

**HOW TO FACE YOUR FUTURE**  
**Developing a Faith That Works - Part 12 of 15**  
**James 4:13-17**  
**Rick Warren**

James 4:13-17

Everyone is interested in the future. James warns us about common mistakes we make regarding the future.

**3 COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID**

I. MISTAKE #1: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money.'" (vs. 13)*

THE SOLUTION: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Instead, you ought to say, 'IF it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'" (vs. 15)*

*"We may make our plans, but God has the last word." Prov. 16:1 (GN)*

*"We should make plans -- counting on God to direct us." Prov. 16:9 (LB)*

II. MISTAKE #2: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil." (vs. 14 & 16)*

Ps. 39:4-6; Ps. 102:3, 11; Job 4:7,9; Ps. 103:15

*"Come," each one cries, "... Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even better!" Isaiah 56:12*

*"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."  
Prov. 27:1*

THE SOLUTION: \_\_\_\_\_

*"So don't be anxious about tomorrow -- God will take care of your tomorrow, too. Live one day at a time." Matt. 6:34 (LB)*

III. MISTAKE #3: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Anyone then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it sins." (vs. 17)*

THE SOLUTION: \_\_\_\_\_

*"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow' -- when you now have it with you." Prov. 3:27-28*

Luke 12:16-20 -- A foolish man

*"RIGHT NOW God is ready to welcome you. TODAY He is ready to save you!"  
Cor. 6:2 (LB)*

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We're going to look at James 4:13-17 today and see what James has to say about "How to Face Your Future." Americans have always been a forward-looking people. An article in U.S. News and World Report said right now we're obsessed with the future. We want to know what's going to happen next, next year, next decade, next century. We're preoccupied with the future. It's amazing how people try all kinds of different things to try to forecast the future: tea leaves, fortune cookies, astrology, palm reading. We try many different ways to get a grasp on the future. We read books, subscribe to seminars that forecast the economic predictions. We attend conferences and seminars on planning and goal setting. What is the Christian viewpoint toward the future? How am I to relate toward what happens? What should be my reaction to that?

James in this passage talks about how to face the future. He says there are three mistakes that are commonly made that we should be aware of. He gives us a warning. He says plan for your future but be aware of these three mistakes.

He illustrates the first mistake with a typical conversation between a couple of businessmen. One guy has his MBA from the University of Jerusalem and the other is the CEO of a Tel-Aviv 500 company. They're talking and discussing their plans. In v. 13 we drop into their conversation, "*Now listen you who say, Today or Tomorrow. We will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.*" What's wrong with this? People make plans every day. These are just a couple of entrepreneurs, go-getters. There is detail in the business plan; they have it all planned out. When? Today or tomorrow. Where? This or that city. How long? We'll spend a year there. What? We'll carry on business. Why? Make money. What's wrong with this? The Bible doesn't condemn making a legitimate profit. The Bible talks a lot about planning too. This man has planned everything. His purpose, the place, the progress. He's got all the bases covered. What's wrong here?

**1. James says the first common mistake we make is PLANNING WITHOUT GOD.**

There's not a single mention of God in this entire business plan. He knew what he wanted, he knew how to get there, but he didn't check it out with God first. Don't misunderstand. The Bible talks about planning. "*No man goes out and builds a house without first considering how much it's going to cost.*" And the book of Proverbs says over and over again that if I don't plan I'm a fool. It's wise to plan. He's not talking about planning, he's talking about presumption without God. It's great to have dreams, it's great to have goals -- as long as you include God, as long as you pray about it. There's nothing wrong with what he did -- all of these things are fine. It's what he forgot to do. He forgot to include God. His attitude was one of self-sufficiency.

Article in Readers Digest by Alexander Saul: "Since I have spent well nigh fifty years working on the history of the Russian Revolution, in the process I've collected hundreds of personal testimonies, read

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hundreds of books, contributed eight volumes of my own. But if I were asked today to formulate as precisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million Russians, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat the phrase, 'Men have forgotten God.' What is more if I were called upon to identify the principle trait of the entire Twentieth Century I would be unable to reflect anything more precise than this statement, 'Men have forgotten God.'"

