

## The Book of James

### Session 9: James 4:13–17

#### OPEN

**Did you ever have plans that got waylaid by a completely unforeseen circumstance?**

**How did you react to that interruption or ruination of your plans?**

#### READ

Read James 4:13–17.

**Leader:** *Read it aloud yourself, or ask someone you know who is a confident reader. Ask the others to listen carefully and/or follow along.*

#### WATCH

Show Session 9: *James 4:13–17* (8 minutes).

## **DISCUSS**

We all make plans. We have to or things would be a mess. I had to plan to lead this study today. You had to plan to be here. You have to plan to do a presentation for work or study to pass an exam. You have to plan to have someone pick up your kids from school activities if you can't do it. Making plans is not the problem James is talking about here. The problem is our attitude about the plans we make.

**What attitude about our plans is James targeting here?**

James talks about "arrogant schemes." **How would you define arrogance?**

**Do you think it is arrogant to declare your plans without first actually saying the words, "If the Lord wills"?**

Some do this. It can get a little crazy when you visit a restaurant and tell the waiter, "If the Lord wills, I'll have the chicken." Or you get up to use the restroom and say, "Excuse me. If the Lord wills, I'll be back in a moment."

**Is this really what James is talking about?**

In the video, Francis said it's about asking,

God, am I really in submission to your will? Am I comparing myself to other people who I consider more arrogant, that I've overlooked my own arrogance?...OK Lord, I recognize that my life is in your hand. Every breath is a gift from you. So I surrender it to you now. What do you want me to do?

**What value do we get from reminding ourselves that our plans ultimately depend on God? Does that change what we do, or how we do it?**

**Is there a way for us to make our plans more in line with God's plans for us? How would you do that?**

[illegible]

**Is James saying we shouldn't make plans for the future? What's the point of making long-range plans if you don't know what tomorrow will bring?**

The example James uses specifically refers to "business." **Isn't it essential for businesses to do planning? How could a businessperson run a business according to this teaching from James?**

Jesus Himself affirmed the value of planning (Luke 14:28–32). The key here is that God's plans trump our plans. We need to be humble enough to recognize that God might have different priorities from ours, and we should be obedient enough to make plans with His priorities in mind.

This is not necessarily bad business. One idea gaining traction these days in the business world is the "pivot." Successful businesses are those whose plans are flexible enough to deal with shifting realities of the marketplace. Changing course is often part of success. The same may be true in the personal lives of believers. God guides us today, and He may lead us to make certain plans, but we need to keep listening to him and be willing to "pivot" and follow new directions as He directs us.

**Leader:** *Use your judgment about drilling deeper into this point. The "pivot" idea could be very helpful for individual Christians and churches alike. One person might have felt called to missionary service and prepared to go, but then circumstances prevented it. Was the "call" misunderstood? Did the person slip out of God's will? Not necessarily. Maybe God wanted the preparation, but then a different type of service. Perhaps a church plans to launch a new ministry and bathes it with prayer, but then it fails. Did they not pray hard enough? Maybe not. God sometimes leads us in a zig-zag fashion. We need to follow His leading today and tomorrow, James would say, always willing to adjust our plans for next year.*

**How does it make you feel to be compared to "a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes"? Does it make you feel insignificant, or does it encourage you to live in the now, or something else?**

Francis said,

Think of a teakettle and the steam that comes up from it, he says that's you. We'll see you for one second, then you're gone. And here you are

saying, “well here’s what I’m going to do tomorrow, in fact here’s where I’m going to go and I’m going to spend the next year there.” And James is saying, “do you not understand, that is complete arrogance?”

### Why do you think James uses that image?

## GO DEEPER

Learn more about arrogance/boasting in the following Bible verses.

1 Samuel 2:3; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; Malachi 3:13–15; 1 Timothy 6:17

### What do these verses add to James's teaching about arrogance and boasting?

## How does God feel about human arrogance?

A few of these passages make a connection between arrogance and wealth. **Why would those be connected? Is it easier for rich people to be arrogant before God? Why?**

Verse 17 raises some questions. **First, what does it mean? How would you put that in your own words?**

**Now what is it doing here? Does it go with the previous section about making plans? Or should it be put with the next chapter about rich people?** (Note that the chapter divisions were not in the original text.)

**How would the original readers of this epistle feel about what James says in verse 17?**

Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan. You probably know it, but if you need a refresher, it's in Luke 10:30–37. A man is robbed and beaten, lying on the side of the road, half-dead.

**Who comes by before the Samaritan does?**

A priest and a Levite (a temple assistant). Let's think about what they did—and didn't do—in this situation. They were headed for Jerusalem, probably going to work. Their work in the Temple required them to be ritually clean. Touching a bloody body would put them out of action, out of work. That's what the rules said. And so they passed by without helping the man.

In the words of James 1:27, they kept themselves “unstained from the world.” They remained ritually clean.

**But did they do the right thing?**

No, of course not. It was the Samaritan who helped, a man with nothing to lose, ritually speaking. He was already considered “polluted” by the religious elite. But it was he who did the right thing here.

As we've gone through James, we've seen a number of clues to indicate that his readers were Pharisee-like. They cared about religion, and yet they judged others, spewing hurtful words and causing division. They were proud, boastful, arrogant. And while they may have observed rules that kept them from certain sinful behaviors, they had a hard time helping the poor (James 2:15–16).

And so James might be telling them: “If you see a mugging victim on the side of the road and don't help, that's just as sinful as showing up at the Temple with bloody hands, maybe more so. You know you need to help the poor. Why aren't you doing it?”

## **LAST WORD**

Sometimes we live as if God does not exist. We conduct our business day to day without thinking a lot about what God wants. We make our plans based on our hopes and dreams, not God's. We may have a rather moral code of conduct, but we're not responding to God's daily guidance.

That's a problem, says James. A few verses earlier he was urging his readers to "submit yourselves to God" and to "draw near to God and He will draw near to you." That humble attitude of submission is crucial if we're going to live for Him in this world. Living in constant communication with Him is necessary if we're going to be flexible enough to change our plans based on His desires.

**How do we need to change our habits so that we can hear God's daily guidance and follow it?**

## **LIVE IT OUT**

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

**Prayer:** What plans do you have for your life, your family, your home, your business, your church? Talk with God about these, and then listen. What does He think about all this? If your plans involve others, get them in on the praying, too.

**Chart:** Look back through your life and choose 1 to 3 plans that you made long enough ago to see them develop. Then trace the development of those plans. Did things turn out as you wanted or expected? How did you interact with God through all of that? Did He lead in a certain way and then change directions? Map this process out as creatively as you can, and then examine that “map” of your life. What can you learn from that?

**Seek counsel:** As you consider plans for the future, find a wise Christian friend to consult with. Pray with them and ask their advice on determining the direction where God might be leading you.

**Dare:** 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 the action dangerous in some way. Keep tuning in to God's direction here. Get appropriate advice from others who are close to God, but then dare to do it—in the spirit of James 4:17.