

**James: Where Faith Gets Real: Planning**  
Glen Elliott - October 15, 2017

**Series Big Idea:** James is one of the most practical books in the Bible, tackling the real life issues and struggles that all of us face: temptation, self-control, work, anger, poverty, our words, prejudice and more. The book challenges our consumeristic and complacent nature as Americans and challenges us to live out a faith that is active and makes a difference. It is a book that combines the teachings of Jesus with the wisdom of the Proverbs to show us the perfect law that gives freedom. James' whole purpose is to help us make sure our faith gets real in everyday life.

**Message Big Idea:** We want to plan our futures. We rely on good planning. But James cautions us about the attitude and assumptions we bring to our planning. The fact is that no one really can control tomorrow. Our lives are frail. And the saddest part is that we tend to neglect God and plan our lives as if he did not exist! James warns us to first and foremost consider the good that God wants for our lives now and in the near future. Our primary task is to understand the good that God wants to do through us and then focus on that and leave the results to God.

**Main Idea:** Is there room for God in my plan?

**Main Text:** James 4:13-17

**Supporting texts:** Proverbs 27:1; Matthew 6:34

**Links:** Watch the Decision series we did in July that talks about how to know and apply God's will to our lives - <http://pantano.church/watch/series/decision/>

**Reflection/Discussion Questions:**

1. Share a time when you made an important plan that fell through, was ruined or thwarted? What was the plan and how did you feel when it was damaged or destroyed?
2. It is time to be honest. How often do you really invite God into your planning before your plan is made and put into action? Why?
3. Why do we tend (at least on some occasions) to plan without considering what God wants?
4. How do we allow God to have room in our planning?
5. James says not only should we plan allowing God to influence it, but we should also allow God to help us be flexible with our plans. How flexible are you with your plans? What makes it hard to be flexible with your plans?
6. What is one rather significant plan you are in the process of making right now? Share it and then share how you will invite God into your planning.

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**Main Idea:** Is there room for God in my plan?

**Screen Information:**

- Slide1: James 4:13-14 (pg. 827)
- Slide2: Is there room for God in my plan?
- Slide3: What is the wise thing to do?
- Slide4: Is there room for God in my plan?
- Slide5: Proverbs 27:1 (pg. 451)
- Slide6: Matthew 6:34 (pg. 661)
- Slide7: What is the wise thing to do?
- Slide8: James 4:15-17 (pg. 827)
- Slide9: Is there room for God in my plan?
- Slide10: Is there room for God in my plan?

**Message:**

We know that both the Bible and common wisdom tell us to make plans. We all make plans! I've planned for weeks to preach this message and I've put lots of time and effort getting ready. I'm guessing you are glad I did some planning and not just get up here and wing it.

Imagine our world if no one made plans. No business would thrive or likely survive without at least some basic planning. Teachers need to have a teaching plan or the class will be chaos and the students might not learn anything. Imagine a class of 6th graders and the teacher starts off each day with this - "No plans today! What do you want to do?" Chaos! For those in our Financial Peace class, if you want to get out of debt, you have to have a plan. It just doesn't magically happen. We have to plan for the meals we'll eat this week. Right now, some of you are not really listening to me because you are making plans for lunch or what you'll do this afternoon! Right?!

And what happens when your plans fall through? You put a lot of time and effort into making a plan and maybe investing some money, resources and a lot of emotion to put the plan into motion. Then something unforeseeable happens and your plans are put on hold or maybe even abandoned. That can be really painful. Maybe you had plans to join a sports team, go to college, get married, start a family, buy a house or plans to retire. And then the plan and dream is thwarted. Sometimes the pain is overwhelming. We've all had our dreams and hopes that were wrapped up in a plan dashed.

I had planned for my first born to go to college. I started saving soon after her birth. Jolene only worked part-time and my salary just got us by. I sacrificed for her future. I had a plan! Then during her freshman year of high school, she got involved in drugs, was cutting and struggling. She dropped out of high school because of the temptation of the drugs. We had to use her college savings to pay for her drug treatment program. She never went to college. Is planning bad? No. But our plans are far more fragile than we recognize.

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We are finishing our series from James today. We've been looking at situations where we need real faith in our lives. Today we see how faith intersects with planning. But before we get into the actual teaching today, I want you to think about something that you are planning for right now. It can be big or maybe routine or ordinary. Maybe you are planning a party or celebration for someone. Maybe it's a project at home. Maybe it's a vacation plan. Or it could be a big one like going back to school, getting married, getting unmarried, starting a family, changing a career or position at work, a move or retirement. I want you to fix one real plan you are making in your mind and then apply what we'll learn from James to that plan.

