

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“Planning with Open Hands”

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): James/Jacob 4:13-17; 1:9-11; Num. 14:39-45; Josh. 9:14

Most of us make plans every day without thinking much about it. We plan what we will do tomorrow, where we will go next month, what we will purchase, how we will use our money, and what we hope our lives will look like several years from now. Planning is not inherently wrong. In fact, wisdom often requires us to think ahead. The problem begins when we hold those plans with closed fists—when our plans become settled conclusions that we expect God to approve rather than surrendered possibilities that we have placed into His hands.

This is the condition Jacob confronts in this passage. The traveling merchants were saying, *“Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit”* (Jacob 4:13). Their occupation was not the problem. Their hearts were. They had determined the time, chosen the place, calculated the duration, and anticipated the profit, but there was no indication that they had asked what God desired. Planning with open hands does not mean that we have no direction. It means that every plan remains submitted to the Lord who gives life, wisdom, and security.

1. OPEN HANDS INVITE GOD INTO OUR PLANS

Jacob repeatedly emphasizes the certainty of their language: “We will go. We will spend. We will do business. We will make a profit.” There is no “if,” no “perhaps,” and no recognition that circumstances might change. Their hands are closed tightly around the future they have designed. They speak as though tomorrow belongs to them and as though their resources give them mastery over what is coming. Their words reveal the orientation of their hearts: they are confident that they can successfully plan their lives without seeking God’s direction.

This kind of arrogant independence is the water in which our culture swims. We are taught to become self-sufficient, determine our own future, pursue our own vision, and make things happen. We may even separate portions of our lives and say, “This belongs to God, but this is just business,” or, “This is simply a financial decision.” But planning with open hands means that no part of our life is closed off from Him. The question is not merely, “Can I do this?” The deeper question is, “Lord, is this what You desire?”

2. OPEN HANDS REMEMBER THAT LIFE IS A VAPOR

Jacob interrupts their confident planning with a sobering reminder: *“Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes”* (Jacob 4:14). We are not experts concerning tomorrow.

We do not have mastery over what is coming. Our lives are like mist, smoke, an exhalation—appearing for a moment and then disappearing. We cannot grip tomorrow tightly because tomorrow was never ours to control.

This is not intended to make us fearful or paralyzed. It is intended to make us humble and dependent. Jacob continues, *“Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’”* (Jas. 4:15). “If the Lord wills” is not meant to become an empty religious phrase attached to plans we have already decided to pursue. It expresses a heart that holds every plan openly before God and genuinely asks, “What does the Lord desire? What is He doing, and how can I bring my plans into alignment with Him?”

3. OPEN HANDS MUST BE WILLING TO OBEY

Jacob then exposes what sits beneath this independence: *“But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil”* (Jacob 4:16). They are boasting in their ability to determine their own lives without divine guidance. This is not the good kind of boasting that praises God or rejoices in what Messiah has done. It is boasting in repeated acts of self-determination—the big talk of “I am going to do this, accomplish that, go there, and make this happen.” Closed hands cling to control. Open hands release the need to determine the outcome.

Jacob concludes, *“Therefore whoever knows the right thing to do and does not do it—for him it is sin”* (Jacob 4:17). Open hands are not passive hands. Once we have heard the Word, acting on it is not optional. We cannot say that we desire God’s will while refusing to do the good He has already revealed. We know that He calls us to care for the vulnerable, show mercy, avoid favoritism, act justly, and use what He has entrusted to us for His purposes. Planning with open hands means being willing not only to hear His desire, but also being committed **to do** what He says.

CONCLUSION

The issue in this passage is not whether we use calendars, make budgets, develop business plans, save money, change jobs, move to another city, or prepare for retirement. The issue is how tightly we are holding those plans. Israel once stored grain because God told Joseph that a famine was coming. In the wilderness, Israel was told not to store manna because God wanted them to depend upon His daily provision. The question was never simply, “Should we store or not store?” The question was, “What does the Lord desire *now*?”

Perhaps there is an area of your life that you have been holding with a closed fist. Maybe there is a decision you have avoided praying about because you are afraid He might say no. Maybe you have been asking God to bless what you have already determined rather than honestly asking what He desires. The invitation today is to open your hands before Him. Bring Him your business, finances, relationships, future, retirement, ministry, dreams, and tomorrow. Lay them on the altar and say, “Lord, I do not want to cling to my will and call it Yours. I want to desire and to do what You desire.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was wrong with the merchants' plans in Jacob 4:13 if planning and conducting business are not inherently sinful?
2. What does the description of life as a vapor teach us about humility, security, and our dependence upon God?
3. How is saying, "If the Lord wills," with sincerity different from using the phrase as an empty religious expression?
4. What current plan, decision, or desire are you holding most tightly right now?
5. What would it look like practically for you to place that plan into God's hands and remain willing to obey His direction?

CLOSING PRAYER:

ADONAI, forgive us for the times we have held our plans with closed fists and acted as though tomorrow belonged to us. Forgive us for making decisions, pursuing profit, and determining our direction without seeking Your counsel. Expose every place where we have separated our faith from our work, finances, relationships, or future.

Teach us to plan with open hands. Give us humble hearts that listen for Your voice and willing hands that do the good You reveal. We place our plans, resources, dreams, and tomorrow into Your hands. If You will it, we will live and do this or that. May our lives be whole, surrendered, and pleasing to You. We want to make you smile.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.