activities so that we are constantly aware of how we can serve Him and serve others.

In this short passage we are taught the following truths:

The proper attitude toward planning for the future.

The fragility of life.

The danger of assuming that life is under our control.

Life is a gift from God.

The sinfulness of sins of omission. (**Broadman Comments, 1995-96**, page 336).

James 5: 1-6 Warning to Rich Oppressors

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have

lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

James has addressed believers in this book thus far. This passage, however, must be addressed to a larger audience. It is specifically addressed to rich people. Since the early church probably did not have great numbers of rich people, we must assume that it is not specifically for the church.

That is not true, however, for our day. Christians must examine this passage and apply it to their own life situation. Christians in North America, western Europe, Japan, Australia, and several other countries who may not consider themselves rich certainly are among the richest people in the world compared to others. However, the question is not how rich we are, but how we obtained that money and how we use it. Who was hurt by our actions as we obtained the money we have – whether it is a great amount or a smaller amount.

Once more, James starts his admonition with the words ***Now listen.*** We might say “Listen Up” or “Now pay attention”. These are teachings we must not miss.

The Message uses an updated interpretation of this passage:

And a final word to you arrogant rich: Take some lessons in lament. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you've piled up is judgment.

All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the Master Avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

History contains many instances of rebellion by workers against the rich. The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in England was one of a number of popular revolts in late medieval Europe and is a major event in the history of England. The revolt was precipitated by King Richard II's heavy-handed attempts to enforce the third medieval poll tax. The revolt did increase awareness in the upper classes of the need for the reform of feudalism in England and the appalling misery felt by the lower classes as a result of their enforced near-slavery.

The French Revolution (1789-1799) was a complex period of radical social and political upheaval in France that had a lasting impact on French history and more broadly throughout Europe. One factor was the resentment by peasants, laborers and the common people toward the traditional privileges possess by the nobility. The plight of

the poor people was a feature of Victor Hugo's **Les Miserables**. It was brought to public notice by the play by that name and in 2012 by a movie which received much acclaim.

Modern day poverty continues to cause unrest in many parts of the world. Issues of taxation and the distribution of wealth are present even in stable democracies.

The arrogant rich is the descriptive term used by **The Message**. It describes an attitude of entitlement – "I have what I have because I earned it", "I have what I have because I am smarter than you", "I have what I have because I have a right to it". There is no consideration for others or for the good that might be done with the wealth acquired.

James pictures a sad future for these people. They will shriek and howl from the frantic terror of God's judgment.

There were three main sources of wealth in Biblical days. There was corn and grain; that is the wealth that grows rotten. There are garments which for people of the east represented wealth. Joseph gave changes of clothing to his brothers (Genesis 45:22). Garments eventually wear out; they may be eaten up by moths.

The last source of wealth was gold and silver, but even that can lose its beauty. It is a poor substitute for family, love, respect from others, and self-respect. It cannot be eaten if food is not available.

"The desire of these things is like a dread rust, a terrible cancer, which eats into men's bodies and souls." And then there comes a grim and terrible sarcasm. It is a fine treasure indeed that any man who concentrates on these things is heaping up for himself at the last. The only treasure that he will possess is a consuming fire which will wipe him out.

It is James' conviction that to concentrate on material things is not only to concentrate on a decaying and corpse-like delusion; it is to concentrate on self-produced destruction and disaster" (Wm. Barclay, **The Daily Study Bible: The Letters of James and Peter**. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, pages 136-137).

The day labourers of James' day were dependent upon the wages earned each day. It was the custom and expectation and absolute necessity that the labourer be paid at the end of the working day. If he was not paid, there would not be food in his home that evening or the following day. The workers had no margin for waiting on payment. Yet they were totally dependent on the landowner's or other employers' whims. They had no recourse if they were not paid. And rich people took advantage of this situation simply because they had the power to do so.

A modern day parallel is the use of low-paid workers in third world countries to provide an abundance of goods at cheaper prices for other parts of the world.

James warns these people that the day of judgment will come. In the end, their riches will mean nothing. **The Message** graphically states: ***But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse.***

A contrast to this is the businessman who sees his ability to earn money as a spiritual gift. One such person expressed that since he had both the capacity and the good fortune to earn large sums of money, it was his responsibility to find appropriate ways in which to invest that money in the Lord's work.

Most of us do not make large sums of money. However, we still have the responsibility to use wisely the money we have. One very small home church sends money to a Mexican layman and his wife who each Saturday morning week feed one hundred hungry children in the town where they live. In addition, this couple travels several times a year to the remote mountains of the area. They have established a church there and each time they go take shoes, school supplies, food, and special treats for children. The gratitude this couple expresses to the home church in North America is humbling for the amount which is sent is really very small. It causes the members of the home church to measure their personal desires against the contribution they can make to alleviating suffering in one small part of the world.

