



**If the Lord Wills**  
**James 4:13-17**

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**IF THE LORD WILLS**  
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When most of us make plans, we think through what we're doing. We consider the consequences. We even ask for advice. That's most of us, but not everyone. Some people just charge ahead and think, "What could possibly go wrong?" Like these folks.

- Two guys on a roof. What could possibly go wrong?
- Looking down the barrel of a cannon. What could possibly go wrong?
- A truck carrying porta-pottys followed by a convertible. What could possibly go wrong?
- A nuclear power plant next to a spider farm. What could possibly go wrong?
- Double Shot Liquor & Guns. Drive Thru. What could possibly go wrong?
- And here's my favorite. A guy filling up his car with gas and holding a cigarette. What could possibly go wrong?

All of us have come up with an idea or made plans that did not turn out quite like we intended. But hey, we learn from our mistakes.

This morning, we're going to talk about making plans without asking God. It's called presumption. And here's the problem with presumption. To make plans without asking God is to miss the blessings of God.

James was the brother of Jesus and wrote one of the first letters in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> He wrote it to Christians new in their faith, and who were enduring persecution.<sup>2</sup> So, he wrote this letter to encourage them to hang on their faith. James challenged them to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers." That challenge still stands. To look in the mirror of God's word and ask the question, *does the life I live reflect the faith I profess?* That question flows throughout this letter.

James 4 is about following God's will. It's about the tug of war between our plans and His plans, between what we want and what He knows is best. So, do the plans I make reflect my faith in God?

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:13-17, NAS).

To make plans without asking God is to miss the blessings of God.

James confronts the tug of war between our plans and God's plans. He confronts the attitude of presumption. He challenges our pursuit of what we want and our resistance to submit to God's will. James exposes what is true about us. We tend to make plans without asking God. Or, we ask God to bless our plans, rather than asking Him to show us His plans. Presumption is making our plans, wanting to be in control, and expecting God to bless us. But that's not how life works. ***So much of life is out of our control, yet all of life is in His control. We must acknowledge the fact that our lives are in the hands of God. So the wise choice is to submit to His will so that we can experience His best.***

## PRESUMPTION

***Presumption is making plans without asking God.*** And here's what it looks like. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit'" (James 4:13, NAS).

James is not against planning. Planning is wise. You can't build a house without plans, and you can't build a life without plans. You can't raise a family, be successful in business, or be effective at anything without plans. Joseph, Moses, Nehemiah, David, and Solomon were great planners and great managers. So making plans is not the problem. The problem is presumption, making plans without asking God.

"Come now" has the tone of confrontation. James' intent was to expose a self-reliant attitude, and the foolishness of such an attitude.

In his hypothetical scenario, people were presumptuous. They decided the timing of their venture. "Today or tomorrow, we shall go ... and spend a year there." They decided the destination. "We shall go to such and such a city." They decided the nature of their work. To "engage in business." And they presumed their success, that they would "make a profit." They made plans as to when, where, what, and even how much money they would make, all without consulting God. That's presumption.

A lot of would-be fortunes were never made. Webvan.com was the brainchild of Louis Borders, the co-founder of Borders Bookstores. Webvan was an attempt to dominate the grocery delivery market. Venture capitalists invested \$1 billion into advertising, warehouses, and a nationwide fleet of delivery trucks. But Webvan left out one factor in their business model. Most customers wanted their groceries delivered at night after coming home from work. The company was not prepared for that; so Webvan never caught on. Within 18 months, the company had blown through \$1 billion and went bankrupt.

A lot of big ideas have failed in the marketplace. The Ford Edsel, watermelon Oreos, and New Coke, which lasted only 79 days. Reynolds attempted the first smokeless cigarettes and lost \$1 billion. The Apple Newton, Windows Vista, and Google Glass. The USFL, Harley-Davidson cologne, and Bic pens disposable underwear. Possibly the worst flop was Lay's Wow! potato chips made with olestra and its unfortunate side effects of diarrhea, incontinence, cramping, and in some cases hospitalization.

A lot of big ideas have flopped and a lot of would-be fortunes were never made.

***Presumption is making plans without asking God.*** It's acting without asking. It's audacity and arrogance. It is thinking we are so wise that we don't need advice. It's thinking we know what's best. Presumption is excessive self-confidence and foolish self-reliance. And for Christians, presumption is asking God to bless our plans, instead of asking God to show us His plans.

Presumption is the attitude of *Invictus*. "I am the master of my faith; I am the captain of my soul."

