



STUDY TOOLS

Sunday, July 27, 2025

Teaching Title: The Illusion of Control

Key Scripture: James 4:13–17

CEDAR VALLEY

5-DAY READING PLAN WITH QUESTIONS:

Monday: Jeremiah 10

Tuesday: Matthew 6:19–34

Wednesday: Psalm 39

Thursday: Proverbs 3:5–6, 16:3, 27:1

Friday: Matthew 26:36–39

1. What does this passage tell you about God?
2. What does this passage tell you about people?
3. If this is God's word, what do I need to do?
4. What's your takeaway?
5. Who would you tell?

MEMORY TOPIC:

Surrendering Control

MEMORY VERSE:

James 4:15 NLT

What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."

LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION:

Introduction:

Making plans is part of our daily lives. We need to think about what to make for dinner, make doctor's appointments, visit family or friends, decide when to write that paper for class, etc. It's a natural part of life. But in this section of James, he shows how important it is to surrender our plans to God. He writes of a well-laid plan: Start today or tomorrow, go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money. But where is God in this plan? James points out how arrogant and prideful it is to plan as if we know what the future holds or as if we have control over it! This self-reliant and self-centered kind of planning will only fill us with anxiety. God invites us to experience freedom, wisdom, and peace through depending on Him. The wisest plans are those laid in God's hands.

Questions:

Icebreaker: Would you rather have a meticulously planned vacation or a completely spontaneous trip with no plans at all? Explain.

Read James 4:13–17 together as a group.

1. What is your initial reaction to James' words about plans?
2. What does it mean to say that life is like a vapor/mist/fog (v. 14)? How does this understanding impact our perspective on time and planning?
3. How can we make plans for the future while still acknowledging God's will? (v. 15)
4. What is the attitude of the hypothetical person in 4:13–17? Why is it wrong or sinful? (See Digging Deeper)
5. Read Luke 12:15–21 and Matthew 26:36–39. How do these passages connect to what James is saying

here?

6. What is an area of life where you are most tempted to live as if you are in control (career, finances, parenting, etc.)?
7. How can we cultivate humility and learn to submit to God's plans rather than our own?

NOTES

1. Planning is wise—but presuming is pride.
2. You can have goals—but hold them with open hands.
3. Real wisdom begins with: “God, what do You want?”

DIGGING DEEPER

Question #4—

“Instead of the self-confident, this-world-oriented attitude expressed in v. 13, the business people should qualify all of their plans and hopes with reference to the will of the Lord... the will of the Lord is to be acknowledged as the condition under which the Christian is to view both his life itself and his specific plans... What James encourages is not the constant verbalization of the formula ‘If the Lord wills,’ which can easily become a glib and meaningless recitation, but a sincere appreciation for God’s control of affairs and for his specific will for us.”

—Douglas J. Moo, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, pg. 156–157

“The true Christian way is not to be terrorized into fear and paralyzed into inaction by the uncertainty of the future; but to commit the future and all our plans into the hands of God, always remembering that these plans may not be within God’s purpose. The [person] who does not remember that, is guilty of arrogant boasting... If a man knows that a thing is wrong and still continues to do it, that to him is sin. James is in effect saying, “You have been warned; the truth has been placed before your eyes.”

—William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, pg. 114