



July 20, 2025

Real Wisdom for a Messy World

DON'T GET ATTACHED TO YOUR PLANS

James 4:13-17



1. **Opening Discussion:** (You will probably want to use only one of these openers)

- a. When preparing for a vacation, some people like to make plans in excruciating detail, while others prefer the flexibility of just going with the flow. Which are you? What is the advantage of detailed planning? What advantages are there to a less structured approach?
- b. Describe a time in your life when a completely unexpected event totally changed your plans for the immediate future. How did you feel at the time? Looking back on the event in hindsight, do you see it in a positive or negative light? Did you feel the same way at that time?
- c. Most children have some definite ideas about what they want to be when they grow up – sometimes those dreams change frequently, while for others they actually come to fruition. How did your childhood ambitions compare with the way your life turned out?

2. **Prayer:**

- a. **Adoration** – Pray a Psalm or other Scripture to focus on praising God.
- b. **Confession** – Spend time confessing any known sins. 1 John 1:9
- c. **Thanksgiving** – Thank God for answered prayers, blessings, gifts, and opportunities to serve.
- d. **Supplications**
 - i. Pray for the activities of His Church locally and around the world.
 - ii. Pray for the spiritual and physical needs of others and yourself.
- e. **Least Reached People Group: Cabiary of Colombia** (*from the IMB “Loving the Lost Through Prayer” guide*)

“Most Cabiary (cah-beeyah-REE) of Colombia live in the tropical Amazon rainforest, but some live in major cities. Their communities have a captain as the leader, and he or she has the most authority in the village. But overall, it is a communal society. The Cabiary grow crops, hunt, fish, and gather food. They barter with other Indigenous groups who live in the area. There is no Scripture available in their language. A sacred, ancestral anaconda is the center of their animistic worldview, and they believe they are all its descendants. They don’t have access to learn about the one true God in their language. Pray God will show the Cabiary He is the one true Creator God and will break the bonds of animism.”

3. **Sermon Key Points**

- a. Don’t make plans without acknowledging God (verse 13)
- b. In comparison to eternity, life on earth is brief and fragile (verse 14)
- c. Have the Right Attitude Toward the Future, submit to God’s sovereign will (verse 15)

- d. Boasting in self-made plans and independence from God is evil (verse 16)
- e. God condemns those who know what is right but refuse to do the thing. (verse 17)

4. Bible Study:

a. **Sunday Afternoon** – As soon as possible after the sermon, make time to consider:

- i. What stood out to you the most in this sermon?
- ii. What new truth did you learn, or what truth were you reminded of?
- iii. Is there a particular Scripture passage you feel God is leading you to meditate on or commit to memory?
- iv. What is one thing God is leading you to do after hearing this message?
- v. Did God convict you of a need to make any changes in your life and walk with Him?

b. **Monday:**

- i. The focal passage this week is James 4:13-17. Today, we will consider the entire passage, and then, throughout the rest of the week, we will examine each verse individually. Read James 4:13-17 several times, using different translations if possible, and meditate on the commands and questions James includes in these verses.
- ii. According to James, what attitudes should we have when discussing our future plans?
- iii. What does it mean to say 'If the Lord wills' when making plans?
- iv. James points out three different attitudes people can have about the will of God.
 - 1. What attitude is depicted in verses 13-14 & 16?
 - 2. What attitude is described in verse 17?
 - 3. What attitude is encouraged in verse 15?
- v. How does this passage challenge your understanding of the future and our role in it?
- vi. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty in our lives?
- vii. How can acknowledging God's control over our plans deepen our relationship with Him?

c. **Tuesday:**

- i. Read and meditate on James 4:13, then read Luke 12:16-21.
- ii. Verse 13 begins with two Greek words translated “come now” (“now listen” in the NIV) that were commonly used to introduce a “diatribe” (a piece of writing that severely criticizes). How does such an introduction influence the understanding of what James thought about the quotation to follow?