Presumption is going into business without consulting. Presumption is being blinded by "love" and marrying impulsively, against the advice of family and friends. Presumption is ignoring your parents' advice. And what's most detrimental about presumption is the illusion that we are in control.

But it's just not true. ***So much of life is out of our control, yet all of life is in His control. We must acknowledge the fact that our lives are in the hands of God. So the wise choice is to submit to His will so that we can experience His best.***

#### PERSPECTIVE

Presumption is a lack of perspective. ***Perspective is acknowledging the uncertainty of life.*** James writes, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14, NAS).

Presumption fails to recognize two truths – life is uncertain and life is short.

Perspective, on the other hand, acknowledges the uncertainty of life. "You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow" (James 4:14). King Solomon was in control of a vast kingdom, but even he said, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1, NAS). None of us know what will happen tomorrow.

When I was in high school, on Friday night, I played a football game. On Saturday afternoon, I played guitar in my sister's wedding. On Monday and Tuesday, I went to school just like any other day. On Wednesday morning, my dad died of a heart attack. On Friday afternoon was my dad's funeral. On Monday, I went to school just like any other day. You've had those days too. You got up one morning, just like any other morning, headed to work or school and then that shocking phone call came. All of us know how suddenly life can be interrupted and turned upside down.

Do not presume that your plans will work out, because you do not know what will happen tomorrow.

Perspective also acknowledges the brevity of life. Life is short. "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Our lives are like steam rising from a cup of hot coffee, like our breath on a cold morning, like the morning fog gone before noon. Listen to these voices on perspective.

- “My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath” (Psalm 39:5, NLT).
- “Man’s days are determined, the number of his months is under your control; you have set his limit and he cannot pass it” (Job 14:5, NET).
- “Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty ... soon they disappear, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10, NLT).
- “Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow” (Psalm 144:4, NAS).
- “Teach us to number our days” (Psalm 90:12, NAS).

James is not being morbid or fatalistic. He’s just facing reality. ***So much of life is out of our control, yet all of life is in His control. We must acknowledge the fact that our lives are in the hands of God. So the wise choice is to submit to His will so that we can experience His best.***

#### PROVIDENCE

Presumption is making plans without God. Presumption also fails to recognize the providence of God. James said, “Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that’” (James 4:15, NAS).<sup>3</sup> “Instead.” Instead of living a presumptuous life, instead of an attitude of self-reliance and self-determination, instead of taking life into your own hands, respect the providence of God and recognize that God is in control.

***Providence is the unfolding of God’s sovereign will.***

There is never a moment when God is not on His throne. There is never a moment when God is not in control. God was sovereign yesterday, He is sovereign today, and He will be sovereign tomorrow and for eternity. The sovereignty of God is a mystery; we cannot understand the ways of God. Yet, knowing that He is in control should be comforting and reassuring. Because sovereignty means that God is in control of everything that happens in the universe, and that He is also in control of everything that happens in my life and in yours.<sup>4</sup>

David was a king and he understood sovereignty. I can imagine him saying to himself, “When I speak, armies march, servants obey, and my will is executed. But when God speaks the stars dance, angels race to their appointed tasks, the winds blow wherever He points, rulers rise and nations fall, babies are born and men die. All at God’s command.”

Sovereignty means God is above and beyond everyone and everything. Like the Supreme Court has final say on legal matters, so God is the supreme judge and has final say on all matters. There is no one greater or higher or bigger or wiser. No one can question Him, challenge Him, oppose Him, compete with Him, defeat Him, or compare to Him.

The Bible says ...

- “God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (Psalm 47:8, ESV).

- “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all” (Psalm 103:19, NAS).
- “The Lord will reign forever and ever” (Exodus 15:18, ESV).
- He is the “Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:14-15, NAS5).

Perhaps the definitive verse on sovereignty is Psalm 115:3. “God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” He sits “in the heavens.” He sits on His throne. And He is in control of everything that happens.

***Providence is the unfolding of God’s sovereign will.***

The word “providence” is not found in the Bible, but the concept is. The word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but the biblical concept is. The Latin word “providence” means to see before. It’s a reference to the foreknowledge of God. But He not only sees the future, He has decreed the future. Providence is the foreknowledge of God, the predetermined plan of God, the unfolding of His plan, and His provision within His plan. The Bible says He causes everything to accomplish “the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11, NIV). The Bible says, “In Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17, NAS). The Bible says, “The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations” (Psalm 33:11, NIV). And the Bible says, “In Him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:28).

