

Planning for the Future
(James 4:13-17)

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As we plan for the future, where does God fit into the planning? Too often we feel we are in control of all things, but in reality we are not. Therefore, we yield to self-sufficiency instead of God, which leads to a dead end. The only way we can successfully plan for the future is to seek God's will, knowing that God is sovereign and is good to His children.

INTRODUCTION

2019 is coming to an end. It has gone by so quickly. As we look back, there is much to praise God for. However, for some of us, it has been a difficult year. We are reminded that God is still with us. As we look forward, may we think about where we are and where we want to be. None of us plan to fail. However, many of us fail because we do not plan. It is critical that we plan wisely. Now, just because we plan, it does not mean that it will take place. However, when we plan, there is a much higher probability of having it come to pass. How are we to plan for the future? What might be wrong ways to plan and what is the right way to plan?

Let us turn to our passage this morning in James 4:13-17. Before we jump into this passage on planning the future, let me give you some background to the book of James. James sets forth a series of six basic tests whereby his readers are to test their own faith. From 4:1-5:12, faith needs to be tested in contrast to worldly-mindedness.

A worldly person is a self-centered person, who has a presumptuous self-sufficient mindset. Let us read James 4:13, "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.'" When we plan for the future, we make two big mistakes because of self-sufficient mindset: 1) We over-estimate our abilities. 2) We under-estimate God's character.

A. We Over-Estimate Our Abilities (4:13-14)

1. We deceive ourselves thinking we are in control, but in reality, we are not.

In verse 13, James addresses the business man, who is self-assured of his traveling plans as well as his schedule and future results. He was so certain and definite that all of his plans would work out just as he planned. Many of us are like this business man. We deceive ourselves into thinking we are in control, but in reality, we are not. We tend to over-estimate our abilities. We claim that we have graduated from renowned university with a masters and doctorate degree. We claim that we are smart and have everything under control. It is natural for us to want control. However, there are so many things that are out of our control.

ILLUSTRATION: I am a planner. I try to figure things out before they happen. Many of you are planners also. When I started college, I planned to be a doctor, but that plan did not come to fruition. I had it all figured out that I am going to get married at 25. After graduating and working for 3 years, I was set for marriage. Unfortunately, my plan did not come to pass. I also targeted to go to seminary after I completed my university study, but my timing was off again. I thought I had everything under control, but that was not the case. The Bible says in Proverbs 19:21, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

We over-estimate what we can do because we believe that we are in control. It is easy to plan our lives without considering God's will because we deceive ourselves into thinking we are in control. Although we might not say it, but we are playing God. The objective of this game is to have final authority over our lives. Because we have everything under control, we are self-sufficient; we really do not need God. We got it covered. We have everything mapped out.

ILLUSTRATION: I have a relative that is exceptionally smart. He became very successful in his career. His company sent him as their representative to work with top officials in many countries. His faith in the Lord started to diminish as he advanced in his company. After a while, he did not feel he needed the Lord because he was moving up the corporate ladder at a rapid speed. He boasted of his abilities and his connection with the right people. He felt that if one has the smarts and has the right connections, there is no limit to what he could do. He over-estimates his abilities.

James, the author, is rebuking those with self-sufficient attitudes. Man's plans are always tentative and he is not sure that it will come into being. We really do not know exactly what is going to happen tomorrow. There are always unexpected surprises.

ILLUSTRATION: My daughter's family flew in from LA last Sunday night. Ellie and I were excited. However, the plane was delayed departing from LA; that is bad. But the plane took off without any trouble. That is good. However, they had a tight schedule catching their connecting flight in Dallas. That is bad. However, when they arrived in Dallas, their connecting gate was only a few gates away. That is good. They arrived early into Houston. That is good. However, the luggage did not make it to Houston. That is bad. There are so many unexpected things that happen to us. We deceive ourselves thinking that that we are in control, but in reality, we are not. We also deceive ourselves thinking we will be around for a long time. Let us read v.14, "But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away."

2. We deceive ourselves thinking we will be around for a long time.

The Bible describes our life is like a vapor or a mist that appears for a short period of time, then it vanishes away. Life is both uncertain and brief. We really do not have control of when it is time for us to depart. We might deceive ourselves thinking that we will be around for a long time. One thing for certain, we will all die. However, we do not know when or how we will die. Every breath that we take is a demonstration of God's grace.

ILLUSTRATION: Last weekend, I invited my neighbors over for a Christmas sing-a-long. Several of my neighbors were not able to come because there were some unexpected tragedies. One family had a car accident and the father and daughter were killed. My next door neighbor's brother had a quadruple by-pass that day. One of my neighbor's mother went home to be with the Lord at the young age of 68. Life is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

V13-14 reminds me of the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21, “And he told them this parable: “the ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “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?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” It is foolish to plan for the future without consulting God. As human beings, we have no idea what will happen today, much less what will happen next year. We are one heartbeat away from death.

ILLUSTRATION: My dad’s boss when he was working in the restaurant was making a lot of money. He was only in his fifties. One day, he went home from work. He suddenly collapsed and died that evening. There was no warning sign whatsoever. We do not have control of our lives. God is the only one.

