

Even if you do good things and live a life of integrity, you have no assurance that you're going to live to be 70 or 80. The athlete that's on the cover of Sport's Illustrated this year may not even be playing next year due to a torn rotator cuff or torn ACL. Be careful about planning for tomorrow because tomorrow might be very different than today.

Life is brief, life is uncertain and ... here's the truth,

#3 – Life is insignificant ... without God. Life is like a mist, the KJV says it's like a vapor, some translations say a "fog." Now a fog creates a little bit of attention or inconvenience but it's soon forgotten. We talk about the 37' flood or the 74' tornados or the Chicago Fire or Hurricane Katrina, but nobody talks about the 62' fog or the Becknerville Vapor! In all honesty a life without God doesn't count for very much.

Doesn't it amaze you how people quickly recover when someone dies? With the exception of close family members and friends, the grieving process is fairly quick. We weep, send a note or a card, visit the funeral home then life goes on. We think we carry a lot of influence but the reality is when we're gone, with the exception of close family and friends, we're not going to be missed by everyone.

Do you recognize these names? James Sherman, Charles Fairbanks, Thomas Marshall, Charles Dawes, Charles Curtis, Charles Garner, Henry Wallace. Those are 7 Vice Presidents of the United States during the 20th century and most of us don't recognize their names.

Or what about these guys? Connie Ryan, Virgil Staucup, Grady Hatton, Johnny Wyroistech, Lloyd Merriman, Bob Usher, Dixie Howell, Ted Klezewski, Ewell Blackwell ... some of you sports fans maybe recognize the last two but that's the starting lineup for the Cincinnati Reds in 1950. Now if those guys reached the pinnacle of their careers just a few decades ago and we don't even recognize their names, how much do you think you and I will really be missed in a few decades?

50 years from now some of your grandchildren will drive by this church and say, "Hey, that's where Pap went to church. I heard him talk about it. What was the preacher's name? Foster? No, no they made a movie about him, Forrest ... Gump. Let's call the church secretary and have her look it up. No, that's too much trouble. It doesn't matter."

Sometimes when you're feeling important, sometimes when you feel that you're going would leave an unfillable hole, just follow this simple instruction and see how it humbles your soul. Take a bucket and fill it with water put your hand in it up to the wrist pull it out and the hole that's remaining is the measure of how much you'll be missed. You may splash all you please when you enter, you may stir up the water galore but stop and you'll find in a minute it looks quite the same as before. The moral of this quaint example is to do the best that you can be proud of your work but remember there is no indispensable man.

Isn't that encouraging? Aren't you glad you came today? Doesn't this just boost your spirit? But that's the truth.

But I've got great news. You're life is incredibly significant to God. John 15:5 Jesus said, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."** You are so important to God that He sent Christ to die for you. He cares for you so much that He knows the number of hairs on your head. The Creator of the Kentucky River, Mt. Pilot, and the Red River Gorge ... knows your name and He will never forget it. He saw you laughing recently and He saw that moment this last week when you were discouraged and you cried ... and He cried, too. He's made eternal provision for you and He's said that not even a cup of cold water that you offer in His name will go unnoticed. He'll reward you for that.

In Him we have everything, but without we have nothing. Our lives are significant only because we are connected to the Vine.

Next, as we plan wisely for the future, we have to ...

Focus our priorities on the spiritual, not the material. James talks about those that are making big plans to go and carry on business and **"make money."** That's pretty much the focus of the world. Get a good education, so you can get a good job so you can make a lot of money so you live the good life.

That's the American dream and we've had it so drilled into us that if someone deviates from that we think they've gone crazy or they've lost their ambition or they've gone overboard. But it's the challenge of the Christian to look deeper than just possessions and accomplishments.

Caught In The Act of Living Out Your Faith
Plan Ahead with Wisdom
James 4:13 – 17

[Read Text]

On a hot summer day in 2005, I bumped into Bob Wigginton at the Post Office. I haven't forgotten what he said to me that day: "Forrest, I never thought I'd see the day when we'd be paying \$1.80 for gas!" I saw Bob last week and we laughed about that.

Who would have guessed three years ago that gas would be \$4.00 a gallon or that property values would shrink significantly or that the American dollar would lose significant value or that a hurricane would slam into the southern coast of the United States? A lot of things seem uncertain.

And that leaves us concerned about what tomorrow will bring. How high *will* gas prices go? How long until *another hurricane* slams into the coast? Will my job still be there tomorrow? Will there be a break down in my family and will my health hold out?

How should a Christian plan for such a precarious future? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, **"Don't worry about tomorrow, God will provide for you,"** but Jesus didn't mean we shouldn't have any thoughts about the future or make no plans for tomorrow.

In fact, Jesus Himself planned for the future. He made advanced provisions for a meal in an upper room; He provided for His mother prior to His death; He informed His disciples that He was going to be crucified and told them where He was to meet them after the resurrection. Then He told them to go to Jerusalem and wait and they would be given the Holy Spirit. Jesus planned for the future.