The two emphases in today's passage seem to be distinct. Yet they are closely related. Our plans for the future nearly always involve how we will gain money and how we will spend money. Education plans, job moves, purchasing a house, planning a vacation all demonstrate how we see God directing our decisions. All of these decisions and many everyday decisions reflect our love of material things. Each one gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our understanding of Jesus' words in Matthew 6: 19-21 ***Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.***

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

The lesson today deals with two truths for the Christian life: do our plans for what we want to do reflect our dependence on God's direction in our life and do our ways of getting and spending money reflect our devotion to Him? This study in James should lead to a serious consideration of these truths. To fail to do so is a foolish way to live.

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)

Foolish Living

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 4:13—5:6

Background

James 4:13—5:6

Main Idea

Arrogantly presuming that one can make plans without God and accumulate possessions by mistreating others is a foolish way to live.

Question to Explore

What is your life?

Teaching Aim

To help the church describe current ways people live foolishly by making plans without God and seeking to accumulate possessions by mistreating others.

Connect with Life:

Open the Bible study by sharing this example: A man wanted to buy an espresso coffeemaker. He considered it a bit of an extravagant purchase, but his wife encouraged him to make the purchase. When researching his purchase on the internet, he discovered over 250 different models. Some were as expensive as \$1,000.

Ask for ideas of extravagant purchases which might be made in the context of your group. Use your display if you have made one to encourage discussion.

Guide the Study:

Have someone read James 4:13-17.

Indicate to the group: The overall teaching of this section is **“Boasting About Tomorrow”**.

Explain the situation in which the Jewish trader found himself in New Testament times.

State: The opportunity for Godly living was often not a consideration for these traders and merchants.

Ask: What is a parallel opportunity for Christians today?

You may wish to explain: Christian business and professional people often work around the world. They have many opportunities for a positive Christian witness. Sometimes it is the only witness that can be made in the countries to which they go.

Now ask: What does James say about the brevity of life?

Summarize the story of the rich man in Luke 12: 16-21.

Involve the group in discussing the difference between sins of commission and sins of omission.

Summarize the difference: Knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it is a sin. Sometimes that is called a “sin of omission”. Sins of commission are those things which we actually do which can be deemed wrong – stealing, cheating, coveting etc. But the “sin of omission” refers to the many things we could have done to share the gospel or help someone in need and we failed to do so because we were too busy or too preoccupied or just didn’t care.

List the teachings of these verses on a white board or large sheet of paper:

The proper attitude toward planning for the future.

The fragility of life.

The danger of assuming that life is under our control.

Life is a gift from God.

The sinfulness of sins of omission.

Have someone read James 5: 1-6. Indicate that the overall teaching of these verses is **“Warning to Rich Oppressors”**.

Comment: Most of the book of James is written to Christian believers. However, these verses must have been written by James to include a larger audience. Some of those non-Christians may have been attending the meetings and discussions of Christian friends and relatives. Some may not have had group contact but Christians who knew them would be expected to share James' teachings with them. We do know that just on the Day of Pentecost 3,000 people were baptized in Jerusalem. They were from many nations. Yet, many were probably from Jerusalem. So, when James pastored that church, it probably had several thousand members. They would have had many non-Christian contacts among families, friends, and business. Yet, we can only assume these things that are not clearly stated in the scripture, itself.

Ask: What do you think is meant by the words **Now Listen**. (James was stressing the importance of this teaching).

Read the passage from **The Message**.

And a final word to you arrogant rich: Take some lessons in lament. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you've piled up is judgment.

All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the Master Avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

Encourage a response from two or three in the group to these strong words.

Take note of the descriptor **"arrogant rich"**. Ask what this seems to say about the attitude of those who possessed wealth.

Point out the three kinds of wealth mentioned—grain, fine clothes, silver and gold.

Have someone read Matthew 6: 19-21.

Look for an answer: How are the teachings of Jesus and the words of James similar?

Lead a discussion on the difference between riches earned by honest labour and the kind of abuse which James describes.

Ask: Does this kind of abuse exist in the world today? Refer back to the discussion which opened the session.

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.

Challenge the group to consider the implications for the use of the resources which we have as individuals and as a group.

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.

Foolish Living

James 4:13—5:6

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.

I WANT! I WANT! I WANT!

Make a list of some things you would really, really like to have.

