

Small Group Guide: Trust in Christ, Not the World

Based on James 4:13-5:12



Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to open your hearts to His Word and help you examine where you're placing your trust and hope.

Icebreaker

Share one thing you're currently looking forward to or planning for in the next year. What excites you most about it?

Key Takeaways

1. **Don't trust in the things of this world—trust in Christ**
 2. **Live with the expectation of Christ's return**
 3. **Pursue the eternal rather than the temporary**
 4. **Patiently waiting doesn't mean standing still—get to work**
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Discussion Questions

Section 1: Plans vs. God's Will (James 4:13-17)

Read James 4:13-17 together

1. What's the difference between making plans and boasting about tomorrow? How can we tell when we've crossed that line?
2. The sermon mentioned submitting our plans to God rather than asking God to approve our plans. What does this look like practically in your life?
3. Share about a time when your plans didn't work out. Looking back, how did you see God's will at work?
4. How does the phrase "if the Lord wills" change our approach to planning? Is this just a religious saying, or should it genuinely affect our mindset?

Section 2: Material Wealth vs. Spiritual Health (James 5:1-6)

Read James 5:1-6 together

5. James uses harsh language about wealth and material possessions. Why do you think he felt this was necessary for the early church? Is it still relevant today?
6. The sermon referenced Jesus's teaching about storing treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). Where do you honestly see your heart gravitating—toward earthly comfort or eternal purpose?
7. What's the difference between having wealth and being consumed by it? Can you think of biblical examples of people who handled wealth well?
8. How does Solomon's conclusion in Ecclesiastes (that all earthly pursuits are "vanity") challenge our culture's definition of success?

Section 3: Patient Waiting and Active Work (James 5:7-12)

Read James 5:7-12 together

9. Explain the farmer analogy in your own words. What does "tilling the soil" look like in sharing the gospel with others?
10. The sermon warned against two extremes: being too timid to share truth or being too harsh (like protesters with megaphones). Which extreme are you more prone to? Why?

11. How does remembering that we're "the chief of sinners" (like Paul) change the way we approach evangelism and conversations about faith?
 12. James says "the judge is standing at the door." If you truly believed Christ could return today, what would you do differently?
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Personal Reflection

Take 3-5 minutes of silence for individuals to consider:

- **What am I building my life on?** Am I more concerned with material wealth or spiritual health?
 - **Where is my hope placed?** In the comforts of this world or in Christ's return?
 - **Am I standing still or cultivating?** What "seeds" is God calling me to plant this week?
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Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge (Choose 1-2):

1. **Audit Your Plans:** Write down your major plans for the next 6-12 months. Pray over each one, genuinely asking "Lord, is this Your will?" and being willing to hear "no."
 2. **Cultivate the Soil:** Identify one person in your life whose heart seems "hardened" to the gospel. Commit to praying for them daily and looking for one opportunity this week to show Christ's love through action.
 3. **Treasure Inventory:** Make a list of what you spend the most time, money, and mental energy on. Does this list reflect eternal priorities or temporal ones? Share your findings with an accountability partner.
 4. **Practice "If the Lord Wills":** For one week, consciously add "if the Lord wills" (or "God willing") to your plans when talking with others. Notice how it changes your perspective.
 5. **Study Job:** Read the book of Job this month. Pay special attention to how Job interceded for others both before and after his suffering. Journal about what you learn.
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Group Activity

The Farmer Exercise:

- Have each person draw a simple picture of a field
 - Label different sections: "Hard soil" (people/situations resistant to the gospel), "Seeds planted" (conversations started), "Growing crops" (people showing interest), "Harvest" (people who've come to faith)
 - Share your drawings and discuss: Where do you see God working? Where do you need to do more cultivating?
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Closing Reflection

Read this quote from the sermon aloud:

"The righteousness is not yours. You didn't earn it. You don't have it. You didn't do it. Jesus cloaked you in his righteousness. It is only through him that you are saved."

Final Question: How does remembering this truth change the way you approach both your plans and your witness to others?

Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer

- Share prayer requests, particularly related to:
 - Plans you're submitting to God's will
 - People you're praying for to come to Christ
 - Areas where you're struggling to trust Christ over worldly comfort

Close by praying for each request and asking God to help the group live with expectation of Christ's return while actively cultivating the fields He's placed them in.

5-Day Devotional: Living for Eternity



Day 1: The Vapor of Life

Reading: James 4:13-17

Devotional: Our lives are but a vapor—here for a moment, then gone. James confronts our tendency to make elaborate plans while forgetting the brevity of our existence. We schedule our tomorrows with confidence, plotting business ventures and life goals as if we control the outcome. But do we submit these plans to God's will? The issue isn't planning itself; it's the arrogance of planning without God. Today, examine your calendar, your goals, your dreams. Are they submitted to the Lord's approval, or are you asking God to bless your agenda? True wisdom says, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." Your plans matter, but His will matters more. Let your yes mean yes—a yes to God's purposes first.

Reflection Question: What plans have I made without consulting God's will?

Day 2: Where Your Treasure Lies

Reading: Matthew 6:19-21; James 5:1-6

Devotional: Jesus warned us not to store up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy. James echoes this with startling urgency: your riches are corrupted, your gold corroded. The corrosion itself becomes a witness against you. This isn't a condemnation of

wealth but of misplaced affection. Where is your heart? Are you building an empire in a world that's passing away, or investing in eternity? The rich young ruler couldn't let go; Zacchaeus gave it all back. The difference wasn't their bank accounts but their hearts. Solomon, the wealthiest man who ever lived, concluded that all worldly pleasure is meaningless without God. What are you chasing—comfort in this life or treasure in heaven? Your answer reveals where your heart truly resides.

Reflection Question: Am I more concerned with material wealth or spiritual health?

Day 3: Patiently Cultivating the Harvest

Reading: James 5:7-9; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

Devotional: "Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." But patience doesn't mean passivity. The farmer doesn't simply wait for rain—he tills the soil, plants seeds, and tends the field. He does his part, then trusts God for the increase. We're called to the same active patience. Are you cultivating the hardened ground around you? Are you planting gospel seeds in conversations, relationships, and daily interactions? Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. Your job isn't to save anyone—that's the Holy Spirit's work. But you must till the soil of hardened hearts through love, compassion, and truth. You must scatter seed generously. Then wait patiently for God's rain to bring the harvest. The judge stands at the door. Are you working while you wait?

Reflection Question: How am I actively preparing the ground for gospel seeds in my community?

Day 4: Remembering You're Saved by Grace

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 3:23-24

Devotional: Paul called himself the "chief of sinners." He never forgot how desperately he needed the cross. Yet some Christians live as if their righteousness is self-made, treating others with judgment rather than mercy. The righteousness you wear isn't yours—it's Christ's. You didn't earn it, don't deserve it, and can't maintain it by your own strength. You're clothed in Jesus' righteousness alone. This truth should humble us and fill us with compassion. When sharing the gospel, do you speak from a place of superiority or from recognition that you're a fellow beggar showing others where to find bread? The Pharisees made following God impossible; Jesus made it accessible through grace. Don't be a

Pharisee. Remember the cross daily—you needed it desperately yesterday, you need it today, and you'll need it tomorrow.

Reflection Question: Am I sharing the gospel from humility or arrogance?

Day 5: Living with Eternal Expectation

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 22:12-21

Devotional: James wrote 2,000 years ago that "the coming of the Lord is at hand." If it was imminent then, how much more now? We live in the last days, closer to Christ's return than any generation before us. This should electrify our faith. Are you as excited about Jesus' return as you are about vacation plans or sporting events? Christ's return is the one certainty we can count on—not a possibility but a promise. Job longed for a mediator between man and God; we have one in Jesus Christ. Job persevered through unimaginable suffering, never cursing God, and afterward interceded for those around him. His faith saved others. Are you living with that same eternal perspective? Trust Christ completely. Expect His return eagerly. Pursue eternal things passionately. The time is short. Live like it.

Reflection Question: Does my daily life reflect the belief that Jesus could return today?