There's an oft-repeated slogan that arose in investment circles but that applies to so many aspects of life: "People don't plan to fail, they just fail to plan." We Christians should plan ahead with wisdom so that we can live our lives victoriously and face tomorrow with confidence. But we need to plan the right way and that's what James is talking about in our text. This little paragraph contains a wealth of wisdom and I want you to see 4 basic principles about planning for tomorrow that can help give confidence and inspiration to us all.

To plan wisely for tomorrow ...

Acknowledge the sovereignty of God over your life. James says, **"You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'"**

There are basically two philosophies of life. First there is the Christian view which says that God is my Creator. I'm not here by accident I'm here by design. And God is my Savior. Even though I violated His standards, He came to earth in the form of a man named Jesus Christ and died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. But God is not only my Creator and my Savior; He's also my sovereign. He is the Lord over my life. He defines my behavior and He directs my future. In the words of Paul, Acts 17:25, "... **he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else ... he determined the times set for men and nations and the exact places where they should live ... in him we live and move and have our being.**"

If a young man accepts a scholarship to play basketball at UK he might write home and say something like: "Mom and dad, I'll be home at Thanksgiving if Coach Gillespie gives us a couple of days off." He has to acknowledge the authority of the coach during basketball season in order to retain the scholarship.

When we become a Christian we accept Jesus not only as Savior from our sins but also as Lord over our lives. Ephesians 1:11 says, "**God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.**" So we are dependent upon Him for everything. He determines our future. That's the Christian view.

The world's view is humanism. Man in his pride doesn't want anyone dictating his behavior and he says stubbornly, "Nobody tells me what to do. I don't need God, I don't even know if there is a God. Maybe I'm here by accident. I can make my own decisions, I can make up my own rules and I can be the master of my own fate. It's all a matter of the will, I just have to want it bad enough."

The men that James is speaking about were humanists, they planned their future without any mention of God. They said, "We're going to go to a city, Rome, and open up a restaurant. And we should make money, maybe \$25K net the first year." Now we hear those kinds of conversations all the time? The problem is there's no submission to God; no acknowledgment of the sovereignty of the Lord over the future. Their attitude was one of complete self-reliance and arrogance.

The idea of a failure, recession, war, heart attack, or breach of contract never entered their minds. Micah 6:8 says, "... **walk humbly with God,**" these men walked proudly without him."

James says when you're planning for tomorrow or next year; acknowledge that God is in control of your life. You ought to say, "**If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.**" When Paul wrote he often used that phrase. In Acts 18:21 he promised the church in Ephesus, "**I will come back if it is God's will.**"

Now this is a spirit of submission more than it is a trite expression that we are to repeat. I think on occasion it is good to say, "I'll do this if the Lord wills," but it can be overused to the point of losing meaning or being absurd. "We'll sing all four stanzas of Amazing Grace, Lord willing." "I've got three more points I want to share with you, if the Lord should tarry." You're probably praying, "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!" Or go to a service station and say, "Fill her up, Lord willing." Or, "Give me a burger, fries and a coke, Lord willing."

James is not suggesting a constant, verbalization of a phrase, rather a continual awareness of a truth. Basically, God is in charge of everything.

I've told you about my cat, and I've told you that I don't like my cat. Everybody has a cross to carry, I've got a cat. The reason I don't like my cat is that she doesn't acknowledge my sovereignty over her. She doesn't understand that she's the cat and I'm the master. She struts around our house and our street like she owns it. My neighbors and I call her "The Queen of Bristol Place." She is the most stubborn thing I've ever seen and yet she's alive because of my grace and kindness. She gets in our window at 3 a.m. and paws the screen or storm window till we get up and let her in (I'm not making this up and I'm only barely exaggerating). Then, if we've made her wait more than 10 minutes, she walks in, looks up at us, and chirps! It's like, "How dare you make me wait outside at 3 a.m.!" Last Monday night she was in the window. So I went to the bathroom and got our squirt bottle. I walked over to the window and said through the screen, "Hey pretty kitty ... kshhh, kshhh, kshhh!" The only time I've ever liked her was about 8 years ago. She got in a fight with some cat and lost. We didn't see her for three days and when I found her under a bush in our back yard she was wounded, dehydrated and about gone. She saw me, barely purred and couldn't lift her head. And I really felt compassion for her and put her in a blanket and took her to Doc Brown and he kept her overnight and got her patched up. Now it's years later and I'm squirting water through my window at an arrogant cat at 3 a.m.

God is our master and He is sovereign over us. He has authority over us and in Him we live and move and have our being. And unlike Licorice the cat, God wants us to acknowledge that. You know what happens when we do that? It eliminates our anxiety. We don't panic when the future is uncertain or when we get bruised up.

We know that, "All things really are going to work together for good because we love him." We start to roll with the punches a little better and even though we're not aware of what the future holds, we know God holds the future.

But secondly, if we're going to plan wisely for tomorrow, we have to **make a realistic appraisal of what our life really is.** James asks, "**What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.**"

Now if you're not a Christian or if you're a shallow believer, what I'm about to tell you may depress you. James implies that there are three realistic facts about life. If you don't face them now someday they will devastate but they're the truth and by recognizing their truth now you can live confidently about tomorrow.

