

James: Faith / Works
Sermon 9: My Plans / God's Will
July 24, 2016

James 4:13-17: Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil. Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

What do you dream about?

- When you are little, maybe you dreamed of being a superhero, or a princess. My grandson tells me he wants to play for the Cats.
- Some ladies dream of finding the perfect man; some guys dream of finding the perfect woman. Just a tip, guys: If you found her, she wouldn't marry you.
- For others it's dream car, or a dream house, or the ability to travel, to see the world.
- For some it's kids – that's their dream. For others, it's no kids.
- Maybe your dream is to win the lottery, or to be debt free, or to retire early.

If you are normal, you dream. And sometimes, we actually start planning to make our dreams our reality.

- If I start saving my money, I can get that vacation, or that car, or that house.
- If I go to school, maybe I can get that job I want.

Sometimes we actually set goals, and we figure out the money it will take, and the time it will take, and we start working the plan. That takes a dream to a different level, doesn't it? When we actually try to make it real? To tell you the truth, that's one way to detect what's really important to someone. You can tell me your dreams, and I might ask you how you plan to get there. If you have no plan, I figure your dream will probably always be imaginary. It's normal to dream; and it's normal to plan to make some of our dreams real.

And then James comes along and says, “Look here.” You can’t see it in the English, but the words James uses kind of show a little attitude. Some Bible translate it, “Now listen” -- and you need to read it with a little attitude. Or “Listen to me, dork,” – I threw in the dork, but the attitude is there. Any of you guys watch NCIS? James kind of starts off with a Gibbs head-slap. “Look here, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.” How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone.” (James 4.13-14)

Now, is James telling us that we shouldn’t dream? That we shouldn’t make plans? Actually ... I don’t think so. What he is going to say is that there is a difference between the way we usually do it and the way we should. He’s going to tell us that Jesus followers have to plan differently than those who are not. We usually do it the same way they do. James is going to tell us, “You claim you believe in Jesus, but you live you really don’t.” We’ll get back to that in a few minutes.

Now, usually when we work our way through a text, we start at the beginning, and then we just move through it, kind of the way it comes. But today I want to jump to the ending first. Here it is. James says, “Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” (James 4.17) This is a pretty important verse. Whenever we teach about different kinds of sin, we use this verse. There are sins of “commission,” and sins of “omission.” Sometimes we do things that are wrong – that’s a sin of commission. Sometimes we don’t do things that are right – that’s a sin of omission. When I break one of the ten commandments, that’s a sin of commission. When I’m not generous like I should be, when I don’t share Jesus when God opens a door, when I don’t encourage someone who needs encouragement, that’s a sin of omission.

Here’s the deal, sometimes what we don’t do is worse than what we do do. In my marriage, I don’t do a lot of things that are just wrong. For me, it’s more often that I don’t do the things that are right. Sometimes I know what a good husband should do, and I don’t. For a lot of husbands, and wives, our sins of omission are way worse than our sins of commission.

I think that's the way it is in our life with God, too. Some of us have gotten pretty good at avoiding the sins of commission. We don't lie, we don't steal, we don't cheat, we don't cuss. But when God gives us an opportunity to be generous, we're not. When God give us an opportunity to be a peacemaker, we're not. When God gives us an opportunity to nudge someone towards Jesus, we don't. I think for a whole lot of us Jesus followers, it's our sins of omission that degrade our life with God way more than our sins of commission.

So, this is an important verse. It's a challenging verse. But what I had never done is connect it with the verses in front of it. James says, some of you guys have all these dreams. And sometimes you try to turn your dreams into reality. You make all these plans. You don't have a clue! You don't even know if you'll still be alive next week. He says, "What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil." (James 4.15-16) ... And then there is a little word in the Greek that English Bibles translate in a lot of different ways. In Greek it's a little word, "oun." It can mean "therefore," or "so then," or "consequently." It's a connecting word. It connects what's coming with whatever came before. "Therefore, it is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it." (James 4.17)

So there is something they are missing. There's something they are not doing. They are dreaming these dreams, and making these plans ... that's probably not the problem. I don't think God minds when we dream. I don't think he minds when we plan. In fact, sometimes he tells us to. But the way we usually do it is messed up. There is a piece we are missing, a piece we are omitting, a sin of omission, that makes us ... arrogant, and evil. That's what we have to look for.

