

# It's Not Your Party

The War on Pride Part 5  
James 4:13-17 8-9-2015

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Summary: The seemingly innocent planning of verse 13 is sinful because it is rooted in prideful presumption - an attitude that thinks this life is “my party.” The solution to that kind of pride is to admit your ignorance about the future, to admit that your life is a mist, and to plan submissively – seeking to do only God’s will rather than your own. (Enjoy being a part of His party.) Failure to heed this is sin.

It's Not Your Party.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Prideful Presumption.....	2
The Presumptive Plan .....	2
Context: Pride .....	3
How to Fight Pride .....	4
1) Admit Your Ignorance .....	4
Contingency.....	5
Everything Depends on God's Will.....	5
2) Admit Your Misty-ness.....	6
Life Is Short, Therefore ... What?.....	6
Plan Submissively.....	7
Plan.....	7
The Goal: God's Will .....	8
God's Will Is Knowable .....	8
God's Will is Good.....	9
Speech Matters.....	9
Sins of Omission.....	10
Conclusion .....	10
Application Questions (James 1:25) .....	11

**James 4:13** 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.” **14** Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears. **15** Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” **16** As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. **17** Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.

## Introduction

It was an exciting day for Miss Kelly’s kindergarten class. It was little Katie’s birthday, and they were having a party for her in the class. When it was time for her to open presents, all the kids were seated around a table, and each one had a little bag of party favors. Two tootsie rolls, a piece of gum, a plastic whistle that probably wouldn’t make it home. Most of the kids were having a lot of fun, but Jeffrey wasn’t. He was sitting directly across from Katie, and he was making it very clear to everyone that he wasn’t one bit happy with the situation. He looked at his little bag of party favors, then he looked at her great big pile of gifts and frowned with a big “harrumph.” Then he did it again, squirming in his chair. He kept doing that until finally one of the adults had enough. She walked up to him, turned his chair to face her, and said, “Jeffrey, look at me. It’s *not your party*.” Insightful lady. She knew exactly what the problem was. Jeffrey’s behavior was unacceptable, but she understood that beneath that behavior was an

attitude that was causing the behavior. How was it that all these little kids could be so happy and could be having such a good time at this party, and Jeffrey has exactly the same circumstances, and he is miserable? It's because parties can be a blast if you understand that it's not your party. But as soon as you start thinking you should be the birthday boy, you ruin the whole party – for yourself and for everyone else.

Every one of us is born into this life thinking *it's all about me*. My life is for me. The main objective is my comfort, my happiness, my preferences, my plans – all of life revolves around that. We have been studying through the book of James, and we left off last time in chapter 4 verse 13, where James turns our little chair toward him and looks us in the face and tells us, *it's not your party*. And James tells us this for the same reason that woman said that to little Jeffrey. We will be a lot happier in life if we learn this. So James is for us – he is going to help us, but he starts with a rebuke.

## Prideful Presumption

### The Presumptive Plan

#### James 4:13 Now listen...

Typically James will address the readers as *my brothers* or *my dear brothers*. But in place of that, here he says **now listen** (or your Bible might say **come now**). That's a little phrase that signals a rebuke. James is about to rebuke them for a sin.

#### James 4:13 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 so bad about that? They were making plans. You can't do anything in life without making some kind of plans. So why is this such a sinful thing for these people to say? We say things like that all the time, don't we?

“I'm planning on moving out to California.”

“Oh really? When are you leaving?”

“I have a van rented for the twenty-third.”

This is an alarming passage, because if we fall into the wrong mentality and do what comes naturally, we will commit this sin every single day. We will wake up, and our very first act will be to commit this sin. And it will seem so innocent.

“Today I'm going to get up, have breakfast, leave for work at 6:30, then get this done and that done...”

“Tonight my wife and I will have our date night.”

“Next week we are driving down to Colorado Springs for this event...”

What's so evil about that? The answer is down in verse 16.

