

# James 4 Commentary

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See also [Overview Chart](#) by Charles Swindoll

## JAMES

Faith for Living

Motives for Works		The Place of Works: Outward Demonstration of Inner Faith				Outreach of Works	
Jas 1:1-18	Jas 1:19-2:13	Jas 2:14-25	Jas 3:1-12	Jas 3:13-4:12	Jas 4:13-5:12	Jas 5:13-19	
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<b>FAITH AT WORK</b>							

### The Reactions of Living Faith to Worldliness

#### The reaction of living faith to selfish strife (James 4:1–5:12)

- A. The condition manifesting worldliness (James 4:1–6)
  - 1. The description of the condition (James 4:1–3)
    - a. The questions exposing the source (James 4:1)
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  - 2. The rebuke for the condition (James 4:4–6)
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- b. The authoritative message of Scripture (James 4:5a)
- c. The divine response to the worldly (James 4:5b–6)
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- B. The exhortation to the worldly (James 4:7–12)
  - 1. The call to return to God (James 4:7–10)
    - a. The statement of the basic demand (James 4:7)
      - (1) Nearness to God (James 4:8a)
      - (2) Personal cleansing (James 4:8b)
      - (3) Open repentance (James 4:9)
      - (4) Godly humility (James 4:10)
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#### **The reaction of living faith to presumptuous planning (4:13–17)**

- A. The rebuke of their self-sufficient attitude (James 4:13–14)
  - 1. The delineation of the attitude (James 4:13)
  - 2. The presumption in the attitude (James 4:14)
- B. The indication of the proper attitude (James 4:15)
- C. The evil of their present attitude (James 4:16–17)
  - 1. The evil of their boasting (James 4:16)
  - 2. The sin of their inconsistency (James 4:17) ([Hiebert's Commentaries – James](#))

### **James 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?**

Amplified - WHAT LEADS to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fightings) originate among you? Do they not arise from your sensual desires that are ever warring in your bodily members?

NET James 4:1 Where do the conflicts and where do the quarrels among you come from? Is it not from this, from your passions that battle inside you?

GNT James 4:1 Πθεν πλεμοι και πθεν μ χαι ν μ ν; ο κ ντεθεν, κ τ ν δον ν μ ν τ ν στρατευομ νων ν το ς μ λεισιν μ ν;

NLT James 4:1 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you?

KJV James 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

ESV James 4:1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

ASV James 4:1 Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members?

CSB James 4:1 What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you?

NIV James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

NKJ James 4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

NRS James 4:1 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?

YLT James 4:1 Whence are wars and fightings among you? not thence -- out of your passions, that are as soldiers in your members?

NAB James 4:1 Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?

NJB James 4:1 Where do these wars and battles between yourselves first start? Is it not precisely in the desires fighting inside your own selves?

GWN James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Aren't they caused by the selfish desires that fight to control you?

BBE James 4:1 What is the cause of wars and fighting among you? is it not in your desires which are at war in your bodies?

- **What is the source:** Jas 3:14-18
- **Is not the source your pleasures** Jas 1:14 Ge 4:5-8 Jer 17:9 Mt 15:19 Mk 7:21-23 Joh 8:44 Ro 8:7 1Ti 6:4-10 Tit 3:3 1Pe 1:14 2:11 4:2,3 2Pe 2:18 3:3 1Jn 2:15-17 Jude 1:16-18
- **pleasures** Jas 4:3
- **in your members** Ro 7:5,23 Ga 5:17 Col 3:5
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE CONDITION & CAUSE OF SELFISH STRIFE

This is the opposite of Tolstoy's great novel "[War and Peace](#)," for here James moves from peace to war! What a contrast between James 3:18+ and James 4:1 (which is probably not the best chapter break) - "**fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace**" is now "**quarrels and conflicts**"! A veritable [antithesis](#)! James has just described the glorious nature and fruit of wisdom from above and now abruptly transitions to a less than glorious picture of the spirit that was present in the churches in the diaspora. James begins this section like a doctor because he is aware that the external signs are only symptoms of a deeper issue. And by asking questions, he quickly diagnoses the heart of the problem which is their heart (which is the problem of ALL of our hearts)! The doctor must first make the correct diagnosis to offer the correct cure. And remember he is speaking to believers and so these problems are clearly rearing their ugly head in the churches **dispersed abroad** (James 1:1+) and he wants to help them understand how a person grows up to a mature relationship in Christ.

**R C H Lenski** - The readers have followed the earthly, unspiritual, devilish wisdom. James tells them plainly what kind of people they have become and calls on them in strong terms to repent. (The Interpretation of The Epistle to the Hebrews and The Epistle of James)

**What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?** - Amplified = "WHAT LEADS to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fightings) originate among you?" James asks the first of two sharp questions to identify the source of their strife. In your interpersonal relationships, what is it that brings about conflict and quarrels among you? His second question will answer the first one. And remember James has been addressing his readers as **my brethren** (James 3:12+), so he is speaking to believers in local bodies of Christ that have been **dispersed abroad** (Jas 1:1+).

**Jamieson** makes a good point that "The cause of quarrels is often sought in external circumstances, whereas internal lusts are the true origin."

**Barton** - At the end of chapter 3, James explains that false wisdom leads to disorder and every evil practice (Jas 3:16+), and that true wisdom results in good fruit (Jas 3:17+) and righteousness (Jas 3:18+). From this poetic description of wisdom expressed in general terms, James returns to practical application. His readers need to know what wisdom is, but they need even more to live wisely. Chapter 4 begins with a challenge to behavior that James saw as proof of (ungodly) wisdom—fights and quarrels among them. (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

**A T Robertson** - This old interrogative adverb ([pothen](#) - here twice) asks for the origin of wars and fights. James is full of interrogatives, like all [diatribes](#). ("A **diatribe** is a style of teaching in ancient philosophical schools, generally characterized by rhetorical questions and imaginary interlocutors." - IVP Background Commentary) In [Robertson's commentary on James](#) he adds "This use of question gives life to style and is the mark of a good teacher. Note also the repetition of "whence," which gives added piquancy...Basically, ecclesiastical strife does not differ in origin and spirit from wars between nations. Sometimes there is even more bitterness. Certainly no wars have been fiercer than the so-called "religious" wars of history. It does seem like irony that the two world wars should have come after so many years of growth of the peace sentiment in the world. "

**Lehman Strauss** adds "Nations, churches, families and individuals could profit much from a study of these verses. Extirpate the

cause of wars and fightings and you have settled the disposition of this evil monstrosity." (Borrow [James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James](#) - page 150)

**Jewish Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza** said "I have often wondered that persons who make boast of professing the Christian religion—namely love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men—should quarrel with such rancorous animosity, and display daily towards one another such bitter hatred, that this, rather than the virtues which they profess, is the readiest criteria of their faith."

