

“God-Centered Planning for the New Year” **James 4:13-17**

Intro: There is something refreshing about a New Year. The New Year brings a fresh start, a sense of hope with new beginnings. Whether you are coming off the best year or the most difficult year of your life, I want to remind us all that just as God’s mercies are new for each day, so they are new for each year. And of course for millions of people, the New Year also brings New Year’s Resolutions. Diet.. & Exercise...; Work Related...; School (Make straight A’s);

FCF: In our text this morning, James is going to give us some instructions on what God-Centered Planning should look like. He is going to warn us against the foolishness of arrogant planning and instructs us to ...

The Point: Make plans with humility keeping God and his sovereign will in view.

Interrogatives: “How can we make plans with God and his sovereign will in view? #1

I. Make plans with humility recognizing the uncertainty of the future... (13-14)

Context: James was the half-brother of Jesus. His letter is full of wisdom and full of allusions from the Book of Proverbs and the Sermon on the Mount. James’ primary focus is to emphasize a living, breathing, active faith. What we have in chapter 4 is James continuing to expound on what a life looks like that exercises wisdom through a living faith. Unfortunately, those who James addresses in this text were not walking in wisdom, they were living like fools.

- Verse 13 begins with the words “Come now” or as some translations say, “Now listen!” The words are given to raise the attention of the hearers/readers for what follows... He goes on: “you who say, “Today...”
- The first century was a time marked by growing commercial activity. The Pax Romana opened up ways of travel not seen in the world to that point. For many, business was booming and business was good, so good that they begin to make presumptuous, arrogant plans.
- That is why James pens some serious truth for them in verses 14-17 that is meant to humble, correct, and guide them into the path of wisdom.

- He exposes their sense of self-dependence on the one hand and presumption on the other. Look how these concepts are revealed in verse 13
- “Today or tomorrow *we will go, we will spend, we will trade, we will make a profit...*”
- But James is not going to let that ride. In fact, he puts the smack down on them in verse 14. In doing so, he exposes their folly and seeks to humble them in a couple of ways:
- First he exposes the folly of their planning by hammering the uncertainty of tomorrow. He writes: “you who are so confident about tomorrow, ‘you do not know what tomorrow will bring.”
- Pics: Who of us can say without absolute certainty anything that will transpire in the next 24-48 hours.
 - We have no way of knowing if Stock Market is going to be bearish or bullish.
 - [We have no way of knowing if the Pats will beat Miami or the Celtics will beat the Wizards twice.]

- We have no way of knowing whether it will take us twenty minutes to drive home or forty minutes.
- We have no way of knowing who the Lord might allow us to bump into that might need a word of encouragement.
- Why?
- Because we are not in control of future events. We are not all knowing. We do not see the beginning from the end and the end from the beginning.
- But we know who does know what a day may bring. We may not be in control, but we know the one who flung the stars into existence, calls them each by name, and holds the universe in the palm of his hand. We may not know what's around the corner, but we know a God who says, in Isaiah 46:9-10: "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"
- *Trans:* After combating their arrogance by exposing the uncertainty of life in general, he unleashes another weapon in his arsenal to bring some humility to them.
- He does so with his dialogical approach by asking a sobering question and providing a sobering answer.
- The sobering question: "What is your life?" Let's pause there...
- "What is your life?" The sum of your days, the sum of your accomplishments and relationships, the sum of your hopes and desires...
- "What is your life?" There's the sobering question...
- The sobering answer: "For you are a mist..." You are a mist. How's that for a dose of reality. Go home this afternoon, look in the mirror and say, "you are a mist." Some translations say "you are a vapor."
- What does he mean? "you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."
- The Greek is even stronger. It says, "You are a mist, *which being seen for a little while even then is disappearing.*"
- James lays down a strong, confrontational word intended to humble the unfounded, presumptuous confidence of those who make plans without accounting for God and his will in the matter.
- *Scriptural Arg:* This is a theme that is clear throughout Scripture.
 - **Ps. 39:5 says, "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! (Psalm 39:5)**
- *Practical Arg:* We have been reminded of the brevity of life this past year. Dan Wheldon, two-time Indy500 winner, dead at 33. Steve Jobs, founder and CEO of Apple, 56. Pop Singer, Amy Winehouse dead at 27. Some of my heroes in church history: David Brainerd, Jim Eliot, and Robert Murray MyCheyne all died at the age of 29. Henry Martyn was 31. Oswald Chambers, 43. Even Charles Spurgeon didn't make it to 60, dying when he was 57.
- *Pastoral Arg:* But we should not let this word discourage us. We should let this word sober us, motivate us, and make us look to our great God!
 - 1) If our life is but a breath, we must remember that just as God is ultimately over every detail of every affair of life, so is he over every breath we take. God gives and takes life. Just as he knows the number of hairs on our head, so he knows the number of days of our lives. Our times are in God's hands (Ps. 31:15 & Acts 17:26).
 - 2) If our days are but a breath, whether we live to be 23 or 93, we should seek to maximize our days to live for God's glory. Listen, "Gloria in excelsis deo," which

means “Glory to God in the highest” should not simply be a phrase we read or sing at Christmas time, it should be the highest goal of our lives. We should seek to make the most of every day that God gives us. It’s so easy to spend our time and energy on that which is trivial rather than the eternally significant.