#### 16 As it is, you boast and brag.

Literally, **it's as it is, you boast in your arrogance**. The sin that James is concerned about is prideful arrogance. It is not just that they said the wrong words. It is the prideful attitude behind those words.

James is always concerned about heart issues, but he is also intensely practical, so he presents those sins in terms of the kinds of speech that they produce. That way we can easily spot the sin. For example, when he talks about lack of love in chapter 2, he describes it in terms of someone *saying*, “I wish you well. Keep warm and well fed.” Or when he describes the sin of favoritism, he talks about someone *saying* to a rich man, “Here's a good seat for you,” and *saying* to the poor person, “You stand there or sit here by my feet.” Sin is a heart issue, but James has a tendency to describe it in terms of what comes out of your mouth when you have that sin in your heart. That way it's easy for us to spot. You diagnose what is in the heart by the tongue. And that is what he is doing here.

## Context: Pride

So far in this book James has rebuked them for four different kinds of pride:

- 1) Pride of *possessions* (1:9-11 - being puffed up because you are rich or you have a lot of earthly success).
- 2) Pride of *piety* (ch.2 and 3 - being puffed up because of your Bible knowledge, your faith, your religious observance, your ability to teach, your wisdom). "Look what a great Christian I am."
- 3) Pride of *position* (ch.3 - They wanted to be teachers and they had selfish ambition in their hearts).
- 4) Pride of *pleasure-seeking* (ch.4 - they weren't getting their prayers answered because their desire was to spend what they get on their pleasures, which was a symptom of their love affair with the world. And James describes all that in terms of pride in 4:6.

So those are four different species of pride that James has condemned in this book so far (pride of possessions, piety, position, and pleasure-seeking), and now we get a fifth: pride of *presumption*.

**13 ... "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."**

That's a great plan, but where is God in it? Nowhere. He's not a factor. What God desires, what God wants, what God has planned – none of that factors in.

This guy's got it all figured out on his own - time, place, duration, activity, and outcome. The time (**today or tomorrow**), the place (**this or that city**), the duration (**a year**), the activity (**do business**), and the outcome (**make money**). Now, if you ask him, "Where does God fit in all that?" he'll tell you – "Oh, He fits in - trust me. I've been praying like crazy about this." And he has. But we saw what his prayers are like back in verse 3.

**James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

He thinks he is seeking God's will, but in reality all he is doing is making his own plans and then asking God to bless them.

"Here's what I'm going to do God – please make it work out. It's my party, please let the cake taste good, and let the presents be good ones, and let the games be fun..."

And he is oblivious to the fact that it isn't his party. Your life isn't your party. It's not for you – it's for God. You exist for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the pleasure of God the Father. You exist for the benefit of His kingdom.

So when we pray about our plans, the goal is not to just get God to put His stamp of approval on your agenda. The goal is to discover His agenda. What if you showed up one day and told your boss, "I'm going to take the company van today and just head up I-70 and do some sightseeing. I should be back around 9 o'clock tonight."

"Is there some company business that you're going to be doing?"

"No, it's just my plan. You know how it is – a good employee always has to be making plans."

"Well yeah, it's good to make plans, but if you're on the clock and you're driving the company van, they need to be plans that have to do with this company."

If you're a Christian, you are on the clock serving in God's kingdom 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Remember, we are still under the umbrella of that command that James gave us in verse 7: **Submit yourselves therefore to God**. He is still talking about that. For the Christian, all of life is an effort to submit ourselves to the desires and the will and plan of God. It's not, "Please bless my agenda," but, "Where do I fit in to Your agenda today God?"

But when I walk through life with the attitude that my life is my party, and I make my plans accordingly, that is prideful arrogance. How can I get rid of that arrogance? James is going to help us with that in verse 14.

