

X. Sins of Presumption

February 10/12/13, 2020 James 4:11-17 OT: Ps. 101:5; Pr. 3:6; 27:1; Dt. 32:39
NT: Mt. 7:1-5; Lk. 12:16-21

Aim: To avoid sins of presumption, both in speaking falsely against others, as well as ignoring the reality of God's providence; and to have a heartfelt submission to God that acknowledges *Deo Volente* – 'if God wills.'

Doriani: At first glance, James seems to take up a string of social sins, in no particular order. Yet, if we read closely—and we should always read God's word closely—connections to humility emerge. We see that James follows his summons to humility with a warning against several sins of arrogance, against attitudes that contradict gospel humility.

Doriani: The first sins, slander and judgment of others, are clearly acts of pride. For when we judge and condemn others, we appoint ourselves to a position over them. But what gives us the right to promote ourselves to that rank? Indeed, to take the post of judge is to usurp a role that belongs to God Himself. So, James asks, 'Who are you to judge your neighbor?'

Doriani: Second, anyone who says, 'We will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money' surely suffers from pride (4:13). Anyone who says his travel and business ventures will certainly prove successful also presumes he can master his destiny. That, surely, is a proud thought. For God is Lord of history and we are not. James questions the self-appointed master of history: 'What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes' (4:14). Third, it ought to humble us when we know the good and fail to do it (4:17).

A. Presumption against God's Law (James 4:11-12)

Moo: Verses 11-12 form a single argument about the sinfulness of critical speech. But the connection between these verses and their context is not easy to determine.... Several connections suggest that vv. 11-12 form a basically independent section that picks up a number of James's favorite themes. But the prominence of the tradition that links 'speaking evil' to the sins of jealousy, quarreling, and pride, which have been the focus of 3:13-4:10, suggests that they belong generally to this larger discussion. Perhaps vv. 11-12 should be seen as a brief 'reprise' of the larger discussion of sins of speech that opened the section (3:1-12). We would then have an *inclusio* on speech that frames the section 3:1-4:12.

MacArthur: Having just shown that the mark of a true believer is humility (4:10), James then reveals one practical way in which humility is violated and pride revealed, through defaming others.... The issue of slander, then, becomes a test of genuine salvation, and for believers, a measure of spiritual maturity.

1. Warning (4:11ab)

a) Brothers (4:11a&b)

¹¹*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother...*

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Moo: The harsh denunciatory address of 4:4 – *adulterous people* – and of 4:8 – *sinner* and *double-minded* – gives way here to James’s more familiar *brothers*. He therefore signals a shift from the call to repentance that acts as the center of the letter (4:4-10) back to exhortations relating to specific forms of behavior.

MacArthur: The threefold repetition ‘brethren...brother...brother’ reminds us of the family relationship we share with other Christians. Slander is the antithesis of what is expected and acceptable in a family, whose members are to love, support, and protect each other. While Christians are to expect slander from outside the church (1 Pe. 2:12; 3:16), slander within the church is unacceptable (cp. Gal. 5:15; Mt. 18:6).

b) *Warning against Slander (4:11a)*

¹¹*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.*

Moo: He begins with a prohibition of *slander*. This word translates a Greek word (*katalaleō*) that means, literally, ‘speak against.’ It denotes many kinds of harmful speech; questioning legitimate authority, as when the people of Israel ‘spoke against God and against Moses’ (Num. 21:5); slandering someone in secret (Ps. 101:5); bringing incorrect accusations (1 Pe. 2:12; 3:16). James warns his readers never to indulge in such slanderous speech. While we cannot know for sure just why slander was a problem in the community, the divisions that were wracking the church (3:13-4:3) may provide the best explanation. Quarrels over most issues usually end up including personal attacks and judgmental attitudes.

MacArthur: James’s words ‘do not speak against one another’ do not forbid exposing sin with a righteous intent, but rather lying with malicious intent. *Katalaleō* (‘speak against’) appears only here and in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:16. Along with the related nouns *katalalia* (‘slander’; 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Pe. 2:1) and *katalalous* (‘slanderers’; Rom. 1:30), it refers to mindless, thoughtless, careless, critical, derogatory, untrue speech directed against others.

Morgan: This verse recalls the truth that the tongue is a powerful and often misused agent in the Christian community (3:1-10), and is a primary source of conflict and contention.... ‘Speak against’ is a negative imperative, is in the present tense, and denotes ‘stop’ doing this. It is not only possible but probable that the conflicts James has addressed in the body were accompanied by these sins of the tongue. Some translations render *katalaleō* as ‘speak evil.’ It reflects the backbiting, faultfinding, harsh criticism that too often characterizes the body of Christ.

Dorani: We see again that James has an ear for sins of speech. And slander is a sin that fits the discussion of ambition. For slander is a way to promote oneself, a way to defeat a rival (3:14, 16; 4:1-2). So then, James forbids slander. The Greek word literally means ‘speak against’ (*katalaleō*) another. It might either mean to speak against someone *truly* or to speak evil *falsely*. To gossip is to take a true story where it should not go. To slander is to create and spread false stories. Both gossip and slander are sins and cause real harm. Here, James seems to warn about slander (false charges), not gossip (true charges made in the wrong court). The reason is that James’s word (*katalaleō*) translated ‘slander’ (NIV) or ‘speak evil’ (ESV) appears alongside another term that clearly means ‘gossip’ in New Testament vice lists (Rom. 1:30; 2 Cor. 12:20). Slander belongs in the same family of sin as gossip, even if they differ slightly.

Hughes: It is important that we understand the precise wording of this command as the Greek has it, because it actually forbids more than slander. Literally the command is, ‘Do not speak down on one another, brothers,’ or ‘Do not speak against one another, brethren’ (NASB). Slander is

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malicious speech that is untrue. But the command here forbids *any speech* (whether true or false) that runs down another person.... James' command to desist from harmful speech tells us that those in the early church (so historically near to Christ that Jesus' brother was one of its pastors!) were often engaged in mutually speaking against each other. They were puncturing one another repeatedly with fine gastric mixes of slander, gossip, and criticism, both behind the back and face-to-face. It was a devil's feast.

c) *Warning against Judging (4:11b)*

The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother...

