

The Book Of James: Keeping It Real

James 4:13-17

What is your life?

If you are watching this video, your life consists of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. Time marches on—with or without your permission. God, who determines the length of your life, leaves you completely at His mercy.

Job 14:5

You decide how long anyone will live. You have established the number of his months. You have set a limit to the number of his days.

Therefore, how you spend your time, and how you order your life, is up to you. Will you live the balance of your life unto yourself and according to your own plans—as some of the Jewish Christians in today's passage did—or will you live unto God?

Ephesians 5:15-21

Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

James is urging his readers to consider the brevity of life, and even more so because they had given their lives over to God (1 Corinthians 6:19) to direct and guide in His Word—in His perfect time and ways:

Proverbs 3:1-8

My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

Problems begin when believers order their lives *apart* from prayer and God's clear Word. Here James is not only speaking to the Jewish Christians of his day, but he is exhorting us today to consider the consequences of disconnection and disobedience.

***QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** Living unto God is not a perfect process. We are still in the flesh, and therefore still subject to distractions—from the devil, self, or the world. What spiritual disciplines have you—or would you like to—implement to facilitate a more consistent walk with God?

***STUDY POINT:** Find two Biblical people in the Scriptures—other than Jesus—that you would model your walk with God after? Write down those passages and study out what practices of life, and of the mind and heart, that make their walk with the Lord so attractive to you?

James 4:13

(KJV) Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

(NIV) 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."

James 4:14

(KJV) Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

(NIV) 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.

We will call this attitude *arrogant presumption*. What? Let me explain:

We all make decisions and plans every day to do this or that and go here or there. To buy and sell, to make money or spend it. However, James is addressing the sinful attitudes of two social classes here that included basic merchants who ran businesses and had money enough, as well as the rich, well-bred upper-class wealthy who amassed millions from land-based revenues such as tenant farmers and crops. In other words, men of means and influence—greatly blessed of God. When people whom God has blessed and called for *His glory* live according to their own dreams and plans, they not only forfeit the favour of God—they *sin*.

James 4:16

(KJV) But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

(NIV) As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil.

James 4:17

(KJV) Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

(NIV) If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

Arrogant presumption is deceptive idolatry because we plan as if our lives were our own—as if we will live forever. The truth is we each and all belong to God and are not only recipients of His great mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10)—subsequently, we are accountable stewards of the limited time He gives us on earth.

***QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** Are you shocked that Scripture calls arrogant presumption sin? Is there not grace for those times when we err on the side of self—and make decisions apart from God? Of course! (See James 4:6). Do you read James 4:16-17 as strict religious writ, or as encouraging instruction? Write down how you feel when you read these verses, and based on the context of this section of text, what you believe the author's intent is for his readers.

Now if our sin nature indeed inevitably draws us out of God's will (read Paul's struggle in Romans 7:7-25)—especially where important life and financial decisions are concerned—James here offers great Biblical encouragement to his Jewish Christian audience, and to followers of Jesus today.

James 4:15

(KJV) For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

(NIV) Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Is this great? Submitting to God's will—praying about all decisions, big and small. Then humbly submitting to His direction. When you read this verse, there should be a peace in your heart about it. When you apply it to challenging crossroads in your life, you give God permission to do what He will, knowing that His ways are perfect. No longer will you be found outside His will—floundering, fruitless, confounded as to how you ended up in a dry, desert place. You settle in your heart that God's ways are best. And you stay. You stay. Again, *you stay with Him.*

John 15:7-8

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Psalms 1:3

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

A couple of the benefits and blessings of a right relationship with God are answered prayer, and a fruitful life that blesses you, your family, and the people you love—and God is glorified!

If my words remain in you. That's it! Jesus has given us victory over our arrogant presumption—our sinful tendency to do what we want we want and then attach His name to it. Beloved, no more!

So I ask again,

What is your life?

Well, life these past two years has been challenging and hard—but used of God to expose our true hearts and reveal where our belief and trust for life and eternity are rooted. I pray for you and me that our simple, childlike faith will be found only in Jesus and the unchanging Word of God.

We conclude with these words from Psalm 19 that will help you reset your heart in holiness and settle into God's will and ways—as you daily make decisions that He cares a lot about.

Psalm 19:7-14

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland