

“Living Faith Humbly Plans for the Future”

Week 8 - James 4:13-17

March 6, 2022

Introduction - Making Plans

Tim. Pastor. **James 4:13-17. PRAY.**

As we get started this evening I want to ask you a question: **What are your plans?**

- Where do you see yourself in a month, 6 months, a year?
- What about when you're 50? 60? 70?

Where do you see your future going? What plans do you have for your life? What do you want to accomplish or achieve?

Planning through life. From as early on in my life as I can remember, I have always been a planner. I love to think about and consider what is coming up in my life and what I want to do in the future. I was the kid who didn't just have like some vague aspirations about what he wanted to be when he grew up, I had life maps, charts, and graphs. Always been a planner, still a planner today.

And part of what I do each year, been doing it for about 5 years now, is sometime in December I take a personal retreat - I get away in the mountains for a day or two and I map out - here's where my life has gone over the past year, here's where I would like it to go. Here's some of my hopes, plans, dreams, and goals for what's to come.

And so I did that this past year again, and I don't know what it was about this year - if it's where my family is right now, or feeling a little more settled in CLT, or finally feeling like we may be in a post-covid world, or turning 30, but I just found my mind going further and further into the future. Ok when I'm 40, I want to be here. When I'm 50 we'll do this, vacation here, have this age kids - I like blinked and in my mind I was 75.

Now that's me, I'm slightly crazy, may have a problem... ***But what about you? What are your plans?***

Now for a select group of us in the room maybe your response is like - "I have no idea! I don't make plans, I just roll with the punches, go with the flow." We'll talk to you all in a little bit, alright?

If I had to guess, the majority of us in this room right now have some plans, or at least maybe some vague ideas.

We have hopes, we have dreams, we have goals and desires, and we have some decisions looming on the horizon of our lives that have to do with those plans.

- I want to get married....Should I get married? Who should I marry?
- We want to have kids...Should we have kids? How many kids should we have?
- I want to stop paying rent....Should we buy a house? How much should we spend and where should we live?
- I want to have a fulfilling career that pays the bills and challenges me...What career should I take? Should I change careers? Should I change companies? Should I go back to school?

What James is going to address today is how living faith in Jesus should affect how we make decisions and how we plan for the future.

This is what we're going to see:

Living faith humbly plans for the future with God.

How we make plans - v13 + 16

Let's get into it together.

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—

James once again introduces a hypothetical group of people that he can argue with and speak to directly. This group in particular are deliberate and self-confident planners. They're planning to go to a different city to conduct some business and make some money.

This hypothetical probably has to do with what was happening in the church at the time. This time in which James is writing (around 60 AD) was marked by growing commercial activity, especially in the Greek cities around Palestine. Jews were especially active in these ventures; many had left Palestine to settle in cities throughout the Mediterranean world in pursuit of lucrative business opportunities and financial gain.

James writes with a specific goal - not to rebuke them for wanting to make money or for making plans for the future, we'll see this more in a second - **his rebuke specifically has to do with the way in which they are making these plans.**

The heart posture that is behind this statement they are making shows something deeper about their hearts.

Skip down to verse 16, this is what he says → **16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.**

So James says - **The way in which you are making plans for the future is arrogant.** You're boasting in your planning, you're arrogant in your planning. This is evil. This is not ok. This is not of the Lord.

Why does he say that? Well look back specifically at what these folks are saying about their plans - **"Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—**

**There's some arrogant assumptions wrapped up in this phrase:
First, it assumes they'll live as long as they please.**

When are we going to take these steps and make these moves? Today or tomorrow. Some time soon. Whenever we feel like it. They assume they have control over the timeline of their lives.

Second, it assumes they can make whatever plans they want.

They assume they can not only know what tomorrow holds, but that they are the ones who call the shots - maybe that town, maybe this one. Maybe we'll spend a year or so. Who knows, it's up to us.

Third, it assumes they can control the outcome of the plans they make.

