

# Making Life Count (Part I)

## James 4:13-17

**Purpose of series:** The purpose of this series is to assist you in taking off the limits of God's expression through you and in your life and His blessing on your life. The book of James reveals many practical duties and activities of Christian, that if not heeded will hinder God's expression through them and blessings on them, especially during difficult seasons of our life. This series will provide us with a practical view of how to live a life of spiritual impact and personal fullness in a difficult world under pressure.

**Purpose of this message:** We are living in an unstable time. There are many questions as to what we are to do and how we are to live. James addresses this point with many of the believer's who were going through difficult and uncertain times. He has given us some key factors to give us balance and success during troubled times. The message today is one that gets to the core root of our hearts and demands a sober look at what and who we say we are. This is a key message for any Christian, especially those who want their life to count.

An article in U.S. News and World Report stated that we Americans are obsessed with the future. We want to know what's going to happen next, with voting projections, oil prices, cost of living, financial opportunities. We want to get the inside scoop about everything, about next year, the next decade, and if we can, next century. To say we are preoccupied with the future is an understatement, we are obsessed with it.

All kinds of people use different things in an attempt to project the future: tea leaves, fortune cookies, astrology, palm reading. There are certain people who personally attempt to project the future, an annalist, strategist and economists who all try to give their clearest projection of what the future will look like. In our attempt to grasp the future we read books and blogs and go to conferences and seminars in hope the the futures potential outcome becomes clearer and more predictable.

If there is anything up for grabs right now it is, "What in the world is going to happen in the future?"

*"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." 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 vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."*

James 4:13-17

Here in James 4:13-17, he talks to us about common mistakes we make regarding Making Our Life Count. Even though we believe we have become so much more advanced in comparison to the times of James, 2000 years ago, that knowledge has not keep us from falling into some of the same pitfalls of what James is warning those he is talking to in his letter. There are three big mistakes people make when it comes to making their life count. For the sake of time, today we are going to discuss the first of the three.

### 3 BIG MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE

***“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.’”***

**James 4:13**

The picture here is a man pointing toward a map saying, “This is what we are going to do.” The big question is, is it wrong to plan. Second, if it's right to plan, then how do you do it?

**Is it wrong to plan?** Of course not. The Bible tells us clearly,

***“May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.”***

**Psalm 20:4**

I want you to picture two guys, one who is pointing at a map and his finger is planted at the spot that he is convinced where he needs to go and do a few things. This is the place, this is where the money is. One is discussing his business expansion plans and the other is listening, knowing he is the one who responsible for carrying out those plans. The one individual is making plans for the next year. So, what's wrong with this picture? People make plans every day. You and I couldn't do very well without a plan. Actually, we do terrible without a plan. So why is a plan a bad idea here?

***“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.”***

**Proverbs 19:21**

*“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.”*

**Proverbs 16:9**

***“A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?”***

**Proverbs 20:24**

What a great philosophical question. If what we do is directed by God anyways, then how can we be have any influence in any of God's plans? How can our plans actually make any difference since God's plans are going to be ultimately done? The question here is very important, it is say, “Do I actually have any influence over my own life. Not only on my own life, but can I have any influence being a Christian? I mean, if God is in control, and I'm committed to Him having control of my life, then isn't my planning or involvement actually interference with what He is attempting to do?” What a huge philosophical question.

Look at the business plan this guy has that James describes:

- **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 picture? 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? Learn to miss the BIG MISTAKES, here is the first of the three BIG MISTAKES,

## 1. **First Big Mistake, Planning Your Life Without God**

Do you notice a mention of God anywhere in the business plan? This guy never considered this one thing, “What does God think of my plan.”

**“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”**  
Psalm 37:5-6

Now I must make mention of a few things here that are very important. If you are truly in love with God, there is nothing more important to you, your business or all the finances that you could acquire that is more important than your relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. More importantly, if you are absolutely passionate about Christ, you want others to know of Christ and I believe that upon a moments notice there are many of you who would lay anything down, your jobs, your finances even your homes for the purpose of sharing the love of God to those who have never heard or know about God. Now listen to this scripture very carefully if you have a heart toward God like this. And you have a heart that you would be an impact person for God.