#1- Life is brief. We appear for a little while and then vanish. James uses the word 'mist.' It doesn't hang around very long. Friday morning I was watching the steam coming off my coffee cup ... it was a really exciting day! ... I counted the time when the wisp of steam would come off the top until the time it was gone ... about 2 or 3 seconds. James says that's how long your life is in comparison with eternity. Psalm 90:10 says, "**The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.**" Even in a day of modern medicine and exercise programs that's still a remarkably accurate assessment of the length of life. By the time you're through your teenage years your almost 1/3 of the way through life. Psalm 90:12 says, "**Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**"

I was born in 1964 and I'll be 44 this summer. If I live to be 70 I'll die in 2034. If I live to be 80 I'll die in 2044. That's not morbid that's just reality. If I die at 70 then I have 26 more Thanksgiving dinners to enjoy and 26 more fall seasons to enjoy the leaves ... only 26 more times to have to file taxes! If I retire at 65 then I only have 21 more Easter sermons to write!

Teach us to number our days aright. There's wisdom in that. There's a bumper sticker that reads: "Life is short, eat your dessert first." Life is brief ... that's the truth.

#2 – Life is uncertain. Life is short but realistically life is also uncertain. James says, "You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow."

I understand that the Harvard student body has a chant that they occasionally yell whenever their football team is way behind. When the opposing team scores a touchdown and they're celebrating their large lead, the Harvard student body yells: "That's alright, that's OK, you're going to work for us someday!"

Now you have to admire that. It's a little cocky but they're looking beyond the football game to the rest of life. But it's our job to look even deeper and farther than that. We look beyond the football game, beyond the business world and work life to ... eternity. And so, when some things aren't going right ... gas is up and hurricanes are forming in the Caribbean and the economy is bad ... we can say, "That's alright, that's OK, I'm going to live forever, someday."

I challenge you to think about what you're doing with your life. It doesn't make sense to make possessions your primary focus. Things won't last – Jesus said moth and rust will destroy things or thieves will break in and steal them. Instead, He said, "**Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**" When you begin to pursue treasure in heaven, the world might think you've lost it, but you suddenly find time to worship and you find time for family and you don't allow the tyranny of the urgent to push aside the matters of eternity. When you place priority on the spiritual, you become generous. It's more fun to give it away than it is to keep it. When you place priority on the spiritual, you put more emphasis on relationships and less on things and you become more interested in serving God than impressing people.

In his book, *Who Switched the Price Tags*, Tony Campolo tells about his preacher, a black preacher in Philadelphia, who spoke to the graduating seniors. The preacher said, "Children, you're going to die. You may not think you're going to die, but you're going to die. One of these days they're going to take you out to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt [in it] then go back to church and eat potato salad." "When you were born," he said, "you alone were crying and everyone else was happy. The important question I want to ask is this: when you die are you alone going to be happy and everybody else crying? The answer depends on whether you live to get titles or live to get testimonies. When they lay you in the grave are people going to stand around reciting the fancy titles you earned or are they going to stand around giving testimonies of the good things you did for them? Will they list your degrees and awards or what a blessing you were to them? Now there's nothing wrong with titles," he said, "titles are good things to have, but if it ever comes down to a choice between a title or a testimony, go for the testimony."

Then he went on a poetic rip through the Bible: "Pharaoh may have had the title, but Moses had the testimony. Nebuchadnezzar may

have had the title, but Daniel had the testimony. Queen Jezebel may have had the title, but Elijah had the testimony. Herod may have had the title, but John the Baptist had the testimony." And as he went on the congregation got more and more into it saying, "Preach it, brother ... that's right ... Amen!" Then he came to the climax and nearly screamed, "Pilate may have had the title" ... and he waited for what seemed an eternity, then said, "but my Jesus ... he had the testimony."

What is your life? Are you focusing on a title or are you living for a testimony?

As you plan for the future ...

Celebrate every day of your life to the fullest. Don't get so involved in planning for tomorrow that you fail to appreciate today. "**What is your life?**" Tomorrow can be an enemy because your life isn't lived out tomorrow.

A study years ago asked 3,000 people, "What do you have to live for?" Psychologists were shocked that 94% said they were simply enduring the present waiting for something exciting to happen tomorrow.

Remember that line from Kipling's poem: "If you can dream and not let dreams become your master then you'll be a man, my son." A lot of us allow our dreams to master us. "We're going to enjoy life someday, when we get more secure and get our problems solved."

I feel I've earned the right to say this because I've learned it recently: No matter what tomorrow holds for you, it will not make you any happier than what you already are today. Two months ago, in the midst of some extremely difficult circumstances, my wife came home and preached a sermon. Now you know how it is, guys, when your wife starts preaching to you, you're in trouble. But when you *are* the preacher, and the preacher's wife starts preaching to you, you're really in trouble. The sermon was a silent sermon and it consisted of 10 words in the shape of a heart on a plaque that Darisa picked up at the Christian bookstore. It's the shortest sermon you'll ever read: "Love life as it is ... not as you want it."

Slain missionary Jim Elliott said, "Wherever you are, be all there."

"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, that's why we call today the present."

The best plan for the future is to live for Christ ... today.