Notice the end of verse 13 → **"And make a profit."** So not only do they think they control the time and the circumstances → they think they control the outcome as well. We'll do this, at this place, when we want and we will succeed.

If I could summarize the whole posture of arrogant planning in one phrase it would be this:

We control tomorrow.

And all of it James says, as it currently stands, is boastful and arrogant...because who is missing? **God, Right?** We. We. We. **We'll** go here, when **we** want, do what **we** want, with the outcome **we** want.

How much of our planning and decision making can sound the same way?

We sit down and we map out in our brains - these are the steps I'm going to take. I'm going to do A, then B, then I'll get C.

- I'm going to go to this school, get this degree, so that I can get this job, make this much money, live in this part of this city and take these vacations.
- I'm going to get married at this age, have kids at this age, have this type of house, this and this and this.

And again, the problem is not in the planning - **the problem is in the arrogance about the planning. The attempts to plan and move forward without God. To run our own lives and make our own decisions apart from the wisdom of God in our lives → We're the captain of the ship and the masters of our futures.**

As one scholar put it - this passage is the epitome of practical atheism. Living life with a framework as if we control our lives, we control the future, we are like god. Living as if God does not actually exist or he is not actually in control. Where we think we control the time, the decisions, the plans, and the outcome.

James says it's evil. It's boastful and arrogant → That you would plan your future without God wrapped up in yourself and your goals and what you want and be boastful enough to think it will happen just because you want it to.

Problem with how we make plans → v14

But not only is it evil, it's also foolish. There's some problems wrapped up in their planning as well.

Verse 14:

14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Do you not realize the actual reality of your inability and lack of control as a human? You see, here are the problems with this statement:

PROBLEM #1:

We think:

James says:

We control tomorrow

→

What is your life? You're a mist.

You're not promised tomorrow. You're not promised the rest of today. How can you arrogantly say what you'll do and how it will go tomorrow, when you don't even know if you'll get tomorrow?

The uncertain brevity, or "mist", of our lives is a theme the Scriptures refer to often - and almost always the intention is to remind us life is short so that we will give all of ourselves to living for the glory of God.

One of my favorite examples of this is King David in **Psalm 39**. He writes:

4 "O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! 5 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! 6 Surely a man goes about as a shadow!

Then look what he says next:

Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

Lord, remind me how brief my life is → not so I get defeated, not so I get depressed - so that I realize - So much of this turmoil just doesn't matter. So much of what I worry about, have anxiety over, fear, dread, toss around in my mind till I'm sick - so much of it gets put in its proper place when I fix my eyes on you.

That decision I'm letting crush me with anxiety. That running ahead and making arrogant plans thinking I can control my life → Lord it's unwise. It's foolish! Teach me to number my days.

James wants us to consider our frailty in our making plans. That we would acknowledge life is a gift from God, and we're not promised tomorrow, so we should not make presumptuous and arrogant plans.

First century Roman philosopher named Seneca, writing shortly after James, said it like this - **"He who was venturing investments by land and sea, who had also entered public life and left no type of business untried, during the very realization of financial success and during the very onrush of the money that flowed into his coffers, was snatched from the world! But how foolish it is to set out one's life, when one is not even the owner of tomorrow."**

PROBLEM #2:

We think:

James says:

We control tomorrow

→

You do not know what tomorrow will bring.

You don't know if you're gonna get tomorrow, and if you get it you don't know what it's going to bring.

COVID Planning. This one I think is pretty easy to grasp given the nature of the past 2 years. This week marks 2 years since the first worldwide shutdowns for this thing we heard was called Covid-19. So many plans have been up in the air, canceled, rescheduled, changed over the past 2 years. We've learned first hand this reality that has always been true - we do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Some of the frustration over the past 2 years has been this fact, right - where we've said to ourselves - "I just don't know how it is going to go. I don't know how to make plans when it feels like every 2 weeks something changes."