- iii. What group or class of people do you think James had in mind when he wrote “you who say”?
- iv. When you read just verse 13, what attitude or action might James be condemning?
- v. Which verses from the Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke most closely align with verse 13?
- vi. Many authors describe both those whom James is addressing and the Rich Fool as “functional (or practical) atheists”. How are their life decisions showing that they don’t really believe God exists? What are some of the common ways we make plans and talk about the future that show we, too, are sometimes “functional atheists”?

d. Wednesday:

- i. Read and meditate on James 4:14, then read Proverbs 27:1 and reread Luke 12:16-21?
- ii. How does James characterize the length of our lives?
 1. How does his description compare with Job 7:7&9, 9:25-26, Psalm 39:5, 39:11, 62:9, 90:5-6, and 90:10?
 2. Why is this significant in relation to the assumption that these businessmen (and farmers) make about their financial success?
 3. Which should we be more concerned about?
- iii. Read the shockingly timely parable in Matthew 7:24-27. How do you feel it relates to this verse in James?
- iv. Now that you have looked at both verses 13 & 14, do you feel James is opposing planning for the future? Making a profit? If neither, what is his concern?
- v. What additional insight does Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6:19-21 provide?

e. Thursday:

- i. Read and meditate on James 4:15, then read Matthew 6:25-34.
- ii. What insight does verse 15 provide about the spiritual status of the merchants James is addressing? How does it tend to personalize for us the entire passage?
- iii. After considering verse 15, do you think James is telling us that planning and investing for the future is wrong? If not, what does he tell us is wrong?
- iv. How did Jesus demonstrate this principle in His life (Matthew 26:39-42, Luke 22:42, John 4:34, 5:30, and 6:38)? How does He clearly teach that we are to do the same in His model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)?
- v. How did Paul demonstrate that he lived by the principle James is teaching (see Acts 18:21, Romans 1:10 & 15:32, and 1 Corinthians 4:19)?
- vi. Think about your typical day in light of this verse. How often do you think you should consider the Lord’s will as you talk and plan? Even if it’s not necessary

to say it every time, how can you work to cultivate that kind of dependence on God in your own life and thinking?

f. **Friday:**

- i. Read and meditate on James 4:16, then read Daniel 4:28-37.
- ii. Does James teach us that boasting is always wrong? If not, what makes boasting wrong (see Proverbs 27:1 and 16:33)?
- iii. What does Paul tell us we should be particularly careful not to boast about (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 & 6)? We will probably never be tempted to boast about the particular sin Paul is addressing, but what are some modern equivalents that we might encounter?
- iv. What does Paul teach us are acceptable boasts (see 1 Corinthians 1:31, 15:31, 2 Corinthians 1:14, 10:17, 11:30, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:3, and 2 Thessalonians 1:4)?
- v. Are there any church activities that we might boast about which would fall into the category of activities James is addressing? What are some of the practical applications of this passage to how we address the success of our church programs? Who should get all of the credit and glory?
- vi. Why is King Nebuchadnezzar's closing statement (Daniel 4:37b) particularly relevant (see also Matthew 23:12)?

g. **Saturday:**

- i. Read and meditate on James 4:17, then read Matthew 25:31-36.
- ii. What does James define as sin? How does this differ from our most common definition of sin?
- iii. Read Luke 12:47-48 and John 19:41. How do these teachings by Jesus relate to what James is writing? Taken together, and considering what Jesus told us about the sheep and the goats, how much emphasis do you think we should place on this verse? Do you think the principle gets the attention it deserves?
- iv. What applications does/should 4:17 have to your life? What should change because of it?

5. **Application:**

- a. When we fail to seek, ignore, or outright reject the will of God in our planning for the future, we are, at a minimum, denying the Sovereignty of God (see Isaiah 46:9-10) and may in fact be a "functional atheist". However, just adding the words "if God wills" is not sufficient. Our hearts must be changed, and we must truly accept Him as our Lord, with all that that implies.
- b. As evangelical Christians, we place great emphasis on the importance of introducing unbelievers to Christ, which is absolutely right. However, the Bible also instructs us to love our brothers and sisters and to care for those in need. We can't say we don't know those commands so when we do not help, James tells us we sin. However, Jesus tells us something far worse in Matthew 25:31-36.