There are two wrong ways to plan for the future. First, we over-estimate our abilities. Second, we under-estimate God’s Character. Because we are self-sufficient, we leave God out of our future planning because we do not value who God is. Let’s read James 4:15, “Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” Instead of depending on self, we need to depend on God.

B. We Under-estimate God’s Character (4:15)

In verse 15, James starts with the word, “Instead.” He is contrasting how the self-centered person or a self-sufficient person (which is how the world plans for the future) with how a God-centered person plans for the future. We see a Christ-follower is dependent on the Lord. He wants to follow the Lord’s will because of who God is. I want to identify two significant characters of God that gives us the basis to pursue God’s will. God is sovereign and God is good. Because of who God is, we can trust Him.

1. God is Sovereign

As we have stated earlier, we are not in control, but God is sovereign and He is in control of all things. He has authority and power over all things. The Bible says in Proverbs 19:21, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.” We can plan all that we want, but if it does not align with God’s purpose, then it is not going to happen. It is wise if we find out what God’s purpose or will is, and adjust our plans to match His. [Not only is God sovereign, but God is Good. In 1 Chron. 16:34, it says “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (Ps. 34:8) “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”]

2. God is Good

God is our Heavenly Father, who loves His children and wants the best for them. He is good to them. Too many Christians look on the will of God as bitter medicine that they have to take instead of looking on the will of God as something precious. Ken Sande, a counselor says, “God is not only in control over us; he is also for us. Not only is the Lord all-powerful, he is all-loving. We trust God because God is both in control and

He cares for us. If we truly understand and believe that God is sovereign and good, then we would trust His will for us. We will not under-estimate God's character. [We have looked at how we are not to plan for the future? We are not to over-estimate our abilities and we are not to under-estimate God's character. The third point of this message provides the right way to plan for the future. We must submit to God's will. Instead of being self-sufficient, we are to find our sufficiency in God.]

C. We Must Submit to God's Will. (4:15-17)

When we play God, we are actually striving to be self-sufficient. Self-sufficient is a sin. It involves not only the sin of commission, but also the sin of omission. James 4:17, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

1. Self-sufficiency is sin (v.17) It is playing God.

This verse reveals a disobedient attitude. One thing is to be ignorant and not know what is right from wrong, but it is another if we know what is right and choose not to do it. That is really defiance.

APPLICATION: We might know that we should forgive our brother, but we choose not to and that is sin of omission. We might know that we should play with our children, but we do not and that is sin of omission. When someone offends us, we know we should talk to that person privately, but we choose not to do that, that is sin. We might know that we should depend on the Lord, but we choose not to. That is self-sufficiency. James calls it like it is. Self-sufficiency is sin.

Sins of omission refuse to make a right response to God. It is knowing God's will, but not willing to do it. We deceive ourselves thinking that a sin of omission is not as bad as a sin of commission, where we knowingly act against God's will. When we fail to obey God's revealed will, we commit a sin of omission. God will hold us accountable not only knowing what is right, but to do what is right. May we seek God's will and do it. [Not only do we need to see that self-sufficiency is sin, but self-sufficiency is boasting. Let us read v. 16, "As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."

2. Self-sufficiency is boasting. (v.16)

James accused these self-sufficient individuals of boasting and bragging. Boasting and pride go hand in hand and it will lead to one's downfall (Prov. 18:12).

APPLICATION: During my early years of ministry. I was a very proud and self-sufficient individual. Ministry was going great during the first few years. I over-estimated my abilities and deceived myself that I was in control. I also under-estimated God's character and relied on my abilities. I sinned against the Lord. To teach me a lesson, God had to humble me by showing that I was not that capable. In addition, all my abilities are from the Lord and I should use them to bring glory to God and not glory to myself. After decades of ministry, one of the key lessons I have learned is that God is sufficient for me.

3. God is sufficient for us (v.15)

Instead of trying to play god, we need to humble ourselves, believing that we are inadequate and weak. We are not in control of things. God is sovereign and good. He is

sufficient for us. May we trust and acknowledge God, pray and ask God for His guidance and help. The reasons why we do not trust God is because we do not know God personally. In addition, we lose sight of the bigger picture that we are here not for ourselves, but we are created to give glory to God.

John Piper says, “God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him.” God desires for us to trust him and to depend on him. When we come up close to Him and develop an intimate relationship with our Lord, then we will realize who God is. He has the best plan for each of us. May we seek His will. Instead of demanding that God align His will with our will, we are to seek God’s will and align our will to match His will. He is the only one that is ultimately in control of all things. May we submit ourselves to His will because it will come to pass whether we go along with him or not. It is wise if we choose to follow Him.

ILLUSTRATION: I asked a brother in the Lord how he was doing? He said, “Amazing. God has been exceptionally good to me. I am scared because if I am not careful, I will deceive myself that I am in control. That is what Satan wants me to think. I need to trust God even more.” This brother passed the test of faith. Instead of depending on himself, he is dependent on God as he plans for his future.

As we start a New Year in a couple of days, may we prayfully seek God’s Will for our lives. Knowing that God is sovereign and good and He wants us to know His will. May we be obedient to God on those things that we know is His will. If we are not willing to do that, why should God reveal things that are not as clear to us? God wants to show us what is best for us. May we make ourselves available to the Lord to use us as He wills because God is sufficient for us.