**Quarrels (4171)**(**polemos** gives us English **polemics**) literally refers to an armed conflict or war (opposite of eirene - peace which godly wisdom gives - Jas 3:17,18+). It is used here in James 4:1 in a negative figurative sense - strife, quarrels, conflicts. **Robertson** says that in James 4:1 "**polemos** (old word, Matthew 24:6) pictures the chronic state or campaign (I.E., A STATE OF WAR), while **machē** (also old word, 2 Cor. 7:5) presents the separate conflicts or battles in the war. So James covers the whole ground by using both words. The origin of a war or of any quarrel is sometimes hard to find, but James touches the sore spot here." **Robertson** adds this word "means a state of war and the lasting resentment connected with it."

**Polemos** - 20x in 16v - battle(4), quarrels(1), war(10), wars(5). Matt. 24:6; Mk. 13:7; Lk. 14:31; Lk. 21:9; 1 Co. 14:8; Heb. 11:34; Jas. 4:1; Rev. 9:7; Rev. 9:9; Rev. 11:7; Rev. 12:7; Rev. 12:17; Rev. 13:7; Rev. 16:14; Rev. 19:19; Rev. 20:8

**Polemos** in Septuagint - Gen. 14:2,8; Exod. 1:10; 13:17; 15:3; 32:17; Lev. 26:6,36-37; Num. 10:9; 14:3; 20:18; 21:14,33; 31:14,21,36; 32:6,20,27,29-30; Deut. 2:5,9,19,24,32; 3:1; 4:34; 20:1-3,5-7,12,20; 21:10; 24:5; 29:7; Jos. 4:13; 8:14; 10:11,24; 11:18-20; 14:11,15; 22:33; Jdg. 3:1-2,10; 8:13; 20:20,22-23,28,34,39,42; 21:22; 1 Sam. 4:1-2; 7:10; 8:20; 13:5,22; 14:20,22-23,52; 17:1-2,8,47; 19:8; 23:8; 25:28; 26:10; 28:1; 29:4,9; 30:24; 31:3; 2 Sam. 1:4,25; 2:17; 3:1,6,30; 5:24; 10:8-9,13; 11:7,15,18-19,22,25; 18:6,8; 19:3,10; 21:15,17-20; 22:35,40; 23:9; 1 Ki. 2:5; 5:3; 8:44; 12:21; 14:30; 15:7,16; 20:14,18,26,29,39; 22:1,4,6,15,30,34-35; 2 Ki. 3:7,26; 8:28; 9:16; 13:25; 14:7; 16:5; 18:20; 24:16; 25:4; 1 Chr. 5:10,18-20,22; 7:4; 10:3; 11:13; 12:1,8,19,33,35-36; 14:15; 19:9,14; 20:4-6; 22:8; 26:27; 2 Chr. 6:34; 11:1; 13:2-3,14; 14:6,10; 15:19; 16:9; 17:18; 18:3,5,14,29,33-34; 20:1; 22:5; 25:5,13; 26:11-13; 27:7; 28:12; 32:6,8; 35:21; Est. 1:1; Job 5:15,20; 22:10; 33:18; 38:23; 39:25; 41:8; Ps. 18:34,39; 24:8; 27:3; 46:9; 68:30; 76:3; 78:9; 89:43; 140:2,7; 144:1; Prov. 21:31; 24:6; Eccl. 3:8; 8:8; 9:11,18; Cant. 3:8; Isa. 21:15; 22:2; 42:13,25; 46:2; Jer. 4:19; 6:4,23; 18:21; 28:8; 41:16; 42:14; 46:3; 49:2,14; 50:22,42; 51:20; Ezek. 7:15; 17:17; Dan. 7:8,21; 9:25-26; 11:20,25; Hos. 1:7; 2:18; 10:9,14; Joel 2:5; 3:9; Amos 1:14; Obad. 1:1; Mic. 2:8; 3:5; Zech. 10:3,5; 14:2-3

**Conflicts** (disputes)(**3163**)(**mache** from **machomai** = to fight - this word is used for physical combat, especially military) when used literally refers to physical combat or a contest fought with weapons = battle, conflict, fight. The idea is a serious clash or conflict, and can be either physical or non-physical. It pictures violent personal relationships. It is used only figuratively in the NT and is always in the plural referring to battles fought with words not weapons (although the tongue can certainly be a vicious weapon of sorts! James 3:8+), thus "word battles," disputes, quarrels, strifes, contentions ( 2 Cor 7:5; 2 Ti 2:23; Titus 3:9; Jas 4:1). **Mache** gives us our English word **logomachy** which describes arguments about words or the meaning of words. **Robertson** says **mache** in this context "refers to battles or outbursts of passion which occur during a state of war."

**Dan McCartney** - The word **polemos** refers to larger military engagements (battles or wars), whereas **mache** typically refers to engagements between individuals or smaller groups (fights, contests). A sword fight between two individuals is a **mache**; an engagement of two armies, or even a full-scale war, is a **polemos**. The use of both terms may indicate that conflict in the churches involves both individual animosities and party antipathy. (BECNT)

**Guzik** makes an interesting statement that "Almost all who have such a critical and contentious attitude claim they are prompted and supported by the Spirit of God. James makes it clear that this contentious manner comes from your desires. "It is self-evident that the Spirit of God does not create desire which issues in envying." (Morgan)" ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Robertson** on **among you** - James does not, of course, here refer to wars between nations but to the factional bickerings in the churches, the personal wrangles that embitter church life. "**Among you**," he adds, to drive the question home. ([Commentary](#))

**Michael Andrus** - Notice that James doesn't ask whether there are fights and quarrels among us—he assumes it. As I have already indicated, I believe some fights and quarrels in the church are legitimate and justified. It is clear that "peace at any price" is not a biblical concept. James, however, is clearly concerned about the kind of arguments and conflicts that cannot be justified. That is, they cannot be ascribed to righteous zeal but rather to selfish ambition. The fact of the matter is that most fights and quarrels in church are not legitimate or justified. In his book, *The Unity Factor*, my friend and fellow Free Church pastor, Larry Osborne asserts that "the fiercest battles in our churches are seldom fought over theology. More often, they are fought over change, sometimes even the slightest change." They are also fought over personalities, over music preferences, over leadership style, over Roberts' Rules of Order, and over injured feelings. Why? James offers an interesting insight here in the first verse. It is that believers are often at war with one another because . . . Believers are at war with themselves. ([Sermon](#) - Pdf)

Perhaps it was this section of James which prompted someone to records this little (all too true) ditty...