## How to Fight Pride

### 1) Admit Your Ignorance

**14 Why,<sup>1</sup> you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.**

Now we need to be careful on this verse, because I think it's easy to miss the point here. Usually people take this verse to mean, "When you make your plans, you need to realize they might not work out because of unforeseen circumstances." If that is what James is saying, he's not really saying much. Everyone knows that. Even atheists understand that if they plan the picnic for Saturday, it might rain that day, so there should be a plan B. That's just obvious.

But we know that is not the point James is making because of the solution he gives in the next verse. When he gives the solution in verse 15 he doesn't say, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If circumstances allow, then we will live and do this or that.'" It's not, "Instead, you ought to say, 'Weather permitting, we will do this or that.'" The issue is not about circumstances; it's about God's will. It is not, "Be careful about your plans, because they might not work out." It is, "Be careful about your plans, because your ignorance about the future proves that this isn't your party."

You are not in control. You don't even know what tomorrow's going to be like.

**Ecclesiastes 9:1 ... no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.**

But we think we know.

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

We think we have a pretty good idea what tomorrow will be like, kidding ourselves.

**Jeremiah 10:23 ...a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.**

**Proverbs 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.**

Look at all the twists and turns your life is taken over the past 10 years. How much of that did you actually have planned 10 years ago? If you can't see tomorrow, or next week or next year, why would you assume your plans are any good? You have got a great idea for your career – how do you know that idea you have in mind would turn out well? How do you know those plans you have for marriage and having kids would end up being what's best? All these plans we make – they sound good to us, because we imagine them to be one thing, but what if reality ends up being something very different?

And even if things turn out exactly as we expect, we don't know if that is really the best thing. This word for **know** emphasizes the understanding – knowing not only what will happen tomorrow, but what the significance is. Maybe things will turn out exactly as we planned, but it means something completely different than what we think it means.

So James says, "Why don't you step down from your position as captain of your own ship?" Why? Because you are blind. You cannot see even one moment into the future. And blind, ignorant people just don't make good captains of ships.

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<sup>1</sup> The English translations start a new sentence in verse 14 to make it readable, but the first word in verse 14 is actually "who." Verse 14 is still part of the description. "Now listen you who make these plans and yet don't even know about tomorrow..."

## Contingency

So we attach a big “if” to every plan we ever make, if it is the Lord’s will. And we do that, not just to acknowledge that things may not work out, but to acknowledge the possibility that this plan may not be what God wants. And as Christians, we don’t want anything other than what God wants.

**Matthew 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**

Living for the will of God is a mark of someone who has true, saving faith.

**Matthew 12:50 Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.**

Doing God’s will is what gives you strength and sustenance in life.

**John 4:34 “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me.”**

And so all our planning needs to be just like our praying - it always ends with “Nevertheless, Your will, not mine be done.” (And you can tell how much you really mean it when you say, “Lord willing,” by how you react when God says *no* to your plans.)

## Everything Depends on God’s Will

Go back to verse 13 for a second and read that statement of prideful presumption again. At what point does that statement become presumptuous?

**13 ...“Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”**

There are some who say that the statement is fine up until the last two words. It is fine for you to pick the time, the place, the duration, and the activity. But it is presumptuous for you to assume you know the outcome. You might make money; you might lose money – that’s up to God. That statement in verse 13 starts out with the thing that seems to be most in our control and then progressively moves farther and farther out of our direct control. For me to decide whether I leave today or tomorrow – that seems pretty reasonable. I might have slightly less control over the city, and a little less over the activity, and then whether or not I make money – that will depend on some things outside of my control.