This is what James is talking about. You can be a believer and forget God in your daily life. I know a lot of people who love the Lord with all their heart but when it comes to planning their business or career or their school education they are practical atheists. It's sad to meet somebody who says, "I don't believe in God. I don't believe He exists." It's sadder to find somebody who says, "I believe He exists," but then acts like He doesn't exist. He doesn't make any plans involving the Lord. He just goes off on his own as if all depends on him.

You say, "I believe in God." Does He have a say in your business? "I don't believe in mixing business and faith." All business is God's business if you're a believer. Don't plan without God. That's presumptuous. Planning without God is practical atheism.

What's the solution? Include God in your goal setting. v. 15 *"Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"* Circle "if". Have you realized that even the best laid plans of mice and men often fall through? There's a thing called Murphy's Law. If things can go wrong, they will. Count on it! Life is just one big if. Right in the middle of LIFE is IF. Life really is pretty if-fy. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, you don't either. I can make an educated guess. But planning without God is presumptuous.

The starting point in facing the future is to say, "God, what do you want me to do. What do You want me not to do." Planning without prayer is presumptuous. He says we should preface all of our planning with the phrase, "if the Lord wills". Couldn't that become a cliché? Of course. You could trivialize it. But he's not saying that. He's saying that the whole attitude of our life should be "It's up to God. Whatever He wants me to do is what I want." It's just a good reminder.

Christians for hundreds of years used to write the initials D.V. at the end of their letters. They'd sign their name and then write D.V.. They stood for the Latin phrase "Deo Valente" -- "Lord willing". James says that ought to be our response to life. It's OK to plan but include God in your plans and goal setting.

There are three possible responses to God's will:

1. I can make reference to it. That's what he's saying here. I admit that God has a will and I accept it, acknowledge it, make reference to it.
2. I can show deference to it. I really want God's will and I accept it into my life.
3. I can show preference for it. More than anything else I want God's will in my life. What God wants -- that's my plan. I deeply desire it.

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Proverbs 16:1 *"We may make our plans, but God has the last word."* Man proposes, God disposes. Proverbs 16:9 *"We should make plans - counting on God to direct us."* Stop praying "God bless what I'm doing". Don't pray that anymore. God, I've made my plans. I've worked them all out now You bless them. Instead pray, "God, help me to do what You're blessing." God is doing a lot of fantastic things in the world. I just want to be in on them. Help me to do what You're blessing. I don't want my plans. I want Your plans in my life because Your plans will provide success in my life.

Planning without God is the first mistake. You overcome it by including God in your goal setting.

#### 2. The second mistake is **PRESUMING ABOUT TOMORROW.**

Taking it for granted, assuming I'm going to live forever, I've got the rest of my life. v. 14 & 16 *"Why you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil."*

There are a couple reasons we shouldn't presume about the future and assume that we've got tomorrow.

1) Life is unpredictable *"you don't even know"*. None of us know what's going to happen tonight much less next year. All we can do is make guesses. Life is so unpredictable. A war could start, the economy could turn around, your friends could leave you. None of us know what's going to happen in life. Life is so unpredictable. Many of you work on commission, or you are self-employed. You go from feast to famine in your income. One day it's great and the next day it's the pits. You don't have any assurance. There is no guarantee of perpetual success. None of us do. Realize that you can't presume on tomorrow.

We shouldn't let that frighten us, that life is uncertain. Don't worry about it or be afraid. Just let it cause you to trust God more. Let it cause you to be more dependent on God. You don't know what's going to happen in your life or your business. It just forces you to trust God more. Life is unpredictable.

2) Life is brief. *"you are a mist"* "Mist" in Greek is "atmos" where we get the word "atmosphere". Your life is like fog; it rolls in, in the morning but it burns off by noon. Who knows how long we're going to live? None of us do.

How does the Bible describe your life? It uses phrases like a leaf, grass, shadow, cloud, puff of smoke, vapor. I'm only one heartbeat away from eternity. I don't know how long I'm going to live. Life is short. It goes so fast from hot wheels to wheelchair. Diapers - Dignity - Decay. Life's brief. Watch out and don't presume you have the rest of your life. Don't take tomorrow for granted.