We miss it because it is so ordinary; we miss it because it is so common. We miss it because it is not something we do, it's something we don't do. You see, there is a sin so common, so ordinary, that we don't even see it in ourselves. This sin to us, is like water to a fish. If you were to ask a fish to describe water, I suspect the fish would say, "What's water?" Fish can't describe water because they are completely enveloped in it. And this sin is so much a part of who we are that we barely notice it at all. It's not something we do; it's something we don't do.

So what is it? Well ... it is simply to go through life — to set goals, make plans, create schedules, make decisions — without thinking about God. It may be the most common sin we sin, it may be the most dangerous sin we sin: to leave God out of what we are thinking, what we are planning, what we are feeling, what we are doing. We leave him out, we marginalize him, we do life with God on Sundays, and then put him on the shelf from Monday through Saturday.

Let's look at what James says again. He says, "Look here (dorks), "Today we'll do this, or tomorrow we'll do this. We'll go to Lexington, and do business there for a year, and make some money." Now the example James gives is about money. But this isn't about money. He could have said, "Next year I'm going to start school, and in four years I'll have my degree, then I'll get that job I want." Or "Next year we're going to start a family, and we're going to have 2 kids." Or, "In three years I'm going to retire." You get the idea. He's talking about making plans. We all make plans, I hope. What's wrong with that?

Well, if we skip down a couple verses, James tells us what we're forgetting. We still have dreams, we still make plans: "We will do this, or we will do that." But this time we include God in our plans. James says, "What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to ..." In other words, "Is what I want to do God-honoring?" "Is this a God-honoring way to spend time and money?" "Do you think he'd be good with it?" Does that seem weird to you? Does it seem over the top to you? Maybe that's how twisted we are: when forgetting God seems normal, and including God seems weird. James says that the failure to include God in your plans is a big, big sin. Remember: "It is a sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it."

Here it is, guys: It is a sin for a Jesus follower, when we call Jesus "Lord," when we promise to do life with him and for him ... It is a sin to go about life — to set goals, make plans, make schedules — and forget about God. You see, one of our worst sins, one of our most serious sins, is simply to forget God. It's not doing something we shouldn't, it's not doing something we should. Think about it, for a person to call Jesus "Lord," and then leave him out is one of the worst, one of the most ruinous, most pathological, dangerous things we can do. To go about life, to make decisions, set

goals, make plans ... without reference to God?! This is a serious one guys, and most of us need a reminder.

Truth is, it's offensive to God, and it creates issues for us. I want to show you how offensive it is to God, first. Think about it? What does it feel like to be forgotten?

- Your friends are grilling out, and everyone is invited ... except you.
- They are getting bonuses at work. And everyone gets a check ... except you.
- I don't know how many people I have wounded because I have forgotten their name.

It hurts to be forgotten. Sometimes being forgotten is worse than being criticized. You are ignored, you are marginalized, it feels like they think you are unimportant – a vapor, a wisp of smoke.

It's even worse when you are forgotten by someone who is supposed to love you. Have any of you guys ever forgotten your anniversary? I have. Have any of you guys ever forgotten your wife's or your kid's birthday? I have. It's not good. A soldier goes off to defend his country. He leaves his girl behind. Her picture is in his pocket, and on his wall. He remembers her and that keeps him going. But she forgets him, and she moves on. He's a vapor to her. Crushes his heart. How does it feel to be forgotten by someone you love?

Did you know that God says he feels that way sometimes – he feels left out, marginalized, excluded, forgotten? There is a verse in the Psalms that is pretty powerful. It says, "The wicked go down to the realm of the dead, all the nations that forget God." (Psalm 9.17) Who are the wicked? Those that forget God. Maybe we remember him on Sundays, maybe even for a few minutes before we go to bed. But we pretty much do the rest of life without him – we forget God.

There is a very emotional passage in Jeremiah 2. God says, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me..." (Jeremiah 2.2) Sometimes we forget. We forget how much we loved each other, how much we loved him. God doesn't forget. Slip down to verse 32. God says, "Does a your woman forget her jewelry, or a bride her wedding dress? Yet for years on end my people have forgotten me."