But where does James draw the line of presumption? At what point do I cross the line in assuming too much? Look what he says:

**15 Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live...”**

James draws that line all the way back at the beginning - even before the beginning. I cross the line into presumption the moment I assumed that I will still exist tomorrow morning. My existing tomorrow morning is 100% outside of my control. Everything, big and small, is up to God. Some people have a tendency to fall into thinking that God is only sovereign over big things. But they don’t think He is sovereign over little things, like whether I leave today or tomorrow. And the reason they think that is because they don’t understand how God could be sovereign over which day I leave, and yet there is still such a thing as free will. If there is such a thing as free will, how can God be in control of all the little things that I decide? Here’s the answer: there is free will, and God is still in total, sovereign control over everything. If holding both of those truths together is uncomfortable in your brain, learn to live with it, because the only alternative is to become a practical atheist - living as if there were no God except when something really big happens. That puts God in charge of big things, and me in charge of little things, which is a problem, because life is made up of 99.9% little things.

To overcome this arrogant pride in my heart, I have to come to grips with the fact that even though my decisions do have an impact on what happens, my decisions are not the ultimate deciding factor of

anything. I am not in ultimate control of anything, which is good, because I don't even know what will happen tomorrow, which means I don't know what is best today.

Realizing that will help us fight pride - admit your ignorance. And then in the second half of verse 14 James gives us something else that will help – admit your misty-ness.

## **2) Admit Your Misty-ness**

### **14 ...What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears.**

You go outside on a cold day, you exhale, you can see your breath for a moment, and then, proof – it's gone. That is your life. A few weeks ago we were up on Mount Princeton and we saw some Rocky Mountain Bristlecone Pine trees that are over 2000 years old. If those trees had minds they would think, "These human beings – they come and go, come and go, live and die – like mosquitoes. They live for little while and then die and some other ones come along." Even people who live a long life generally only make it 70 or 80 years. And millions of people don't even get close to that. They die in their 40s or in their 20s. If you are six years old, you could die before your seventh birthday. Any person in this room, including you, could be dead before bedtime tonight.

### **Psalm 49:11 Their tombs will remain their houses forever ...though they had named lands after themselves.**

They named places after themselves, and said, "This is going to be my home long-term." And God said, "No, that pine box is going to be your home long-term."

I remember when I was a teenager. One year our family plan was going to Lake Powell for a vacation, but just before we got there we saw a van several hundred feet off the highway rolled over. The mom and dad were still alive – the 16 year old girl was dead. I helped carry her body over to the ambulance, and I was thinking – that family no doubt had their vacation all planned out. And I'm sure they had hopes and dreams for their daughter. She probably had plans about going to college or getting married. She had no idea that her life would be over that day.

Life is fragile, and life is short. Did you know that our galaxy is traveling through space at about 1.3 million miles an hour? That means in the last three seconds you traveled over 1000 miles. But it doesn't feel like we're moving, does it? In a very similar way, you and I are rocketing towards death. It doesn't seem like it, and none of us can see it coming because we don't know what is going to happen, but it is the most certain thing in the world.

We don't like thinking about death – or even aging. We get all stressed out over signs of aging. We hit some new milestone and think, "Oh no, I'm getting old." When something comes along and reminds me that my life is a mist, should that make me depressed? Yes, it should – if my life is my party. If this is my party then it's a bumner of a party, because it's unpredictable, short, painful, out of my control, and the only thing I can be sure of is that it ends with me in a pine box.

## **Life Is Short, Therefore ... What?**

But when Scripture reminds us over and over that life is a mist, the purpose is not for us to become depressed. If you look up all those passages that say life is like a mist, it's a vapor, it's like the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown in the fire, it's like the flowers that fade, What is the point all those passages are making? Life is short, therefore what?

Your first thought might be, "Life is short, therefore don't waste a single moment! Make every day count." That's a good thought, but that is usually not the point those passages make. Usually it is more along the lines of what you see in Psalm 39.

### **Psalm 39:4 "Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. 5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as**

**nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Selah 6 Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.**

He already knows his life is short, but he asks God to impress it on his heart even more - why? Why would someone want more reminders of his mortality?

Because he needs hope, and that's the way to get it. The right response to learning about the shortness of your life is not depression; it is hope in God.

