



INTRODUCTION

“No one plans to fail, but many fail to plan” so the old adage goes. The business world says, “Time spent planning is time well spent”. Another familiar saying from society is, “Failing to plan is planning to fail”. Dwight D. Eisenhower was not only a five star general in the US Army, but also became the 34th President of the United States. He said, “Plans are nothing, planning is everything”.

Planning is big in our culture. We like to set goals, have direction, and feel as though we are in control. And so our life planning begins often during our teens years with college planning, next is wedding planning, followed by family planning, financial planning, and food planning, which necessitates fitness planning. We enter the world of business and discover strategic planning, tactical planning, operational planning, and contingency planning. We look toward the future and instigate investment planning, retirement planning, tax planning, and education planning for our children. In our later years there is estate planning and end-of-life planning. For some, planning becomes an obsession, and people are diagnosed with “excessive planning disorder”. With all the plans that modern American’s make there is one aspect that is too often ignored – planning for eternity.

James is once again confronting his audience. In this section he is concerned with their lack of spiritual planning. It was not that they had failed to plan, but that in their planning they had failed. They had mapped out their future but left out the key to not only planning but life itself – God! So James reminds these “forgetful hearers” that life apart from God is meaningless.

Transition: In these verses, two attitudes towards living life are identified. Many go through life with an attitude of pride, seeking to live life apart from God. However, real faith is characterized by humility and lives a life dependent on God.

1. Pride Lives Life Independent of God

Here is the first of the two attitudes and approaches to life. Our pride wants to live life independent of God, becoming our own “end all, be all”. However, no one is truly a “self-made, man”. We have not initially created ourselves, and we cannot indefinitely sustain ourselves. What are some evidences of one who is attempting to live life independent of God?

a. Pride is self-appointed (4:11-12)

The proud and independent self-appoints himself as judge over others. He falsely believes that he is above the law and an exception to the rules. In his attitude of arrogance he is harshly critical of others.

James reveals that this type of person will slander other brothers in Christ in an attempt to make himself look better. To “speak evil” literally meant to “speak down on, or slander”. Ironically, it is the same term that is used of the devil in James 4:7, he is a slanderer. This is someone who makes false accusations, exaggerates the faults of another, and needlessly repeats the real faults of others. They are critical and derogatory with their speech and malicious in their intent. When speaking, the proud will maximize his virtues and minimize his faults, while maximizing other’s faults and minimizing their virtues. This slanderer watches others in order to find fault and then to criticize.

Not only is the proud critical but also judgmental and condemning towards those with whom he finds fault. James says they “judge” their brother (4:11). The proud criticize and condemn in a judgmental spirit. To these self-appointed judges everyone must live according to his standard. He has become the judge and jury in one and believes himself to be exempt from obeying the law. By setting himself up as above the law, James says he is judging the law (4:11). And when you begin to judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. The person with a critical spirit acts as if he can choose what parts of God’s law he will obey and what aspects he may set aside. In effect, he proposed that he is qualified to enact a better law than God.

It is utter folly for finite human beings to attempt to assume His distinctiveness as “Lawgiver and Judge”. Behind the critical spirit is an attitude that usurps God’s authority and is full of pride. Furthermore, the real problem with judging others is that it comes perilously close to playing God. God alone is the ultimate source of all law and authority. He both gives and enforces the law. We who are accountable to God’s law cannot place ourselves in God’s place. Only God can pass judgment on a person’s actions and motives without fault, without hypocrisy, and without spite.

James wants us to understand that when a believer speaks against another believer, he is disobeying the law. The “law” James is referring to is not the Mosaic Law but the “royal law”, the “law of love”. Thus slanderous, vicious speaking against a brother is a violation of the second Great Commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself”. James says that if you tear down and judge your fellow Christian, you become a lawbreaker because you are not treating others as you would like to be treated. This kind of disobedience shows disregard for the law, and he is sitting in judgment on it. By doing so, he is putting himself above God. When we judge one another in this slanderous way, we are clearly failing to submit to God.

