

HOMEGROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give your group wisdom and understanding and then
Read James 4:13-17
- **Kid Questions:**
 - 1) Can you think of some times in your life where you made plans without asking God about them? How did those plans turn out?
 - 2) In verse 14, James says that your life is “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” How does that make you feel? What does that make you think about? Why?
- **Whole Group:** Considering these verses, your quiet time this week and Sunday’s message, did something stand out to you? Do you feel God brought your attention to a particular point? Is there a question that you have about this text?
(If you were not able to attend church Sunday you can always listen to the message on our phone app or at adventurecommunitychurch.com/resources/sermons/)
- James is ultimately refuting a worldview that boasts in its self-reliance. Are there some areas where you have realized there is either some pride or boasting that pairs with your self-reliance? Maybe it’s hard to think of times where you’ve outwardly been prideful or boasted about your self-reliance, but what about internally? What has gone on in your heart?
- Similar to the kids’ question, what kinds of emotions and or thoughts evoke in you when you read verse 14? Do you find yourself relieved to know that your life here on Earth is short, or is this more unsettling? How come?
- What should our posture be as Christians living with this tension of being here on earth and yet this not being our true home?

DAY ONE

Read James 4:13

How often do we find ourselves planning? This is something our culture is uniquely gifted at, isn't it? For myself, at times it's depressing when I look at my calendar and realize that I have to schedule something weeks in advance simply because there's no time left to offer. On the contrary, there is an efficiency and productivity that comes with planning. And effective planning actually opens the door to more freedom in a lot of ways. Here's the good news, James isn't rebuking planning in this passage. All you pocket day-planners can breathe a sigh of relief. James is really after the heart. His focus is with the worldly self-confidence that so easily sneaks in with our plans and goals. He is concerned with the pride and arrogance that comes knocking on our door when our plans and goals are successful. These are the things in which James is encouraging the church to be wary of. So then, what is James saying? Again, he's after the heart. Rather than discouraging successful planning and goals he encourages a heart of humility and submission in our planning.

REFLECT

- What plans are in motion in your life that haven't been submitted to the Lord? Having a hard time thinking of one? Invite the Lord to reveal one to you. Here is the beautiful thing about submission, when we submit to someone who is more skilled or more knowledgeable than we are, their strengths then become our own. We are in relationship with a perfect God who has infinite strength and wisdom. His plans and goals for our lives are far better than anything we could dream up.
- Take some time now to pray and give those plans to the Lord.

RESPOND

- *Lord, I repent for the ways I have let my pride or ignorance get in the way of inviting you into my planning. Will you forgive me for not letting you be a part of that. Jesus, I want to submit my planning to you now. I submit my agenda, my to do lists, and I ask for the grace that when things go differently than planned, my response will be one of joy and not selfishness. Thank you, Lord for your grace. Amen.*

DAY TWO

Read James 4:14

Life is short. You will die. This is essentially what James is saying in verse 14. This verse is actually based out of Proverbs 27:1, as much of James letter comes from wisdom literature in the Old Testament. Proverbs 27:1 says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring” (ESV). I love the contrast James is making in this passage between a day and year. Here he is writing about businessmen who are talking about their plans for staying a whole year, and he’s saying, “Hold up! You don’t even know what’s going to happen tomorrow.” It’s very clear by now in this passage that James is tracing a theme of humility. James is bringing perspective back into the minds of the businessmen who are planning so far ahead, and he offers us the same perspective today. The certainty of life only rests in the hands of our Maker. For us, life is uncertain. But we should take hope in knowing that our tomorrows are known and secure in the Father. It’s only when we know that we are in His care that we can be confident of tomorrow.

REFLECT

- What kinds of thoughts does this passage in James provoke in you when you think about your life being “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes?” I experience this as fairly paradoxical, and maybe you can relate. On one side, my flesh hates the idea that my life is simply a mist that comes and goes. The weight of that statement comes crushing down on my pride, which evidently I’m sure is the effect James wants to have on his audience. But then, there’s a part of me that is actually relieved to hear that my time here on Earth is short and fragile because it is paired with the hope that Heaven lies ahead. And also that the evils and darkness in this world are simply a blimp on the radar in comparison to eternity in the Kingdom.
- What is your perspective on your life? Do you find yourself holding tightly to it, afraid of letting go? Or maybe you want nothing more than to be in Heaven?

RESPOND

Father, give me grace to see my life through your eyes. I don’t want to hold tightly to the things of this world, but instead to live with an urgency for the work that awaits your kingdom. Help me to live with a kingdom passion! I want to run the race well, even for the short time you have me here. Lord, thank you for the hope of Heaven. I can’t wait to see you face to face. I look forward to that moment with all my heart!

DAY THREE

Read James 4:15

What is the Lord's will for your life??? I'm sure the answer came to you immediately after reading that question (*yes, this is me trying to be funny*). This can often feel like HUGE question to answer and the Bible is the best place to start looking for answers to this question. Take a deep breath. There are actually plenty of verses that give clear instruction on what God's will for your life is.

"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." - **1 Peter 2:15**

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

John 15:17, Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:23, Matthew 28:19-20, Colossians 3:12, (and the list goes on...plus, just in James alone we can find numerous instruction on what God's will for our life is).

God's word is FILLED with answers on his will for your life, but he doesn't just stop there! There's even more to discover about His will for your life that is unique, crafted specially for you to walk into and fulfill. That's what James is after in this passage. He is not talking about simply making lip service to God by saying, "If it is your will God..." He is after a much deeper heart. James is talking about it being a constant attitude reflected from a heart that is close to the Lord. And as we get close to Him, we discover incredible things about his character. God's nature is a wild one! He's not interested in telling you steps abc to discovering your life. He wants to have relationship with you. Doesn't it make so much sense that the God who is wild at heart wants you to discover more of His will for your life through the adventure he has for you and not through some detailed instruction manual?