(Jeremiah 32.32) Guys, I've done a lot of weddings. But I've never seen a bride come down the aisle and suddenly panic and say, "I forgot my makeup, I forgot my dress." That's probably never happened, probably never will. Because a wedding is a big deal, it's really, really important. The bride wants to be as beautiful as possible, and they spend huge amounts of money and huge amounts of time to get it done. And God says, "You remember things that are that important to you, but you don't remember me? Really? You have forgotten me? Really? Do you hear the hurt?"

Do you remember the day you were baptized? You claimed his promise that if you made him the Lord of your life, he would forgive all your sins – all of them, and he would give you eternal life – life with him forever. Were you grateful? Were you happy? Did you have a sense of peace that things were right between you and God? Do you remember? He does. He remembers that moment perfectly. Do you remember giving him your life, making him the Lord of your life, telling him that you would do life with him, and for him? He does. So what do you think God feels when we dream our dreams, and set our goals, and make our plans, without stopping to think about where he fits, whether he might have a preference, whether the one we call our Lord will be honored by what we will do?

Guys, it's a horrible thing to be left out, especially when you are forgotten by someone you love, and who is supposed to love you back. It's hurtful, it's hateful. It's evil to do life without including the one we call our "Lord." But it's not just evil, it's flat out arrogant. It's telling God, I don't need you on this one. I don't need your direction. I'm smart enough, I'm wise enough, I can manage this one on my own. And sometimes we leave him out because we're pretty sure what we want wouldn't match up with what he wants. You ever do something like that? You date some person, you marry some person, you take some job, you buy something, you go somewhere, you hang out with someone – and you know down deep, God isn't with me on this one? Bottom line, when we forget God, we take his place, we take his seat, we dethrone him. And guys, we're not very good at playing our own god.

Now we're going to go down deep for a couple minutes. We're going to play with some really big ideas, and some really big words. Hang on, I think you can stay with me – and it might really help. The theologians, the

guys who explore the nature and the work of God, they divide the attributes of God into two categories: there are the incommunicable attributes, and there are the communicable attributes of God. Sounds kind of high-falutin, but its not that hard. You guys know what a communicable disease is? It's a disease that rubs off, it's one you can catch – things like a cold, or the flu, or measles. I sneeze, and you can catch my cold. Incommunicable diseases are diseases that won't rub off. I can't give it to you, you can't catch it from me – stuff like cancer, or high blood pressure, or heart disease.

Well, God has some communicable attributes: things like love, and grace, and wisdom. If you hang around with God, they can rub off; if you're up close and he breathes on you, we can catch them. We can catch them when we are touched by God, and we can pass them to people we touch.

God's incommunicable attributes are different. You see, there are some attributes of God we will never catch. No matter how much time you spend with him, no matter how close you get to him, these don't rub off. There are quite a few of these. Some of the big ones start with "omni" – which means "all."

- God is omniscient: God knows everything ... that is knowable. And God doesn't struggle to remember, he doesn't forget anything. Guys, no matter how close you get to God, you will never be omniscient, and half of what you do know, you'll forget.
- God is omnipotent: God can do everything ... that is doable. If God tells it to happen, it does. Guys, as strong and as capable as you think you are, you will never be omnipotent. That's a God thing.
- God is omnipresent – he is everywhere, all the time. Because he's not like us. No matter how good Google gets, we will never be omnipresent. That's a God thing.
- And here's a big word you probably have never heard. God has "aseity." That means God is "of himself." Nothing made God; he's the only one who just is. He is self-existent, he is un-dependent, self-sustaining. He is the only one who could survive on "Alone" forever.

Why am I telling you all this stuff? What do these big theological words have to do with James 4? Well, here's the deal: we've become all twisted up. We tend to devalue his communicable attributes, and desperately desire his incommunicable ones. We don't care about righteousness, or

holiness as much as we do about omnipotence. We don't care about wisdom as much as we do about omniscience. We don't care about love, or grace as much as we do about being un-dependent, self-sustaining. You see, when we forget God, we step in and try to take his place. When we forget God we act like we have the ability and the right to call the shots in our own life. We act like we're smart enough to know what's going on, and strong enough to get where we want to go.