So James confronts those proud, critical, self-appointed judges of others by saying, “Who do you think you are!?” (4:12). We might say it, “who made you God!?” You don’t get “play God” in the lives of others, for there is only one Lawgiver and Judge, and it is not you!

Application: When we become harshly critical of others, maximizing their faults to maximize our virtues, we are evidencing our pride. When we self-appoint ourselves as the judge of other’s motives and actions, we are attempting to take on a role that belongs God alone. This doesn’t mean that we should not compassionately confront when a brother is living in sin. There is a difference in goal here. The proud looks for faults in others to condemn, the spiritual may observe faults but seek to restore.

b. Pride is self-sufficient (4:13)

A second attitude that expresses a proud independence from God is self-sufficiency. This is the attitude that is portrayed in William Ernest Henley’s poem, *Invictus*, when he writes “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul”. James would warn, “Careful captain, your ship is about to go down”.

That kind of philosophy demonstrates a self-sufficient attitude that plays God in his or her own life. They live by the motto, “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” and “call your own shots”. The self-sufficient person sets their own schedule, selects their own path, sets their own limits, arranges their own activities, and predicts their own outcome. In fairness, none of those activities are wrong in and of themselves. The problem being addressed by James is a self-sufficient attitude that excludes God from all areas of life.

These make plans without any consideration of God. They want to be in control of their own life and plans. They measure success in life by how many times they get their own way and accomplished what they had planned. James confronts, “You don’t know what will happen tomorrow!” (4:13). He wants

them to recognize that their best laid plans will not happen if God does not will it.

We have no idea what the future may bring. Experts may make predictions, but the future is unknown to all but God. Furthermore, James adds, don’t forget your life is “a vapor” (4:14). In other words, we have no assurance of a long life. Life is short. Have you noticed how quickly life seems to go by? Someone has said of life, “about the time your face clears up, your mind gets fuzzy”. Life is a vapor that appears briefly and disappears suddenly.

Illustration: The rich farmer in Luke 12 exemplifies this “self-sufficient attitude”. After filling his newly built barns with a tremendous harvest he says to his soul, “Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Lk. 12:19). God says to him, “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall all those things be?” A fool is one who makes plans for earthly life, but no plans for eternal life. God is not in their thoughts. Because God is sovereign, we must consider His will in every aspect of life.

James speaks of the perils of planning without God. These merchants had the “best laid plans”. They had planned the period (“continue a year”), they had planned the place (“such and such a city”), and they had planned the procedure (“buy, sell”), and they had planned the profit (“get gain”). However, they had left out one key factor in life’s equation – God.

Application: In pride the self-sufficient live life as practical atheists. They may not deny God’s existence in word, but in deed they live like He does not exist. Those to whom James is writing were self-assertive, self-confident, and self-centered in their purposeful ignoring of God. Many people say that they believe in God, but, in reality, they are practical atheists. That is, in the way they make decisions and plan for the future, they live as if God does not exist. To listen to their conversation we would have no idea that God is a factor in their lives.

Discussion Point: What are some common ways we become “practical atheists” and leave God out of our lives and planning? When we describe retirement in selfish terms as our time to enjoy the fruits of our labor. When we see work and careers as ways we can make money in order to buy what we want. When we define money as a symbol of independence. When make practical decisions about education, job changes, moving, investments, and spending all without prayer.

c. **Pride is self-conceited (4:16)**

A third evidence of pride and independence from God is revealed. Pride is self-conceited. These worldly businessmen were boasting about their abilities and plans, instead of giving praise to God. The word *boast* denotes a self-glorifying. This is an attitude of conceit that keeps the credit to oneself and fails to give glory to God. They were arrogantly boasting as though they could control their own destiny.

These people made more of themselves than facts warranted. They were self-conceited and self-deceived. These merchants were proud of their abilities to plan and profit in business. They attributed any success to their own personality, intellect, and ability. They were glorying in their arrogance. James confronts this self-conceited attitude by saying, “all such rejoicing is evil”. It is evil because they failed to give glory for their accomplishments.