**7 "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.**

If you look up all the passages that talk about how brief and fleeting our lives are, you will see that this is a recurring theme. Life is short, therefore get depressed? No! Life is short, therefore cling to something that is forever. Hope in God instead of hoping in yourself. Your train is about to crash, so jump over onto a train that is going to go forever. Enjoy God's party instead of trying to make this your party. Every time you see some new gray hairs, or missing hairs, or those times when you realize that song that seems like it just recently came out is an oldie, every time you pass some milestone and realize you didn't accomplish all those things you thought you would have accomplished by now – any time you get a little sense of that three million miles an hour movement toward death, just say to yourself, "Sure am glad this isn't my party." And grab all the more tightly to that which is eternal.

So what is the solution to the pride of presumption? Admit your ignorance and understand your misty-ness – your weakness, and the brevity of life, and your inability to even keep on existing without God's enablement. When we have a solid understanding of all that, we will be less likely to fall into the error of thinking this life is our party.

That's half of the solution. You could walk around with a dunce cap on your head, nickname yourself Misty, and put a coffin in your living room and do everything you can to remind yourself of your ignorance and of the brevity of your life, but that still leaves the question – what about making plans for the future? James answers that in verse 15. Instead of having that, "it's my party," attitude of verse 13, here is the right way to make plans:

## **Plan Submissively**

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

## **Plan**

There are several interesting things we need to notice about this verse. First of all, we see that planning is a good thing, not a bad thing. James doesn't say, "You don't know the future; God is in control of that, therefore there's no point in planning." What he says is this: "**instead, you ought to say... We will ... do this or that.**" **We will ... do this or that** is just a shorthand way of repeating the plans from verse 13 (travel, do business, make money, etc.). So James is saying, "Go ahead and plan your trip." It is good to plan ahead.

**Proverbs 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! 7 It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, 8 yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.**

If I don't plan ahead for the future, I'm dumber than an ant. Jesus had plans in Luke 13 – "Today and tomorrow I'm going to do ministry, and I plan to arrive in Jerusalem the day after that." (Lk.13:31-32.)

**Luke 14:28 Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?**

So don't think that James is against planning. What he is against is the kind of planning that operates on the assumption that this life is my party. Go ahead and plan, but instead of planning your party, plan to do God's will.

## The Goal: God's Will

**15 you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."**

I will leave on my trip on this or that date if that conforms to God's will. I will go to a particular city if it conforms to God's will. This life is God's party, and I care about one thing and one thing only – His will.

**2 Corinthians 5:9 So we make it our goal to please him.**

If I lose all my money, but I am still pleasing God and doing His will, I am in good shape because I am fulfilling the purpose of my life. But if I make \$1 million and I'm not pleasing God, my life is a disaster.

## God's Will Is Knowable

Start every day asking, "What do you want me to do today God? What is Your will for me today?" And by the way, don't make that harder than it is. Some people make God's will impossible to discover because they measure it by favorable outcomes. And so finding God's will becomes an impossible guessing game because you don't know the outcome until after you have made the decision. And they wonder, why doesn't God just tell me clearly: "Pick option B, not option A"? One reason God doesn't just tell us which option to pick is because pleasing God isn't mainly about picking the right option. Pleasing God (doing His will) is mainly about fellowship with Him and drawing near to Him and submitting to Him. That is what James has been talking about in this chapter. So the best way to discover God's will is to stop loving this world and stop being conformed to this world's way of thinking.<sup>2</sup>

**Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

If you want to know God's will, I'll tell you – God's will is that you love Him and not the world. If you face a really hard decision, first eliminate any sinful option, then do your best to eliminate any foolish options that would violate biblical wisdom, then, out of the options that remain, pick the one that you have the most desire for. Then you can be confident that you are doing God's will. God is not going to put his will out of your reach or make it impossible for you to discover – why would He do that?