If you “**commit your way**,” your plans, your business, your goals and desires to the Lord, in other words, if your plans, business, goals and desires are **dedicated, committed** to the Lord, and you will trust Him with all of this, here's what He said He will do, two things:

1. **He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn**, He will make what you are doing the platform for portraying Christ. He will make your job your testimony!
2. **He will make the justice of your cause like the noonday sun-** He will allow your passion to become contagious! Not only will people recognize the righteousness, be attracted and changed by this righteousness but that they will become involved in the cause that you are passionate about as well. Now that is good!

### **James' Point**

You don't find this man here in James mentioning God in his entire business plan. He had the where, when, how long and what, but he didn't know the who!

### **Two Misinterpretations**

I would like to take a moment and discuss two misinterpretations of reading this portion of scripture here in James 4:13-17. The two **misinterpretations** of this passage is:

- **God Doesn't Approve of You Making Plans**
- **Whatever, The Lord's Will Be**

#### **1. God Doesn't Approve of You Making Plans**

See, God wants us to plan, but many people read this scripture and interpret it as saying that God doesn't want us to have plans, that would be presumptuous and we would miss God's will. I am not denying that we can make plans that are totally negligent of God's will and that we can lie to ourselves to take a course of action in our life and attempt to say “God told me...” But in the end we are found out and to much regret. I am really not wanting to go there in this conversation, but I am attempting to

address this fear that many believers have in missing God's will and disappoint God through our decisions. Now again I will admit, getting off course here in the present in a small direction and in a little way can take you in a whole new destiny later on from where you started out. We can never lose the caution of straying away. But too many Christians are polarized in "paralysis of analysis," stuck in place because they never have the confidence or assurance that it's alright to make a decision, plans or take a step forward. Look again at this scripture,

*"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.' 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 vanishes."*  
James 4:13-14

Now let me reinterpret this scripture in the way many people of God hear and read it.

*"You who attempt to make plans of many kinds for today or tomorrow, to go somewhere, do something over any extended amount of time, to make money, you can never count on tomorrow or your plans. Who do you think you are? You're nothing, just a mist, here and then gone."*

Sadly, I don't think this is an exaggeration for many believers because they have a misinterpretation of what this scripture is attempting to say. And because of that, they are limited in what God can do in their lives. Please understand, if you are limited in your capacity to believe God can use you, God is limited in His capacity to touch the world. You are the city set on the hill, you are the light and salt of the world. If you don't have it the world will never get it, plain and simple. To believe that God doesn't approve of you making plans goes against His Word, look what Jesus said,

*"Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."*  
James 4:13-17

*"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?"*  
Luke 14:28

Jesus is encouraging those listening that it is only reasonable to sit down and consider, count the cost of the plan you have for your life. There really would be no cost if there were no plan. Please understand, making plans is not the sin, it's not making plans that can be finished, that can be done, that are not of God. Look what the wisest man on this earth had to say about this:

*"Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance."*  
Proverbs 20:18

*"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure."*  
Proverbs 11:14

It's wise to plan and it's crazy if you don't. James is not saying that the problem is with planning, he's saying that you have a problem when your plans don't involve God.

And it's important that you understand this point, you are not inviting God to take a ride on your plan, you are openly asking God to review and approve your plans, to see if there are any flaws or concerns He has.

In our attempts of preparing and developing plans for our future facility here at Cornerstone, we thought and thought about what we should do. We contacted an architect and had them do a preliminary drawing of the concept that we came up with. It was...OK. Last year I came across a church that really felt like something more in line of what we were really trying to accomplish. I came back, asked several people if they would like to take the trip with me to visit that church. Several did take that trip and we spent over an hour in prayer in that place, walking down the isles and asking God, "What is it that you want." On the way back I asked if everyone who went to turn in something that they saw or didn't see, but something that was specifically important to them that should be a part of our next building. I accumulated that information together and made a big list of things that were mentioned. I later came in contact with some new architects that asked me to provide things that were important to us in a future facility and give them an opportunity to draw up preliminary drawings, and you would not believe the difference in the drawings. The clarity of what we are wanting to accomplish became more evident. When God and others were involved the picture became that much more clearer and exciting.

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 and ask for God's insight. There's nothing wrong with what this man 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. He was driven to accomplish everything by His own power, he may have wisdom. He may have had a good plan. But without God, nothing amounts to much. Listen to a portion of this article written by Alexander Saul, (Readers Digest)

"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 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.'"