Moo: James' reason for prohibiting slander is interesting.... James's addition of 'judging' takes the argument a step further. He suggests that our criticism of a fellow believer involves standing in judgment over that believer.

MacArthur: Closely associated with the sin of slander is that of being judgmental. Thus, after cautioning his readers not to 'speak against one another,' James commandingly warns the one who is judging his brother to stop. *Krinō* ('judges') does not refer to evaluation, but to condemnation (cp. Mt. 7:1-5).... If fellow believers are viewed as those chosen by God before the foundation of the world, for whom Christ died, who are loved and honored by God, and with whom we will spend eternity in heaven, we will seek to honor, love, and protect them. The first step in avoiding the sin of slander is not keeping one's lips sealed, but keeping one's thoughts about others right.

Dorani: James quickly shifts from slander to the sin of judgment. Again, judgment can mean false condemnation of the innocent or improper condemnation of those who are truly guilty. We know what is wrong with false condemnation, but what is wrong with judgment of the actual sins of others.

d) *Brothers (4:11a&b)*

¹¹*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother...*

MacArthur: The threefold repetition 'brethren...brother...brother' reminds us of the family relationship we share with other Christians. Slander is the antithesis of what is expected and acceptable in a family, whose members are to love, support, and protect each other. While Christians are to expect slander from outside the church (1 Pe. 2:12; 3:16), slander within the church is unacceptable (cp. Gal. 5:15; Mt. 18:6).

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2. **Presumption (4:11bc-12ab)**

a) *Presumption against the Law (4:11bc)*

(1) Judge of the Law (4:11b)

... speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

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Moo: But how can James claim that criticism of a fellow believer is tantamount to criticism of the law? ... James assumes that criticism of a fellow believer contradicts the demand that we love our neighbors. Therefore, we fail to keep the law when we slander and stand in judgment over one another. And in failing to keep the law, James says, we also ‘judge’ it. The last part of the verse explains [it].

MacArthur: This is the next logical step in James’s flow of thought. Since loving others is the quintessence of the law (Rom. 13:8; James 2:8), and slander is failing to love others, slander therefore is a violation of the law. The law is love codified; it is the expression of how to love others.... Since slander is a violation of the law of love, a slanderer speaks against the law and condemns the law, thus showing utter disregard for the divine standard.

Morgan: James gives two reasons to refrain from speaking evil against brothers and sisters. *First*, ‘Anyone who speaks [evil] against a brother or judges a brother, speaks [evil] against the law and judges it.’ To disparage brothers and sisters in Christ is to disparage God’s law. The ‘royal law’ (2:8) commands us to love one another. In 4:9 James called to repentance those who had a nonchalant attitude toward sin and toward God. In keeping with that idea, he insists that slandering and speaking evil of the brethren is tantamount to slandering the Lawgiver. Just as Moses shattered God’s tablet of laws at Mount Sinai, so we break God’s law when we judge and speak evil of our fellow believers.

Hughes: James’ first argument here is that when you speak against other believers, you exalt yourself above the Law.... His point is, when anyone speaks uncharitably against a fellow believer and judges him, he breaks the law of love, the royal law (2:8)—‘love your neighbor as yourself’ (Lev. 19:18)—which then makes him guilty of breaking the whole law of God (2:10). His failure to keep the Law amounts to judging it, in that he has judged it to be invalid and unnecessary.

(2) Not a Doer of the Law (4:11c)

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

Moo: Since James contrasts ‘judging’ the law with ‘keeping’ it, he apparently thinks that failure to do the law implies a denial of the law’s authority. However high and orthodox our view of God’s law might be, a failure actually to do it says to the world that we do not *in fact* put much store by it. Again, we see coming to the surface James’s understanding of Christianity as something whose reality is to be tested by the measure of obedience.

MacArthur: And if you place yourself above God’s law, warns James, ‘you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.’ The unimaginable implication of that is that the one who disregards God’s law in effect claims to be superior to the law of God, not to be bound by it or to be subject to its authority. By such fearful disrespect the sinner judges the law as unworthy of his attention, affection, obedience, submission—all of which is blasphemy against God.

Morgan: One may ask how this judging and disdain of fellow Christians may be equated with judging the law. This leads to the *second* reason James gives for refraining from speaking evil against fellow believers. ‘If you judge the law, you are not doers of it but judges.’ The one who judges (*krieneis*) the law is not a *doer* (from the common *poieō*) of it but sits in judgment against it, and, by implication, the divine Lawgiver. We usurp God’s place when we voice judgment against others. He alone has the right to enforce His decrees with life or death.

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Hughes: If we think thus, we evidently view our opinions as better than God's. We imagine that given the chance we could improve the Law.... The argument here is meant to deliver us from mind games that tell us it's okay to be judgmental because we are so spiritually sensitive and insightful, or because we have the kingdom's good as the motivation behind our judgments. God says this is stupid arrogance of cosmic dimensions.

b) *Presumption against God (4:12ab)*

Moo: But there is another reason why slandering another is so wrong: it also involves an infringement on the unique right of God Himself.

(1) Lawgiver and Judge (4:12a)

¹²*There is only one lawgiver and judge...*

MacArthur: By placing himself above the law, the slanderer also attempts to place himself above the only true 'Lawgiver and Judge'—God Himself. Such folly places the sinner on a par with Satan, who sought unsuccessfully to usurp God's throne.... The desire to usurp the place of God has been the essence of every sin ever committed. Sin seeks to dethrone God, to remove Him as supreme Lawgiver and Judge and rule in His place. Because it asserts that the sinner is above God's law...sin strikes a murderous blow at the very person of God Himself.... The Greek text literally reads 'one is the lawgiver and judge,' stressing that God alone is the sovereign ruler and judge of the universe. *Nomothetēs* ('Lawgiver') appears only here in the New Testament. It refers to one who puts the law into place. *Kritēs* ('Judge') refers to one who applies the law. God, and God alone, insists James, is both lawgiver and law-applier (cp. Is. 33:22); He gave the law and will judge men by His law. Only He, because He knows the hearts and motives of men (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kgs. 8:39; Pr. 15:11), can perfectly apply the law He has given.

