



Making Plans

James 4:13-17



Come now...

☐ Read James 4:13-17. James makes a distinction between what “you say” (*verse 13*) and what “you should say” (*verse 15*).

1. Based on verses 13 and 15, fill out the top row of the following table. (We will complete the remainder of the table at the end of the lesson.)¹

<i>What You Say</i> (v. 13)	<i>What You Should Say</i> (v.15)
<i>What You Think</i> (v. 16)	<i>What You Should Think</i> (v. 14)
<i>What You Do</i> (vv. 13, 17)	<i>What You Should Do</i> (vv.15, 17)

2. Making plans for the future, in itself, is not wrong, but there is a wrong kind of planning. Considering verses 13 and 15, what kind of planning is wrong and what kind of planning is right?²



📖 “The plans of the diligent lead to profit, as surely as haste leads to poverty.” (*Prov. 21:5*)

Instead...

☐ Verse 15 says, “Instead, you should say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’” However, merely saying these words is not the point.³ It’s our attitude that is important. We should say ‘if the Lord wills’ *sometimes* with our mouths, but *always* in our hearts.

3. How would you describe the attitude of those whom James is addressing?⁴

📖 “Don’t boast about tomorrow, for you don’t know what a day might bring” (*Proverbs 27:1, HCSB*)



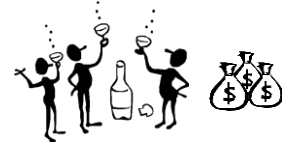
¹ For the 2nd and 3rd rows, it may be hard to know what Jay has in mind, so he will complete the table at the end.

² The Bible tells us to plan. The problem is planning without any consideration of God. Of course, some people don’t consider God because they don’t believe He exists. But even those who believe in God often leave Him out, either forgetting God, assuming He doesn’t care, or else thinking, ‘I’m going to do what I want to do anyway.’

³ It may be appropriate to say ‘Lord willing’ or ‘God willing’ when we state our plans. The apostle Paul sometimes said it when referring to his plans (Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7). When we say, ‘if the Lord wills’ (and mean it in our hearts) we 1) guard ourselves against presumption (taking things for granted); 2) we affirm to others that God is in control; and 3) we acknowledge that we are subject to God’s will.

⁴ Their attitude apparently includes presumption, self-sufficiency, self-centeredness, and arrogance (boastful pride). What they think is ‘I’m in control.’

4. Read James 4:14. How are we like “smoke?” If we are like smoke, how should this affect our attitude in making plans? How should this affect our relationship with God?⁵ (Consider Luke 12:16-21.)



5. Read James 4:17. How do you think verse 17 relates to the previous verses? What prevents or hinders people from doing “the good they ought to do?”⁶
6. How can we gain and maintain a “Lord willing” attitude? How can we know the Lord’s will for our lives, and be confident that we are making plans according to His will?⁷

📖 Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. (*Prov. 16:3, NIV*)

📖 Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails. (*Proverbs 19:21, NIV*)

Reflection/Application

- Think about your plans – for tomorrow, for the future. What factors have you considered in making your plans? Do you believe that your future is under *your* control? Are you trusting in *yourself* for your “success?” Are you presuming that you will be successful as you define “success?” Have you thought about the frailty and brevity of life? What if you die tomorrow? Have you thought about God? Have you considered His will in making your plans?
- God alone is ultimately “in control.” Continually reflect on this fact. *Submit* to Him, and *trust* in Him. If you have not already done so, receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.
- This week, read and reflect on Romans 12:1-2. Commit to live daily according to these verses, submitting every decision and every plan to the will of God. Examine your current plans (and attitudes) and ask for God’s grace to make the needed changes.

⁵ Our life is relatively brief, and it can be frail or fragile. Our lives could end today or tomorrow. Or else we could become disabled, or something else could happen that shows us we aren’t as strong and independent as we think. We should not take anything for granted. Each day is a gift of God. We are completely dependent upon the mercy and grace of God. Instead of a prideful ‘I’m in control’ attitude that focuses on the things of this world, we *should* be thinking ‘I am like smoke,’ which should result in humility and a desire to invest in eternal things.

⁶ If we are motivated by our own pride and selfish ambition, we will fail to do the good we ought to do. If we leave God out of our daily lives and planning, we will fail to do the good we ought to do. If we only care about doing what we want to do, instead of the things we ought to do, it is sin. In his letter, James gives us instructions to do good, and he says, ‘Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.’ (James 1:22, NIV)

⁷ God’s revealed will is given in the Bible. But we will not truly gain a ‘Lord willing’ attitude until we enter into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. God will change our attitude, and by His Spirit enable us to know and do His will. As we read the Bible, pray, and submit ourselves to God’s guidance through the Bible and by His Spirit, we will live according to His will (Romans 12:1-2). For more information on knowing God’s will, see ‘Knowing God’s Will’ under Articles and Archives on the ICF website.