### **A Picture Of Our Time**

How could I avoid what has just happened in our world as an exact expression of this, "Men have forgotten God." There is an unavoidable picture that is screaming off the news paper and TV news, we cannot help but acknowledge what has happened to us in the last few days here in the United States is nothing than "men have forgotten God."

- **The Dow dropped a record 778 points**, the lowest in our history, with the **biggest sell-off since the post-9-11** trading period.
- **Washington Mutual, the nation's largest savings and loan**, was seized by

federal regulators in what is by far **the largest bank failure and bail out in American history**.

- **Merrill Lynch**, whose trademark bull was a mainstay on Wall Street for many Americans is now being meshed into something not of its own, the **Bank of America**. Its changed locations too, from Wall Street in **New York City to Charlotte, N.C.** Not quite the glamor it has known.
- **Citigroup** acquired **Wachovia** this week, saving it from the brink of collapse.

For now, here we are in the middle of corn harvest and the financial crisis that has overtaken the news has had little or no effect on most of us here in middle America. It would be easy for us to think that all this alarm and the stirring going on with Congress and the stock market is nothing but a \$700 billion bailout for rich scoundrels on Wall Street. But something else is going on. Something deeper. There are people who attempted to project the future and just got busted in the process. They were hoping for one more day without anybody asking the right questions or checking on the right accounts. They were counting on things to never catch up with them, that somehow, out there, their ship was coming in that would keep them from ever facing the neglect and disgrace of what they were doing. Now here we are, about to find out what really is wrong and how wrong everything was. Someone was counting on the future of never having to give account for their lives. And that future just ended! It is frightening not only to know that you will have to give account for your life while here on this earth, but you will give account throughout eternity. I know without a doubt, God's name was not absent on Wall Street this week!

But James is wanting us to know, as a believer you don't have to be a crooked businessman and you can be just as powerful a believer at work as you could preaching the gospel. Your work is your platform for ministry. You know, it's sad when you meet people who don't believe in God because they are missing the one ingredient in life that makes it so worth while. But something that is disturbing is one who knows Christ, but when it comes to the plans for their life they have no involvement for Christ to help design that. That is one of the main reasons why so many kids drop out of church when they leave home, they don't leave home, they leave God. When they leave the house they leave the one who can give them the guidance for every decision for the rest of their life!

***“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”***

**Proverbs 16:3**

You can't miss this! You can't go all the way through your life thinking, if I could just get this one job, or if I could just turn this around. Hey! Listen! There is no turning around without God, you are looping, but you are not turning around! Stop the rut. Get God back in your game and see what He will do in you.

How is God involved in your business? How is He involved where you are going to college or where you are working right now? How is God involved with the decisions you are making about your future, your finances, your goals and dreams? Here's James' suggestion for us, and this will lead us to our second misinterpretation of this passage of scripture. The first misinterpretation is,

1. **God Doesn't Approve of You Making Plans**
2. **Whatever, The Lord's Will Be**

*"Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"*  
James 4:15

I can still remember the first music that came into my house when I was a child. It came in the form of a record player, the small box with the arm that you had to lift and place on the record. We owned three records, Ferlin Husky, Marty Robbins and Doris Day. As hungry and desperate as I was to hear music I remember my brother and I just could not play Ferlin at all. Marty Robbins got plenty of play, I can still walk down the streets of El Paso with a vivid memory of his songs. But it was Doris Day who put a song in my heart. I know I should be more manly than that but I can still hear her telling me to catch a falling star and to put it in my pocket, because on a rainy day I might need it...whatever that means? But it was another song on that album that stuck in my mind, "Que Sera Sera," whatever will be will be, the future's not ours to see, Que sera, sera, what will be, will be. It was a "give it up and let things just happen." Of course it is a neat thought to just park it and stop being so pressed about life, but it is fatalistic as well. Whatever will be will be.

I have had to many experiences with those who get to the point of needing to make some key decisions about their family, their job, even God, when they need to take a stand and they throw up their hands and just say, "The Lord's will." Here's something I understand, God has given me the opportunity to connect with Him. Here is something I know that you believe, "Satan is wreaking havoc on this earth!" Do you agree with that? Do you think that Satan is bringing all kinds of damage and pain to this world? Of course he is. Well listen to this,

*"...because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."*  
I John 4:4b

Or read it in the good old King James version,

*"...greater is he who is in you than he that is in the world."*  
I John 4:4b

Think of it this way, if you can believe that Satan can have the power to attempt to destroy this world and release his evil forces to plague the earth with pain, separation and destruction. And, you believe the Word of God is true, then God, being in you is not a passive, "Come By Ya" moment. Greater? He is greater in me than Satan is in the world? Then there is something residing in me that is capable of wreaking havoc on Satan's plan. Too many people have everything lined up in their life, everything is accounted for, there is a plan for this and a plan for that, but when it comes to God they just throw up their hands and say, "Whatever the Lord's will is." NO! That is not the Lord's will, that is Que Sera Sera, Whatever will be will be. You have a spirit of Doris Day...cast it out!

