

# DAILY DOSE OF JAMES



## **Week 9 - James 4:13-17**

### **Monday – Is it wrong to plan ahead? (4:13-15)**

No! In fact, the bible encourages us to carefully prepare for the future. Proverbs 6:6-8 tells us: “Go to the ant, you sluggard; considers its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers food at harvest.” Clearly we are exhorted to be like the ant who diligently goes about its business without instruction and without oversight so as to prepare for the coming season. So James is not advocating a hands-off approach to life where we let the whims of the day blow us here or there. Rather, James is cautioning us against becoming presumptuous in our planning and ignoring God’s will. Ultimately judgment will be given to our deeds, whether they honored or dishonored God.

- Are you a planner by nature? If so, what are you doing to make sure your planning is in accordance with the will of God?
- Are you a procrastinator by nature? If so, what can you learn from the sluggard and the ant about being responsible for your own actions?
- James warns us not to boast about tomorrow, in Matthew 6:34 Jesus warns us not to worry about tomorrow. So we are to neither boast nor worry about tomorrow. How can you translate these two admonitions into trusting God for today?

### **Tuesday – If my life is a vapor, does that make it meaningless? (4:14)**

Upon first glance we may read verse 14 as dismissing the value of our individual lives. “What is your life?” can be read as a condescending brush off of my value as a person. Mist or vapor appears for a little while and vanishes, is the extent of my life really that insignificant? Rather than expressing the meaninglessness of an individual’s life, James is exhorting us to reject an inflated view of ourselves or our plans. Life is short no matter how many years we live. Don’t be deceived into thinking that you have lots of time remaining so you can live for Christ another day, or love your spouse or children another day, or work diligently as unto the Lord another day. Live for God today! Then, no matter when your life ends you will have fulfilled God’s plan for you.

The group Casting Crowns has written a song called “Who am I” and the final verse of that song seems to capture well this theme from James 4. Here are the lyrics:

I am a flower quickly fading,  
Here today and gone tomorrow,  
A wave tossed in the ocean,

A vapor in the wind.  
Still you hear me when I'm calling,  
Lord, you catch me when I'm falling,  
And you've told me who I am.  
I am yours.  
I am yours.  
I am yours.

- Have you ever been discouraged by the insignificance of your life? James here affirms the brevity of life, but not because we are insignificant. How can you live for Christ today in a way that matters for eternity?
- Since you can't know what will happen tomorrow are you bound to inaction by fear, are you reckless without regard for consequence, or do you strive for balancing your responsibilities with a sensitive ear toward listening to God's will for your life.

### **Wednesday – How do I know the Lord's will? (4:15)**

"If it is the Lord's will" is not just a statement tacked onto our plans but a constant attitude. Jesus had that attitude in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me." Knowing and doing God's will is not the result of decoding some superstitious formula available only to the "super-Christian." So how can we find and know God's will for our lives? **The Bible** is God's handbook for life, the more we are in it, the more we know it and the more we live it. It is always God's will for us to obey his word. **Prayer** is an essential component of knowing God's will. The model pray-er was Jesus, think how many references there are in the Bible to Jesus going off by himself to pray, encouraging his disciples to pray, and teaching them how to pray? God often uses **circumstances** in our lives to point us in the direction he wants us to go – the "open door" of opportunity or the "closed door" of rejection are guidelines for us to stay in his will. Seeking **wise counsel** from godly leaders and role models is found in Proverbs. Finally, God's **peace** is always given to those who are in his will and consequences are always given to those who reject it.

- Can you think of a time in your life when you faced a difficult decision and you didn't seek the Lord's will in your decision making process? How did that decision turn out?
- Has there been a time in your life when you have sought the Lord's will and it has just been exceptionally obvious to you? How did that decision turn out?
- What challenge or decision are you facing today in which you may be unsure of the Lord's will? Are you willing to obey biblical principles, be devoted to constant prayer, watch for "open" and "closed" doors, seek wise counsel and ask for God's peace?

### **Thursday – Why is boasting about the future evil? (James 4:16)**

James must have thought it important that we not make our own plans independent of God's will. On Monday we examined what he had to say on planning our lives without God. In verse 16 James returns to his admonition against the boastful expression of our future plans by calling them evil. It wasn't sufficient for him to condemn the process of

planning our future without God, he needed to address the grandiose pronouncements of our future plans that don't consider God's will for our lives. Boasting is our way of declaring to the people around us just how great we are. And when we are increasing, he is decreasing which is exactly the opposite of what is says in John 3:30, "He must become greater, I must become less." So it is a matter of understanding that it is God who controls the future, not me. In Psalm 31 David says "but I trust in you O Lord; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands." David understood that his trials or successes in life could only be properly viewed in the light of God's will for him, not the result of his own planning.

- Think of a recent time when all your plans came crashing down around you. Could this have been a circumstance in which the Lord was trying to get your attention and turn your focus from pursuing your will to pursuing His?
- Has there ever been a time in your life when your planning didn't work out and yet God had a greater purpose for you?
- What plans and ambitions are you holding onto right now that you need to release in order to follow God's will for your life?

#### **Friday – Is there more than one way to sin? (4:17)**

We know that disobeying God's commands is sin. We know that many of the 10 commandments are prohibitions against certain thoughts or actions (lie, steal, cheat, etc.). Yet it's interesting that James doesn't address that type of sin in this verse. Rather he makes the opposite claim that "anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." We tend to think that doing wrong is a sin, and it is. But James tells us that sin is also not doing right. Theologically these are distinguished as sins of commission (what we do) and sins of omission (not doing what we should do). It is a sin to lie, yet it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is a sin to speak evil of someone, yet it is also a sin to avoid that same person when you know they need your friendship. We should be willing to act as the Holy Spirit guides us. If God has directed you to do a kind act, to render a service, or to restore a relationship, then you should do it – for not to do so would be sin.

- Everyone struggles with sins of commission – we regularly violate God's commands. But what about sins of omission – is there a regular pattern in your life of not doing something that you know is right?
- What about today – will you ask God to give you an opportunity today to do the right thing, and pray for his strength to help you do it?