

James 4:13

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder, do you have your summer holiday booked? Do you know what you're doing this afternoon? Do you have plans after Easter? Children, do you have plans for your school holidays at Easter? I know they just have half time, but when Easter comes, you've got plans? Those are still a bit older, have you got your pension sorted out yet? Do you know when you can retire? If you'll ever be able to retire?

Are you the sort of person who likes to book things up? Or do you prefer to look on lastminute.com and see what you can get cheaply at the end? What sort of person are you? They're not unreasonable questions, are they? It's true because we live our lives thinking a bit about the future, don't we?

So as we look at these verses in James, I want us to understand first of all what James is not criticising. What he's not criticising. Look at verse 13. Come now, you who say today or tomorrow, we'll go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit. He's not criticising having some sort of plans for the future.

Proverbs 15, verse 22, assumes we will have plans. It says a plan fails. Without counsel, plans fail. But with many advisors, they succeed. We're expected to plan someone. If you read through the New Testament, you find the apostles planning. Romans 15, verses 24 and 25.

Paul talks about his plans to come to Rome and then on to Spain. And all through the Bible, we see people planning. In Luke chapter 19, Jesus tells a parable in which a king going after the crown gives his servants, some miners, to invest.

[1 : 45] And the one who gets told off, the one who gets judged at the end, is the one who had no plan. He had no plan of what to do, so he didn't do anything. And he was judged for it.

So if you don't have plans, we just drift and waste. If we're going to be good stewards of what God has given us, we do need to plan. That's one of the implications of that parable, even though it's not the main point.

So the sense which we need to plan. Some of you right now are planning what you're going to choose for your GCSEs, or planning what ALMS you'll choose. Some of us are maybe planning what we hope will happen work-wise.

Financially, you need to have some plans, otherwise we'll never pay off mortgages. Or pay our rent. So as human beings, we have to plan, because we do not know everything, and cannot control everything.

So James is not criticising planning in itself. So is he condemning travel? You who say, we'll go here, we'll go there, and make some money. Well then he's not condemning travel either.

[2 : 45] In itself. Again, read through the Bible, you see people travelling. In the book of Ruth, you see Naomi leaving her homeland, travelling and travelling back.

In the book of Acts, we see people travelling left, right and centre. Yes, to communicate the Gospel. But in some cases, Acts chapter 16, we make a Mussolini called Midian, who had moved from her home in Thyatira in modern Turkey, to Philippi in modern Greece.

She moved to make money. She was a business lady. James isn't condemning travel necessarily. So is he condemning making a profit? That's all these people are doing, is that we'll spend a year here and trade and make a profit.

Is that the problem? Certainly there's a lot of people critiquing making profits, aren't they? They occupy Wall Street and occupy London movements. Saying capitalism is a terrible thing.

And certainly Jesus makes some warnings about money, doesn't he? He warns us our life does not consist in the abundance of what we have in our possessions. He warns us we cannot serve God and money.

[3 : 52] So yes, there's a danger there. But making a profit in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. What if you want to eat? So James isn't condemning planning, or profit making, or travelling.

So what is he condemning? Well look at verse 14, we get a bit of a clue. You've got these plans, he says, yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a time and then vanishes. So what James is condemning here is these people's self-confidence.

They have their plans, they think it's all going to work out. They make their plans entirely in their own self-confidence, with no reference to God whatsoever. As if they're completely independent from God.

As if they do not need God. As if they were utterly in control. So James is saying, hang on a second, who are you? You're like a mist that is here today, gone in a moment.

[4 : 53] Now of course James is not talking about the average British mist. Which if it was there in the morning, could still be there at night. He's talking about the Middle East, isn't he? For us it's perhaps better to think of the vapour from a kettle.

Look at a kettle boiling and some water of April appears and it's gone, isn't it? Fleets it. He says that's what human life is like. You cannot guarantee anything. Look at these people.

Look at verse 13. They're confident of their health, aren't they? We'll go here, we'll stay there a year or two. We'll live that long. They're confident of their health. They're confident of their choices. We know this place or that place.

They're confident of their own ability. We will pray and make a profit. I wonder how many people heading up to the city tomorrow morning would love to have that confidence in the current economic situation.

As John Calvin put it, their minds were drunk with vanity, so they forgot God. They were drunk with vanity, so they forgot God. And James makes that even clearer in verse 16.

[5 : 53] As in the East he said, you boast in your arrogance. Now that word boasting in the original language can be positive or negative. It's the word Paul uses in Galatians chapter 6.

