

DEO VOLENTE
(James 4:13-17)

INTRODUCTION:

There was an officer in the navy who had always dreamed of commanding a battleship. He finally achieved that dream and was given commission of the newest and proudest ship in the fleet. One stormy night, as the ship plowed through the seas, the captain was on duty on the bridge when off to the port he spotted a strange light rapidly closing with his own vessel. Immediately he ordered the signalman to flash the message to the unidentified craft, 'Alter your course ten degrees to the south.' Only a moment had passed before the reply came: 'Alter your course ten degrees to the north.' Determined that his ship would take a backseat to no other, the captain snapped out the order to be sent: 'Alter course ten degrees--I am the CAPTAIN!' The response beamed back, 'Alter your course ten degrees--I am Seaman Third Class Jones.' Now infuriated, the captain grabbed the signal light with his own hands and fired off: 'Alter course, I am a battleship.' The reply came back. 'Alter your course, I am a lighthouse.' No matter how big or important any of us think we are, God's Word stands forth as an unchanging beacon. All other courses must be altered to His.

Too often we refuse to change our course in life and what happens? We hit the rocks of the lighthouse. We have a built-in arrogance in our thinking that we are in charge of the course of our life and no one should ask us to change it!

William Earnest Henley (1849-1903) probably displayed this attitude most memorable though his 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.
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.

We are living in an age of great uncertainty about the future. Can we truly say that we are the “master of our fate; the captain of our soul?” With the economic turmoil and the political confusion, we need to listen to God’s Word on how to proceed forward. What is a believer to do in times like these? How are we to plan for the future? James gives us a plan that comes directly from the Holy Spirit to God’s people.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HUMAN PLANS ARE ALWAYS TENTATIVE

First, we need to acknowledge because no one knows what will happen tomorrow, human plans are always tentative. Verses 13-14:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; {14} whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.

James paints a colorful picture of a group of business people discussing their plans together. They are saying "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." You can almost see them at their planning meeting, hovering around a table with a large map out before them. They are plotting out the various trade centers and cities they are targeting for the next year.

Now what’s wrong with this? Is James saying that it’s wrong to plan? No, it’s not. He is not condemning careful planning or the making of profits in business. The Bible is filled with the call for us to not be slothful in business or any other endeavor in life. A businessman who doesn't think and plan ahead is a foolish businessman. A student who never plans ahead for an exam is a foolish student. A father who never thinks about a long term financial plan for his family is a foolish father. A mother who doesn't look over and plan ahead the affairs of her

home is a foolish mother. "A person who fails to plan, plans to fail," as the saying goes. God approves of wise planning

What is condemned here is planning without considering God's will or God's providence. It is making our plans without acknowledging that it is God who holds tomorrow and the future. We plan, God decides!

(Prov 16:9 NKJV) A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

(Prov 19:21 NKJV) There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel; that will stand.

Do you see this as a problem in your life? Do you make your plans for the future without regards to the will of God or the providence of God? Do you consult with God about the plans of your life? No? Then you need to hear the rest of what James is saying.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE DON'T HAVE A CLAIM ON TOMORROW

We must acknowledge that we don't only know what will happen tomorrow, we don't have a claim on tomorrow. We may not be around tomorrow. Our life is very short and shorter than you think! In verse 14 he writes:

For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

A doctor called one of his patients into his office to deliver some very important news. "I have received the results of your tests and I have some bad news and some good news", said the doctor. The patient was quiet for a moment, sensing the severity of the announcement. "Let me have the good news first, doc", said the patient. The doctor took a deep breath and said, "You only have 24 hours to live." "Oh my goodness", shouted the patient, "If that's the good news what could the bad news possibly be?" The doctor replied, "I was supposed to tell you yesterday."

Most of us live as though there will always be a tomorrow. We simply have no concept of a world without us and yet each second the clock ticks away is one less second off our lives and as David said, "It is soon cut off, and we fly away."

The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop at late or early hour.
To lose one's wealth is sad indeed.
To lose one's health is more.
To lose one's soul is such a loss as no man can restore.

So in light of this how then should plan for the future?

WE HOULD LIVE IN DEPENDENCE ON GOD AND HIS WILL

We should live our life in total dependence on God and his will. And we should express it in the way we plan and live. Verses 15-16:

(James 4:15-16 NKJV) Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." {16} But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

We should say, "If it is the Lord's will, I will live and do such and such." We need to live in light of the fact that God is in control, not us.

The Latin words *Deo Volente* meaning "God willing" were common among the Puritans who came to America in search of religious freedom. Later, the Methodists also peppered their speech and correspondence with the phrase, signaling their dependence on the Lord by often signing their letters with the initials D.V. It was a simple reminder that all plans were subject to the Lord's sovereign permission. Is it any wonder that the Puritan era and the Wesleyan revivals were golden times when God advanced his kingdom agenda?

Whether you use this phrase audibly or it's just something you simply remind yourself of in the inward recesses of your heart, it really doesn't matter. As long as you're seeking to be sensitive and aware of the Sovereign Will of God in your life

"If the Lord wills" speaks to the reality of a transcendent God and to the relevance of God in our daily lives. The absence of it from our lips perhaps suggests we are not as dependent on the Lord as we think we are. We charge ahead with our own puny plans and expect God to bless them. Worse yet, we live like practical atheists, making plans and boasting about the future without acknowledging the sovereign hand of God in the daily affairs of life.

We are also a presumptuous nation, having pushed God to the periphery of our culture, kicked him out of the public schools, and said that he is not welcome in the public square or in our current political debate. If that isn't enough to provoke the Lord, we have threaten to remove "in God we trust" from our currency and "under God" from the pledge we make to the American flag. No wonder the phrase "God willing" sounds strange to our modern ears.

In verse 16 James makes clear that if you live your life as if God were not in control and without consulting Him, then your stated plans are nothing more than arrogant boasting. All such boasting is seen as evil in God's sight.

KNOW WHAT IS GOOD AND DO IT

James concludes by saying that if we know the good we ought to do, we need to do it! For, **"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins"**.

When you know that God is the Sovereign Ruler over all the events of life and then you live out your day to day life in denial of that truth---as if you are the Master of your own fate---James says that is a very serious sin.

If you know that you should be seeking God's will in your plans and you do not, then it is sin. When you plan your life without seeking what is the will of God for your life, then it is sin.

Could anything be clearer? Could anything be more practical? Jesus lived this way. In John 4 after his encounter with the woman at the well, he told his disciples that **"my food is to do the will of Him who sent me."** This should be our attitude. The most important thing in life is to do the will of God, not plan our life as if God's will shouldn't be considered or in a way that says that God is not in control, but that we are. This is arrogant boasting. This is wrong.

CONCLUSION:

Make your plans. But add 'DV' (Deo Volente: "God willing") to them. Ask God to be involved in your plans. Work your plan. But add "DV" to your work. And remember:

The clock of life is wound but once, and no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop at late or early hour.
To lose one's wealth is sad indeed.
To lose one's health is more.
To lose one's soul is such a loss as no man can restore.

Amen? Amen!