To dwell above with saints we love,  
That will be grace and glory.  
To live below with saints we know;  
That's another story!

## **OUR PLEASURES CARRY ON A CONTINUAL "MILITARY CAMPAIGN"!**

**Is not the source your pleasures** ([hedone](#)) **that wage war** ([strateuomai](#) - [present tense](#) - continually) **in your members** ([melos](#))? - **CSB** = "Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you?" **NIV** = "Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" **NET** = "Is it not from this, from your passions that battle inside you?" This is rhetorical and expects a "Yes, you are correct James." So James answers his own question before they can wax eloquent (making excuses, rationalizing, etc - we never do that do we?! His "diagnosis" is that the strife going on externally between saints (**brethren** Jas 4:11+) is a reflection of the war going on internally, in their hearts. They sought to selfishly satisfy their base, carnal inner cravings! Once again James simply validates what his half-brother Jesus had taught declaring "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man., for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." (Mt 15:18, 19, cf Mk 7:21-23)

*Selfish Passions  
Cause Strife*

**The source your pleasures** is more literally "out of" your sinful, sensual lusts, depicting the inner desire to get something that one does not possess and yet greatly desires to possess.

**THOUGHT** - Mark it down that selfishness will always destroy peace. Think of how this principle impacts so many marriages in our day! There is only one solution and it is to kill sin before it kills your marriage. In Ro 8:13 Paul says "if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (AND SO WILL YOUR MARRIAGE BELOVED!)" Again Paul gives us the ONLY effective antidote to our continual tendency toward selfishness - "But I say, **walk** ([present imperative/ See discussion of the Need for the Holy Spirit to obey NT commands](#) - Beloved, let's be honest - we need the Spirit to give us the desire to even want to walk by the Him!!!) by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Gal 5:16-17+) (See [Illustration below](#)).

How can you know if you are in the flesh or in the Spirit? Here's a short checklist - Are you conscious of a secret spirit of pride? because of your natural gifts and abilities, love of human praise, a secret fondness to be noticed, love of supremacy, a touchy, sensitive spirit, a disposition to resent and retaliate when you are reprov'd of or contradicted, self-will, a stubborn unteachable spirit, harsh, sarcastic expressions, an arguing, talkative spirit, an unyielding, headstrong disposition, a disposition to criticize and pick flaws, a peevish, fretful spirit, an unpleasant sensation in view of the great prosperity and success of somebody else, a disposition to speak of the faults and failings rather than the gifts and virtues of those more talented and appreciated than yourself, given to exaggeration, etc, etc

**Don Anderson** - It's those passionate, earthly, natural, selfish, carnal desires. When you turn it over and the controls are taken by yourself rather than the Lord, that old nature rises to the surface and it acts in this way, totally contrary to the agenda and the program the Lord has in making you more Christlike. ([James 5:1-6](#))

The statement **that wage war in your members** suggests that the primary site of the war is internal, but while this is true, that is not what James is addressing, for his focus is on individuals continually at "war" (with words) with each other. The internal source feeds the external strife.

**Hiebert** says this was "evidence that they are being governed by the spirit of worldliness." ([Hiebert's Commentaries – James](#))

One is reminded of Peter's exhortation to the saints "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain [apecho](#) = push away from, put some space so to speak, in the [present tense](#) only possible as we rely on the Holy Spirit to empower us! cf use in Acts 15:20, 29+, 1 Th 4:3+) from fleshly lusts which (continually - [present tense](#)) wage war ([strateuomai](#) - same verb used by James) against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11+)

**Vincent** points out that "The sinful **pleasures** are the outgrowths of the lusts, James 4:2."

**Tryon Edwards** - Sinful and forbidden pleasures are like poisoned bread; they may satisfy appetite for the moment, but there is death in them at the end.

**John Foster** - The difference between false pleasure and true is just this: for the true, the price is paid before you enjoy it; for the false, after you enjoy it.

**Joseph Hall** - There is no earthly pleasure whereof we may not [surfeit](#) (sate); of the spiritual we can never have enough.

**Thomas Manton** - All sins are rooted in love of pleasure. Therefore be watchful. All the pleasure that wicked men have is upon earth; here, and nowhere else. (ED: Or one could say it this way - for unsaved men this is as "good" as it gets, but for saved this short time is as bad as it gets.)

**Thomas Manton** - God allows us to use pleasures, but not to live in them; to take delights, but not that they should take us.

**J. I. Packer** - Pleasure seeking, as we learn from experience, is a barren business; happiness is never found until we have the grace to stop looking for it and to give our attention to persons and matters external to ourselves.

**A. W. Tozer** has a pithy (as usual) quote - That this world is a play-ground instead of a battle-field has now been accepted in practice by the vast majority of fundamentalist Christians.

**Thomas Watson** - Soft pleasures harden the heart. (INTERESTING!)

*The hardest victory is victory over self.*

(Can I hear an "Amen?")

--Anonymous

**Pleasures** is our English word [hedonism](#) which is the pursuit of pleasure as a matter of ethical principle. It says that pleasure is the main goal in life, like the commercial that says "You only go around once. Grab for all the gusto you can!" The Greek word (below) **hedone** is the root of our English **hedonism**, which is the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life, and is manifest as an insatiable pursuit of self-satisfaction that so characterizes our modern society.

**Pleasures** (also in Jas 4:3)([2237](#))([hedone](#) from **hedos** = delight, enjoyment > **hedomai** = have sensual pleasure) describes the state or condition of experiencing pleasure for any reason and thus speaks of gratification and enjoyment. Feelings that please self and selfish desires. Although the word has a strong philosophical flavor (GPT, 75-78; TDNT), it is to be taken here in a practical and bad sense. Ancient **hedonism** expressed itself in two ways: the cruder form was that proposed by [Aristippus](#) and the early Cyrenaics, who believed that pleasure was achieved by the complete gratification of all one's sensual desires! In contrast, [Epicurus'](#) school, though accepting the primacy of pleasure, tended to equate it with the absence of pain and taught that it could best be attained through the rational control of one's desires. In either case it was focused on **SELF!** In the NT **hedone** is used only in a bad sense, referring to indulgence and lack of control of natural appetites (sensual) pleasure.

**HEDONE** - 5x - Lk. 8:14+; Titus 3:3+; Jas. 4:1; Jas. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:13+.

**Vincent** - The thought of wars and fightings is carried into the figurative description of the sensuality which arrays its forces and carries on its campaign in the members. The verb does not imply mere fighting, but all that is included in military service.