The song is true. “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” He is in control of everything that happens in the universe, and He is in control of everything that happens in my life and yours.

When we were buying a house a few years ago, we were waiting to hear if our offer was accepted. So, I drove by the house and prayed. “Lord, I know what I want. But I don’t know what’s best. I can’t see what You see. So, please shut the door or open the door. I leave it up to you. I only want to be where You want us to be.” We did not get that house. Instead, we got the house two doors down for \$40,000 less. And by the way, if that house had cost \$40,000 more, and been God’s will, it would have been the best for us.

As a pastor, I pray like this all the time. “Lord, if we’re busy with the wrong things, please interrupt us. If we’re off track, then get us back on track. If this is not what You want, then please show us!” As a church, we can’t waste time with our plans; we must be about His plans.

Jesus is our best role model. Knowing the cross was near, He agonized in prayer, and said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42, NIV).

Jesus said, “Not My will, but Yours be done.” James said, “If the Lord wills.” That must shape how we live. We must live open-handed lives. We must pray with our hands open. Our desires, our ambitions, our wants, all open-handed before God. It’s praying, “Lord, take away anything that is not what You want, and place in my hands only what You want.”

## PRIDE

Presumption is making plans without God. It is failing to acknowledge the uncertainty of life. And it is failing to respect the providence of God. Presumption is also pride. And ***pride is thinking we know best***. James writes, “But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:16-17, NAS).

Pride is thinking we know best. It’s relying on our wisdom. It’s relying on our strength. It’s making plans without God. James said it is “arrogance,” it is “evil,” and it is “sin.” Being a Christian means trusting God, following Him, obeying Him, aligning our hearts with His, and wanting what He wants.

Then James said, “To one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” This verse has so many applications in so many areas of obedience. But in this context, a failure to acknowledge God as the Lord of your life, and a failure to submit your ambitions and goals and plans to Him, is sin.

But the heart that trusts God, the heart that gladly surrenders to Him, says,

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me after Thy will,  
While I am waiting, yielded and still.*<sup>5</sup>

The heart that loves God, and desires only to please Him, says,

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.*<sup>6</sup>

What does your heart say? What is your song? What is your prayer?

*“Oh Lord, I have been so blind, and so foolish. I rarely pray and ask You about Your will. I just go ahead with my plans. I’ve taken my life into my own hands. I’ve been so self-reliant. I’ve let my dreams blind me. How foolish I have been. How often I have missed Your best. Oh Lord, no more making plans without You. No more asking You to bless my plans. Only asking You to show me Your plans, Your will, Your best.”*

## CONCLUSION

James confronts presumption, that tendency in all of us to be self-reliant and self-determined. That tendency to take life into our own hands and a desire to be in control. But here’s the truth. ***So much of life is out of our control, yet all of life is in His control. We must***

***acknowledge the fact that our lives are in the hands of God. So the wise choice is to submit to His will so that we can experience His best.***

I want to close with David's prayer. I love what he writes in Psalm 25. I hope your heart will resonate with David's prayer as well.

*"O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! ... Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow."*

*"Make me know Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth."*

*"Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow."*

*"For You I wait all the day." ("I'm staying put until You tell me what to do Lord. I don't want to take another step without You.")*

*"I am trusting you, O Lord. You are my God. My future is in your hands."*

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> According to Matthew 13:55, Jesus had four brothers, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, and 13:56 also mentions sisters.

<sup>2</sup> Peter also wrote to those who were “scattered” throughout the Mediterranean world (1 Peter 1:1).

<sup>3</sup> Paul learned to submit his plans to God’s sovereignty. Acts 16 says that he and his missionary team “were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them” (Acts 16:7, NAS). When he departed from Ephesus, he said, “I will return to you again if God wills” (Acts 18:21, NAS). To the Corinthians, he wrote, “Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits” (1 Corinthians 16:57, NIV). Paul knew to say, “If the Lord wills.”

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 29:10 declares, “The Lord sat as King at the flood; yes, the Lord sits as King forever.” This is the grand declaration of the sovereignty of God. “The Lord sat as King at the flood.” He was sovereign at the time of the great flood of Noah. He has been sovereign over every event in the past. And He will be sovereign over every event in the future.

<sup>5</sup> “Have Thine Own Way,” written by Adelaide Pollard in 1907.

<sup>6</sup> “I Surrender All,” written by Judson Van DeVenter in 1896.