I don't believe that everything that fails the first, second or tenth time is "God's Will." I do not determine God's will by failure or road blocks, especially when God has spoken into my heart about obeying Him in certain areas of my life. In other words, I don't take something not working as a sign that God doesn't want me to do it. If I've prayerfully

sought God's insight and carefully planned, I think I am set up for a great attempt and possibly several attempts before I succeed. Here's why I believe this, of all the things in the universe, I do believe in a law that keeps getting in the way of many great opportunities, Murphy's Law, if anything can go wrong it will go wrong. Maybe you are familiar with that law?

There are many things that happen, why? I'll never know all the reasons, sometimes I am fortunate to know some of the reasons, but what I do know, "If it was easy..." do you know the rest of that statement? (...everybody would be doing it.) But things are not that easy, they are complicated and difficult and **the more complicated and the more difficult, fewer and fewer people will actually attempt to do it. The more you raise the level of complication and difficulty the more you raise your chances of succeeding if you stay with it longer and attempt to do a better job.** It's that simple. This is not brain science, it practical. When you start looking for the easy route is when you will get discouraged, you realize that everyone is looking for that job. Don't throw your hands up at complicated situations, realize this is when everyone else gets off the elevator. Stay on, go all the way to the top floor.

This is what we do know, tomorrow is as questionable and vulnerable as blown glass, anything could happen, and without God things are not in your favor. Today, the best thing you can do for yourself is to say, "God, I'm yours. Everything I've got is yours and all I want is you. I want your guidance, I want your blessing, I want your wisdom, I want your hand in my life. I will stand on your Word.

***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."***  
**Proverbs 3:5-6**

There is a song that we used to sing:

"I'm yours Lord, everything I've got, everything I am, everything I'm not  
I'm yours Lord, try me now and see, see if I am completely yours."

Many people hide behind the cliché, "Oh the Lord's will be..." But that is not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about bailing out of decisions and the need to make plans because we don't really want to be responsible for knowing God's will or take any responsibility to carry it out. I really have a problem with those who are all about planning down the the very cent in their financial pocket book but want to be unorganized, spiritual butterflies when it comes to God, "the Lord's will be..." No! I believe that there are absolutes in God and you don't keep "spiritualizing" realities!

There are some difficult decisions you have to make that will not happen on their own. Namely, building a church. And I am not just talking about a physical one. When people say, "On the Lord's will be..." basically it is saying, "well, it will happen if it is supposed to." Basically what I hear is, "Don't push me off of my cloud while I am playing my flute, I don't want to get mixed up with the realities of this evil, nasty earth. I'm being spiritual, don't mix the earthly necessary things with the solitude of my spirit! Don't confuse building a church or expanding God's kingdom with my inter sanctity." Here's a Greek word for you, "Bull!" Get off your cloud. Stop minimizing the reality that there are some real keys to reaching people and they cost us time, energy and money.

Stop minimizing the price of developing people in a healthy and exciting environment. If many business operated like churches they would fail because people would refuse to go there and even let their children eat there. The failure in most churches today is because we are ignoring "the Lord's will is..."

Our purpose and call to influence our community by providing a discipling environment where people feel welcome and safe is possible and can be developed. But it can't happen on it's own. We have to ask the question, "God, how would you like us to do this?" We have to get with people who are doing a great job in this area and see if we can't learn from them. We were called to make disciples in the world, not consumers. We must change the mix of people in the house of God from observers to participators. Many people need to stop excusing their lack of participation in serving God with, "the Lord's will be..." and start exerting their activity with "the Lord's will is..."

### **There are three basic responses to God's will:**

1. **I acknowledge it.** I need to admit that God has a will and it is available to me. I understand that His way is the best way, no matter how it looks to me on the outside.
2. **I accept it.** I really want God's will and I accept it into my life. I say, God, move in and teach me how to let your will take charge of my life.
3. **I anticipate it.** I now look for it. I anticipate it, not dread it. I deeply desire it more than anything else in my life. My plan is whatever God wants.