Isaiah 56:12 *"Come, each one cries, '...Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even better!'"* Do you know anybody with that kind of attitude? Life is great! Let's party! Let's get drunk! Bring on the beer! The guys who say this have a bumper sticker on their camel: "It's party time in Jerusalem!" Live it up and have fun. We're going to live forever. James says that's a dumb attitude toward life. You can't presume that tomorrow is going to be just the same as today. You

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can't presume that you're going to live to be 100. Proverbs 27:1 *"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."* We love to announce our plans, to make our goals and declare them. Next year I'm going to double my income! Next year I'm going to take over three territories! Announcing a goal can either be a statement of faith or it can be a statement of arrogance. What makes the difference? Your motive. Why are you saying what you're saying? God says it's great to have goals but check in with Me first. Let me share with you what I think your goals ought to be. Don't presume on tomorrow.

What's the solution? Matthew 6:34 (LB) *"So don't be anxious about tomorrow -- God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time."* Live one day at a time, that's how God says to face the future. The future could be overwhelming but fortunately it comes in bite-size pieces, a 24-hour segment at a time.

Plan for the future but you can only live now. I can't live the future, I can only live today. Plan for the future but take advantage of the present. "Life is what happens to us while we're planning something else." We're always planning what's going to happen in January and miss Christmas.

Today is the Good Old Days you're going to talk about in 15 years. Enjoy now. Make the most of now. Don't make the mistake of planning without God. Don't make the mistake of presuming about tomorrow. I don't know if I've got next week, much less next year. I shouldn't just assume it.

Spencer Johnson, the man who wrote the book The One Minute Manager wrote another book called The Perfect Present. In this book he said the perfect present is literally the perfect present. The present time. That's all I have. That's all I have to give to this world. Not next hour or next month but right now. That's the gift that God has given to me so I ought to use it. That's all I have -- the present.

Just because the future is uncertain and unsure and brief, doesn't mean you get all uptight and get paralyzed with panic and worry. It's the motivation to trust God more. You put your trust in God -- that's how you face the future. "I don't know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future." That's what counts. David said in Psalm 35:15 *"Lord, my days are in your hands."* Commitment -- that's what James says. Don't make the mistake of planning without God and don't make the mistake of presuming about tomorrow. Instead, include God in your planning and make the most of today. Live life one day at a time.

### 3. A third common mistake is PUTTING OFF DOING GOOD.

*"Anyone then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it sins."* (v. 17)

James is talking about the issue of procrastination. "I'm intending to do it." Ever met somebody who is always "aiming to do it." I always want to say, "When are you going to pull the trigger?"

Procrastination is my sin,  
It only caused me sorrow  
I know I ought to change my ways,

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In fact I will -- tomorrow.

We love to put off. James says that's a trap. Just because you know the right thing to do doesn't mean you're going to do it.

How do you define sin? We think of evil activities: murder, commit adultery, cheat, lie, steal. Those are sins of commission. But there's another kind of sin -- sins of omission. *"To him who knows to do good and doesn't do it, it's sin."* I can do nothing and still sin. Because there are things I ought to be doing. You can be a part of a legalistic church. "I don't drink, smoke, cuss or chew... run around with girls that do." You don't do anything but you still forget God in your life. Christianity is more than simply avoiding evil. If all that the Christian life was, was a bunch of "don't"s -- don't do this, don't do that, then everybody who is dead would qualify as a Christian, because they don't do anything.

Procrastination is a subtle trap -- it's the land of "Someday I'll..." "One of these days ..." and you never do because we presume upon tomorrow. "One of these days I'm going to get serious about God. I'm really going to get committed." God says you don't have any guarantee of tomorrow, none at all.

The solution is "Do it now". Proverbs 3:27-28 *"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow' -- when you now have it with you."* If somebody comes to you and asks you a favor, don't say "tomorrow -- later". Don't procrastinate. If you can do it now, do it now.