How would you go about deciding what God's will in these matters would be?

Is there anything significant you can do to alleviate suffering in the world?

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Foolish Living***
James 4:13—5:6**Beginning the Service:**

Sing one or both of the following:

Shine on Us, *The Worship Hymnal* # 89; CCLI # 1754646
On Eagle's Wings, *The Worship Hymnal* # 92

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

The Turkmen (300,000 to 2.5 million) are the third largest ethnic group in Iraq, with the largest concentration being in the area of Kerkuk. Speaking a Turkish dialect heavily influenced by Arabic and Kurdish, they began moving into Iraq from Central Asia around the 7th century. In modern-day Iraq, the language of the Turkmen has been banned in schools, media, and private life. They have emerged as key political players in the controversy over the future status of northern Iraq, resisting assimilation into Kurdish groups. The Turkmen, mostly Sunni Muslim, are generally tall, slim, strong, and warmly hospitable. Within Iraq, there are few Christian believers, no churches, and no evangelistic work among the Turkmen.

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.

Rich Toward God

We are reminded of the story which Jesus told about the rich, but foolish man. In Luke 12: 16-21, we read of the rich man who had a plentiful crop. He determined to build bigger barns in which to store his crop. He said to himself, ***“You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”***

Jesus said “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

We have thought about the selfish person in our Bible Study. Let us now consider the person who is “rich toward God”. What kind of person and what kind of action did Jesus have in mind when he used this descriptive term?

Jesus certainly described some of what he meant when he said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are the meek

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Blessed are the merciful

Blessed are the pure in heart

Blessed are the peacemakers

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

(Matthew 5: 3-10).

Being rich toward God involves being humble; longing for righteousness; being kind, generous, and forgiving towards others; having motives which are honest and true; seeking peace in all relationships; and being true to Christ even when persecuted.

In addition, Christ taught that we are to be a light in a dark world; we are to be reconciled with those with whom we have a disagreement; we are to love our enemies and pray for them; we are to give to the needy secretly and without fanfare; we are to pray honoring God, asking that His will be done, asking for daily bread, and deliverance from evil. We are to ask for forgiveness from sins as we forgive others.

These are ways in which we are rich toward God.

We are not to be judgmental. We are to be prayerful and expectant of having our prayers answered. We are to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus.

We are to take up our cross daily and follow him. Every plan we make; every purchase we make; every relationship we build is to be under His guidance.

The one who is rich toward God will express that goodness in speech, attitude, and deed.

Jesus said in Matthew 12: 35 ***The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.***

Those who are rich toward God acknowledge Jesus as did Simon Peter as recorded in Matthew 16: 15-16 ***“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered , “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”.***

In Luke 10: 38-42 we read ***As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”.***

We can identify with Martha’s feelings in this story. Meal preparation was very labour intensive in those days. Fuel for cooking had to be found, cut, and hand fed to the hearth. Bread was made from “scratch”. Meat dishes began with live animals. However, we can see that Mary was rich toward God. By his own words, she would know that the time Jesus was to be with them was undoubtedly short. She wanted to learn all she could; she wanted to enjoy his presence. She understood what was most important.

In Luke 7: 2-5 the sermon which Stephen preached to the leaders of the Jews – the high priest and the Sanhedrin – is recorded. Then we read ***When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”***

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen was rich toward God – he was ***a man full of God’s grace and power. ...his face was like the face of an angel.***

Two people rich toward God—one was quietly sitting and learning from Jesus; the other was a passionate preacher who did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

The psalmist who was rich toward God wrote:

***O God, you are my God,
Earnestly I seek you;
My soul thirsts for you,
My body longs for you,
In a dry and weary land
Where there is no water.***

***I have seen you in the sanctuary
And beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life,
My lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live,
And in your name I will lift up my hands.***

***On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.***
(Psalm 63: 1-4; 6-7)

Call to Commitment:

Lord, teach us what it is to be rich toward God.

Concluding the Service:

End the service by reading the scripture passage used during the Gathering Time.

For use in the Gathering Time and the Worship Time:

Worship Leader: ***I raise my eyes to the mountains. Where will my help come from?***

Worshippers: ***My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.
The Lord is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in Him.***

Worship Leader: ***Do not those who plot evil go astray?
But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.***

Worshippers: ***But the noble man makes noble plans,
And by noble deeds he stands.***

Worship Leader: ***Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer
and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.***

Worshippers: ***And the peace of God which surpasses every thought, will guard
your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

(Psalm 121:1,2; Lamentations 3:24; Psalm 14: 22; Isaiah 32: 8; Philippians 4: 6,7)

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