Morgan: When we judge others and speak against them we are in effect pushing God off His judgment seat and placing ourselves on it. This is an action of gross presumption because God's position is absolutely unique. *First*, He is the sole true 'Lawgiver' (*nomothetēs*), 'to establish' and 'law'. His laws alone are of permanent significance. *Second*, He is the one Judge (*kritēs*) of mankind. The One who gave the law also judges us according to it.

Hughes: The second parallel argument takes the absurdity of a critical spirit a step higher, suggesting that a judgmental person sets himself not only above the Law, but above God.... Since God is the only one who can save and destroy, only God has the right to judge! Therefore, to judge one of His creatures is to usurp a right that only God has. Thus, judgmentalism is not only arrogant but blasphemous! This alone ought to seal our judgmental, demeaning lips for eternity.

(2) Save and Destroy (4:12b)

...he who is able to save and to destroy.

Moo: As Jesus reminded us, it is God alone who is able 'to destroy both soul and body and hell' (Mt. 10:28). James therefore is thinking of 'judging' in terms of determining the ultimate spiritual destiny of individuals. And the believer has no right to make any such determination.

MacArthur: God, James continues, is able both 'to save' those who place their faith in Christ 'and to destroy' unrepentant sinners; that is how He applies His law (cp. Dt. 32:29; 1 Cor. 1:18).... The writer of Hebrews declares of the Lord Jesus Christ, 'He is able also to save forever

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those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb. 7:25). Those who refuse to repent, however, God will destroy. 'Destroy' is from *apollumi*, and does not refer to annihilation, but to eternal destruction in hell (cp. Mt. 10:28; 25:26; 2 Th. 1:9). The sin of slander, James warns, is no trivial matter. It is brazen, reckless, treason against the Sovereign lawgiver and judge of the universe.

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Morgan: And His judgments upon us are of eternal validity. He has the unique ability both to save and to destroy.

Hughes: God's sovereign capacity 'to save and to destroy' is repeated many times in the Bible (e.g., Dt. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; Job 40:7-14; Mt. 10:28).

3. Question (4:12c)

a) *When It Is Right to Judge*

Dorani: Why does James oppose judgment? Judgments are necessary at times. For example, Scripture requires leaders to discern or 'judge' when a putative disciple commits a sin and refuses to repent. In that case, the supposed disciple must be put out of the church (Mt. 18:15-18; cp. Gal. 6:1). Leaders must likewise judge when a teacher is guilty of such an error or propounds such a falsehood that he must be confronted and possibly pronounced a false prophet and put out of the assembly (Dt. 13:1-11; Mt. 7:15-20; Gal. 2:11; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-5). Finally, Jesus knew judgment is sometimes necessary. Thus, he told His disciples, 'Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment' (Jn. 7:24).

Moo: We should note that James is not prohibiting the proper, and necessary, discrimination that every Christian should exercise. Nor is he forbidding the right of the community to exclude from its fellowship those it deems to be in flagrant disobedience to the standards of the faith, or to determine right and wrong among its members (1 Cor. 5 and 6). James rebukes jealous, censorious speech by which we condemn others as being wrong in the sight of God.

Hughes: It is helpful to understand that he is not saying Christians are never to make judgments about others or tell them what is what. Some reason that the greatest saints never judge anyone and that the ideal preacher is indifferent to people's moral choices, treating everyone the same. Their favorite verse is Matthew 7:1 – 'Judge not, that you not be judged.' They interpret Christ's word as meaning that if you dare make a judgment about someone's actions you will be in big trouble with God. They neglect to read the saying's context (it is directed to people who are overlooking the logs in their own eyes while they judge others). Jesus does not forbid judgment. Rather, He forbids flagrant sinners from exercising it while refusing to deal with the sin in their own lives.

Hughes: In point of fact, it is the Christian's *duty* to exercise judgment. For example, we are to beware false prophets (Mt. 7:15). How can we determine a false prophet except by judging him against the standard of the Word of God? Likewise, we are told, 'You will recognize them by their fruits' (Mt. 7:16). Recognition hinges on careful judgment. We are to judge adultery, murder, lying, and theft as sins, and if anyone does these things, we must judge them as being sinful! Jesus said, 'Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment' (Jn. 7:24).

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What the Scriptures forbid is *judgmentalism*, a critical and censorious spirit that judges everyone and everything, seeking to run others down. It is this unkind, judgmental spirit that James attacks.

b) *When It Is Wrong to Judge (4:12c)*

But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Moo: The introduction of *neighbor* here reveals that an implicit anchor for James's rebuke is the love command, with its demand that we love 'the neighbor' (Lev. 19:18; cp. James 2:8).

Doriani: But James says, there is usually no need to judge the words or deeds of another; we should attend to ourselves. That is Jesus' point at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged.... Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye' (Mt. 7:1, 3, 5). In context, Jesus is not simply uttering a general principle. He knows that those who hear His teaching will be tempted to judge others, to point out how they have failed. He says: 'Don't do it. Don't criticize others; attend to yourself.'

MacArthur: Those who slander others betray an exaggerated view of their own importance. In a stinging rebuke to them, James demands, 'who are you who judge your neighbor?' In our contemporary speech James would be saying, 'Who in the world do you think you are, sitting in condemnation of someone else?' ... Judging or slandering others is the antithesis of the humility James commanded his readers to manifest (4:10). Those who habitually engage in such behavior cast doubt on the genuineness of their faith.

Morgan: God alone is competent to judge justly (1 Cor. 4:4-5). For us to judge others, therefore, is to take upon ourselves a right that belongs to God. It is an infringement of God's prerogative. We do well to ask ourselves, 'Who am I to judge my neighbor?' ... If we grasp the presumptuousness of our judging others we will tremble at the thought of engaging in it.

Hughes: James' concluding rhetorical question is powerful: 'But who are you to judge your neighbor?' Would we take God's place? *Ignorance* mars our best judgments. We can judge external sins to be sins, but only imperfectly. We certainly do not know what is in the heart of another. God, however, knows every subtlety.... Let us thank God with all our hearts that we will not be judged by our sinful human counterparts.