**Barclay on wage war** - "He does not mean that they war within a man – although that is also true – but that they set men warring against each other." ([James 5 Commentary](#))

**Wage war** ([4754](#))([strateuomai](#) from **strategos** = army, **stratos** = an encamped army) means literally to perform military service, serve as a soldier in the army, go to fight, carry on a military campaign, make a military expedition, lead soldiers to war or to battle. **Strateuomai** is used figuratively in this verse (and 1 Pe 2:11+) of spiritual battles, the picture being one of actively carrying on a campaign with the implication of battles planned and orchestrated by the indwelling [flesh](#), the evil disposition all mankind inherited from Adam and which is still "latent" even in believers. Note the use of [strateuomai](#) in the [present tense](#) which indicates that the spiritual campaign spearheaded by **fleshly lusts** against our **souls** is a continual struggle we can expect to engage in until the day we see our Commander in Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, it is analogous to what Paul wrote in Galatians "For the flesh sets its desire ([present tense](#)) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition ([present tense](#)) to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." (Gal 5:17+)

**Vincent** adds that "The thought of wars and fightings is carried into the figurative description of the sensuality which arrays its forces and carries on its campaign in the **members**. The verb does not imply mere fighting, but all that is included in military service. A remarkable parallel occurs in Plato, "Phaedo," 66: "For whence come wars and fightings and factions? Whence but from the body

and the lusts of the body?"

While **"members"** does not refer to "members" of the congregation, there is a sense in which it does because there were problems in the members of the members of the local body!

**Members** (3196)(**melos**) refers to a limb or member of the body and in the plural (and in the [context](#) of the present verse) refers to the members of body as the seat of the desires and passions. In James 3:5+ **melos** is singular (most of us have only one tongue, although some of us do often speak with a ["forked tongue!"](#)) In the plural **melos** was used to describe the members of the body as the seat of the desires and passions (Ro 6:13, 19; Ro 7:5, 23; 1 Cor. 6:15; Col. 3:5; James 4:1).

**Nieboer** writes: "So the real trouble was self-pleasing and self-love. Herod got into trouble because of the love of pleasure (Mark 6:14-29); Judas, because of the love of money (Mark 14:10, 11); Hezekiah, because of the love of display (2 Kings 20:12-18); Adoni-bezek, because of the love of power (Judges 1:5-7+); and Diotrophes, because of the love of preeminence (3 John 9, 10)." [Practical Exposition Of The Epistle Of James Verse by Verse](#)

In our day an insatiable thirst for pleasure  
is destroying our thirst for the things of God.

-- Lehman Strauss

**Lehman Strauss** - The conflict, says the Apostle, is "in your members," the lusts creating the conflict being part of the Old Nature. "The old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" is at war with "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22+, Eph 4:24+). In writing to the Galatians, Paul speaks of this same war with different words: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17+). If we yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin instead of yielding ourselves unto God (Ro 6:13+), there will be unrest and turbulence within and without; hence the exhortation to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." (Ro 12:1+). In our day an insatiable thirst for pleasure is destroying our thirst for the things of God, and these sinful, selfish gratifications are responsible for the strife among Christians, all the while warring against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11+). **Desires of a good sort are commendable, but desires after the gratification of the flesh and the world disturb the peace of your life as well as the lives of others.**" (Borrow [James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James](#) - page 150)

**Bruce Barton** comments that James "doesn't waste time saying that these conflicts should not occur. When they do happen, are we wise enough to understand why? Do we know their source? Fortunately, most of us have experienced the conflicts that James describes as temporary struggles in local churches. When handled correctly, with godly wisdom, they can lead to growth. Sadly, however, some churches become permanent battlegrounds. New believers find themselves in a cross fire of arguments, resentments, and power struggles that may carry a veneer of spiritual truth, but are more often simply personal conflicts between people. In the process, innocent bystanders are sometimes deeply wounded. Many of us know people who have been alienated from the church because of a conflict that had nothing to do with the gospel. These battles and the issues at stake remind us of Jesus' words concerning people with twisted religious priorities: "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:1-9; Luke 11:37-54). (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

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**ILLUSTRATION OF THE BATTLE OF THE FLESH AND SPIRIT** - Pastor Tim Brown tells this story. Listen to this: Some time ago, I was having lunch in McDonald's with my daughter and mother-in-law. We were enjoying a pleasant conversation when a man, with his wife and children, plopped down at a nearby table. The man was someone who in the past had hurt me very deeply. We faked pleasantries and exchanged hellos, but I could feel my blood begin to boil at the thought of what he had done to me. This person had wounded me badly, and I was surprised about how much hurt I still felt. My family and I gobbled down our food and on the way out of the restaurant I overheard "my enemy" and his arguing because neither had any money to purchase the food they had ordered. Their three kids were screaming for their Happy Meals. The couple was embarrassed. My first thought was, Praise God, there is justice in this world. He deserves every bit of embarrassment he's feeling, and I'm so glad I got to see this. Suddenly God spoke to me through the text I had read that morning. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink'" (Romans 12:17-20). God was saying to me: Here's your chance to be set free of your pain and overcome your hurt. I knew I had a choice either to obey or bask in my bitterness. Somewhat reluctantly I reached into my wallet, pulled out \$20, and gave it to this man who had been my enemy. "Have lunch on me," I said with tears in my eyes.

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**ILLUSTRATION FROM CHARLES SWINDOLL** - Ever eat grass? In the neighborhood where I grew up, that was the standard

punishment for anybody who lost a fight. Victor and spectators jeered and howled while the vanquished grazed. Then we would all go play again—until the next fight. You probably had your own unwritten protocol that integrated fighting into the fabric of adolescent subculture. Our cycle of “fighting, eating grass, playing, fighting, eating grass, playing” sure sounds silly, doesn't it? And it was. I just wish we had grown out of it by our adult years. No, we don't eat grass anymore, but we still seem to work fighting into our lives. Fighting comes naturally to most people, especially men. Why? Because we're each born with a scrappy nature that prefers going for the jugular instead of giving in. It all started after the Fall (Gen. 3). The first fight between Cain and Abel ended in murder (Gen. 4:1-8). Since then, we can chart history easily by its conflicts and wars. It isn't surprising, then, that James addresses the cycle of conflicts among Christians. Worshiping, fighting, praying, worshiping, fighting, praying—it was the same two thousand years ago as it is today. That's the problem James addresses in 4:1-10. ([Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter](#) - You can borrow his related study guide [James : practical and authentic living : Bible study guide](#))

**ILLUSTRATION** - A father heard a commotion in his yard and looked outside to see his daughter and several playmates in a heated quarrel. When he reprimanded her, his daughter responded, "We're just playing church!" Actually, that's not too hard a scenario to believe when you think about all the conflict that plagues the average church. (Michael Andrus - [see his sermon for two interesting personal examples of church conflicts](#))

**James 4:2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.**

Amplified - You are jealous and covet [what others have] and your desires go unfulfilled; [so] you become murderers. [To hate is to murder as far as your hearts are concerned.] You burn with envy and anger and are not able to obtain [the gratification, the contentment, and the happiness that you seek], so you fight and war. You do not have, because you do not ask.