It's about I boast in the cross of Jesus Christ. It's about having your confidence in something. Well, these people have their confidence. They boast in their confidence in what?

Their own arrogance. Their own self-sufficiency. Their own self-confidence. That they are in control. That's an easy trap for us to fall into, isn't it?

Because it's the way of the world around us. Self-confidence is seen as a value. Something to be prized these days, isn't it? You can read books about how to boost your children's self-confidence. You can hear a sportsman, they interviewed, saying, I had to back myself. I had to be confident. When you look on millions of websites. Here's one I read this week. LiveStrong.com That's a great website title, isn't it?

[6 : 52] To achieve even the smallest goals. And to get through life's daily duties and responsibilities. You have to have self-confidence. Self-confidence is something people aspire to.

And yet James wants us to see what that really is. A self-confidence that assumes we do not need God. But assumes that God does not matter. What is it?

What is it? What is it? Verse 16. What does James call this? As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

All such self-confidence that thinks we do not depend on God is evil. That's a bit of a theme here. If you look up to verse 4, James has warned his readers that their ambition, their desires are actually a sign of friendship with the world which is enmity with God.

And that then carries on with the self-confidence, this boasting, this planning as if God didn't matter. It is evil, says James. One writer puts it like this. He says, How astonishing how sobering it is to hear this criticism of our self-confident planning.

[8 : 04] He says, What we might consider an insubstantial and passing feature of life, forgetfulness of our utter dependence on God, James sees as the hard core of the vaunting pride, which is the mark and curse of fallen man.

This kind of living as if we are independent from God, as if we don't need God, is the heart, the mark and curse of fallen man. For these readers of James' letters, it was another symptom of their double-mindedness.

Twice in this letter, chapter 1, verse 8, and chapter 4, verse 8, he's called them double-minded. They live as Christians with one half of their mind, but in the other half of their mind, they live as if

God doesn't answer prayer, as if it doesn't matter if they read something in the Bible and then don't do it.

And yet, they're happy on a Sunday to see hymns in church, they think they'll be excellent teachers, chapter 3, verse 1. They think they're mature. James says, you're double-minded.

What you're doing is evil. You're falling into the very sin of Adam and Eve. When Satan disguised the serpent, tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, what was the heart of that temptation?

[9 : 20] The temptation to eat the fruit from the tree God had told them not to eat from? Part of the temptation was this, to live as if they were independent from God, as if God didn't really matter.

And that's the way of the world around us, isn't it? It tells us we should have confidence in ourselves, and people believe God doesn't matter. Yes, lots of people believe God doesn't exist, but lots of people say they do believe that God exists, but they do not believe God matters.

And that is the heart of sin, and that is why this attitude James is writing about, he condemns as evil. So how can we resist those pressures? How can we resist the pressure to feel we have to have confidence in ourselves, and that we actually can live independently from God?

How do we resist those pressures? Paul, writing for Romans, chapter 12, verse 2, tells us we're not to be conformed to this world, not to be moulded by the attitudes and ambitions and beliefs of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we discern what is the will of God, who is good and acceptable and perfect.

And James here, that's a general principle, not to be conformed, but to be transformed. And James, back in verse 6, has really told us how we need to respond. If you look up to verse 6 for a moment, it says, God gives more grace, therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

[10 : 53] God opposes the arrogance that says we can live life on our own, but he gives grace, help, to the humble who will submit, who will have the right attitude. So how can we humbly submit?

How can we get this right attitude to God, as we inevitably plan for the future and think about the future? Well, let me give us three questions to ponder, to help us get that right attitude.

First of all, who do you think you are? Who do you think is in control? And thirdly, how then should we live? Who do you think you are? Who do you think is in control?

And how then should we live? So let's look at them in order. First of all, who do you think you are? We'll go back to verse 14. James more or less asks the same question, isn't he? You do not know what tomorrow will bring.

What is your life? You're a mist that appears for a little time, then vanishes. You are ignorant, you are transient, and therefore, you are totally dependent.

[11 : 53] That's what James is saying. You're ignorant. You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. You might have all sorts of plans, but you do not know what will happen. I know that every day. I start off with a list of things I'm hoping to do, and it never works out, because other things always happen.

We don't analyze what will happen, do we? A bus might run a saver, a plane might land on your house. It might not land on your house, it might land on my house, run on the boat halfway to the North London, so they go every 45 seconds at peak times.