4. Summary

Hughes: Normally, we would probably agree that speaking against our brothers and sisters and judging them is a serious sin. But James has set the record straight—it is one of the *worst* of sins because: 1) it is self-exaltation above the Law; and 2) even worse, it is self-exaltation above God. We must agree that judgmentalism/evil-speaking is a terrible sin, for there is one thing even worse than this—namely, denying that it is so. We must agree with God or experience terrible consequences.

B. Presumption against God's Providence (James 4:13-17)

Morgan: As James moves on to another subject, the tongue is still part of it. The tongue can be used to express an unjustified confidence about the future that is in conflict with a genuine confidence in God.

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MacArthur: True to the pattern he has followed throughout his epistle, James takes a practical approach to the issue of responding to God’s will. In a fascinating passage built around the seemingly mundane illustration of businessmen’s plans, James gives significant insight into how people respond to God’s will.

Moo: In 4:13-17, then, James returns to the theme of 1:10-11, encouraging rich believers to avoid boasting in their own worldly accomplishments and to put their trust in the Lord.

1. Scenario regarding God’s Will (4:13)

a) *The Set Up (4:13a)*

¹³*Come now, you who say...*

Moo: *Now listen* is a fair paraphrase of the Gk. *age nyn*, which means ‘come now.’ It is a stock form of address in the diatribe style that James uses elsewhere (see esp. 2:18-21). James’s tone is brusque and admonitory. Reinforced by *you who say* that immediately follows.... The tone James adopts suggests, however, that he regards the attitude of these Christians as unworthy of who they really are. We are reminded of a father forced to rebuke his children for behavior not in keeping with family values.

MacArthur: The first negative response to God’s will is foolishly ignoring it, living as if God did not exist or was indifferent to and benign toward human behavior. James addressed such people in familiar Old Testament prophetic style (cp. Is. 1:18); his words ‘come now’ are an insistent, even brash call for attention. James is in effect saying, ‘Listen up!’ or ‘Get this!’ The phrase ‘come now’ appears in the New Testament only here and in 5:1.... The Greek text literally reads ‘the ones who are saying,’ indicating people who habitually live without regard for God’s will. The underlying Greek verb, *legō*, means to say something based on reason or logic. James rebuke those who habitually think through and articulate their plans as if God did not exist or care (cp. 4:11-12).

Morgan: The beckon ‘come now’ (*age nun*) occurs only here and in 5:1 in the New Testament. It has the effect of saying, ‘listen up!’ or ‘give me your attention!’ The identity of ‘you who say,’ (a present participle, *hoi legontes*) is uncertain – is it members of the body or non-Christian businessmen? The lack of any reference to ‘brethren’ might suggest that the people were outsiders, but people in the Christian community were addressed as sinners and double-minded rather than as brothers and sisters (4:9). And the use of the tag ‘the Lord wills’ in 4:15 points to professed members of the congregation.

b) *The Scenario (4:13b)*

...“*Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit*”—

Moo: James’s quotation of the merchants that he addresses here is, of course, fictional – as the language *this or that city* makes clear. What he does is put words on their lips that pointedly bring to expression the underlying attitude that they are adopting in the plans that they make. Here are people, says James, who are deliberate and self-confident planners. They decide where they will go, when they will go, and how long they will stay. Moreover, they are quite sure about the outcome of all these plans: they will *make money*. The picture James paints here would be familiar to his first-century readers. This period was marked by growing commercial activity, and especially in the Hellenistic cities of Palestine (such as those in the Decapolis).

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Jews were especially active in these ventures; many had left Palestine to settle in cities throughout the Mediterranean world in pursuit of financial gain. And, of course, the picture is equally familiar to us in the modern world. Modes of transportation and distances have changed, but the ‘bottom line’ has not.

MacArthur: The specific illustration James chose was one that would have been familiar to his readers. Many Jewish people dispersed throughout the ancient world were successful businessmen, itinerant merchants who naturally sought out the flourishing trade centers in which to do business. Wise planning and strategizing in business is not, of course, sinful in and of itself but commendable. No spiritual principles are violated by anything the businessmen said. The problem lies in what they did not do. They did extensive planning, but in the course of their planning, they totally ignored God; God was not part of their agenda.

Morgan: James imagines businessmen sitting around their conference tables, making plans for future commercial enterprises. They were so sure of themselves that they spoke without restraint of what they would do, where they would go, and what profit they would take. They assumed that they could forecast what they were going to do on every day. But their boasting tongues led them to overlook the fact of God’s providence.

Hughes: James immediately goes on the attack.... His attack is specifically aimed at the materialistically focused Christian merchants in his congregation who arrogantly mapped out their destinations and sojourns on the basis of profitability, with no reference to the will of God.

c) *The Situation*

Morgan: The activity of planning is normal, even necessary, to any business endeavor. We should *not* interpret this verse as a denunciation of planning for the future – James reflects the teachings of Proverbs too often to suppose that (he even does so in the next verse!).

Dorani: It is still good to make plans. The Bible commends the ant for gathering food in the summer to guarantee a supply in the winter. Godly leaders often sense a God-given mission. The Bible commends Moses for planning to lead his people out of Egypt. God blessed Joshua for planning to lead Israel into Canaan, Paul rightly planned to take the gospel to places where Christ Jesus had never been preached. The saints do not hesitate to say ‘I will’ or ‘We will.’ Planning is entirely proper as long as we confess that God is sovereign and that we are frail, ignorant, and dependent upon Him.... Indeed, to refuse to plan may be a sign of sloth.... The Lord expects us to do more than take whatever pleasures each day affords.