Illustration: Napoleon was a brilliant military commander and a tactical genius on the battlefield. Just before the Battle of Waterloo began, the emperor outlined his strategy to one of his subordinates. This humble officer reminded the emperor that “man proposes, but God disposes.” Napoleon, with an air of perfect superiority, replied, “Napoleon proposes, and Napoleon disposes.” Then the rain began to fall, transforming the ground into a field of pure mud and hindering the French advance. In the end, Napoleon was defeated. In his pride he had discounted God.

Application: We must remember that God alone gives us life, sustains our life, and allows us to accomplish anything in life. There is no place for self-glory when all the glory belongs to God alone.

Transition: Pride lives life independent of God. It is unable to recognize God as Lawgiver and Judge, and unaware of God’s creating and sustaining power, leading to unwillingness to give God the glory He alone deserves. This is the godless mindset and attitude that James has been confronting. But there is a proper way to approach life that James is encouraging.

2. **Humility Lives Life Dependent on God**

Humility is not a term that the world aspires to or readily accepts. Yet, it is the one that God announces is the key to receiving His grace (4:6). Remember a humble person is one who understands that he must rely on God for everything. Therefore, he lives with an attitude of dependence on God. This attitude is evidenced in several ways.

a. **Humility affirms God’s sovereignty (4:12)**

A humble person understands that ultimately it is God who has given man the true standards and who holds him accountable. It is He alone who not only made the law but also has the authority to carry out all final judgment. So instead of being critical and condemning of others, the humble person affirms God as the rightful Lawgiver and Judge of man. The humble person places himself under the law and not above it. He sees his own faults as greater than the faults of others.

This does not prohibit believers from making any kind of moral judgments regarding each other. Scripture actually commands believers to evaluate the conduct of others and take appropriate action. What James is prohibiting is a judgmental spirit that usurped authority belonging to God alone. Humility affirms God’s sovereignty.

b. **Humility acknowledges man’s frailty (4:14)**

The humble person acknowledges the uncertainty of life. He lives by Proverbs 27:1, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”. Your life is transitory, precarious, and not totally controllable or predictable. Life is short and death is certain. Job pondered this truth throughout his suffering (Job 7:6, 9; 8:9; 9:25, 26). No doubt it was one of the truths God used to bring him to a place of humility and dependence.

We count and celebrate our years on earth by birthdays, but God tells us to number our days (Ps. 90:12). Someone has well said, “Life is short no matter how long you live”. The man who makes his earthly plans without sensitivity to the nature of life itself is clearly foolish and spiritually ignorant. While life may be uncertain to us, it is not uncertain to God.

Our lives are much like money. We can spend life, waste life, or invest life. Some waste their lives enslaved to sin and ultimately bound for hell. A life lived without Christ is a wasted life. Others spend their life selfishly. They may know Christ, but they have chosen to live for the “here and now”. How much better to live life the way God intended it, all for the glory of God? That would be a life invested for the cause of Christ. It is the one who whether they “eat, or drink, or whatever they do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31).

By acknowledging the frailty of man and brevity of life, James is not condemning wise planning. He is denouncing a plan that leaves God out. He is not making an argument against careful plans; rather, he is cautioning us to submit to God even in our planning. The shortness of life should sharpen our vision from the temporal to the eternal.

John Wesley said, “Realizing the future is uncertain not only teaches us trust in God, it helps us to properly value the present. To be obsessed with future plans may work our failure to appreciate present blessings or our evasion of present duties”.

c. Humility accepts God’s will (4:15)

Believers cannot live independently of God. We are to plan, but we are to recognize God’s higher will and divine sovereignty. Our plans should be evaluated by God’s standards and goals, and they should be prayed over with time spent listening for God’s advice. Apart from the will of God, life is a mystery. Only through knowing and serving Christ can life make sense.

We have no right to ignore God’s will in any aspect of our lives. We need to live with an attitude of acceptance to the will of God. James says “we ought to say if the Lord wills” (4:15). This is not just a phrase Christian’s should tag-on to their future planning, but an orientation of life. We are to humbly submit our lives and will to God’s will. We must accept that God governs all things in our life, even the “mundane” decisions.