Now, James sort of shocks us. He starts out by questioning the very practice of planning. He does this by using a business example from that day. Turn to James 4:13-17 (pg. 827 - NIV) - **13 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." 14 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.** Now what kind of planning is James addressing. Is he saying all planning is bad? I don't think so. Rather, he's asking us to look at our attitudes and some assumptions about how we go about planning. What he's addressing here is that too often we just rush into our plans as if they were our plans and leave God out. And here's the point that I think we'll see James focus on through this whole teaching. Let me put this in a question form - **Is there room for God in my plan?** This is a question we need to ask ourselves as we make plans. It is a macro or big question. Do I allow God to have a say in my planning overall? It is a micro or small question. Do I allow God to have influence in a specific plan? How have we invited God into our planning?

James is addressing something deeper than just planning. He's speaking to our over confidence, a presumption of control. Let's call it what it really is - arrogance. He is speaking to anyone who just assumes they are going to be able to do this or that! What's really behind this is what is behind all our spiritual problems. We think we know best! We take and maintain control of things. This is nothing less than the pride I spoke about last week. If you missed that message, we archive them online. We assume we can or should engage in this or that and make the decision or plans out of our own wisdom or out of what we want or think we need or what we think is best is for us.

Can we be honest right now? The fact is that you and I make plans all the time, on our own, without really considering God, what he wants or even how our plans might affect our relationship with him. I'm sorry to admit that I do that too. We make plans all the time without considering how our plans will affect our spiritual life. We make plans without inviting God into our planning. We all do it. It is our default way of planning.

We need a car. The old one is dead or dying quickly. Are going to buy a new car and take out a 60 month loan? We start to make a plan. Do we give God and his wisdom a place in our plan? In a series we did this summer called Decision, I asked us to ask this

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question: **What is the wise thing to do?** That is one way we invite God into our planning. Is this loan wise? What does God think about this? How does he want me to use my money while addressing my need. Have I even taken time to really pray about it?

Last fall my daughter got injured and wasn't able to work. She needed a vehicle. I gave her one of ours and I went and bought a new vehicle. I honestly never prayed about it or asked God what was the wise things to do. Of course I thought it through thoroughly and carefully. But it was my plan and mine alone. I'm guessing I'm not the only one who does that. I'm not even saying the decision I made was bad or wrong. I just did it on my own. I don't always do that, but I did in that situation.

James brings up another point about the folly of our arrogance in planning around God. Let's re-read verse 14 - **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.** This is a bit sobering. Our lives are like a mist.

I was in Ukraine a month ago celebrating the 20 anniversary of a Christian college I helped start. The campus is located on the Dnieper River. It is beautiful. One morning I woke up to a light fog. I went outside. And before my eyes, I watched as the sun rose and cleared off the fog. I literally watched it disappear above and around me. That's our lives.

I turn 62 next month. As a child or young adult we love counting up our years. Ask my 5 year old granddaughter how old she is and she'll say; "I'll be six in January." But my life is counting down. These 62 years have just flown by. They have evaporated quickly. The final 20 or so, they will evaporate quickly as well. I'm now old enough to see how fast and fleeting life is. I don't feel old, but all of a sudden my baby boy is a man and a father and I'm a grandfather. As a young man I didn't see life as a mist. It seemed like it would go on forever. But James reminds us that our life is like the fog that forms overnight and is burned off as the sun starts shining. So that should put some perspective to our planning. We actually have so little time on earth. Planning is about our time and our lives - gifts God has given us. So we have to ask: **Is there room for God in my plan?**

You see partnered with pride and a self-reliant focus, we also assume that we can direct the affairs of tomorrow. The fact is we don't have a clue what will happen tomorrow. I keep thinking of those 22,000 fans attending the country music concert in Las Vegas. They all had plans for that night, the next day and beyond. Who could have possibly known how short life would be for the 58 killed and how fragile for the 500 plus that were wounded. Life passes quickly - trust me. So our planning has to take that into consideration.

As I introduced the book of James I said that he takes the wisdom of Proverbs and combines it with the teachings of Jesus. Here's another example. Turn to Proverbs 27:1 (pg. 451- NIV) - **Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may**

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**bring.** And Jesus in Matthew 6:34 (pg. 661- NIV) - ***Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*** What matters most is today, right now. That is what we can influence. It is only the now, not tomorrow, that we can enjoy. We can only enjoy the now. We can't control tomorrow and so why worry about tomorrow. There are things we need to give our full attention to now. And we need to do that from a God perspective. Faith is about living life to the best of our ability now. That is all we have control over.

But that doesn't mean we never plan! So how are we to approach the necessity of planning. James gives clear direct guidance found James 4:15-17 (827 - NIV) - ***15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*** Now we get to the real stuff. You can tell by the strong language James uses!