Moo: We should guard here against another kind of misinterpretation: the idea that James is forbidding Christians from all forms of planning or concern for the future. Taking out life insurance and saving for retirement, for instance, are not condemned by James; these may very well be a form of wise stewardship. What James rebukes here, as v. 16 will make clear, is any kind of planning for the future that stems from human arrogance in our ability to determine the course of future events.

d) *The Sin*

Morgan: No, the problem is not planning but the arrogance and presumption reflected in their words. The four verbs of the phrase are all future: ‘we will go’ (*poreusometha*), ‘will spend a year’ (*poiēsomen*), ‘will do business’ (*emporusometha*), ‘and make money’ (*kerdēsomen*), literally ‘get gain.’ The verse reveals five areas of arrogant certainty about their plans: certain of future (we will go), certainty of place (into ‘this or that’ city, *tēnde*), certainty of time (spend a

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year), certainty of activity (carry on business), and certainty of result (make money). The error of these merchants is their confidence in the certainty of their plans. We sometimes say, ‘Man proposes, but God disposes.’ ... Recall the parable our Lord told about the rich man who presumptuously left God out of his planning (Lk. 12:16-21). In the end, someone else would own all that the man amassed because he stored up treasure for himself and was not rich toward God.

MacArthur: The businessmen’s statement contains five presumptuous elements, indicating their ill-advised confidence. First, they chose their own time: ‘today or tomorrow.’ Second, they chose their own location for doing business, ‘such and such a city.’ Third, they chose their own duration, deciding to ‘spend a year there.’ Fourth, they chose their own enterprise, to ‘engage in business’ (literally, to travel into an area for trade’). Finally, they chose their own goal or objective, to ‘make a profit.’ James is not attacking their profit motive, but their exclusion of God. Allowing for no contingencies, they planned as if they were omniscient, omnipotent, and invulnerable. In Luke 12:16-21 the Lord Jesus Christ told a parable illustrating the folly of presumptuously leaving God out of one’s planning.

Dorani: As he so often does, James gets at the sin of presumption through our speech.... James says such speech is presumptuous and arrogant in several ways. 1) It presumes we will live as long as we please. 2) It presumes we can make whatever plans we please: we can go today or tomorrow; the choice is ours. 3) It presumes we have the capacity to execute whatever plan we conceive. We declare that we *will* make a profit. This way of thinking forgets three things.

Moo: However, we need to guard against a misinterpretation at this point. It would be terribly tempting...to find here a rebuke of those who are out to make a profit at all. The economic system we call capitalism, in other words, might be the real target of James’s polemic. But, whatever we might think about the compatibility of Christianity and the profit motive of capitalism, it would be wrong to find any critique here. As the following verses make clear, James is not rebuking these merchants for their plans or even for their desire to make a profit. He rebukes them rather for the this-worldly self-confidence that they exhibit in pursuing these goals – a danger, it must be said, to which businesspeople are particularly susceptible.

2. Sinning against God’s Will (4:14, 16-17)

a) Ignorance (4:14a)

¹⁴...yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Moo: James now tries to bring these self-confident merchants back to a proper sense of their place in the world. He reminds them of the kind of people they really are. James makes this point subtly. Right at the beginning of the verse. The NIV attempts to capture the nuance with its introductory *Why*. The basis in the Greek text for this nuance is the word *hoitines* at the beginning of the verse. This word bears a qualitative sense: ‘people such as you.’ James is asking, in effect: How can you, being the kind of creatures that you are, presume to dictate the course of future events? The fragility of human life and the consequent uncertainty of all human plans is the main point of the verse.

Dorani: It forgets our *ignorance*. We think we can plan a year in advance and come and go as we please, but we do not even know what tomorrow will bring.

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Morgan: In verse 14, James reminds us of just how brief our lives on earth are. In doing so, he gives two important reasons for yielding to God in our plans. *First*, we do not know what tomorrow will bring.... ‘Tomorrow’ entails all that is planned by the merchants, but such planning is the height of foolishness because they have overlooked two fundamental facts: life is transitory and God is sovereign. James’ Old Testament wisdom counterpart, the Proverbs, advises, ‘Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth’ (Pr. 27:1).

MacArthur: In verse 14, James gives two important reasons those who presumptuously leave God out of their planning are foolish. First, James says to such people, ‘You do not know what your life will be life tomorrow.’ Like the rich fool in our Lord’s parable, they were ignorant of the future (cp. Pr. 27:1).

b) Impermanence (4:14b)

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Doriani: It forgets our *frailty*.... We think we can master our destiny, but our lives are insubstantial and fleeting as the morning mist, that appears and disappears in hours.

Morgan: A *second* reason why it is foolish to leave God out of our plans is because: ‘you are a mist that appears for a little while, *it is* there and then disappears.’ Life is short. The older we get, the more we realize this truth that James recounts. The word translated ‘mist’ could either mean a vapor or smoke. Either meaning conveys a familiar figure of speech. James uses a play on two verbs with ‘appears’ and ‘disappears’; the first is *phainomai* and the second is *aphanizō*. The idea of a mist, especially one that rolls in from the sea and then vanishes, would be especially relevant for sea merchants. Elsewhere in the Bible, similar pictures are used for the brevity of human life, such as the grass that withers (Is. 40:6), the flower in the field that fades (Job 14:2), a leaf in the wind (Job 13:25), or a fleeting shadow (Job 14:2). Instead of looking to God, who alone can sustain life, this person relies on what can be accomplished by his or her own efforts.

Moo: ‘Mist’ translates a relatively rare word within biblical Greek (*atmis*), which can also be rendered ‘smoke’ ... or even ‘vapor.’ ... But whichever word we choose, the point is clear enough: human life is insubstantial and transitory, here one minute and gone the next. Illness, accidental death, or the return of Christ could cut short our lives just as quickly as the morning sun dissipates the mist or as a shift in wind direction blows away smoke. The transitory nature of life that James reminds us of here is a recurring biblical theme (cp. Pr. 27:1; Job 7:7, 9, 16; Ps. 39:5-6; Lk. 12:15).

MacArthur: James gave those tempted to do so a second reason that leaving God out of one’s planning is foolish: the brevity of life. ‘You are just a vapor that appears for a little while,’ James reminded them, ‘and then vanishes away.’ Life is as transitory as a puff of smoke from a fire; the steam that rises from a cup of coffee; or one’s breath, briefly visible on a cold day. How foolish, in light of the brevity and frailty of earthly life, to plan and live it without consideration of God’s will.... Their ignorance of the future and the frailty and brevity of human life should give pause to those who foolishly ignore God’s will.