NET James 4:2 You desire and you do not have; you murder and envy and you cannot obtain; you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask;

GNT James 4:2 πιθυμε τε κα ο κ χετε, φονε ετε κα ζηλο τε κα ο δ νασθε πιτυχε ν, μ χεσθε κα πολεμε τε, ο κ χετε δι τ μ α τε σθαι μ ς,

NLT James 4:2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it.

KJV James 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

ESV James 4:2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

ASV James 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not.

CSB James 4:2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask.

NIV James 4:2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

NKJ James 4:2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

NRS James 4:2 You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.

YLT James 4:2 ye desire, and ye have not; ye murder, and are zealous, and are not able to attain; ye fight and war, and ye have not, because of your not asking;

NAB James 4:2 You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask.

NJB James 4:2 You want something and you lack it; so you kill. You have an ambition that you cannot satisfy;

so you fight to get your way by force. It is because you do not pray that you do not receive;

GWN James 4:2 You want what you don't have, so you commit murder. You're determined to have things, but you can't get what you want. You quarrel and fight. You don't have the things you want, because you don't pray for them.

BBE James 4:2 You are burning with desire, and have not your desire, so you put men to death; you are full of envy, and you are not able to get your desire, so you are fighting and making war; you have not your desire, because you do not make request for it.

- **You lust and do not have:** Jas 5:1-5 Pr 1:19 Ec 4:8 Hab 2:5 1Ti 6:9-10
- **because you do not ask.:** Jas 1:5 Isa 7:12 Mt 7:7,8 Lu 11:9-13 Joh 4:10 John 16:24
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

1 Timothy 6:9-10+ But those who want to get rich (LUSTS) fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Romans 7:7-8 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

Proverbs 27:20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.

## DANGERS OF FORBIDDEN DESIRE AND ENVY

In the previous passage James asked two questions (the second one was rhetorical) and now proceeds to address them. James exposes the root cause of conflict which is not *external* pressures, but *internal* passions. Beneath wars and quarrels lies a restless craving for self-satisfaction (self...self...self) that never brings peace. The apostle now unmask the evil desires that wage war in our members, showing that unfulfilled longing leads to frustration, strife, and even murder. At its core, this verse is a spiritual diagnosis of one's heart. The idea is that covetous hearts breed contention and prayerlessness. Instead of humbly asking God, we attempt to seize what only He can rightly give. James contrasts self-driven grasping with God-dependent asking, a sobering reminder that the source of every good thing is not our striving but His grace (cf. James 1:17).

**You lust ([epithumeo](#)) and do not have** - You lust, desire strongly, set your heart on or covet, usually what others have and always what the fallen flesh wants. **NLT** says "You want what you don't have." **Lust** is in the [present tense](#) (plural - all his readers) describing this as their continual practice, and the [active voice](#) shows they were making a volitional choice to do this - they were not coerced and could not say the "devil made me do it!" Their fallen flesh urged them on to lust! Do not have basically means your sinful, selfish desires go unfulfilled, ungratified. You lust and do not have The phrase depicts the futility of self-centered desire apart from God. It illustrates the principle that sin always promises fulfillment but delivers emptiness. The believer's life is meant to be one of dependence (asking), not demanding (lusting). Unchecked desires become spiritual adultery (James 4:4), leading one away from fellowship with God.

**THOUGHT** - How often our frustrations trace back to misplaced desires—mere shortcuts to true satisfaction. We crave pleasure without purity, success without submission, and blessing without obedience. Yet the soul's hunger can only be filled by the Giver, never by His gifts.

**Michael Andrus** asks "**What are some of those frustrated desires?** Let's name a few: power and influence certainly qualify. Some people desperately desire to be power brokers in the church; they want to be in on the decision-making, and if those desires get frustrated they can cause a lot of trouble. One man I knew expressed real anger to me that he had never been elected to the Elder Board in our church in St. Louis. It seems to me that an argument could be made that the very presence of such an attitude would disqualify him from serving as an Elder. Even good things can lead to frustrated desires. A person may wish to sing solos but isn't asked; or to teach an adult Bible study, but people don't respond; or to build friendships but people don't seem to return their

hospitality. If such disappointments are not handled properly such people can generate a spirit of contention. And that's seems to be happening to James' parishioners. Let's face it, friends. Believers are often at war with each other because they are at war with themselves. ([Sermon](#))

As **Matthew Henry** said "Natural desires are at rest when that which is desired is obtained, but corrupt desires are insatiable. Nature is content with little, grace with less, but lust with nothing....Our desires must not only be offered up to God, but they must all terminate in Him, desiring nothing more than God, but still more and more of Him." (Read Mt 6:33±, Ps 37:4)

**Note** - John MacArthur (who I respect immensely) says on James 4:2-3 that "the asking is done or not done by those who do not belong to God and have no part in Him." I am not sure how he arrives at this interpretation and do not agree with it and it seems neither do most other commentators as for example

Yet this language is very much in keeping with the situation described in James 3:1-12, 14-16, that is, the atmosphere of conflict and infighting in the church. The language makes a great deal of sense as describing the serious discord in the community. (Grant Osborne - Cornerstone Biblical Commentary)

Two rhetorical questions try to locate the source of struggles and **fight**s among Christians. (Max Anders - Holman New Testament Commentary)

James here dealt with the source of the hostility which existed among some Christians. (Gilbrant - Complete Biblical Library Commentary - The Complete Biblical Library – Hebrews-Jude)

This picture of open quarrels and bitter disputes among the readers of this letter at once dissipates any view that apostolic churches were ideal churches. Compare the conditions in the Corinthian church. ([Hiebert's Commentaries – James](#))

Throughout his letter, he's addressing Jewish Christian believers (James 3:1; 4:11). This section reveals that they are obviously having problems getting along. ([Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter](#))