There are three things you can do with your life: spend it, waste it, invest it. You can waste your life; there are a lot of ways. TV commercials will show you lots of ways to waste your time, money, life. Or you can spend it. You can spend your life trying to acquire things: fame, pleasure. Or you can invest your life. The best use of life is to invest it on something that is going to outlast it. "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose." -- Jim Elliot. What's going to last forever? The Word of God and people. People will last one of two places for eternity. Where I spend my time now may determine where I'll spend eternity. Invest your life in things that will last -- the word of God and people. Make it count.

There was a commercial years ago on TV by the Peace Corps: "It doesn't matter how long you live if you're not doing anything with your life." We worry about the duration -- how long are we going to live. God worries about the donation -- what are you doing with it. Am I making my life count or frittering it away on non-essentials, things that aren't going to count. God says, Make your life count -- do it now!

Remember the story that Jesus told about the talents? The master gave one talent to one man, five to another and ten to another. He left and came back years later. Two guys had doubled their money. (A talent was a weight of gold.) The third man had taken his gold, buried it in the ground and did nothing with it. The master said, "At least you could have put it in a passbook account and got interest on it!" He said, "You wicked servant!" Why? What had he done? Nothing. That's wickedness. Doing nothing with your life is bad. Make your life count.

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I can do all kinds of things that keep me from doing those no-no sins but if I'm not doing anything in a positive sense, what does it matter? God said it doesn't!

Whatever you intend to do for the Lord, do it now! Not next week, next month, next year. Thinking about witnessing to a friend and inviting him to church? Do it now! Thinking about teaching a class and getting involved in Bible study? Do it now! Thinking about starting to tithe and giving? Do it now! Do your giving while you're living, then you're knowin' where it's goin'.

A businessman in Dallas gives 50% of his income back to the Lord. There's a guy who's got the concept of doing it now!

2 Corinthians 6 *"Right now God is ready to welcome you. Today He is ready to save you!"* When is the best time to get it together with God? Luke 12 Jesus told a story that illustrates what James is teaching in this passage of Scripture. He tells the story about a man who is very successful in life but he made a very foolish decision. He made the same mistakes that James talks about -- all three mistakes. He planned without God. He presumed about tomorrow. He put off doing good. v. 16 *"Jesus told them a parable, 'The ground of a certain rich man produced good crop [literally, abundant crop] and he thought to himself 'What shall I do. I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods and I will say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink, be merry,'" but God said to him 'You fool. This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get all that you have prepared for yourself.'"*

This guy has "I" problems -- all he can see is himself. Doing "my" thing for "me". God says, "How dumb!" You don't know how long you're going to live. Don't get morbid about it. Don't worry all the time, "Am I going to die tonight?" I invite you to give your life to Christ, not because you're going to die tonight, but because you have to live tomorrow! The fact is, none of us have any certainty how long we're going to be here. Just consider that in your planning and do three things: plan with God; don't presume on tomorrow, but live today -- make it count; don't wait on the things you know are the right things to do.

*"Right now God is ready to welcome you. Today He is ready to save you!"* For some of you, today is your day to give your life to the Lord. Today. Not tomorrow. Not next week. Today! In the book of Acts is the story how Paul was a prisoner before King Felix in the northern part of Israel. Paul talked to the King, "Felix, God has a plan for your life and God wants to work in your life. You're not here by accident. You weren't made and created just to breathe and take up space, get up in the morning, go to work, come home and watch TV, go to bed, retire and die. There is more to life than that. It starts when you give your life to Jesus, God's Son, and you commit yourself to Him. He becomes the manager of your life and He will direct you." Paul tells him exactly, "Start by getting in tune with the Lord and establishing that relationship with Him."

Felix said, "That's real interesting, Paul. In fact, I'd like to hear more about it. Why don't you come back in a few days and we'll discuss it some more?" He never got another chance. It's presumptuous to depend on tomorrow.

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What are your plans for the future? Have you set days, marked your calendar, scheduled appointments and then prayed, "By the way, God, I want You to bless my life." God says that's practical atheism. The person who acts as if God doesn't exist in his planning is no different than the person who doesn't believe He exists. Does God have a say in your schedule or do you just fill it up? Does God have a priority in your planning?