Hughes: It is fleshly presumption to say we are going to do this or that, travel here or there, without humble reference to the will of God. This is not only because of life’s uncertainty, but also because of its *brevity*.... Evidently the Spirit of God wants us to grasp and internalize the

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brevity of our lives because the Old Testament contains so many parallel similes (e.g., Job 7:6, 9:25, 26; Ps. 39:5; 102:3, 11; 103:15).

c) *Arrogance (4:16)*

MacArthur: The first wrong response to God's will is presumptuously ignoring it, living as though God and His will do not exist. But there are also those who, while acknowledging that God exists and has a will, nevertheless arrogantly reject it. Those in the first group are practical atheists—living as if God did not exist. Those in this second category are self-theists—refusing to submit the uncertainties of life to God, they set themselves, their own goals, and their own wills above God. God's will, though acknowledged, simply is not as important to them as their plans. Though such disdain does not characterize the life of a believer generally, even Christians are often guilty of setting aside God's will in favor of their own plans.

(1) Boasting in Arrogance (4:16a)

¹⁶*As it is, you boast in your arrogance.*

Moo: This verse contributes significantly to our understanding of the problem that James addresses in these verses.... The problem, as James now makes clear, is the attitude underlying this planning. *As it is* (Gk. *nyn*, 'now') brings us back to James's own present and to the problem that he is addressing. And the root problem is arrogance: *you boast and brag*. Where the NIV uses two indicative verbs, the Greek text in fact has an indicative verb followed by the preposition *en* ('n') with a plural object: 'you boast in your arrogances (*alaoneiais*).' ... The verb 'boast' (*kauchaomai*) need not have a negative connotation.... It combines the ideas of 'put confidence in' and 'rejoice in,' with the slightly archaic 'boast' still probably the best single English equivalent. The point of importance here is that 'boasting' is not itself a negative activity or attitude: the question is what it is that one is boasting in.... And so James must qualify the verb to indicate that he uses it to depict a boasting that arises from misplaced pride on one's own ability to chart the future.... It is this 'pride of life,' this arrogant sense of self-sufficiency so characteristic of the world, that James condemns in this passage.

Morgan: 'As it is' is literally 'but now' (*nun de*). The idea is, as the matter stands at the moment.' The verb 'boast' (*kauchasthe*) was used in 1:9 to denote a proper boasting or exaltation in response to God's perspective. Here, however, their glorying is in presumptuous bragging about their plans rather than humble submission of those plans to God, who alone can determine what tomorrow holds. As if their boastful attitudes were not enough, James adds that such attitudes are full of 'arrogance.' The noun (*alazoniais*) is plural, indicating that they repeatedly boasted this way.... The only other occurrence of the noun is in 1 John 2:9 where it denotes similar hollow pretensions in word and deed, an ostentatious display that goes beyond that which reality justifies. How foolish and frail of mankind to think that we can dispose of our future any way we wish.

MacArthur: Those who deny God's will, James says, 'boast' in their 'arrogance.' *Kauchaomai* ('boast') can mean 'to be loud-mouthed,' or 'to speak loudly,' either in legitimate rejoicing (e.g., Rom. 5:2-3, 11) or in touting one's own accomplishments (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:19). The context indicates James has the latter meaning in mind in this passage. *Alazoneia* ('arrogance') comes from a root word meaning 'to wander about' and reflects empty pretense. It was sometimes used to describe charlatans who traveled around selling phony goods. Taken together, the two words

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picture someone bragging pretentiously about something he doesn't have and can't obtain. Such is the arrogance, James says, of those who deny the will of God.

Hughes: Here the Greek would be better rendered, 'As it is, you boast about your pretensions. All such boasting is evil.' ... Apparently, some of James' parishioners were actually bragging around about their independent accomplishments apart from God. The same word is used in 1 Jn. 2:16 of 'the boastful pride of life' (NASB). 'Look what I have done on my own. Sure, God gave me life, but it is *my* brains, *my* plans, *my* energy.' This was amazing arrogance.

Doriani: Sadly, James says, much of our planning is boastful or arrogant... The boaster forgets God. He thinks he is the master of history. He presumes he can trade and make money when he does not even know if he will be alive tomorrow.

(2) Boasting Is Evil (4:16b)

All such boasting is evil.

MacArthur: 'All such' empty, arrogant, foolish 'boasting,' James warns, 'is evil.' Scripture uses *ponēros* ('evil') as a title for Satan (Mt. 13:38;; Jn. 17:15; Eph. 6:16; 2 Th. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19), the original boastful (cp. Is. 14:13-14) sinner. Those who arrogantly deny God's will emulate Satan's sin, and may suffer his doom.

Morgan: This climatic ending suggests that James wants to emphasize that such behavior – presently exhibited by them – is inherently evil. The presence and providence of God has been left out, and their pride has ruled the day. Presumptuous people are confident in the success of their self-made plans devised apart from consideration of Christ's Lordship. But this in no way negates the fact that God is still in control, and He can frustrate schemes among His children that are outside His will.

Hughes: James says, "All such boasting is evil." Most of us would not be so crass as to outwardly boast. We're far too urbane and culturally 'cool' to do that. But inwardly? God knows, and God has His ways of dealing with us.

Moo: *All such boasting is evil*, James concludes. The Greeks called this boastful pride *hubris*... People not only leave God out of account in planning their lives; they brag about it as well, proclaiming in effect their autonomy and independence from the Lord... We must remember, James is rebuking not people of the world but Christians. He warns, therefore, of the tendency of the world to 'press us into its mold' by leading us, perhaps very subtly, to begin assuming that we control the duration and direction of our lives. Such an attitude is simply inconsistent with a Christian worldview in which there is a God who sovereignly directs the course of human affairs.

(3) Boasting as Examples

MacArthur: Perhaps no one has expressed this defiant attitude toward God any more clearly than William Ernest Henley in his famous poem *Invictus*:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.