We are tempted in arrogance plan our life around God. James calls us to plan in light of God's will. God's will is important to understand. That's why I just did that whole series on God's will back in July called Decision. If you missed that, you can watch the four messages of the [Decision](#) online anytime.

What James is asking us to do is rather simple. We simply want to consider God in our planning! What does God say in the Bible about the decision or plan I'm making? Remember the question I taught us to ask in the Decision series - **"What is the wise thing to do?"** Wisdom comes from God so we are asking what God has said regarding the commands or principles we apply to a situation. What values does God want me to live by that should play into my planning?

The painful, honest reality is that we tend to neglect God and plan our lives as if he did not exist! I know that is true because it happens in my life. It happens to you too. It isn't that we don't believe in God. We just forget to invite him into our planning. Then we ask God to bless the plan we made without him. And then when the plan we made without God's input goes wrong, we cry for help or in anger we wonder why God let us get into the mess ... that we actually planned!

So James is encouraging us to invite God into our planning. That might mean you slow down your planning and that is almost always a good thing. It means we truly pause long enough to pray, to talk to God about what we are thinking. We actually ask God what the wise thing to do is before we put the plans in motion. We think through the spiritual commands and principles in the Bible and apply them to our plans. Sometimes we might even abandon our plans because of this. And we seek wise counsel from trusted godly people in making our plans. But fundamentally, we believe that God is present, available, and wants to guide us. **Is there room for God in my plan?**

Here's where God, through James is leading us. We submit to God and his will in all things. We let him have the first and last word in our planning. We push back the

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self-centered pride, which James calls boasting, and let God have a say in what we do today and tomorrow. We invite God's influence in our planning.

Now, verse 17 is really interesting. Let's re-read it - ***If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*** This is both a spiritual fact and a great definition of sin. If you know what God wants, if you know what is good according to God and don't do it - that is sin. Sin isn't just doing something wrong or bad, it is not doing the good we know we should do!

But in context James is saying more than that. He's actually speaking about the issue of being flexible. Here's my problem. I'll bet it is yours too. I make plans. I might even make the plan asking for God's guidance. It might be a really good and godly plan. Then a people problem or need pops up. It feels like an interruption, a distraction. It was not a part of my plan. It wasn't a part of my plan that included God! Now we have to decide what to do. Do we adjust our plan? How do we adjust?

Jesus tells a powerful story found in Luke 10 about a Jewish guy that gets beat up, robbed and left for dead. A priest came by but he had plans! He can't be distracted from his calling to go work in the Temple. That's really important and a very godly responsibility. He's got important things to do. Then another religious leader called a Levite comes by. Same story. He's got important business to do in Jerusalem so he can't help. There's no flexibility for these two who know the laws and good will of God so well. They know the good they should do, but don't do it. God through James says that's sin.

But it is a Samaritan, one who was disliked by the Jewish people, who was on a business trip who stops and helps the poor man. He takes a personal risk as the robbers could have been waiting for the person who might help. And he also put aside his plans. He stopped his business trip! He went the extra mile of taking the wounded man to an inn and paid for the cost of his care. Wow! This is a perfect example of what James is teaching. It must be the good and right thing we know we should do that is right before us that must drive our actions and plans.

Being flexible is not being wishy-washy. Being flexible is allowing God to direct and change the course of our plans. James is challenging us to make room for God to change our plans! **Is there room for God in my plan?** Is there room for him to make a change in my plans!

So let's apply this. I asked you earlier to think about something you are planning. Now take the time to consider God in your plan. What does God think about what you are planning? Ask him to shape your plan. Consider what God values and let it shape your plan. Take the time to talk to others about what they understand God's will to be in relation to your plan.

Maybe here's why we don't invite God into our planning. Do we really trust him? Do I

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really trust that he has my best interests at heart? Do I trust his goodness and the goodness of his ways? Do I have faith or truly believe, and that's what James has been focusing on, that the life God has for me is better than what I can plan and manage? Do I really believe? When we ignore God in our planning and make our plans without him, we act like we don't trust him! If we don't trust God, we take control of our plans!

How do we make room for God in our planning? Start by asking the question: **Is there room for God in my plan?**

Or maybe you've sensed some plans God has for you? Have you sensed a nudging to do something, to start something? Maybe you've been resisting it. Maybe God has been nudging you to be baptized. Last week 29 people made that decision. Maybe it is about joining or even starting a group. Maybe you've realized you need to find a place to serve and give back to others. Maybe you've been thinking about the need to go or go back to school. Maybe you've worried about the potential for failure or what others would think? What is the good that God wants for you and wants you to do that requires a change of plans? If you need help, we've got folks who can help you at Launching Point - room number 3 off the courtyard. We call it "Launching Point" because we want to help launch you into the good God wants for you. Our prayer partners will be here at the end to pray with you about a plan that you want to invite God into.

**Pray**