

Small Group Guide: Living with God Today

Sermon Focus: Understanding that God controls tomorrow so we can obey Him today, based on James 4:13-17.

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: Share one plan you made this past year that didn't go as expected. How did you respond when things didn't work out?

Key Takeaways (Review Together)

1. **Life is a vapor** - We are temporary and dependent on God by design
 2. **Grace is practical** - God's grace empowers our obedience today, not just our standing before Him
 3. **Jesus is our tomorrow** - Because Jesus controls the future, we can trust Him with today
 4. **Obedience is the evidence** - Living with God means obeying God, not just feeling close to Him
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text (15 minutes)

1. Read James 4:13-17 together. What stands out to you most from this passage? Why do you think James uses such sharp language in verse 17?
2. The sermon explained that "vapor" or "mist" doesn't mean meaningless, but rather *dependent*. How does this change your understanding of what James is saying about human life?
3. What is the difference between making plans and trusting your plans? How can we practically make plans while still acknowledging God's control?

Personal Reflection (20 minutes)

4. The pastor defined "the illusion of control" as overestimating our control over specific outcomes. Which of these signs of the illusion of control resonates most with you?
 - Preference for positions of authority
 - Blaming yourself or others disproportionately
 - Being too busy/overly involved

- Panicking, withdrawing, or getting angry when things don't go as planned
- 5. James 4:17 says, "It is sin to know the good and yet not do it." What is something good you know you should do but have been avoiding or neglecting? What keeps you from doing it?
- 6. The sermon mentioned "sins of omission" - things we leave undone. In what area of your life are you most prone to these sins?
 - Patience with family
 - Sexual purity
 - Time with God in prayer and Scripture
 - Generosity
 - Sharing Jesus with others
 - Other: _____

Applying the Truth (20 minutes)

- 7. **Gary's Mist Wisdom** offered four lessons on living wisely:
 - Go to the past for lessons, not reasons or explanations
 - Don't go to the "what ifs" of the future because Satan lives there
 - Take responsible action in the present based on what you actually know
 - Look for Jesus and live faithfully with Him today

Which of these four lessons do you most need to apply right now? Why?

- 8. The sermon stated: "Grace removes earning, not effort." How does this truth change the way you think about obedience and your relationship with God?
- 9. Discuss this statement: "Your obedience does not protect you from suffering. It actually guarantees it." How does Jesus' example help us understand this? How should this shape our expectations as we follow Him?

Looking Ahead (15 minutes)

- 10. As we approach 2026, what plans are you making? How can you hold those plans with open hands while still being wise and responsible?
- 11. The sermon emphasized that "God doesn't want your faultlessness. He wants your obedience." What would change in your daily life if you truly believed this?
- 12. Complete this sentence: "Because Jesus is my tomorrow, today I can..."

Practical Applications

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to this week:

- [] **Daily Prayer Practice:** Each morning this week, pray: "Lord, help me live with You today by obeying You today. Show me what You want me to do."

- [] **The "If the Lord Wills" Exercise:** When making plans this week (even small ones), consciously acknowledge God's sovereignty by saying, "If the Lord wills..." and reflecting on what that means.
 - [] **Obedience Inventory:** Identify one specific thing you know is good but haven't been doing (James 4:17). Share it with one trusted person and ask them to pray for you and check in with you.
 - [] **Grace Journal:** Each day, write down one moment where you needed God's grace for practical obedience. Note how God provided what you needed in that moment.
 - [] **Control Audit:** Identify one area where you've been living under the "illusion of control." Confess it to God and one other person. What does obedience look like in that area today?
 - [] **Future Focus:** When you find yourself anxious about tomorrow, repeat this truth: "Jesus is my tomorrow. He wants to be with me today."
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Memory Verse

James 4:14-15 - "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring, what your life will be, for you are like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'"

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Pray together as a group, focusing on:

- Thanking God that Jesus is our tomorrow
 - Confessing areas where we've lived under the illusion of control
 - Asking for practical grace to obey God today
 - Committing our plans for 2026 to God's will
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Leader Notes

- Be prepared to share vulnerably about your own struggles with control and obedience
- The Napoleon Bonaparte story can be a helpful reference point throughout discussion
- Encourage specific, concrete applications rather than general commitments
- Remind the group that grace is for today's obedience, not yesterday's failures
- Consider following up individually with members who share specific struggles

How does Napoleon's failed Russian campaign illustrate the limits of human control, and where in your own life have you experienced plans falling apart despite your best efforts?

What is the difference between making plans for the future and trusting in your plans for the future, and how can we practically live out this distinction?

James says our life is like a vapor or mist—temporary and uncontrollable. How does understanding this truth change the way you approach your daily decisions and relationships?

In what areas of your life are you most tempted to believe the illusion of control, and what signs indicate you might be operating under this illusion?

How does the concept of sins of omission—knowing the good you should do but failing to do it—challenge your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus faithfully?

The sermon states that God wants our obedience, not our excellence or faultlessness. How does this shift your perspective on your relationship with God and your spiritual growth?

Dallas Willard said that grace removes earning, not effort. How does this understanding of grace as practical help for obedience today differ from how you've previously thought about grace?

Gary's mist wisdom includes not going to the what-ifs of the future because Satan lives there. What anxieties about tomorrow are keeping you from living obediently with God today?

Jesus' perfect obedience guaranteed his suffering rather than protecting him from it. How does this reality reshape your expectations about what faithful Christian living looks like?

If Jesus is your tomorrow and your future is already secure in him, what specific act of obedience is God calling you to today that you've been avoiding or postponing?