We just don't know. We are ignorant. Over the next few months, we'll have politicians on either side of the debate telling us what will happen if we vote yes or no to the in-out referendum.

The truth is, no one knows. No one knows. They'll do their best to try and persuade us. I'm sure we have to plan and listen to the argument, but no one knows. We do not know. We are ignorant. And we are transient.

We're at the vapour from our kettles. We're here one moment, and gone another. We don't know how long we'll live. And where do we get our abilities from anyway? James' readers have these plans of making money, but who gave them the ability?

[12 : 57] To make money? To trade and profit? Who gives you or I the ability to think? To work? To learn? To sow? It all comes from the Lord God, doesn't it?

And yet how easily we forget, especially when life is going well, we forget, don't we? That's why Moses, addressing the people of Israel, was there preparing to move into the promised land.

In Deuteronomy chapter 8, he said this to them, Beware, lest you say in your heart, my power, and the might of my hand, have gained me this wealth. You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth.

Our abilities all come from the Lord God, who are utterly dependent upon him. That's why Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread. It does not just come automatically for our employees' benevolence to pay our salary.

Ultimately, it comes from God, upon whom we are dependent for all things. In Luke chapter 12, Jesus tells a famous parable that illustrates our transience, and our ignorance, and our total dependence.

[14:05] The parable of the rich fools, we tend to call it. There's a man, a rich farmer, who has a bumper crop, who thinks, what can I do? Oh, I know, I'll build even bigger barns. I can store all my food in those bigger barns, and then I can relax.

I can enjoy myself. I can go on a luxury cruise. I can play golf every day. I can enjoy my retirement. I'll have all the money I need. I can eat, drink, and be merry. And God appears to him and says, you fool.

This very night, your life is required of you. We are ignorant. We do not know what tomorrow holds. We are transient. We're here today and gone tomorrow.

We are utterly dependent on God for our lives, for our abilities, for everything. So who do you think you are? Who do you think you are?

And secondly, who do you think is in control? Well, James makes it clear in verse 15, isn't he? Instead of having these plans and saying, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. Instead, verse 15, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

[15:13] You see the emphasis here. It's if we live, if the Lord wills, we will live. It's not just if the Lord wills, we'll do this and that.

If the Lord wills, we will live. If the Lord spares us another day, then yes, we'll go and do something. But we're dependent on God for how long we live. Psalm 139, verse 16, your eyes saw my unformed substance.

In your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them. I don't know how long I'll live, I don't know how long you will live.

But God knows. He had them all written down in his book before any one of them came to pass.

We're dependent upon him. So James says, we have to say, if the Lord wills.

Now that's not a magic formula with a dear, retired, missionary friend of ours who sends us Christmas cards. I actually got a car from her this week which didn't have this saying for the first time ever.

[16:12] And she writes, DV, at least once, DV, Deo Volente, if God wills. Now I'm sure that was actually meant very sincerely in her case. She's a godly elder lady.

But it's not just a kind of magic formula. If God wills, I'll do this. If God wills, I'll do that. There are plenty of people in the first century Palestine that did the era when James wrote, who wrote things like God willing, if the gods permit, on their statutes, on their documents.

The people today, who say, oh, I'm going to get a promotion, I'm going to get a payroll, touch wood. And they touch wood, if somehow that makes a difference. There are plenty of people who believe in fate or believe their stars have something to do with the outcome of their lives.

But James isn't saying any of those things. He's willing to cultivate an attitude of true dependence on the one who really has control. Notice three things about this one who is in control.

First of all, he's personal. That's why James says, if the Lord wills. He doesn't even say, if God wills. He says, if the Lord wills. That's the word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

[17:20] To translate a personal name of God. The Lord. Of course, the name that is used of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is personal. He's not like the impersonal force in Star Wars.

May the force be with you. He's not like the impersonal force of Hinduism. He's not like the distant deity of Islam. Oh, if Allah wills, we'll do this.

Impersonal. And distant. No, he is personal. He's come in the flesh to reveal himself to us. We see that through the Lord Jesus. So firstly, he's personal.

Secondly, he is sovereign. He is utterly in control of everything. Those words, if we have our call to worship at the start of the service. Whatever the Lord pleases, he does. Psalm 135, verse 6.

Whatever the Lord pleases, he does. In heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. In other words, everywhere in the universe, God does what he pleases. Ephesians chapter 1, Paul says, he works out all things according to the purpose of his will.