Let's get specific. Have you talked to God about how you're going to retire? Or have you just thought you can do it any way you want to? Have you talked to God about your plans to go back to school, to get that degree? Have you talked to God about your plans to get married, to get divorced, to date, to remain single? Don't you think He's interested in those kinds of things? He is. Have you talked to God about your business? A career change? Your investments and how you spend your money?

James is saying that none of us have any right to just plan our lives as if God doesn't even care. Check in with Him first. Consult Him.

Do you have a tendency to take tomorrow for granted? "There will always be time to spend time with my kids. Right now we're just trying to make ends meet. Once we reach a certain economic level, then I'm going to spend more time with my husband/wife." Right! That's called the Saddleback Syndrome. What starts out as a temporary condition ends up as a permanent lifestyle. People are going 100 miles an hour, bringing in the bucks. And then once they have them, there are no relationships left. If you only had a week left, how would you spend it? What would you do with your husband, wife, children?

God says, live each day and each week as if it were your last. Don't get morbid about it. And plan for the future. But you can only live right now. That's what counts.

The number one way we presume on tomorrow is credit buying. An undue amount of credit buying is presumption on the future. "We can afford it. Things are only going to get better!" That's presuming on tomorrow. Live each day as if it were your last. James says you don't know what is going to happen.

Is God a partner in your business? How? Prove it. How do you know if God's a partner in your business? Simple. Does He get part of the profits? Whoever heard of a business partnership where one partner took all the profits? I know there are men right here who tithe not only on their personal account but on their business account. They say, "God's in my business so we tithe on the profits of my business income." They write two checks a week.

What have you been knowing that you ought to do and you know is the right thing to do but you've just been putting it off? ..."Someday I'll get around to it." James says, "Do it now." Right now! Don't wait. "Someday I'm going to give my life totally to God." Why not today? There's not a better time.

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Prayer:

Would you simply pray a prayer like this? Maybe you've never opened your life to Jesus Christ. Maybe you're not sure you have. Settle it today. Are you absolutely certain if you die you'd go to heaven? You can be sure. Simply do what the Bible says. Give your life to Christ. He's the bridge to God. Pray, "God, I want You in my life. I realize You made me for a purpose. I want to know what that purpose is. As much as I know how, Jesus Christ, I ask You to come into my life and make Yourself real to me. Help me to understand it more. I want You to be the Chairman of the Board in my life. I want You to call the shots. Lord, I don't want to do planning without You. I want to open up my heart to You. Today." The Bible says, "Right now God is ready to welcome you." Today He is ready to save you. Today's your day. God didn't bring you here by accident. Today's your day. Say, "Jesus, yes. I want You in my life. I want to be a Christian. Help me with my problems." He will.

Others of you are saying, "I know I'm a Christian. I know I've got God in my heart." The greatest mistake in life is to forget God, to leave Him out of your life. Even Christians can do that. We can go to church on Sunday, talk about the Lord, and never say "Hi" or "Bye" again, consult Him, or have any reference, much less, preference in our business, our families, our marriage, our schoolwork. Some of you need to pray, "Lord help me not to plan without You. I want You in my plans. I want to know what Your will is. Lord, help me to live one day at a time. Help me to plan for tomorrow but to live in today, to not worry but to trust." The Bible says, "God will take care of your tomorrow too." We don't know what the future holds but we do know who holds the future. That's security. Maybe you would say, "Lord, help me to stop putting off doing what I know I ought to do." Maybe it's to get involved with a church. Maybe it's to get help with a problem. Maybe it's to change careers. Maybe it's to restore a relationship. I don't know your heart but God does. Today's the day. Don't procrastinate. Say in your heart, "Lord, help me to do what I know is right to do."

Father, I thank You that You are here today. I thank You for your presence and for Your word that it's practical and it applies to our lives in areas we need it most. Help us to trust more, to not depend so much on our own ability and ingenuity but realize that You hold the keys to the future and when our life is in Your hands, that's the safest place to be. Help us to do what we know we ought to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.