



Faith and Submission

James 4:13-17 |

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SUMMARY

In our passages for this and next week James addresses the same malady in two groups of people. Both kinds of people are presumptuous about their ability to control their own destiny through (1) planning and (2) wealth. We know that neither planning nor wealth are inherently bad. Yet James makes clear that *these forms of planning and accrual of wealth are of the sort that forget God* **and** *lead to the sort of presumptuous words James mentions* (v.13-16). **Dan Dorani notes,**

"...such speech is presumptuous and arrogant in several ways: "It presumes that we will live as long as we please," it presumes that we "can make whatever plans we please: we can go today or tomorrow; the choice is ours;" and presuming that, "we have the capacity to execute whatever plan we conceive. We declare that we will make a profit."

Dorani continues, "This way of thinking **forgets three things**. It forgets **our ignorance**. We think we can plan a year in advance and come and go as we please, but we do not even know what tomorrow will bring. **It forgets our frailty**. James says: "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" (4:14). We think we can master our destiny, but our lives are as insubstantial and fleeting as the morning mist, that appears and disappears in hours. Many of us have spent time at a lake in the summer. If the nights grow cool, there will always be a mist on the lake early in the morning, at sunrise. The beauty of sunrise on a lake is a treasure, but by mid-morning, the mist is always gone. The Lord says that by the standards of eternity our lives are as ephemeral as a mist.

Presumptuous planning also **forgets our dependence on God**. Our frailty and ignorance lead to the conclusion that we should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (4:15 esv). We may still say, "We will do this or that," but James says we must have a preface: "If the Lord wills." Although Jesus had more clarity than we ever can have, he modeled this spirit in Gethsemane. Facing the cross he said, "Your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). Paul modeled the same thing when he journeyed to Jerusalem where he knew he might suffer harm. He went where he had to go and said, "The Lord's will be done" (Acts 21:14; 18:21)."

Take some time as a group to read James 4:13-17. Then ask these questions:

1. What stood out to you as you read today?
2. What point does James seem to be making?
3. How does this portion of Scripture connect to what came before? How does it connect to what comes after?
4. What didn't make sense? What do you still wonder about?
5. How much do you rely on wise planning over God? What do you suppose puts planning into the category James describes (planning that forgets God, our ignorance, frailty, and dependence upon God)?