



## JAMES 4:13-17

*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." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

### START TALKING

1. What is one thing that stood out to you in Sunday's message?
2. Have you ever had a big surprise in life that has taught you that you are not as in control as you think? What was this experience like?

### START THINKING

1. Read James 4:14. How does it make you feel to be compared to a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes? Does it make you feel insignificant, or does it encourage you to live in the now, or something else?
2. Read James 4:13-17. What attitude about our plans is James challenging here? How do we humble ourselves?
3. Read James 4:13-17. How can we be strengthened and encouraged through this scripture? How are we challenged so that we can learn and grow?

### START SHARING

1. Share about a time when your plans changed after seeking God's will. How did you react? What did you learn?
2. What challenges and pressures have you experienced in figuring out your future plan with God? What encouragement do you have for others going through the same thing?

## START PRAYING

What are the prayer requests in your group? Spend some time praying for one another.

## START DOING

Is there something God has been nudging you to do for Him that you've been resisting? Maybe you're worried about what people will think, or you might consider yourself unqualified or the action dangerous in some way. Keep tuning in to God's direction. Seek wise counsel from others who are close to God, and then take courage and do it!



This Sunday, we continued with our series in the book of James. Dusty shared another challenging message from James, chapter 4. We pick up in verse 13, just after James urges us to humble ourselves and avoid judging others (v6). Now he hones in on the idea of our human habit of self-reliance: **13 (problem) 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." 14 why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 instead (solution), you ought to say, "if it is the lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 as it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 if anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.** James 4:13-17.

Planning isn't a bad thing. The Bible is full of scriptures that encourage us to plan - we live by the idea that proper planning prevents poor performance. This issue here isn't future planning; James is addressing people that live according to their own plans, desires and worldly pursuits. People with the idea that we are masters of our own destiny rather than putting our lives in God's hands.

The culture of our society today promotes a self-centered, self-reliant, self-dependent approach to building our future... and when it all goes wrong, we question and blame God.

But how can we be self-reliant when we're likened to a mist (v14)? James is not the only one that likens our time on earth to a vapour that easily disappears: *Remember, o god, that my life is but a breath; Job 7:7.*

*You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. Psalm 39:5*

There couldn't be a better example of this than the year 2020. Think of all those declarations we made at the beginning of the year:

- 2020 the year of perfect vision
- 2020 the year of plenty
- 2020 the year of new heights
- 2020 the year of change and empowerment
- 2020 the year that establishes the rest to come

And yet 2020 will be remembered by most as:

- 2020 the year from hell
- 2020 the year that left us broke
- 2020 the year that broke us
- 2020 the year that shouldn't be respected as a year
- 2020 sucked!

In KZN, besides the uncertainty of Covid, we've also dealt with flooding, looting, shooting, polluting, and earth tremors - clearly, the future is not in our control!

This lesson James is teaching us is powerful: He's not telling us to stop planning for the future, but HOW to plan for the future.

### Three anchors for future planning:

#### 1. Ask God what He is doing.

*"...if it is the lord's will, we will live and do this or that."* (v15)

When last did we just stop and ask, what are You doing, Lord? For some, asking God possibly sounds like a cop-out, but this is what the Bible teaches! Enquiring of the Lord was the pillar of great men and women in the Bible. Moses enquired of the Lord, as did David, Abraham,

Joshua, Elijah, Samuel... even Jesus withdrew daily to pray, to enquire of His Father. We need to stop asking God to bless what we are doing and instead find out what He is doing because it is already blessed!

Living in God's will doesn't mean life is easy. God's will is missional, it's sacrificial, it's humble, it costs (time, money, emotions), it always involves extreme levels of loving people, it's relational and it requires spending time with God daily.

In his book, *Not Safe*, Mark Batterson tells us of a unique group of missionaries from years ago: Two centuries ago, a band of brave souls became known as one-way missionaries. They purchased one-way tickets to the mission field. Instead of suitcases, they packed their few earthly belongings into coffins. As they sailed out of port, they waved goodbye to everyone they loved and everything they knew. They knew they would never return home.

A.W. Milne (1785-1822) was one of those missionaries. He set sail for the New Hebrides in the South Pacific, knowing full well that the head hunters who lived there had martyred every missionary before him. Milne did not fear for his life because he had already submitted his life to The Father. His coffin was packed. For thirty-five years, he lived among that tribe and loved them. When he died, tribe members buried him in the middle of their village and inscribed this epitaph on his tombstone: When he came, there was no light. When he left, there was no darkness.

Billy Graham said: "The will of God will not take us where the Grace of God will not sustain us."

Life in the will of God will always be better than life in the plans of man. A.W. Milne would never have planned that for his life, but he would never have been fulfilled outside that plan from God.

We need to ask God, what do You have for my future? What do you want me to do with my life, my family, my possessions, my money?

God's grace will sustain us regardless of our environment, situation, circumstances, hardship etc., when we are in His will.

God provided for the Israelites - if was His will that they would enter the promised land and in his provision, he parted the red sea, bread and quail fell from the sky to feed them, water came from rocks to quench their thirst, their clothes never wore out, but their commitment to their own plans is what caused all their challenges.

While Paul was in the will of God, he was shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, whipped, gone hungry, left naked, imprisoned...

But in this will, God gave him:

- Courage - he kept going, even with all the challenges he experienced
- Peace that surpasses all understanding
- Joy (as he sang in prison)
- Finances (through churches and work)
- Strategic partnerships (Aquila & Priscilla, Silas, Epaphroditus, Timothy etc.)
- Passion
- Wisdom
- Gifting (he witnessed healings & miracles)
- Significance
- Intimacy with the Father that was so deep that at the end of his life he said that to live is Christ to die is gain

Life in the will of God will always be better than life in the plans of man.

## 2. Seek wise counsel

How do we know we're going to make a bad decision? When we find ourselves using phrases like: how bad could it be; you only live once; go big or go home; only one way to find out; when in Rome; what's the worst thing that could happen; better to ask for forgiveness than for permission... Stop! And ask someone for advice.

Seeking counsel is often seen as a sign of weakness, but avoiding wise counsel is a sign of foolishness:

- *Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counsellors there is victory.* Proverbs 11:14
- *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.* Proverbs 12:15
- *Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counsellors they succeed.* Proverbs 15:22
- *For by wise guidance you will wage war, and in abundance of counsellors, there is victory.* Proverbs 24:6

God's will gives us a future, but we are responsible for getting there the right way. We can seek counsel for our marriages, finances, new opportunities etc. This is why the local church is so powerful because it is a community!

There is power in the gathering of believers:

- *24 and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching.* Hebrews 10:24-25.
- *As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.* Proverbs 27:17
- *14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?* 2 Corinthians 6:14

When it comes to future planning in the pursuit of God's will, wise counsel is a must!

## 3. Submit all your plans to the Chief Architect of life

God will give us the vision, but we are responsible for walking in His plans to get there. When God warns us that we're making plans outside of His will, it's because we're in danger of being hurt and having to deal with pain.

- *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.* Psalm 127:1
- *Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans.* Proverbs 16:3

Stop planning your future and step into His plans for you!