Believers are at war with each other...It is that believers are often at war with one another because....Believers are at war with themselves. (James 4:1-3) ([Michael Andrus](#))

**James** had already explained that we are each responsible and cannot blame God writing

"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away (FIRST "THE LOOK") and enticed (THEN "THE LURE") by his own lust ("THE SINFUL DESIRES" - [epithumia](#)). Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." (James 1:13-16±)

**THOUGHT** - As discussed above the "lusts of the flesh" in 1 Peter 2:11± where Peter exhorts believers to "abstain from fleshly lusts," which while not a command per se is an action only possible as we rely on the [Holy Spirit to obey!](#)

**Lust** (covet, desire) (1937)([epithumeo](#) from **epi** = upon, used intensively + **thumós** = passion; [epithumia](#)) means literally to fix the desire upon (object could be good or morally neutral [Mt 13:17, Lk 22:15 used of Jesus] or morally evil [1Co 10:6]). The cravings which God has placed in the human body in themselves are not sinful; they are God-given and essential for continuance of life here on earth. **Lusts** occur in our mind (and [heart](#) - see Mt 5:28±, Ro 1:24±) and are not physical actions per se although they may (and frequently do) lead to physical actions. But they readily become sinful when used for illegitimate (ungodly) ends. And so **epithumeo** means to have a strong desire to do or secure something, to desire greatly, to long for. And remember that **desires** lead to **deeds**, **appetites** lead to **actions**. Note also that the preposition **epi-** can express motion toward or upon and thus one lexicon defines it as to set one's [heart upon](#) (something or someone)! In sum, **epithumeo** describes a strong impulse toward something so that one's passions or affections are directed toward an object, thing or person. In the evil sense, epithumeo denotes a desire that becomes so strong that it takes control of the person, even though it is the desire for something forbidden or beyond one's proper reach. **Lust** is like rot in the bones. This is the desire that dominates rather than serves, passion out of proportion to reason or righteousness. **Lust** denotes the varied cravings of fallen human nature pursued in the interest of self in self-sufficient independence from God. One writer says lust describes setting one's heart upon something not granted, and the result of this evil desire is murderous resentment. In James 4:2 epithumeo is in the present tense which shows that they have the habit of passionate craving, an ever-unsatisfied hunger of self-centered desire.

**POSB** - Note that desire, lust, a yearning passion for is not always evil. In verse 5 the Spirit "lusts to envy." In Luke 22:15 Christ desires (yearns) to eat the passover with the apostles. What is it that distinguishes a good desire from an evil desire? At least two

major things. (Borrow [The Preacher's outline & sermon Bible](#))

**Vine** adds that **lust** "describes the inner motions of the soul, the natural tendency of men in their fallen estate toward things evil and toward things forbidden."

**A W Pink** writes that worldly **lusts** "are those affections and appetites which dominate and regulate the man of the world. It is the heart craving worldly objects, pleasures, honors, riches. It is an undue absorption with those things which serve only a temporary purpose and use. "Worldly lusts" cause the things of Heaven to be crowded out by the interests and concerns of earth. This may be done by things which are quite lawful in themselves—but through an immoderate use they gain possession of the heart. "Worldly lusts" are "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16+). ([Grace Preparing for Glory](#))

**Jamieson** explains that the **lusts of the flesh** "is the lust which has its seat and source in our lower animal nature. Satan tried this temptation the first on Christ: Lk 4:3+, "Command this stone that it be made bread." Youth is especially liable to fleshly lusts (2 Ti 2:22+). ([1John 2 Commentary](#))

A wise man will desire no more than he may get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully and leave contentedly.

**Thomas Brooks** nails us all with this quote -- "A little will satisfy nature; less will satisfy grace; nothing will satisfy men's **lusts**."

**Thomas Manton** - Carnal desire is a gulf that is never filled up.

**Josh McDowell** - Love can wait to give; it is lust that can't wait to get.

**A. R. Fausset** - Lust and lucre follow one another as closely akin, both seducing the heart from the Creator to the creature.

**Thomas Fuller** - Our eyes, when gazing on sinful objects, are out of their calling and God's keeping.

**Oswald Chambers** rightly warned that "We cannot think anything without the thought having its consequence." (Shade of His Hand)

**Oswald Chambers** also said that "Love can wait and worship endlessly; lust says, "I must have it at once."" (Woe! Are you as convicted as I am?)

The **Ten Commandments** clearly addressed the problem of **looking and desiring** "You shall not **covet** your neighbor's house; you shall not **covet** (**chamad** = desire, take pleasure in; **Lxx** = **epithumeo** the same verb Jesus used in Mt 5:28+ = to set one's heart upon and so to have a strong impulse in this context in a bad sense toward) your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:17+, cp Dt 5:21+)

We can't afford to play with fire  
Nor tempt a serpent's bite;  
We can't afford to think that sin  
Brings any true delight.  
-- Anon.

**Paul** reminds us this battle with the lusts of our flesh is one that believers will wage **every day** (another reason you daily need spiritual sustenance [Lk 4:4+, Mt 4:4, cf Dt 8:2-3+, cf Jn 17:17+] and spiritual preparation - "**Put on** {[aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)} the full armor" [Eph 6:10-18+] not just one piece or you will be vulnerable!-- it is a battle we cannot win on our own but only as we begin each morning surrendering our will to the sweet, perfect will of the all-powerful Holy Spirit of God (present your sacrifice in the morning - Ro 12:1-2+)! Why... (see the "**for**" = a [term of explanation](#)).

(Gal 5:17+) **For** the **flesh** sets its desire (**present tense** = continually!) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for (another [term of explanation](#)!) these are in opposition to one another, so that (another [term of explanation](#)!) you may not do the things that you please. See Galatians 5:16+ for the ONLY WAY to defeat the incredible power of the lusts of our flesh!

(Gal 5:24+) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

**THOUGHT**- These fundamental **desires** of life are the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go. Turn off the steam and you have no power. Let the steam go its own way and you have destruction. The secret is in constant control. These desires must be our servants and not our masters; and this we can do through Jesus Christ. (Wiersbe - [Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Hiebert** notes that the "degeneration in the meaning of the term (epithumia from God given desires to perverted desires) is a revealing commentary on human nature. Left to himself, instead of gaining mastery over his base desires and steadfastly adhering to the good, the individual is characteristically overcome by his evil cravings, so that they become the dominating force of his life."

One can imagine James' readers when they came to this charge of '**murder!**' Clearly James was trying to startle and awaken in his readers an understanding (and admission) of the depth of evil when one has hatred toward another person.