[18 : 28] He is personal. He is sovereign. Thirdly, he is good. He is good. Hard times come, don't they? Difficult things happen.

When illness strikes, when a loved one is lost, when our hopes are dashed, when dreams don't work out, life can be hard, there can be grief in many trials, and yet, God is good.

And we know he's good. We know he's good because he sent his own son to live the life that we couldn't live, to die the death that we deserve to die, so that rebels like me and you could become his children.

And if he has given us his son, as Paul says in Romans 8, will he not graciously give us all things, all things we actually need? He is good. In Romans 8, 28, Paul says, we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to God's purpose. God's purpose. So who do you think you are? You're in this. Who do you think is in control? The triune God, the good, sovereign, personal God.

[19 : 54] So how then should we live? How then should we live? Well, look back at verse 15. James sets us in the right direction here, doesn't he? Instead of having your own plans, instead of living with an attitude of independence, be independent, you should say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

So to submit. God opposes the proud who gives grace to the humble. We humbly submit. And there are two aspects to this. We submit to God's providential ordering of events in our lives.

We submit to God's providential ordering of events. And we submit to God's revealed will in the scriptures. So first of all, we submit to his providential ordering.

If the Lord wills, he'll keep us alive. If the Lord wills something else, we'll submit to it. I was speaking to someone the other day who told me about when they'd been given a diagnosis of Parkinson's disease many years ago.

So I wanted to throw myself under a bus. Because I knew what that does. I think another friend of mine, a very fit man in his early 60s, recently retired, who was running one day, he ran marathons, just tripped up, and thought, that's strange.

[21 : 07] And he noticed one or two other things. He started to look into what was going wrong with himself. Within a couple of months, he had a diagnosis of motor neurone disease, which is a terrible degenerative disease.

After about three years, he died last September. It's not easy to submit the providence that God brings into our lives. Some may be hard, those diagnoses, may be hard when we don't go to the school we want to go to, or the university we think we'd like to go to.

What are we going to do in those moments? Well, James has told this, hasn't he? We can submit ourselves to God in verse 10 of chapter 4, he says, humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exhort you.

Instead of finding faults with God's providences, we can lean into him, we can trust in him, we can look at his good promises. Remember, he is personal and good and sovereign.

even when our prayers aren't answered, even when the healing doesn't come, even when we live with degeneration and decay in our bodies, we know he is good.

[22 : 14] We know that the one who could bring ultimate good from the ultimate tragedy, the ultimate tragedy of the death of his innocent son, the ultimate good of salvation for all who will believe, the one who can do that can bring good and give grace to us in the midst of our heartaches and disappointments.

William Cooper, the poet, who suffered a depression and tried to take his own life several times, and it's him the Lord works in mysterious ways, but it's this verse, Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace.

Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. God gives more grace, James tells us in verse 6. Grace to live for the things he sends to our lives, grace to raise us up on the last day.

So we submit to God's providences, to the things he sends into our lives. But secondly, submitting to the Lord means submitting to his revealed will, submitting to what he commands us, what he teaches us in the scriptures.

There's nothing we get hung up about questions of guidance. Perhaps some of you are thinking that right now. What should I do for my GCSEs? Which university should I apply to? Which job should I seek to do?

[23 : 34] Should I seek to move jobs? Should I move habits? Lots of questions, we want guidance. Well God's guidance is not primarily about do I do A or B, do I go to place A or place B.

God's guidance primarily is about how we live, not where we live. So for example, Psalm 23, verse 3 says, he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

He leads us to live his ways. And as we do that, he directs us in the paths he wants us to be in. And we know what God's will is generally, don't we? It's not complicated to understand it.

It's his will that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It's his will that we love our neighbours as ourselves. It's his will that we don't worry about what we'll eat or drink and what we're going to wear.

Jesus says the pagans run after these things. No, seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Now that gives us a fair amount of guidance, doesn't it, about what we need to do.

[24 : 41] As we think about decisions, we think about plans for the future. Will this help me to love God with more heart, soul, mind and strength? Will it help me to love my neighbour as myself? Will it help me to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness?

If we find that our plans are mainly concerned with making money purely for our own comfort, getting a good pension so we can purely retire from God, of course, not doing anything ever again, then probably that's not seeking first God's kingdom.

Probably that's not actually loving our neighbour as ourselves. So probably that's wrong. Probably that's not God's will. So submitting ourselves to God means submitting ourselves to purposes he brings into our lives.