But that's always been true. We've never been guaranteed the future - it was just easier to believe we did prior to March 2020.

You do not know what tomorrow will bring. You can make plans for sure, but you don't know if your car won't start, if you'll wake up sick, if you'll walk into the meeting and get fired, if the house contract will get pulled out from under you, if you'll get that call that changes everything. You don't know what tomorrow will bring, so you can't control it.

PROBLEM #3:

We think:

James says:

We control tomorrow

→

You're completely dependent on God.

We can't control that we'll get tomorrow. We can't control what we'll do tomorrow. And we most certainly cannot control the outcome of tomorrow.

These prideful, boastful, arrogant planners are guaranteeing - "we'll go here and we'll make a profit!" What is your life, James says. Haven't you learned by now you're not in control?

Haven't you learned by now everything you have is a grace gift from God?

Don't you understand how reliant you are on Him for everything?

The breath in your lungs → Gift from Him.

The job that you have → Gift from Him.

The relationships, friendships, family you have → Gift from Him.

Today, today is a gift from Him. And tomorrow will be a gift from Him.

I love the way one theologian Dan Doriani puts it about this passage, he says: **"We must confess that we are all heirs of God's generosity...If a woman is intelligent, did she earn it or inherit it? If a man is an athlete, did he construct his muscle fibers?...The achiever may think, 'But I have worked hard to hone my skills.' Perhaps so. But even then, we can ask if God did not guide our desires and nudge us toward godly aspirations."**

We are completely dependent on God for life, breath, everything. From our salvation, to our dinner - God is the giver of all we have. The best, most thorough, well thought through and executed plans mean nothing without the hand and providence of God.

So we make plans, we think we control tomorrow, yet we are a mist, we do not know what tomorrow will bring, and we're completely dependent upon God. So what should we do?

How we should make plans - v15

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

What should we do? Two things.

1. We make plans.

Notice James says → **"We will live and do this or that."** Making plans is not a bad thing. We're not supposed to just throw our hands up in the air and live "que sera sera". Whatever happens happens I guess. We're not nihilistic, we're not fatalistic → We're called to make plans.

Plans are a good thing. I think about the faithfulness of Ruth right? Ruth 1 where she's like - alright Naomi, I'm in on this where you go I'm going to go, let's do it. There's examples like this throughout the Scriptures - God's people making plans for their lives.

In fact, some of us need to get better at making some plans. We have let sloth drive us, apathy drive us, we've just gone wherever our emotions and whims want to take us → and we're worse off for it. This sermon doesn't apply to us because we would never dream of making arrogant plans - mostly because we would never dream of making plans in the first place!

Now, I'm not saying you have to be me, ok? You don't have to become type A. You don't have to plan out your vacations for the next 50 years. Alright, I'm ridiculous. You don't have to be me - **but you are setting yourself up to not be able to honor God by not planning, even in line with your personality and wiring.**

You're not able to be obedient to verse 17 → James says if you know the right thing to do and fail to do it, it's sin.

Sin is not just doing things you shouldn't do, sin is also not doing things you should do!

When you don't step into the good things God calls you to do, be it because of apathy or busyness - sharing the gospel, abiding with Jesus through various spiritual practices, caring for the poor and needy → that is sin. That is against God's design.

And I would argue a huge part of the reason why we don't do those things is because we don't know how to plan!

- Part of the reason why you might struggle to have consistent times of Bible reading and prayer is because you don't make a plan for it. You don't put it into your calendar. You just assume it's going to happen.
- Part of the reason why you don't share the gospel, or have any non-Christian friends to share the gospel with may be because you haven't made any plans.
- Part of the reason why you struggle to be financially generous, might be because you don't have a money plan. You need to make a budget.

We must make some plans to the glory of God. Set some goals. Have some aspirations of things you want to see God do in your life, good goals you want to accomplish in your career, in your relationships, in your families. Then what do we do?

2. We humbly submit our plans to the Lord.

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills,

"If the Lord wills" is not simply a Christian cliché to say...