***"We may make our plans, but God has the last word."***

**Proverbs 16:1**

We can attempt anything, but God ultimately has the last Word. All that we do are attempts at pleasing ourselves. But the greatest joy is attempting to be pleasing to God. The servant is the greatest among the Kingdom.

***"We should make plans - counting on God to direct us."***

**Proverbs 16:9**

Don't pray, "God bless what I'm doing". I know that many may struggle with this question in your life, "Am I pleasing God?" I want to suggest to you that you can be not only confident, but also affective where you are in your life today by answering three questions. Let me ask you the three questions:

1. **Is your HEART submitted to God?** Are you open to God's will and direction in your life? Is your heart open to hear Him speak direction and specifics to you? Are you willing to acknowledge that God has a will and plan for your life, that you want to accept it and live in a fashion of anticipating it?
2. **Is your NOW submitted to God?** Did you prayerfully ask God about what you are doing right now, going to college, working in Garden City or the surrounding area. I'm not talking about doubting that you are pleasing Him. I am talking about asking Him if you are doing things in a manner that would bring Him glory? Is your life right now submitted under His authority? Many people want the will of God until it intrudes on their plans and pleasures. If your now, the attitudes of your heart, the lifestyle and participation and expressions reflective of a life that is submitted "now", not later, but now to God?
3. **Is your FUTURE submitted to God?** Are you willing to adjust your projected

life's goals and pleasures for the pleasure of God? Many people are committed now, when it seems convenient or feasible. But have you made a decision that no matter what comes in my future, I am submitted to His will? Many people serve God today. There are people around them that spur them on. There is a church that worship draws you to God, but what happens when all those conveniences are not there. What happens when a convicting message is not preached or a life group is not there to influence you? If your future committed right now? You need to ask that question now, not later. You need to know that your life is committed to serving God no matter where you are at and who is around you. You will seek out Godly advice the rest of your life. You are in it until "death can't keep us apart!"

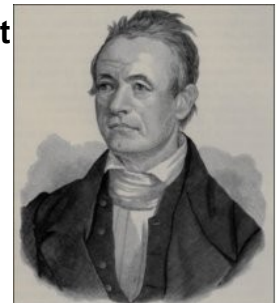
We make plans. We've worked many hours on them and they look good to us. That's exactly what this guy did here in James 4:13. We want God to bless whatever it is that we are doing, but that's not the way that God works, He wants to bless what He is doing. God invites you to participate with Him in this world, He has an incredible plan. With God's plan, there is no "bailout" plan ever needed. We need to get on board with Him.

There is a story of a girl named **Ann Hasseltine**. She was born in Massachusetts in **1789** and grew up in a well to do family, very distinguished. She was highly intelligent and much sought after. As a teenager she gave herself to the Lord, that means that she acknowledged, accepted and anticipated the will of God in her life. One of her life prayers was,

**"Direct me in your service, and I ask no more. I will not choose what it is you would have me do or the place or the kind of work. Only let me know that it is your will and I will be completely ready and willing."**

When she was 21 years old she was a school teacher and met a young man named **Adoniram Judson**, who believed more than anything that God had called him to be a missionary. Adoniram wrote a hard letter for any father to read concerning the future of his daughter and what he had to offer with his idea of marriage. Here's what he wrote,

**"I am asking you now if you would consider and consent to parting with your daughter early next spring to never see here again in this world. Would you consent to her leaving there for a journey to a heathen land, and the hardships that will come from a missionary life? Would you consent to her exposure to every kind of want and distress, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death..."**



It was found later in Ann's journal that as Adoniram was consulting with Ann's father she was pondering the same questions and wrote in her journal:

**"God has an undoubted right to do with me as He is everywhere present and can protect me in one place as well as another. When I am called to face danger, to pass through scenes of terror and distress, He can inspire me with fortitude, and enable me to trust Him. Whether I spend my**



**days in India or spend eternity in His presence. I am quite willing to give up temporal comforts and live a life of hardship and trial, if it be the will of God. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” (Luke 1:38)**

So it was that Adoniram and Ann Judson became the first foreign missionaries ever sent from the shores of America and spent their lives in Burma, officially what we now call the Union of Myanmar.

**Planning your life without God is the first BIG mistake people make.**