And submitting ourselves to his revealed will of the scriptures. Life is not about building our own kingdoms, but about being part of the kingdom Jesus is building.

And of course that can be costly, can't it? That can be costly. I know people from in this moment, stepping out of the rat race, stepping out of potential promotions, so they've got more time to give to serving our family or serving in our church.

[25 : 54] For some it will mean giving up on jobs or looking at jobs which keep them employed on a Sunday because they want the cost, they'll take the cost so they can be with God's people Sunday by Sunday.

We have an example of following this, don't we? Our great high priest knows what it is to make costly decisions to obey the father's will. Jesus, in the night that he was betrayed, knelt in Gethsemane, sweating blood, praying, take this cup from me, yet not my will but your will be done. And he went to the cross. And so now as our great high priest in heaven, we find grace in our time of need as we go to the one who's made costly decisions, the one who knows it's hard to trust and obey sometimes.

He has been there and done that for us. So if we submit to the Lord's will, we find grace, grace from the Lord Jesus to help us in those times, grace when it is hard, hard to live, hard to obey.

That is how we should live. There's also a warning here back in verse 17. Verse 16, as it is, you boast in your arrogance, all such boasting is evil. In verse 17, listen to this warning.

[27 : 15] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. In the immediate context for us and for James' readers, if we keep on carrying on, organising our lives and planning our futures as if God didn't exist or as if God didn't matter, as if we weren't dependent upon him, then that is sin.

That is rebellion against God. If we keep trusting our own self-confidence, not humbly submitting to the Lord, that is sin, James says. We can't hide the fact that we haven't done anything wrong.

James says you know better, you have done something wrong. That's a specific point. That's also a broader point in life, isn't it? If we know what God wants and we do not do it, that is sin.

Paul in preaching on the Viscals a few weeks ago reminded us about sins of omission, which we often take quite lightly, don't we? Confess the wrong things we have done. We often don't confess the good things, the right things we fail to do.

We have it in our confession Sunday by Sunday. The good we have left undone to confess this morning. So what are some of the things that you and I know are right but do not do?

[28 : 32] Children, what about you at school? You know it's right, don't you, to love and be kind to other children. Perhaps there's someone in your class who's neglected and bullied a bit and left out.

Perhaps sometimes you just ignore them or go along with that. If you know it's right to show love and kindness to them, then that's something you can do tomorrow. You can pray today, pray that you're mum and dad, mums and dads tonight, that God will give you grace to love that child and befriend them.

Not exclude them. Perhaps we know there are things we haven't sorted out yet. We know the son we haven't said sorry to. Some sin we haven't repented of.

Perhaps we know money should not be gone in our lives and yet we haven't yet got round to sorting out our giving. So easy to take that drift, isn't it?

I know it's easy to take that drift. I hate giving the money. Yet if we know things that haven't done, James says that is sin. We know we should talk to our neighbours about the Lord Jesus.

[29 : 40] We know we should pray for people to come into the kingdom. Yet do we do it? So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him is sin.

Now I don't know about you, but I can feel very overwhelmed as I look at the list of good things I haven't done. It can be very overwhelming, can't it? That's why we need to finish with this great promise back up in verse 6.

Do look at chapter 4 verse 6 again, let's read it again. But God gives more grace, therefore it, the scripture says, God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Submit yourself therefore to God, resist the devil, and he will flee. If we humble ourselves before the Lord, he gives us more grace. Grace to forgive, grace to cleanse us from our sin, grace to make us new.

We are the first fruits of God's new creation, as James says back in verse 18. Grace to cope with the illness, with the grief, with the pains, with the trials.

[30 : 45] We will submit ourselves to faith rather than fault finally with his providence. God gives grace. And see the ultimate promise, verse 10, humble yourselves before the Lord, he will exhort you.

That's what happened to Jesus, wasn't it? He humbled himself, became obedient to death on the cross, and now is exalted to the highest place and has the name above all names.

And that is the pattern of the Christian life. We humble ourselves now. We humble ourselves and submit our plans to God. We will not exalt ourselves, but he will exalt us.

And our exaltation will be complete when Jesus comes back. We live forever with him. And every tear is wiped away, every grief forgotten, and every joy complete for all eternity.

So Jesus suffered for sin, so that we can be God's children. So we submit ourselves to him now. We can be exalted there. The sovereign Lord holds the future, so he must humbly!

[31 : 55] submitting to his rule of the field and scriptures, and knowing one day we will be exalted with him as prayer.