You are jealous and covet [what others have] and your desires go unfulfilled; [so] you become murderers. [To hate is to murder as far as your hearts are concerned.] You burn with envy and anger and are not able to obtain [the gratification, the contentment, and the happiness that you seek], so you fight and war. You do not have, because you do not ask.

[So] **you commit murder** ([phroneuo](#)) - So is added by NASB. Notice how short the journey is from desire to death! Is James describing literal murder? Although there is a natural tendency to soften the word and make it figurative, it is difficult to avoid the fact that murder does happen in the church. I was going to a church in which the head elder murdered his wife, a well known teacher in the church. The cause of death was listed as *bludgeoned with a galvanized steel pipe* and then *stabbed multiple times*. Investigators found evidence of staging: e.g., the piano bench behind her, the angle of the body, a sheet of music overturned, and the location of the wounds all suggested the scene had been manipulated. The elder had a hidden motive of an extramarital affair, about which his wife apparently had grown suspicious in the months prior to her death. Everyone in the church was shocked, yours truly included, but it seems that almost 2000 years earlier the apostle James warned that such a horrible crime (PS: The elder received a prison sentence of 32 years but far worse, the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ was sullied. To do not be deceived. Anyone that falls prey to the powerful lusts of the flesh can carry out the same crime! As an aside when you are ensnared in sin as was this elder, you basically are "out of your mind!" That's the power of our fallen flesh!

That said, below I have a number of commentaries that favor literal interpretation and several that favor non-literal interpretation. While my initial commentary favored non-literal, I now strongly favor a literal interpretation (when I wrote the notes before I have completely forgotten about the murder that occurred in my own church!)

## **FOLLOWING DO INTERPRET MURDER LITERALLY**

**R V G Tasker** on **murder** (ye kill) - The second difficulty lies in the words **ye kill**, which appear strange when followed immediately by and desire—for these would appear to create an inversion of the thought underlying the passage. It will be best to consider this difficulty first. The words ye kill are found in all existing Greek manuscripts and ancient versions. In spite of this, Erasmus found the difficulty of interpretation insuperable, for he assumed that the reference was to the perpetration of murder as an existing fact in the Christian communities known to the author. He therefore suggested the emendation 'Ye envy'. The two verbs in Greek meaning 'murder', *phoneuete*, and 'envy', *phthonerte*, are not sufficiently dissimilar for any assumption that such a change between them could not have taken place in the course of textual transmission; and it is interesting to notice that in 1 Pet. ii. 1 the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus confuses the cognate nouns and reads 'murders' for 'envyings'. The text of the New Testament has, however, been so well preserved that resort to emendation should not be made. This particular emendation commended itself nevertheless to Tyndale, who translated 'Ye envy and have indignation and cannot obtain', and to Calvin and others, including in our day James Moffatt. There is, however, no overwhelming difficulty in the words ye kill, provided that the punctuation is adopted which was suggested by Westcott and Hort in the margin of their Greek Testament published in 1881, and has commended itself increasingly to modern translators and commentators. The nature and significance of this revised punctuation can perhaps best be seen in the translation of the r.s.v. "You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war." Here we have a genuine parallelism in spite of the presence of 'and' before 'you covet'; and the consequences to which thwarted desire and unsatisfied covetousness lead are clearly brought out. Though each clause is in the nature of a statement, the verbs being in the indicative, the sentences are virtually conditional. 'If you desire . . . the result is you kill. And if you covet . . . the result is you fight and wage war.' James, we must not forget, is writing a general Epistle, and is not necessarily contemplating either here, or elsewhere, the circumstances actually existing in a particular Christian community known to him. He is rather underlining what can happen-and does happen in human life when men choose pleasure to the exclusion of God: **Under such circumstances, as the history of humanity from the days of Cain to the present time makes abundantly clear, the laws of God are disregarded; and pleasure, given full rein, takes control of the situation and often sweeps its victims on to murder.** The story of [Naboth's vineyard](#) (See 1Ki 21:1-29+) is the classic example in the Old Testament of the mighty power of covetousness and of the end to which it can lead." ([BORROW](#) The general Epistle of James : an introduction and commentary)

***It is simplest to take 'murder' straightforwardly and to regard it as that extreme to which frustrated desire, if not checked, may lead***

**Douglas Moo** on **murder** asks "is James seriously accusing his readers of murder? Indeed, it has been asserted that he is doing just that. Some recent Jewish-Christian converts among James' readers, it is alleged, may have been members of the radical Jewish Zealot movement, which advocated assassination of prominent Romans and their collaborators as a policy of terror. Perhaps James must warn them that such practices are totally incompatible with their new faith.<sup>22</sup> While such a scenario is not impossible, granted

the sociopolitical situation in Palestine in James' day, it does not square well with James' clear indication that the problems he addresses were within the church (cf. 'among you' in 3:13; 4:1). More popular has been the suggestion that *phroneuete* (you kill) be emended to *phthoneite* ('you are envious'), but there is no textual justification for the change. Others suggest that 'murder' may connote attitude rather than action: 'you are murderously jealous' (Phillips; cf. Matt. 5:21–26; 1 John 2:15). However, in the light of the tradition we have cited, it is simplest to take 'murder' straightforwardly and to regard it as that extreme to which frustrated desire, if not checked, may lead.<sup>23</sup> Things have not yet gone this far among James' readers. But 'fightings' and 'wars' are already in evidence among them; and, if covetous zeal goes unrestrained, the danger of actual violence is real. With penetrating insight, then, James provides us with a powerful analysis of human conflict. Verbal argument, private violence or national conflict—the cause of them all can be traced back to the frustrated desire to want more than we have, to be envious of and covet what others have, whether it be their position or their possessions. (See [The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary - Page 141](#))

***Some have dismissed this as an error or, more commonly, have seen it as a metaphorical statement. But there is no compelling evidence for either view.***

**R Kent Hughes on murder** - Having established that the root of fighting is the pursuit of pleasure, James proceeds to introduce its miserable pathology in verse 2a: "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight." This is a jarring indictment, to say the least, because James says of the church "you kill." This is shocking! Some have dismissed this as an error or, more commonly, have seen it as a metaphorical statement. But there is no compelling evidence for either view.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the case of King David's murder of Uriah the Hittite is almost a letter-for-letter acting out of what we have here, as the New American Standard Bible better puts it: "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder" (see also NEB and GNB).<sup>11</sup> Very likely something like this had happened in one of the churches, scandalizing everyone and bringing disgrace on the name of Christ. Whatever the exact case, Christians were brought to terrible lows in their frustrated pursuits of pleasure and became homicidal in heart (cf. Matthew 5:21, 22). Murder went to church and grinned fraternally at its brothers and sisters. How degenerating are the effects of "pleasure first" upon the Body of Christ. (See [James: Faith That Works](#))

