

The Future

- I was looking at some books on planning for the future. Here are some that I saw recently:
- What Color Is Your Parachute? Discover Yourself, Design Your Future, and Plan for Your Dream Job (For kids going to college)
- I'm dead: Now what? (Death planning)
- 50 Things to do before you deliver (Birth planning)
- Planning for Everything
- Strategic Planning Kit For Dummies
- There are meal planners, exercise planners, daily planners, wedding planners and vacation planners.
- Do you know though, that until that last couple of hundred years, the idea of planning for the future was the province of the small middle and upper class.
- For most of history, people lived at a subsistence level. They were concerned primarily with how to live and eat. They had no time or energy to plan too far into the future.
- We now live in a culture that some would say is obsessed about planning for the future.
- Young kids dream about how they are going to be professional musicians or athletes.
- High school kids plan for the college they are going to go to, the degree they will get and the job that will make them plenty of money.
- Single people plan to get married. Married people plan to have kids. Then they eventually plan for how to get the kids out.
- We plan to get promoted and buy our first house.
- We plan for how we are going to change or grow in a ministry position.
- We make financial plans for a good retirement.
- We plan for the next vacation, the next party or family gathering.
- Now, there IS something I would call a *planning continuum*.
- Some do a minimal amount. They plan a bit because they have to, but generally they simply let life come to them. The future is not certain so why worry about it? It will all work out. They decide what to do on a vacation then they wake up and find themselves on vacation. Dinners are decided in the moment and retirement is something that will work itself out.
- Others do a lot of planning. They have spreadsheets and lists for everything. They have their path mapped out at work. They have every day of vacation planned for, and they know exactly what it is going to take to retire and do the things they want to do.
- One believes that those who plan too detailed are needlessly complicating things, while the other is horrified at the lack of planning and think it is completely irresponsible.
- Is one more right than the other?

- We have been studying the book of James (actually a letter) and while much of what he said seems to be disconnected, he really is grouping all his instructions in three big areas. How to live in wisdom. How to deal with people and relationships. How to use money and stuff.
- His main idea is that AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS and today he addresses the issue of our attitude towards the future.
- How do you see the future? Positively? Negatively?
- Our view of our future is colored by our past (what has happened before in our lives) and heavily weighted by our present. What's the current positive or negative situation.

- Jesus talked about the future. He told stories and parables about it.
Luke 12:16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."'
- He had his retirement all planned out. He was going to enjoy the fruits of his life.
20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'
- All his plans came to nothing, because he died before he could benefit from any of it.
- Or how about this one?
Matthew 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."
- One built for the future based on living according to the words of Jesus and the other built for the future based on his own desires. The results were dramatically different.
- I wonder if James had these and other stories in mind when he wrote this part of his letter.
James 4:13 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. 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.
- James is probably addressing the middle class merchant type with this. In James' day, merchants would gather goods and products from one city and travel to a distant city and remain until they sold those goods at a profit. Then, using their profits, they'd buy up products from that city and head to another city to sell them.
- The main idea here is not to plan or not to plan for your future. It is about your perspective of your future. There are two things we have to hold to be true about the future. The first is fairly evident.

I. Admit my inability to know or control my future. (v13-14)

- The first problem these people had is that they thought they were in control of their future.
- We will go this city. . .
- We will spend a year there. . .
- We will carry on business. . .
- We will make money. . .
- These people were not just planning, they were arrogant in their plans. They were boasting about it like they had it all figured out.
- James asks the question: "What is your life?" You simply do not have the control you like think you have in your life.
- You are smart people. You all know this. If we did have control, our present wouldn't be so different from what we expected or hoped.
- Since we know the future is not certain, we try to control it. One way is by making as many plans as possible. We think of as many contingencies and eventualities as we can. Or,

conversely, we gain control by ignoring it altogether because it is scary, overwhelming and complicated. We control all our thoughts and emotions by keeping them in the now.

- We don't know what will happen tonight, much less next week or next year so when you are faced with your future, you can ignore it or you can try to control everything about it. Neither will work.
- The second problem these people had is they forgot how temporary life is.
- The idea of mist or smoke was commonly used in antiquity to refer to the temporary nature of life.
- I need to admit to myself that I don't know my future and that I ultimately cannot control it.
- I also need to see that my life is simply not that long and it is frail in the overall scheme of things.
- A proper perspective is necessary when we look at our future and it begins with an examination of our own place in all this.
- If we stopped there, it would be depressing and hopeless. Remember that there are two truths that we must hold at the same time.