And I realize there are some decisions that are extremely difficult. And when that happens, we cry out to God in prayer, and we seek wise counsel from the church, and we search the Scriptures, and we think hard, and all the rest. But 99% of the time, it's easy to know what God's will is. Your alarm goes off in the morning – that's a sign from heaven that it is God's will for you to get up and go to work. If you are having your devotions, and you're tempted to cut them short, you can ask, "Is it God's will for me to rush through my time alone with Him so that I can go finish some project? Or is it His will that I stay

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<sup>2</sup> There are three pillars to true religion from chapter 1: Love, controlling the tongue, and avoiding worldliness. All three are woven all through the book like three colors of thread in a tapestry, but there are heavy concentrations of each one in various places. Chapter 2 focuses a lot on love, chapter 3 on controlling the tongue, and chapters 4 and 5 on worldliness. James' teaching on worldliness is very complex and fascinating. It starts at the end of chapter 3, where we discover that worldliness is all about earthly wisdom. It's the way you think and speak and act when you are operating on natural, human wisdom. And it is characterized mostly by selfishness and pride. The pride part of it makes us rely more on our own ideas and opinions and feelings more than God's Word. And the selfishness part of it makes us fall in love with earthly treasures and delights and pleasures above God. And when we do that, it causes all kinds of hostility and fights and quarrels and arguments with other people, because they interfere with our desires. That is what we have learned so far.

But James has a lot more to teach us about worldliness. In the rest of chapter 4 and beginning of chapter 5 he is going to give two rebukes to worldly people. And in both cases, it is because they are living in a way that does not take eternity into account. They are living as though this life was all there is. He is going to show us that living that way is prideful, foolish, and destructive to other people's lives. Then, midway through chapter 5, he is going to tell us how to respond when we are on the receiving end of the evil that comes from worldly people.



focused on Him right now?” The vast majority of the time, it’s very easy to know what God’s will is if we will just stop and ask the question. If you say, “My husband isn’t paying one bit of attention to me. The next time he wants to talk, I’m just going to ignore him all evening see how he likes it ... if the Lord wills.” That just doesn’t quite work, does it?

Most of the time our problem is not that we don’t know God’s will. Most of the time our problem is it doesn’t even occur to us to ask what God’s will is, because we slid back into thinking this life is my party. I don’t know if I should do option A or option B, because I’m not sure which one will result in the most comfort and ease and prosperity. I don’t know if I should take this job or that job, because I don’t know which one will end up being more pleasant. I don’t know if I should commit to this ministry, because I don’t know if I’ll like it. So many of our decisions are hard, not because God’s will is hidden, but because we are not even seeking God’s will. We are just trying to make our party work out well. And that is the kind of arrogance James is talking about. So he tells us, the solution to that is to realize that your life is a mist and you don’t know the future, so you should focus all your attention on doing God’s will, because then you will latch on to something that is eternal and you will get on a ship that is being piloted by a captain who can see where He’s going. Admit your ignorance, admit your misty-ness, and plan submissively – plan to do what pleases God.

## **God’s Will is Good**

And the assumption underlying all that is that God’s will is good. If you live life as God’s party instead of your party, you will have far greater joy. If you live your life as your party, you will have heartbreak and disappointment. There’s an old song from the 60s, “It’s my party and I’ll cry if I want to.” I looked up the lyrics to find out what it is she’s crying about. She’s crying because the guy she’s interested in, Johnny, leaves the party with a gal named Judy. Then Judy comes back wearing Johnny’s ring. I think that song is a great illustration of what it’s like when you think this life is your party. The premise of the song is, “It’s my party, therefore I should be able to do whatever I want.” But she can’t make things work out according to her plan, and so she ends up just crying. That’s where you will end up if you try to make this life your party. You don’t have any foreknowledge of the future; you don’t have the power to make your life anything other than a mist, so inevitably your whole party will turn into a big disappointment.