“If the Lord wills” acknowledges and accepts God’s direction and approval for life. It is a mind-set that says, “I need God’s grace, and I am dependent on the will of God in every facet of my life”. When one’s perspective is correct, it will be reflected at times in words, but always shows in the way he looks at life and makes his plans.

A believer must recognize his dependence on God for everything. Our life itself is a gift from God, and the ability to accomplish anything in this life comes from God. We must put God’s desires at the center of our planning. For some, that is a troubling thing to do. But as we humbly accept God’s will it should not lead to fear but be lead by faith. God’s will is an expression of His love, so there is not reason to fear. Weirsbe says, “The will of God comes from the heart of God”. His heart is to lead, guide, protect, and provide for His children. Someone has said, “To know God’s will is life’s greatest treasure, and to do God’s will is life’s greatest pleasure”.

George Truett has said, “There is no failure in God’s will, and no success outside of it”. Therefore “to know the will of God is the greatest knowledge, to find the will of God is the greatest discovery, and to do the will of God is the greatest achievement”.

God’s will is not something mystical but understandable. When we are willing to accept God’s will for our lives and live in obedience to it, He reveals it. God

is not obligated to reveal His will to the curious or careless, but to those who are the committed and consecrated, He does. The Christian who knows, loves, and obeys the will of God will be able to experience and enjoy God’s blessing.

d. Humility applies God’s Word (4:17)

God has revealed His will through His Word. Knowing and obeying the Word of God is the surest way to success (Joshua 1:8). In verse 17, James provides a summary statement of the first four chapters. It reads much like a memorable proverb, “Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (4:17). There are many who may know God’s Word and will but chose to ignore it. James calls this disobedience and sin.

There are two categories of sins, commission and omission. A sin of commission is doing something that God has clearly said not to. IE – thou shalt not commit adultery, kill, steal, lie. To commit adultery, murder, steal, or tell a lie is sin, a sin of commission. There are also sins of omission. This is failing to do what God has told us to do. Sins of omission are often overlooked as “respectable sins”. God says be a witness, be praying, or be holy. When I fail to share my faith, do not take the time to pray, and neglect my pursuit of holiness before God, these are sins of omission. I have neglected to do what should have been done. Someone has said, “It is a greater sin to fail to do what you ought to do than to do what you ought not to do”.

Illustration: A man who was being fired from his job complained, “Why are you firing me? I haven’t done anything.” His boss replied, “Exactly – that’s why you are fired”.

Some think that they are good Christians because of what they don’t do. If that is the case, the best Christians are in the cemetery because they don’t do anything!

James is saying that it is not enough to simply know the right thing to do, we must do the right thing. Christianity includes stopping the wrong things and starting the right things. If we continue to live as if God isn’t interested in certain areas of our lives, it is sin. By trying to call our own shots, make our own plans, and do our own thing we are not doing what God wants us to do. God’s Word shows us the right path, we must humbly submit to it in obedience.

Application: James would have liked the Nike slogan, “Just do it!” Are you doing the things you know to be right? What sin of omission is in your life? Sins of omission get started by stopping, and they can be stopped by starting. You know what is right, do it!

CONCLUSION

What type of attitude does your life demonstrate? Pride tries to live life independent of God. It is self-appointing, self-sufficient, and self-conceited. It believes itself to be above the law and judging in the place of God as it criticizes others. It considers itself to be self-made and self-sustaining as it makes future plans without any consideration of God's will. It is arrogant as it boasts in its own accomplishments refusing to give the glory to God. These are evidences of pride, and God resists the proud (4:6). In contrast, a humble person lives life in dependence on God. They affirm God to as sovereign. They acknowledge man's frailty along with the brevity and uncertainty of life. They accept God's will by submitting themselves and their plans to God. They apply God's Word to their life. They know what is right and do it. To the humble, God gives grace. Real faith depends on God.