
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

Into Thy Word Ministries www.intothyword.org

James 4: 13-17: Do Not Plan Ahead Without God!

General idea: Do you wonder what the Lord wills for you? The picture presented here is that life on this earth is short and no one knows the future—especially that of his or her own. Yet, many Christians spin their wheels trying to guess the future, and even demanding their will and might in making their plans, hoping for the best. The problem is what is left out and what is often missed; and, that is the question, *does this align with His will?* The call to us in this passage is that our will and plans must focus on God and His ways—period! Our plans and ways are not sovereign; only He is. As Christians, we must not plan our lives with God as an after-thought, or as if He is not concerned or involved. Rather, all our plans must be prefaced by prayer, seeking Him and His ways.

This is all about God's will; and, the principle aspect of God's will is not so much what we plan and develop in our lives, but whether or not we are aligning ourselves with His plan. It is far more important that our focus be that our character and fruit come from Him, not so much in the specific actions in life such as school, career, or who to date and marry. Rather, the important thing is "who" and "how" we are in those areas. Our character and fruit must come first. Our relationship with, and focus on Him helps determine our actions in life. When we operate within His love and precepts, then His will becomes clear. His will has more to do with our temperament, attitude, and fruit than it does with the specific decisions we make. So, our focus must be on seeking Christ as Lord in all areas of life, through prayer and His Word. Then, our path will line up correctly, and we will lead a life that is transformed and triumphant!

Vs. 13-16: James is addressing people of wealth who were traders or who bought and traded land. Most were born in aristocracy or obtained wealth from dubious means. Their continual wealth was from renting and sharecropping land. These were the people who oppressed the poor. Thus, both the poor and the oppressors were a part of James' congregation, and he addressed them further in chapter five. James does not denounce wealth. Rather, he questioned the practice of seeking wealth by trusting in one's own abilities and plans instead of seeking God's. They were being presumptuous, thinking that "my life" belonged to them, and feeling secure in their means while feeling they did not need God (Jer. 12:1; Amos 6:1).

- *Come now.* In our modern vernacular, we say "pay attention" or "listen up!" The common objection to Christian precepts and applying them to life were the same then as they are today. People think that all assertions to truth are equally valid, which is *relativism*.

- *Today or tomorrow* was a philosophical statement referring to having no control of the future (Matt. 24:38; Luke 12:16-21). This is the classic statement, “Life is short; death is sure; sin is the cause; Christ is the cure!”
- *Know what will happen* refers to a stoic, philosophical statement. This means ignoring the providential, sovereign reign of God in our lives (Job 9:5-6; 28:25; Psalm 104:10-25; 145:15; 147:9; Matt. 4:4; 6:26-28; Luke 12:6-7; Acts 17:25-28; Rom. 8:28). It is to live our lives our own way with arrogant presumption and self-satisfied forgetfulness of God. This mindset shows a total disregard for God, His truth, and His call. James’ readers would wholeheartedly agree with this; however, they did not practice it! When we make plans without God, we are like a blind person stepping into the dark without guidance or sight.
- *What is your life* refers to thinking and living without faith, with only our own perception in view. This is extremely restricted because what we see is limited input that equates with limited output.
- *If the Lord wills* was a common Greek expression (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 16:7), and a Latin motto, “Deo Volente,” for centuries for committed, pious Christians. This refers to the fact that God’s will is supreme. We have no preview to future events. The future is conditional to God’s will, not ours. God is universal. He is sovereign, preserving, and leading all of us intimately and personally with care, while remaining in control of the entire universe!
- Paul lived His life from the precepts of this passage. He saw that every day is full of God’s workmanship from His mercies and providence (Rom. 1:10; Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; 2 Tim. 4:9-21). We do not get any added days or opportunities by chance; thus, we must live in the “here and now” as vigorously as we plan for the future—all in God’s sight. We are to be dependent on God, not on any fortune tellers or speculator’s so-called “knowledge” of the future. Be prudent, yes; but, also be wise in Him!
- *Boast* is claiming that our own will and power are supreme and that our trust is in our accomplishments and plans, not in God’s (Psalm 31:15; Daniel 5:23; Acts 17:28; Col.1:17). By this, we ignore the fact that God is running the world! God tells us this is evil. As Christians, the only thing we can boast of is what Christ has done for us (Daniel 4:30; 2 Cor. 11:20; 12:5-9)!
- *Evil* is being arrogant so we are ignoring God, His love, and His plan! To ignore what Christ has done for us is considered evil, both for the Christian and the non-Christian! We have the ability to ignore the heart of the cross, but we do not have the right to ignore God. This also includes ignoring what Christ did on the cross on our behalf (1 John 4:4)!

Do you know what will happen tomorrow? No one does. The Bible is not saying we are not to make plans or just sit on a couch and wait for our ship to

come in (as it will not). Nor, does it indicate for us to just pray and then put forth no effort on our part; rather, the Christian, godly life requires our effort and impact, but the principle point is that our lives are to be spent seeking what God wants from us. We seek His wisdom, not ours! The warning here is not to “play God” or to be self indulgent, thinking we have the final authority. Only God has final authority! Our lives are far better in His arms of love and care than with our whims and limited ideas (2 Cor. 5:16-17)!