But if we can stop pretending it’s our party, and we can join in with the great, marvelous, eternal things that God is doing for His glory, and we find our place in all that, that’s when real joy will come. Imagine your friend is having a birthday party, and his rich parents are taking all his friends to Disney World, and all kinds of amazing adventures. But you wanted it to be your party, so you stay home and try to blow up some balloons and make it all about you, and you refused to go to your friend’s party. You are doing that because you want to be happy, and yet the result is you end up sitting by yourself all day in misery and self-pity, instead of having all kinds of fun at your friend’s party. (Now, don’t take that illustration too far. I’m not trying to suggest that God’s party is mainly about fun or that it’s like going to Disney World. Very often it will involve hardship and suffering and persecution. But what I am saying is that it will be far more fulfilling and produce far more joy in your heart than trying to invent your own party.)

## **Speech Matters**

So does this require that we say, “If it is the Lord’s will,” every single time we mention something we are planning on doing? No. Jesus didn’t do that, nor did anyone else in the Bible. We could turn this phrase into a meaningless cliché, or even a superstition, like saying, “Knock on wood.” You could say the words, “if it is the Lord’s will,” and still not have any real concern for God’s will in your heart. I think what James is describing here is a mentality and an outlook that sees everything as dependent on God’s will and for the purpose of God’s will.

However, that is not to say that the words don't matter. I think it is important that we do actually verbalize the words, "if the Lord wills," fairly often. The things that come out of your mouth influence your heart. You can undermine beliefs or reinforce beliefs or even change beliefs by the way that you speak. It really is possible to talk yourself into something or out of something. No one has more influence over you than you, because no one talks to you more than you. You talk to yourself all day long, and the things you say have an impact. You change yourself by the things you say to yourself. It's good for your tongue to become accustomed to holy forms of speech, and saying true things – especially things we have a hard time remembering.

The godly men who wrote the Scriptures verbalized this.

### **1 Corinthians 4:19 I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing**

He said it again in chapter 16, and in Romans 1:10. We see it in Hebrews 6:1. It is a good thing to say. And regardless of how often we say it, we must have the attitude behind it all the time. That is the point of verse 17.

## **Sins of Omission**

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

Most of the time we think of sin in terms of something that we did that we should not have done. But it is just as sinful to fail to do something that you know you should do. If just avoiding sinful actions were all there were to it, then a corpse would be virtuous. Not only must we avoid doing wrong things, we must also do right things.<sup>3</sup>

### **Luke 12:47 That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.**

And that is not to say you have to do every good thing there is. There are millions of good things you can think of, and there is no way you could possibly do them all. It would be good to share the gospel with every person on the planet, but it's not possible for you to do that. So is James saying you're sinning because you know of a good thing and you're not doing it? No. The verse doesn't say "Anyone who knows of a good thing *he could do* and doesn't do it sins." It says, **Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.** There are plenty of things that are good that you know about, but that aren't your responsibility. Would it be a good thing for me to preach God's word to a bunch of people besides you this morning? Sure, but that's not my responsibility. My responsibility is to teach here, where God has called me.

## **Conclusion**

Maybe you are here today and you realize you've been trying to make your life your party, and you're sick of it. It is nothing but disappointment and heartbreak all the time. And you realize right here and now God is speaking to you. He is inviting you to His party. As you've heard the Word of God today, He has gripped your heart, and He isn't letting go. You need to respond. If you would like to pray with someone about that, we have some people who would love to pray with you.

**Benediction: Hebrews 10:35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.**

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<sup>3</sup> It is striking to note how many of the parables focus on sins of omission rather than sins of commission.

## **Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) Are there any certain reminders of aging or mortality that push you in the direction of depression? Let the group help you reorient your thinking about those things so that they cause you to latch on to something eternal.
- 2) Name two or three things about God's will that are delightful to you.
- 3) Is there any area you can identify where you have been living as though your life is your party?
- 4) Think of how many things you did today because they were God's will. The reason you have them in your daily routine is because you know they are pleasing to God. Take a moment to pray and thank God for all the things His Spirit brought about in your life to please Him just today.