"If the Lord wills" is also not a way of getting God to bless the plans we already decided we wanted to take anyways. "Hey God, I'm doing this, can you make sure it goes alright?"

"If the Lord wills" is posture of our hearts where we submit both the outcome and the direction to our Heavenly Father.

We live with open hands. Not close fist. I've got some plans Lord. Here they are, but ultimately I trust you. I'm first and foremost loyal to you. I want your will. I'm praying for your will. I want to see your kingdom not my kingdom. Here's my plans Lord, show me what needs to change, redirect my paths.

One church planting mentor of mine used to say this → When it comes to church planting, make a bunch of plans, but write them all in pencil.

When it comes to your life, make a bunch of plans, but write them all in pencil.

- Lord, this is what I think we should do for school for our kids, but you're God, not me, so I put it in your hands.
- Lord, I think I'm supposed to marry this person, I've thought a lot about this, sought counsel - but you're God, not me, so I put it in your hands.
- Lord, I think I'm supposed to make this career change, make this move - but you're God, not me, so I put it in your hands.

This is the prayer Jesus teaches us to pray as His disciples → **Matthew 6:10 - Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.**

Here's my best made plans Lord, but your kingdom come. Not my kingdom - yours. Not my will - yours. Not my plans - yours.

Gospel Turn

And here's the good news in all of this: We have a good Father who is actively working among His people and in our world.

- **So for the chronic non-planner, go with the flow person** – you need to hear you have a good Father who is actively working among His people in our world. He is inviting you to step up and step out and join Him in the work He is doing in you and around you.
- **For the one wracked with anxiety over what the future holds** – you need to hear you have a good Father who is actively working among His people in our world. He is inviting you to trust Him. His ways are better.
- **For the one heartbroken over your dreams for your life not coming true** - you need to hear you have a good Father who is actively working among His people in our world. He is also inviting you to trust Him.
- **For the boastful, arrogant, my way or the highway I don't care what God says** – you need to hear you have a good Father who is actively working among His people in our world. Sometimes what God might do is make none of your plans work such that He would get the glory and sometimes he makes all of your plans work such that you realize it still didn't satisfy so that He would get the glory.

That's James' teaching - we make plans, not arrogantly but with open hands submitting our wills to the will of God - trusting ourselves to our heavenly father. That's what living faith does - Living faith humbly plans for the future with God.

Practical Steps of Decision Making

Here's how I want to spend the rest of our time. This passage is pretty straightforward - This is what you should do - say, believe, live this way → “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” Submit your plans and decisions to the Lord.

What does that mean? I just want to end with some pastoral help → I want to give you some steps to practical, wise, God-honoring decision making and planning. (we'll hit them quickly)

1. Pray.

This really should be what you're doing throughout - before, during, after. But we want to actually take time to pray. To seek the face of God. To talk to Him and to pause and sit in silence to hear from Him.

Let me just encourage you, because this is my temptation → praying about it and thinking/worrying about it are not the same thing. I'm often tempted to think about the decision a bunch, and call it prayer. That's not prayer. Talking to God and listening to God - that is prayer.

2. Assess all of the facts.

Get all of the data, all of the pertinent information you can.

Thinking about switching careers? Find out as much as you can about that new career. Talk to folks you trust in that career field, ask good questions.

“If the Lord wills” is not just some “the Lord's got it” type deal → God doesn't call us to check our brains at the door.

3. Assess all of your feelings.

What are the heart level motivations going on inside of you?

- Both good - desire/longing/wants
- And bad - sinful motivations/guilt/shame/etc. Comparison/jealousy

make chart

****Can I just say this while we're all here in this room together → Don't believe the lie of "peace"**. Don't trust "well I just feel good about it". Or I just feel at peace about this decision. That is something I hear so often from folks.

I remember having a conversation a couple of years ago with a friend who was telling me about a decision they had made that was explicitly sinful. Not like gray and wisdom, like written clearly in scripture not even close to up for debate. And I said "well what do you do with this?" And they said - I don't know, because I just feel so at peace with this decision.

Feeling good, having "peace" might be an indicator it's the right decision, it might also not be.

1. The heart is wicked and deceitful, so a good feeling might not be a good thing.
2. The mission and calling and will of God often comes with risk and uncertainty - so you might not "feel" peace, and that might be because you're in the center of what God has for you.
3. God promises to take us to and be with us in the midst of hard circumstances.

Isaiah 58:11 - And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

So often in our decision making our goal is to avoid the scorched places. If I make the right decision, if I choose the right person, if I pick the right job - then everything will go awesome. Sometimes the right decision is the opposite of "peaceful" or "feel good".

4. Study the Scriptures

Psalms 19 tells us the Law of the Lord is perfect, sure, right, and pure. And then verse 11 says - **11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**

I put this here because once you have all of your facts and all of your feelings sorted through, it's good to lay those things before the authority of God's Word.

You want to look for commands - There's some stuff the Bible is explicitly yes or no on. When it comes to those things, we can and should just stop here and be obedient.

You want to look for principles - are there ways the Bible talks about this type of decision, my feelings towards it, the steps I'm taking. Principles of wisdom I could apply to this decision. (This is a needed step - many folks just go - explicitly wrong? No? Ok then I can just choose what I want. - Not the case).

God's Word is our authority because it's the revelation of God and God is our authority, so we submit ourselves to the good and perfect law of God.

5. Seek Wise Counsel

Find some folks who love Jesus and love you and get their input. Two things to be careful on: (1) we only ask people who will agree with us or (2) we ask enough people until we find someone who agrees with us.

Throughout church history, Christians have practiced what they call “circles of decision making”. I love this, I think we should bring it back. When thinking through large decisions, Christians would gather a group of wise believers who would become their circle of decision making. The purpose of this group was to ask a lot of questions and then make the decision on behalf of the person or couple. It was a trusting of God and the Spirit in these other people. We hate that idea because we’re modern 21st-century Americans who love our freedom, but I think there’s a lot of merit to it.

Story about dating Lindsay. “You guys tell me and if you say ‘no’, it’s a no.

6. Seek God’s glory

What in all of this is going to bring God the most glory? We seek that above everything else. Not what makes life easier, what sets me up the best → What is going to bring God the most glory. All the stuff we addressed last week.

7. If you still can’t decide, wait.

Take some more time, read some more scriptures, seek more counsel, prayer. There might be a reason why you can’t decide, worth pausing and considering.

8. Trust God’s Sovereignty and DO SOMETHING

At some point you have to make a decision and go. Don’t be stuck in analysis paralysis. A byproduct of our culture, we’ve talked about this before, is that we want to live with endless possibilities, so we can hate making decisions because to say “yes” means we have to say “no”. And we want to keep all of our options open.

Faithful, Godly, wise planning says we walk through these steps, we trust God, and make a decision and go.

And guess what, you might do all these steps and be wrong. Sometimes you’ll get to the end and go - “I should do X”, do X then realize you need to reverse - God is sovereign over that. Some stuff you can’t change course on, but a lot you can.

Trust the sovereignty of God, be wise, walk the steps, and then take some action.

*****You have a good Father who is actively working among His people in our world**

Communion → Let’s be a church that submits ourselves to the sovereign will of God. In so doing, we follow the way of Jesus, our Savior. Jesus who prayed in the garden of Gethsemane - (*LUKE 22:42*) Lord if possible take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours Father be done. And Jesus, God the Son, submitted Himself to God the Father, and went to the cross to die and rise again victorious over satan, sin, and death - so that we could have life forever with God.

Church let’s follow in the way of Jesus. Let’s submit ourselves to the sovereign will of our good and gracious and glorious heavenly Father.

Let’s commit to that even now as we pause to reflect on the gospel and the death of Christ through this act of communion...

Pray.