- I know everything I need to know to set my own goals and make my own plans.
- I can do everything myself. I am in control of my own life. I make myself what I want to be.
- God, you can sit this one out, I don't need you.

Quite a few pastors have been challenging what some call "Christian atheism." A lot of us Jesus followers say we believe in God, but we live like he really doesn't exist. We may give him a couple hours on Sunday, but for all practical purposes we exclude him from Monday through Saturday. We want to believe in God enough to get out of hell, but not enough to let him change the way we live. This is a spiritual disease, guys, and it's epidemic. It's in this room. Even the last pope was concerned about it. He said, "The practical atheism of those who say they are Christian but (who) live as if God does not exist is a greater threat than actual atheism." (Pope Benedict XVI)

So James points us another direction. Here's verse 15. He says, "What you ought to say is, 'If the Lord wants us to ... (if he wants us to) we will live and do this or that.'" (James 4.15) Now look at it carefully. He says we can set goals, and we can make plans, if it's God honoring. But even before that, you have to know that your very life is his. "If the Lord wants us to, we will live." Guys, you've got to know that the only reason you are sitting here breathing is by the grace of God.

I quoted an old dead preacher named Jonathan Edwards last week. Here's another quote from him. Sometimes when he would get up in the morning he would tell himself, "Remember, everything I enjoy today which is better than hell is strictly by the mercy and grace of God." (repeat) Do you realize how different your life would be if you actually remembered that?

“If the Lord wants us to ... we will live and do this or that.” Some Bible says, “Lord willing, we will live and do this or that.” Guys, those aren’t just words. You hear people saying things like, “Lord willing and the creek don’t rise.” They are not just words; this is a conviction. I’m telling him, “God, I want you involved and engaged in my plans and decisions.” “God, wherever I go, whatever I do, I want it to please you, to honor you.” “God, here’s what I want to do, but I’ll adjust if you nudge me.” “And if my plans don’t work out, I’ll trust you, God, because my life is yours.”

Here’s the deal, guys: God doesn’t want a couple hours, a couple days a week; he wants 24/7. He doesn’t just care about what we do in here; he cares about the choices we make, the relationships we choose, the places we go, the jobs we take. He wants us to do life with him, and for him – all of life. He loves us unfathomably, he cares about how we live, because he wants the best for us.

- He cares who we hang with, he cares who we date, he cares who we marry, and he cares how we treat him or her till death do us part.
- If we have kids, he cares how we raise them – because they his more than they are ours.
- He cares about what we do with our money. Not because he is greedy – he is self-sufficient. He cares because we are so prone to be self-centered and greedy. He wants us to give him the first part, as a recognition that it’s really all his. And he wants us to be generous, like he is.
- He cares about how we use our time – all of it. Listen, could a person tell, by examining your schedule, that he’s first in your life, and your family is second in your life, and your work is third, and your “me time” comes after all that?
- He cares about what job you take, and how you do that job. Is it God-honoring?
- He cares whether we find a way to use the gifts he has given us to serve, to live outside ourselves, to invest in something bigger than ourselves.
- He cares how we treat people, and whether we look for and take advantages of those opportunities he gives us to nudge someone towards Jesus.

Guys, God wants to be involved. He wants to be involved in every part of your life. “If the Lord wants we will live; if the Lord wants we will do this or that.” If the Lord wants, because he is my Lord, and because he is way smarter, and way more powerful, and way better than I am.

“Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.” Sometimes the biggest sins are not the things we do, it’s the things we don’t do. To say we believe in God, and then leave him out?! To say we are Jesus followers, and then marginalize him?! To forget God?! Guys, that both irritates him, and it’s stupid.

I’m challenging you to do life with humility. I’m challenging you to do life -- all of life – with him, and for him. I don’t always know what he wants me to do, but I know I want to honor him. And I hope I have the wisdom to change who I am and what I’m doing when he nudges me. If the Lord wants, I’ll live a while longer here. And if the Lord wants I’ll keep doing what I’m doing. Because he is my Lord, and he deserves that, and I want to honor him from the bottom of my heart. And he’s your Lord, and I want you to honor him from the bottom of your heart.

Lead me to the cross
Where Your love poured out
Bring me to my knees
Lord I lay me down
Rid me of myself
I belong to You
Oh lead me
Lead me to the cross