REFLECT

- How do you view God's will? Is it palpable to you or is more like some distant, mysterious star that seems light-years away? After reading today's devotion, how do you think God feels about you discovering His will for your life. God wants to walk with you. He wants to be your closest friend. If you think about it, it really is a grace that discovering more of His will for our lives isn't laid out in some step by step instruction manual. Where would the relationship be in that?

RESPOND

Just go spend time with Him. Maybe this means going for a walk on a trail. Maybe this means singing or playing worship and praise. Or maybe going on a long drive where you can just sit and be with him. The point is that God is after relationship. It is the heartbeat behind everything that he does. Go experience Him for who he truly is.

DAY FOUR

Read James 4:16

In this verse, James is rebuking a very specific kind of boasting and arrogance, which relates to his previous points in the passage. If I were to break it down to a very basic and contemporary translation, I think James is saying this: “you people are getting a kind of pride in yourself in planning for your future with such confidence. Cut it out! It’s bad!” James is once again reiterating a biblical perspective to the people he is writing to, urging them to see how foolish it is to make plans apart from God. And at the end of the day, man’s pride only covers up man’s weakness. A wise mentor of mine has always taught me that pride and fear are two sides of the same coin. Where pride exists, fear is lurking in the shadows. We are terrified of our weakness being exposed, of being found out. But that is what makes the Gospel so powerful and so life-changing. In our hiding and in our pride-masked fear, God sees us for who we truly are. His creation, fearfully and wonderfully made. And he is so passionately in love with his creation, that he sent his son to die for us so that he could clear away all of the junk and lies that keep us from discovering who we truly are and from being with Him.

REFLECT

- Take some time to do some deep excavation in your own heart. What areas of your life are operating out of a place of pride?
- Can you think of how that pride is connected to fear?

RESPOND

With those areas of pride and fear in mind, bring those to the Lord now. First, take a moment to repent. Ask the Lord to forgive you for covering up your fear with places of pride in your life. Then, invite him to speak to those places of fear. Allow him to bring his light and illuminate the truth about who you really are and how he sees you. Last, invite him to retake control in your life over those areas that you have been governing.

DAY FIVE

Read James 4:16

Before getting into today's verse, I believe it is important to share the differing scholarly views on its interpretation. Most every academic theologian believes that the placement of this verse seems rather odd and abrupt. Some contend that James is summarizing all the instruction he has given thus far with this verse. In other words, he has just spent 4 chapters laying out instructions on the good we ought to do, so now there is no excuse. Not doing it, amounts to sin. Other scholars argue that James is focused on referring to God's will in verse 15. These people know the will of God but choose to disobey it. This suggests an even higher level of boasting and arrogance than what is laid out in verse 16--one that the Lord speaks very seriously about. "For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Peter 2:21). Pride is a powerful thing. It puts us in the driver's seat and deceives us into thinking that we are in control of our own fate. Indeed, James encourages Christians to obey God's will and do what he has asked.

**Thankfully, whether this statement is referring just to verse 15 or a conclusion summary thus far of the entire letter, its underlying message is the same. And that is part of the beauty and mystery of God's Word. It is living and active! A perfect understanding is not a prerequisite for God's truth to speak to our hearts and transform our lives. Amen for that!*

REFLECT

- This verse brings up a very important theological doctrine called sins of commission and omission. Sins of commission are acts that we commit. For example, stealing or lying are sins of commission. But James makes it clear in this verse that it is also sin to know the truth and not to act on it. This is what we call sins of omission. I think as Christians, it is very easy to focus on sins of commission. After all, this is usually what we are taught about most. But scripture makes it absolutely clear that sins of omission are just as serious. This reminds me of the parable of the sheep and goats. **(Read Matthew 25:31-46)**

RESPOND

- *Father, I pray that all this great teaching and learning in James over the past couple of months would not just be head knowledge. I pray that it would seal in my heart as well. Lord, I want to be your servant who lives-out their faith. Lead me deeper into living out my faith today, Jesus. Amen.*

DAY SIX

Review of this weeks study: Read James 4:13-17

When reading through James 4:13-17, one thing is very clear. James presents a worldview that principally excludes God and is marked by a boastful self-reliance that is thematic throughout the passage. He counters this worldview by reminding his audience that their life is uncertain, frail, and that only God alone is mighty enough to know what tomorrow holds.

REFLECT

- *Take some time to look back through this study and also your journal to reflect on what the Lord has taught you and the things He has spoken to you in your study.*
- *In this passage, James brings fresh perspective. This makes me think about how often I need fresh perspective in my life. How easy it is for me to barely get off kilter, but how that one degree off makes for a huge margin after time. What about you?*
- *In the respond section, I'm going to list some questions that I'd like to invite you to take before the Lord. God's primary focus is about having relationship. He yearns jealously for you (James 4:5). There is so much more abundant life available when we let go of being the one in control. For one, we are simply fooling ourselves by thinking that it is even attainable. And two, we miss out on such an adventurous relationship with Jesus. So take some time to really dive deep into this next section*

RESPOND

- Where do you need to ask Jesus to give you fresh perspective as it relates to this passage?
- What areas in your life do you need to repent of for taking pride or boasting in self-reliance?
- Now that you've taken some time to mine those areas out and give them to the Lord, invite Him to develop you into being more reliant on Him. This can be a scary prayer, but it is the doorway to more of the abundant life that He has to offer his children.