- We should take to heart the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 90:12, a great verse for the New Year and our medimemo verse this week, which says: **“So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”** As believers, we of all people, should count each day as precious, each day as a gift from the Lord and live accordingly.
- With these two strong points in v.14 concerning the uncertainty and brevity of life, James confronts the pride and arrogance in our planning, and the effect should be for us to look beyond ourselves, to the one who holds the events and times of our lives in his hands.
- *Trans:* That is where he turns our attention in verse 15. Verses 15-17 teach us that we should

II. Make plans recognizing God and his sovereign will (15-17).

- Look at **verse 15...**
- Did you catch the implicit thought of verse 15? What is it?
- James is not saying planning is bad. Planning is not bad. James is not encouraging us to get rid of our day planners and calendars on our phones and computers.
- Planning is a necessary part of life and it is biblically wise to plan ahead.
- What does Solomon write in Proverbs 6:6-7? **“Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.” (Proverbs 6:6-8 ESV)**
- The ant is commended not simply because of its work ethic, but also because it executes a plan of preparation for survival.
- As the modern day proverb says: “A failure to plan is a plan to fail.”
- God is a God with a plan. Jesus lived his life with a definitive purpose saying no to some requests while focused on fulfilling his planned mission in the world.

- So let’s be clear: James addresses not the fact that we make plans but *how* we make those plans, and he provides the solution in verse 15.
- His solution stands in stark contrast to the attitude of the merchants in verse 13. Check it out... “Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”
- With those four words, “If the Lord wills” we have the crux of God-centered planning. This is the crux of what it means to live out a living, breathing, active faith. This is the crux of what it means to live with the wisdom from above...
- All of our plans should be made in light of the will of God. “If the Lord wills...”
-
- The reason this is so important is that the simple phrase “If the Lord wills” God-willing, the Latin, “Deo Volunte” undercuts the self-reliance, independent, presumptuous spirit of verse 13.
- “If the Lord wills,” is a statement that sees God’s sovereignty over all things! God is the Creator and the Sustainer of everything. His will controls all that happens. Thus, we should make every decision and every plan with the recognition that he is Lord.
- “If the Lord wills ,” is a phrase that displays the wisdom of Proverbs 3:5-6 which tells us to... “Trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not to lean on our own understanding, In

all of our ways we are to acknowledge him, know him, and he will make our paths straight.

- In everything, we are to recognize and know God!
- But don't miss the subtlety of what follows in the text... I believe the order is important. He says: "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this and that."
- Start with your life... utterly dependent upon God... then move to the details of your life... also totally dependent upon God!
- Listen, the fundamental problem of those rebuked in the text is that they took God out of the equation. In essence, they engaged in a form of practical atheism, separating their business and "secular" life from their Christian and "sacred" life. But to call Jesus Lord is to recognize his Lordship at all times in all spheres.
- We need to wrestle with the fact that there are to be no "God-free zones" in life. Period. End of discussion. [possibly expound...]
- To live in a way that leaves God out of the picture is foolish, but to do so in a manner that is explicitly arrogant and prideful is evil.
- James, again, pulls no punches in verse 16 when he says: "As it is you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."
- The phrase "boast in your arrogance" refers to "proud confidence in one's own knowledge or cleverness."
- James already told them in v. 6 of ch. 4 that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- James sums up this discussion by concluding with a final word concerning God's will in v. 17... "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." God desires for each of us to live with his will in view, and when we know what he desires for us, we must respond in obedience. Anything less is sin.

Conclusion:

- Jesus tells us a powerful parable in Luke 12 about a rich man who made some plans...
- So let me ask you, as we embark on any year in our journey in life: "What good is God placing before you in the New Year?"
- Is there anything you need to do differently in 2012? **What God-centered resolutions do you need to make** in order to more clearly reflect the glory of God in your marriage, in your parenting, in your friendships? How can you more faithfully and fervently pursue God in 2012?
- For some, a great first step might be to come to grips with the fact that our life is just a mist, a vapor, a breath, and to consider if you, once your brief life is through, are ready to meet the God who made you. We are only ready through Jesus Christ..
- For others, we need the reminder that there are no God-free zones. Surely all of us need to give thought to how God wants to work in our lives in 2012 and plan accordingly.

Let's make some God-sized, God-centered plans this New Year. Let's plan to do something great for God. Let's resolve to live our lives in a radical, Spirit-filled way for him this year.