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Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

[Or how about the lyrics to *My Way*, famously sung by Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley]

And now, the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I've traveled each and every highway
But more, much more than this
I did it my way

Regrets, I've had a few
But then again, too few to mention
I did what I had to do
And saw it through without exemption
I planned each charted course
Each careful step along the byway
And more, much more than this
I did it my way

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew
When I bit off more than I could chew
But through it all, when there was doubt
I ate it up and spit it out
I faced it all and I stood tall
And did it my way

I've loved, I've laughed and cried
I've had my fill my share of losing
And now, as tears subside
I find it all so amusing
To think I did all that
And may I say - not in a shy way
Oh no, oh no, not me
I did it my way

For what is a man, what has he got
If not himself, then he has naught

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To say the things he truly feels
And not the words of one who kneels
The record shows I took the blows
And did it my way
Yes, it was my way

d) Omission (4:17)

¹⁷*So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

Moo: The teaching about ‘sins of omission’ in this verse appears to be rather awkwardly added to the end of this paragraph. Most commentators, in fact, think that the content of the verse was a traditional saying that James added at this point.... However, James does explicitly connect the verse to its context, with a ‘therefore’ (*oun*). While the saying may well have been traditional, then, we should presume that James had good reason to include it at this point in his argument.... He has urged us to take the Lord into consideration in all our planning. We therefore have no excuse in this matter: we know what we are to do. To fail now to do it, James wants to make clear, is sin. We cannot take refuge in the plea that we have done nothing positively wrong. As Scripture makes abundantly clear, sins of *omission* are as real and serious as sins of *commission*. The servant in Jesus’ parable who fails to use the money he was entrusted with (Lk. 19:11-27); the people who fail to care for the outcasts of society (Mt. 25:31-46) – they are condemned for what they failed to do (cp. Lk. 12:47).... James’s reminder here is an important one. For we have a tendency, when we think of sin, to think only of those things we have done that we should not have done.

MacArthur: Those guilty of this third negative approach to God’s will affirm God’s existence and acknowledge the supremacy of His will—then proceed to disobey it. James rebuked such people with the axiomatic statement that the ‘one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.’ Those in this third group know God’s will, and affirm that it is ‘right.’ *Kalos* (‘right’) describes what is qualitatively good, morally excellent, worthy of honor, and upright. In the broadest sense, God’s will is expressed in all the commands and principles of Scripture.... Those who know God’s will are responsible to obey it, and if they fail to do so, they sin. They will find no comfort in the fact that they have not actively committed sin. Just leaving God out is itself sin. The sin of disregarding and disobeying God’s will is one of omission, of not doing what one knows is right (cp. Lk. 12:47). Sins of omission are rarely isolated from sins of commission.

Morgan: James ends this section with an admonition to these merchants to do good and stop disregarding God in their lives and businesses. His call is to acknowledge God in all our attitudes (v. 16) and actions (v. 13). Failure to do so is a sin of commission – not just omission – in neglecting to seek and follow God’s desires for our lives. Sometimes we tend to think of sin as breaking a particularly command, like one of the Ten Commandments. And that certainly is sin. But sin can also be the failure to do what God commands. Or it could be a matter of the heart or mind. James reminds these merchants of this because they likely were not thinking of themselves as sinful in their presumption. James also exhorts others in the Christian community through this summary sentence. The ‘right’ thing James speaks of here translates *kalos* and means ‘morally good, noble, praiseworthy. The word is found elsewhere in Mt. 5:16; Mk. 14:6; Jn. 10:32; Gal. 6:9; 1 Tim. 5:10.

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Doriani: James says that anyone ‘who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.’ Since we know we cannot simply ‘do the good’ no matter how well we know it, we must humbly ask the Lord to lift us up. His grace does lift every penitent sinner who comes to Him. The path of the gospel is the path of humility, says James. There is a path of meekness and peace or a path of ambition and grasping. There is a way of peace or a way of striving. There is a way of repentance and conversion or a way of arrogance and pride. James bids us join him on the path of gospel humility.

Hughes: James closes with a challenge to do the truth here enjoined and not succumb to the sin of *omission*.... What is ‘the right thing’ here in our text? It is this: we are to reject the modern delusion that sees God as, even if He exists, irrelevant to life—and this being done, we are to embrace the truth that our life is short and we have no control over its brief span, finally saying with all our heart, *Deo Volente*.

3. Submitting to God’s Will (4:15)

¹⁵*Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”*

a) The Connection (4:15a)

¹⁵*Instead you ought to say...*

Morgan: Literally, the phrase reads ‘instead of your saying.’ The expression goes back to verse 13 to ‘you who say’ and makes verse 14 something of a parenthesis that rebukes the ‘practical atheism’ they commit by leaving God out of their plans. Quite contrary to the pride of verse 13, their attitude should be in keeping with James’s words in this verse....

Moo: *Instead* connects this verse to v. 13 rather than to v. 14.... James urges these confident and presumptuous merchants to add a key qualifier to their planning: ‘*If it is the Lord’s will.*’ ...

b) The Statement (4:15b)

...“*If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.*”

Moo: It is not enough, James suggests, to recognize that one’s own life is uncertain and transitory (v. 14). Such a recognition, after all, is not even specifically religious. What these merchant need to go on to reckon with is that their lives are also in the hands of God. The world is not a closed system; what appears to our senses to be the totality of existence is in fact only part of the whole. This life cannot properly be understood without considering the spiritual realm, a realm that impinges on and ultimately determines the material realm in which we live day to day. Of course, such a worldview is not specifically Christian. Few of the people who lived in James’s day would have been agnostic or atheistic; most recognized the existence of some form of divine being. And so it is not surprising that phrase such as ‘if God wills’ (Latin *Deo volente*) or ‘if the gods will’ are found in many kinds of ancient literature.... It might be significant that James encourages them to say not ‘if God wills’ but ‘if the Lord wills.’ The title ‘Lord’ (*kyrios*) conveys a more distinctive Jewish-Christian perspective than the title ‘God’ would have done.... Thus, James takes a common expression of general religious sentiment and ‘baptizes’ it in the service of his distinctive biblical vision of a biblical worldview of history and its sovereign ruler.

Morgan: ‘If the Lord wills (from *thelō*)’ expresses the attitude God blesses. James suggests that we develop a conscious awareness of God by speaking often of His will for our daily lives. To speak this way regularly will remind us of who is in control and of whom we should seek to please. But a danger arises in that the phrase can become just an empty, pious platitude. It can

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be trivialized by stating it glibly over inconsequential decisions.... But uttered reverently and rightly it would not be a bad practice to take up.