Vs. 17: The warning is not to take God out of our plans. If we try to cut God out, by either deliberate action or our unconscious inaction, the result is sin. We are usurping His authority with our own. The context advocates humility and seeking God, not the world or the devil. When we seek only our plans, it places us in the world’s and devil’s camp that pushes us away from God! If we do not do what we ought to do, it is sin!

- *Does good.* The call is to be introspective with what we are doing, to allow God’s spotlight on us, so we see where we are headed and be willing to make the corrections and course changes to fit His will. If not, all we will have is our own self-satisfied forgetfulness of God that only leaves us in despair and without hope.
- *Does not do it* is being overly aggressive with our plans; this is a sure sign that Christ is not your Lord. Your Savior perhaps, but not your Lord because your will is leading your path and not His! As Christians, we are not to assert ourselves over others, as we are all God’s children. Thus, you have to find a way to balance Christian character with marketing yourself for employment, school, and competitions in sports, so you can excel to the abilities and call He has given without mowing over others or commandeering God’s will. Being a linebacker works in football; it does not work in the church!
- *Sin* is to go against God. We tend to govern our lives by what we want, not always what is best for us. This passage beckons us to seek what God wants. You may think, *hey, this is my life, and I can do what I want.* Yes, you are right, and yes, you can. But, would you really rather have your limited, imperfect perspective without the perfect, eternal, loving God’s insight and plan? James is saying God is involved in us; He is not a cosmic idea but a personal, loving God! Thus, only an extremely arrogant and dim-witted person would say *yes, I can do it on my own!* God sees it all. He has the big picture of how all things in life and all persons are interwoven in His tapestry of love and redemption. Thus, do not seek to be a person who is a loose thread and liable to be unwoven (Eph. 6:12)!

Saying “if the Lord wills” is not to be a catch-phrase or trivialized; it is to be a lifestyle. When we make plans in our life, we must always ask, *does this align with His will* (Prov. 27:1)? This is the veracity of His precepts and the character to

which He calls us. As Christians, our lives need to be prefaced by His precepts, not our desires; then, the decisions we make become easier and clearer!

God is not an *anachronism* in science or in our personal lives. Chance does not rule the universe; God's providence does! Our comfort and hope is that we do not need to be on this journey of life worrying about our destination, as we are already secured in Christ! We are to make the most out of the journey of life by embracing His precepts and plans over ours. Our lives need to be responses from what God has given us, of indebtedness and love, so all we are and do is infused with His love and care, and so our decisions are made that way, too.

The great comfort we have as Christians is that our lives, experiences, and opportunities are not happenstance; we have a purpose! We have a God who transcends space, time, and thought, who knows us intimately, and who has a plan for each of us (Acts. 18:21; Rom. 1:10; 15:32; 1 Cor. 4:19; 1 Pet. 3:17). *What does this mean for me today?* We are not to be making haphazard plans or negating research, wisdom, or counsel, as there are many passages that exhort us to plan carefully and effectively (book of Ephesians and Proverbs). Rather, the point here is not to do it without putting God first and foremost! We must be in His process, not ours, because He is personal and involved with us.

What is in the way of this thinking? Perhaps, it is our fear of conviction. Yet, in my counseling experiences, the false perceptions of people tend to be the biggest causes of fear and frustration. John Calvin stated, "we read everywhere in the Scriptures that the holy servants of God spoke unconditionally of future things, when yet they had it as a fixed principle in their minds that they could do nothing without the permission of God." Thus, the call of Scripture is to expectantly await the Holy Spirit's additions and corrections, be confident, and place our reliance in Him, so we can do all of our planning from God's providential providence. This means planning with God.

We can go further and ask God *what are my opportunities and gifts and how can I use them to Your glory?* This is an operating system for your decisions that control both your programming input and output. The system is prayer and precepts, seeking Him, and learning His Word, so you can make good, healthy decisions (Luke 12:19-20; Prov. 16:9; Isa. 56:12).

But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Luke 12:31

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?

3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Do you know what will happen tomorrow? Does having no control of the future frighten you or give you comfort?
2. How do you tend to plan things in your life—from a shopping trip to determining what job or school to undertake?
3. We tend to govern our lives by what we want, not always what is best for us. Why would a Christian do this? Why would we seek to make plans without God?
4. Do you wonder what the Lord wills for you? What happens when God is just an afterthought in your plans? What happens when we claim that our own will and power are supreme?
5. Why do you suppose that many Christians will seek to spin their wheels, trying to guess and even demanding their might and will in making plans, hoping for the best? What is left out? Have you done this? If so, how and why?
6. Why is it that our plans and ways are not sovereign? If you understood this point, do you think that, as a Christian, you could be better at planning your life?
7. How would you define being *presumptuous*? How have you experienced it in your ways and that of others? What have you observed in others or yourself when you seek wealth and trust in abilities and plans, while ignoring the providential, sovereign reign of God in your life?
8. How do you practice dependence on God? Do fortune tellers or the knowledge of speculators have an influence on you? If so, how and why? When is this bad? When is it good?

9. How do you balance this passage on planning for the future with being prudent and wise in Him?
10. How can the fact that God is concerned and involved in your life intimately, and has the best plan for you help you make better decisions?
11. What do you need to do to be better at aligning yourself with His Will?
12. Do you realize that God's will has more to do with our temperament, attitude and fruit than the specific decisions we make? If so, how can this fact help you make better decisions?

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Proverbs 27:1

© 2005 Dr. R. J. Krejcir *Into Thy Word Ministries* www.intothyword.org