II. God understands my future better than I do. (v15-16)

- Which means that only God can be trusted with the future.
- "The Lord wills" could seem like a throw-away line. But the implications behind this statement are huge.
- God has plans. God has purposes. God sees the big picture. God understands what is happening in your life, the lives of everyone around you.
- We live our lives with this assumption that we know what is best for us. We know how it should turn out. We have a map in our head, a set of expectations, that if we can make things happen this way, all will be right in our worlds.
- James has already shown that the root of our conflict problems is in our own desires. Those same desires lead us to want to control our future.
- James is addressing those that believed they were the center of their plans. Not only did they believe they were in control, they thought that they knew best.
- They were actually boasting and bragging about it.
- The object of their boasting was not that they were going to make money, but that they were in charge of their lives. They made plans and were confident in their abilities and resources to carry them out.
- The term arrogant schemes – connected to self-confidence. The focus is where you put your trust.
- The boasting term is a negative one for presumptuous bragging.
- The construction of the sentence seems to say that they are bragging about their ability to plan and control their lives independently of divine guidance.
- When people boast about their own autonomy, they sin.
- Only God can be trusted with your future.
- "If it is the Lord's will" is an interesting phrase.
- The expression is not just this pious religious phrase that we add to the end of a statement. It is not something we just repeat mindlessly. We run the risk of fatalism. Fatalism says that we might want something, but whatever God wants, God will do, and we can use this to excuse us from taking responsibility for our actions.
- What is more important than the mere verbalization of these words (in other words, just adding "God willing" to any sentence is not the goal) is the attitude of humility that puts God at the center of all of our planning.

- Proper attitude does not exclude planning – but it does mean this. You are not the center of your life and plans. God understands your future better than you do.
- “What God is doing or asking of you is exactly what you would do or ask of you if you knew everything he knew.”
- You see, if we believe we that we have no ability to know or control of future, but not the faith that God understands, we will worry, try to control, obsess. We will do it based on what I think is best. It will be all about me and my life. This is exhausting, defeating and in the end, miserable.
- But if I believe God understands my future better than I so but have no sense of the temporary nature of my life or the lack of control I have, I will lack urgency in aligning my life with the kingdom.
- James finishes with a thought that seems to be disconnected.
17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.
- Remember that James is poking at the attitude underneath the behavior. It is not just about what they are doing, but why and the thinking behind it.
- These were followers of Jesus who had rejected the sovereignty of God over their lives.
- They decided that their own plans, their own economic well being, their focus on making money, living comfortably, and doing this in their own power, was the most important thing.
- In doing so, their focus had narrowed to themselves. The goal of all their planning was them.
- They were putting all their effort into securing a future that they could enjoy, that would leave them happy and comfortable, and in doing so their lives lost all significance.

III. The best future is a future that takes the long view. (v17)

- It's a future in which my decisions are based on the knowledge that my life is not my own.
- It's a future where I see that life goes past this one.
- It's a future that trusts that God knows better than I do and as a result, I can do whatever he invites me into.
- It's a future that lives in obedience and gives up what I want, even when it doesn't make sense.
- James readers had ignored all the good they you should have been doing. They knew that should be listening to Jesus. Following him. Having conversations with others. Living generously. Whatever Jesus was leading them to do. Their time was supposed to be centered around God and his ways.
- Instead, they were ignoring most of it. They knew better. And he told called out his friends for what it was – sin.
- View #1: Birth, Life, Fuzzy eternity. Life is the primary focus and what I get here.
- View #2: Birth, Life, Long, glorious eternity. Life here is simply what prepares us for what happens next.
- Which one are you living?
- God is not against planning. He is against autonomous planning that does not take God into account.
- So make plans. Move into new seasons. Take a job. Stay in a job. Save money. Start a retirement fund. Serve others. Get married. Move to another place.
- BUT do it all in concert with God.
- Hold your plans loosely. The further out those plans are, the looser you should hold them.

- Admit that you can't know or control your life anyway. Know that God understands your future better than you.
- Invite God in and leave room for his will to overturn yours.
- **THE BEST FUTURE IS A FUTURE THAT TAKES THE LONG VIEW.**
- What would change if we ordered our lives this way?
- Worry less – free from fear.
- Risk more
- Be more generous.
- Accept God's correction
- Be more humble
- Make wiser decisions
- Once when Jesus was speaking about the future, about how we should live, how we need not worry, he concluded by saying this.

Luke 12:48 From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

- **THE BEST FUTURE IS A FUTURE THAT TAKES THE LONG VIEW.**
- Let's be a people, who live this life, not afraid of the future, but confident that the Lord knows and understands. Let's live a life worthy of what he has entrusted to us.