MacArthur: In contrast to the negative, sinful response to God's will discussed above, James gives the positive side. Instead of the practical atheism, self-theism, or flagrant disobedience of the first three responses, James exhorts his readers 'to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."' This fourth alternative and positive response to God's will, that of acknowledging it and obeying it, generally marks true believers. The present infinitive form of the verb translated 'to say' reveals that submission to God's will must be habitual and continual. In every aspect of their lives and in every decision they face, believers' response is to say, 'If the Lord wills.' Simply put, the will of God is central to all their plans (cp. Acts 18:21; Rom. 1:10; 15:32; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Phil. 2:19; 24; Heb. 6:3).

Dorani: Presumptuous planning also forgets *our dependence on God*.... We may still say, 'We will do this or that,' but James says we must have a preface: 'If the Lord wills.'

c) *Its Usage (4:15b)*

... "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Moo: Appropriately in the light of James's reminder that our lives are a 'mist' (v. 14), James thus makes the continuance of life itself contingent on the will of the Lord. But he also, in light of v. 13, reminds us that our plans must also be subject to the same condition. This Paul did, as he frequently expressed his submission to the Lord's will in his plans for missionary work (Acts 18:21; Rom. 1:10; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; cp. Heb. 6:3). And, more significant yet for James's background, Jesus Himself exhibited the same submission to the Lord's will at the great crisis of His own life in Gethsemane. However, as Calvin pertinently observes, Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles do not always *state* this condition when they plan for the future. What was important is not the verbalization but that 'they had it as a principle fixed in their minds, that they would do nothing without the permission of God.' James attributes no magical significance to the words themselves. 'If the Lord wills' can become nothing more than a glib formula without any real meaning. James, rather, wants us to adopt the attitude expressed by the words as a fixed perspective from which to view all of life. This perspective should add an element of contingency to all our planning – 'if the Lord allows this to happen.' But it should also force us to evaluate our planning from a biblical ethical perspective – 'if this kind of plan is in accordance with the Lord's will expressed in Scripture for His people.'

Dorani: Although Jesus had more clarity than we ever can have, He modeled this spirit in Gethsemane. Facing the cross He said, 'Your will be done' (Mt. 26:42). Paul modeled the same thing when he journeyed to Jerusalem where he knew he might suffer harm. He went where he had to go and said, 'The Lord's will be done' (Acts 21:14; cp. 18:21).... Planning is entirely proper as long as we confess that God is sovereign and that we are frail, ignorant, and dependent upon Him. The phrase 'Lord willing' is no magical incantation. It does not ensure our humility. But the suffix 'If the Lord wills' is helpful. It reminds us that our plans, even our lives, are as frail as the mist. Thus we plan, hoping that God will use the process so that our aspirations match His purposes.

Morgan: We should speak this way for two reasons. *First*, such explicit expression of God's providence is good for us. *Second*, we find frequent examples of it in Scripture (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Phil. 2:19, 24; Heb. 6:3). It is the Christian's duty to refer everything to the will of God in light of life's uncertainties. We are not equal with God. We cannot see around the

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next curve or over the next hill. But God can, and if we ‘acknowledge Him in all our ways He will direct our paths’ (Pr. 3:6).

Hughes: Interestingly, the expression ‘If the Lord wills’ appears nowhere in the Old Testament, though it is used several times in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 18:21; Rom. 1:10; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Phil. 2:19; Heb. 6:3)... However in similar circumstances [Paul] talks confidently about his future plans without using the phrase (cp. Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:28; 1 Cor. 16:5). The right mind-set—dependence on God—is more important than saying the right words.

Hughes: Despite this, the phrase has been immensely popular in church history. The Puritans loved it and filled their speech and correspondence with the Latin equivalent *Deo Volente*, ‘God willing.’ And the Methodists followed the same practice. In fact, godly Methodists regularly sign their letters with the initials D. V. and placards and circulars about coming events also had D. V. I think this was a beautiful custom, but of course I realize the danger inherent in its becoming a cliché.... Words are so much more easily counterfeited than the reality they represent.... One thing is for sure—*Deo Volente* is to be the constant refrain of our hearts as we conduct the affairs of our lives. ‘If God wills’ ... all of us should have this heart attitude. D. V. before and after everything in life presupposes a life of dependent prayer in which all is taken before God. It means, further, a profound submission, for ‘God willing’ truly said from the heart cannot produce anything else.

4. Summary

MacArthur: Responding to God’s will is yet another test of a living and true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A strong desire to do the will of God is a sure mark of a transformed life.

Morgan: Verses 13-17 reveal a preoccupation with this life and its values rather than eternity and the things of God. Once again James sounds much more like his Master by echoing Jesus’ parable in Luke 12:16-21. In that parable the land of a certain farmer was very productive and he began making plans much like the merchants of James 4. This parable illustrates the folly of leaving God out of our planning. How shortsighted it is to live for now when we could live for now *and* eternity.

Dorani: There are humble ways to plan. First, planners *dedicate their plans to God*. Second, planners *confess they need God’s favor*. Humble planners know we can do everything right and still fail.... Unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain (Ps. 127:1)... Third, planners confess that *whatever they achieve is through the gifts and favor of God*.

Dorani: The last sentence of James 4 seems like an isolated statement.... In fact, it links the section of proud plans to the section on abuse of the poor. We should always do what we know, as James likes to say (1:21-25). James is also telling us not to forget God.... We can never fully do the good we ought to do. If we have nothing beyond these commands, James will drive us to despair. Therefore, we must remember the promise James so recently made, ‘Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up’ (4:10). Indeed, humility is the way of the Lord Jesus. We must remember that He humbled Himself by taking human flesh and enduring all the troubles that attend human life. Above all, He humbled Himself by dying on the cross. Yet that supreme act of self-denial led His supreme glory, when God raised Him from the dead and crowned Him with honor. Thus, when James says, ‘Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up,’ He bids us to follow the path of Christ.

For next time: Read James 5:1-6.