



AWAKEN TO MATURITY

April 18 | Devotionals

Day 1 - Devotion

Maybe you remember a game from 2010 between the Buffalo Bills and their rivals, the heavily-favored Pittsburgh Steelers. The game went to overtime and the Bills had one glorious pass into the endzone to win the game. It was a beautiful pass right into the hands of a wide open receiver named Steve Johnson. It would've been a highlight of Johnson's career. Only one problem: he dropped it. The Steelers went back down and won with a field goal. It was ugly. Johnson was humiliated.

After the game, he had only one person to blame, and he went to Twitter to do it: "I PRAISE YOU 24/7!!!!!! AND THIS HOW YOU DO ME!!!!!! YOU EXPECT ME TO LEARN FROM THIS??? HOW???!!!! ILL NEVER FORGET THIS!! EVER!!! THX THO..."

We might all be able to read that tweet and say that's a bit immature. A dropped pass is God's fault? Really? But it's not that far removed from responses we have to God. See if this sounds familiar:

- "God, I've prayed and prayed for healing, why am I still suffering?"
- "God, I have followed you all my life, why did I get passed over for the promotion?"
- "If I obey your commands, I expect you to bless my life."

It's easy to fall into the temptation to think that following Jesus means our struggles will be over. It's easy to think that because we have a connection to the Almighty that he will pave the way and make life easier for us. But if you've been following him for very long, you know that's not the case. And when things fall apart, it might be easy to think God is punishing or tempting or just plain disinterested in you.

James paints a different picture. He says things like, "Consider it pure joy when you face various trials" (**James 1:2**), and, "Blessed is the one who endures trials" (**James 1:12**), and, "God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn't tempt anyone" (**James 1:13**). The beautiful truth about following Jesus is not that trials won't come, it's that when they do, we can persevere because Jesus is with us. And it's that perseverance that marks our maturity in Jesus. As we become mature, God's will and his glory become more important than our own.

There's a story in John 9 about a man who was born blind that illustrates this maturing process, not from the blind man so much as from the disciples. Take a look at **John 9:1-3**:

Day 2 - James Study Breakdown

Today, we're going to look at a brief overview of **James 1:2-18**. This is just an overview, because these verses pack a huge punch. They're really the introduction of just about everything else James is going to share through the rest of his letter.

If there's one word that summarizes this section, and maybe the whole book, it's "maturity." James is sometimes referred to as the manual for mature living. The original Greek word for mature is *teleios*, which means perfect or complete. James wants followers of Jesus to see how to become complete in their following of Jesus.

How do we become mature? What are the marks of maturity? Let's open our Bibles and look at a few from chapter 1.

Read James 1:2-4. What do these verses tell you about Christian maturity?

We become complete by facing trials. Trials come to us from God in order to test and purify our faith, which produces all kinds of good things in us: perseverance, character, and hope (Romans 5). Those things don't grow when life is good and we're sailing along, they grow when life is hard. James points out that we should therefore rejoice, knowing that God is making us mature.

Read James 1:5-11. What do these verses tell you about Christian maturity?

We become complete by facing decisions with wisdom and discernment. Verse 8 in the King James Version says, "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways." Instability is a mark of immaturity: being tossed back and forth by life, searching for the next high, avoiding the next low. A mature follower of Jesus admits our needs, asks for wisdom, and faithfully expects an answer.

Read James 1:12-18. What do these verses tell you about Christian maturity?

We become complete by enduring temptation. It's important to note the difference between trials and temptations. Trials come from God and enrich our faith; temptations come from the devil to cause us to sin. Some situations could be both: a trial that has the potential of making us closer to God, but also an opportunity for the enemy to tempt us to drift away from God. James points out that the mature

follower who endures under temptation will be “blessed” (meaning happy) and will receive “the crown of life” (meaning life itself). When we’re mature enough to endure temptation, we’re happy because we’re ready to truly live.

We can start to see in these introductory verses how passionate and practical James is about seeing the people of Jesus become mature. It’s this theme of becoming complete that’s behind the rest of his letter. So let’s keep that in mind each week as we get practical guidance for following Jesus.

Above we noted three of many marks of maturity from James. What are some other important marks of maturity that we can glean from scripture? Where is that maturity present in your own life? Where is there immaturity?

As you read this passage, what is God inviting you to? Is there one of these marks or a particular phrase in this section that is drawing your attention? Why is it?

Day 3 - Scripture Survey

As we look at **James 1:2-18** this week, we want to see what the whole story of Scripture has to say about this week's particular topic. Where else in Scripture do we find this same truth? How do other authors of Scripture support or expand on what James shares in this week's particular passage?

Take a moment first to re-read **James 1:2-18**. Maybe even consider reading it in another translation on your Bible app.

After you've read through it, take a few moments to slowly read through the passages below. Take time to note any similarities you find between the passage and the James passage. Jot those similarities down. Note if there are any questions that arise as you read. Finally, ask, "God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?"

Luke 4:1-13

1 Peter 1:6-7

1 Peter 2:19-25

Psalms 69

Romans 5:3-5

Day 4 - Story Work

You have a story of awakening. Maybe for you that looked a lot like James or Paul where Jesus changed everything in your life in an instant. Or maybe you've always had a constant awaken-ing. As you've gotten older, you've had your eyes opened more and more to who Jesus is and how that impacts your life.

Today we're going to continue looking at our own stories through the lens of James. This week's focus will be on how perseverance has led to maturity.

Reflect on your story using the questions below. Invite God to lead as you look back on the moments of pain or suffering you've experienced and to help you see the perseverance and maturity he's grown in you as a result of those trials.

1. When have suffering or trials awakened you to something new about who God is? Explain.
2. How might that awakening allow you to show compassion or encourage someone else going through the same pain?
3. Have you been shown compassion during a trial by someone who'd faced the same pain? How did that compassion affect you?
4. Name good and perfect gifts from God that have shown up in your story.
5. Name a time when you've persevered through temptation. What did that victory mean to you? Is there a temptation you have failed to persevere? Are you still struggling with it? Victory and defeat both matter in your maturity and your story.

Day 5 – Hear & Do

For this last day, let's slow down and pay attention to what God has been inviting us into as a result of this week's passage. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. We want to be hearers of God's Word and we want to be doers of God's Word. Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions:

As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

Where else outside of your devo time did you notice "these things" pop up in your week?

Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:

- Pray for someone who is suffering.
- Help a friend or neighbor who is hurting: give them a call, take them a meal, etc.
- Volunteer with an organization that helps the disadvantaged. You can see the ones The Creek works with at thecreek.org/outreach.