**Ralph Martin** - While James' community may have not yet experienced and engaged in literal murder on a mass scale, the contingency is a very real one and must be warned against...."You kill out of jealousy" explains why the horrible crime of murder is to be construed as literal. Yet despite such killing, the perpetrators of heinous crimes still do not have what they desire. (See [James, Volume 48 - Page 146](#))

**Kurt Richardson** - There is nothing benign or mild about what these individuals are willing to resort to. Since passion is unbridled, **murder 27** is committed. In James 2:11 (**ED: DO NOT COMMIT MURDER** uses same Greek word [phroneuo](#)) James quoted the prohibition of killing from the Decalogue, the Greek translation of which uses precisely this word. (**27 phroneuo** "murder," "kill," as from the command, "You shall not kill" [Ex 20:15; cf. Mt 5:21; 19:18; Ro 13:9]. A great many interpreters wish to soften this association with literal murder, but this reinterpretation does not fit the context.) (See [James: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition- Page 175](#))

**William Barclay** - The craving for pleasure drives men to shameful deeds. It drives them to envy and to enmity; and even to murder. Before a man can arrive at a deed there must be a certain driving emotion in his heart. He may restrain himself from the things that the desire for pleasure incites him to do; but so long as that desire is in his heart he is not safe. It may at any time explode into ruinous action. The steps of the process are simple and terrible. A man allows himself to desire something. That thing begins to dominate his thoughts; he finds himself involuntarily thinking about it in his waking hours and dreaming of it when he sleeps. It begins to be what is aptly called a ruling passion. He begins to form imaginary schemes to obtain it; and these schemes may well involve ways of eliminating those who stand in his way. For long enough all this may go on in his mind. Then one day the imaginings may blaze into action; and he may find himself taking the terrible steps necessary to obtain his desire. Every crime in this world has come from desire which was first only a feeling in the heart but which, being nourished long enough, came in the end to action. ([Daily Study Bible](#))

**Ropes on murder** - φονεύετε, "kill," "murder." No weaker sense is possible, and none is here necessary, for James is not describing the condition of any special community, but is analysing the result of choosing pleasure instead of God. The final issue of the false choice is flagrant crime. δονή implies πικθυμία; πικθυμία is often unsatisfied; **in such a case its outcome, if unrestrained, is to cause the murder of the man who stands in its way.** ([International Critical Commentary](#))

## **FOLLOWING DO NOT INTERPRET MURDER LITERALLY**

**Michael Andrus** comments "I don't know if the killing mentioned here (verse 2: "you kill and covet") is literal or figurative. Some people can kill with their looks and kill with their words, and I'm inclined to think that is probably what is meant. But even literal physical violence is not unknown in the history of the church. Some pastors could tell you about deacon meetings that ended in fist

fighters. Far more have ended with verbal violence or seething tempers—all due to frustrated desires." ([Sermon](#))

**Hiebert on murder** - The failure to attain stirred a vicious reaction: **"you kill."** Some modern translations seek to soften the startling force of the term: *"and so you are bent on murder"* (NEB); *"so you are ready to kill"* (TEV). Some interpreters understand James to mean **literal murder**. (R. W. Dale, *The Epistle of James and Other Discourse*, pp. 122–23; Billy Simmons, *A Functioning Faith*, pp. 90–91.) Moo concludes, **"It is simplest to take 'murder' straightforwardly and to regard it as that extreme to which frustrated desire, if not checked, may lead."** ([The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary - Page 141](#)) **But if James is addressing Christians, such a literal meaning is difficult to accept.** Lenski discounts the view with the remark "For such murders the criminals would have been executed by the secular government."<sup>28</sup> Plummer proposed a semiliteral meaning for the term with the suggestion that defrauding the poor was the equivalent of destroying him, and cited Deuteronomy 24:6 and Ecclesiasticus 34:21–22 as support.<sup>29</sup> But such a means of destroying an opponent would be available only to the rich (cf. 5:4). It seems best to hold that James, like John (1 John 3:15), used the term figuratively; in Matthew 5:21–22, Jesus transferred the guilt from the outward act to the inner spirit. "Hate is potential murder."<sup>30</sup> This is consistent with the figurative usage of "wars" and "fightings" (ASV) in verse 1. The word "kill" is startling and was meant to startle; James sought to force his readers to realize the depth of the evil in their bitter hatred toward others.

**Donald Burdick** - James says, "You eagerly desire something, but you don't get it." So strong is the desire that "you kill and covet." This last statement has aroused much discussion. First, it is difficult to believe that James's readers, whom he elsewhere addresses as Christians (Jas 2:1), were actually guilty of murder. Some, insisting that the word must be taken literally, say that James is not referring to any specific occurrences but is indicating what happens when men desire pleasure rather than God (Ropes, p. 255). This interpretation, however, does not do justice to the pointed accusation "You kill." In the context of forceful words such as polemoi ("wars") and machai ("battles"), it seems better to take phoneuete ("you kill") as hyperbole for hatred. This also resolves the problem of seeming anticlimactic word order. To say "You hate and covet" is a much more natural order than to say "You murder and covet." Furthermore, Matthew 5:21–22 and 1 John 3:15 show that hatred is equal to murder. James repeats his assertion that, with all their consuming desire and bitter antagonism, his readers were not able to obtain what they wanted. The reason was that they were going after it in the wrong way. They did "not ask God" for it. They were lusting and fighting rather than praying. (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary - Abridged Edition:- Page 19](#))

**Steven Cole** - Scholars differ over what James means when he accuses his readers of committing murder. **Did he mean this literally? Probably not.** (ED: THAT IS NOT A STRONG STATEMENT!) It is more likely that James has in mind what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21–22), that if you are angry with your brother, you have murdered him in God's sight. But we should not miss the implication that murder usually begins with unchecked anger. Even though we may think, "I would never murder anyone," if you don't deal with your sinful anger, it could lead there! You may think, "I would never physically abuse my wife or my children." Nice thought, and I hope you're right. But if you continually erupt in anger toward them, it may happen! You must confront the enemy within, because he does not want to stop short of destroying you and others through you. And, you cannot grow in your Christian life and you will not bear fruit for God if you engage in unchecked anger and conflict at home or in the church. "The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

**Bruce Barton** - The craving described here becomes so strong that the people "kill and covet" (NIV) to obtain what they want. Are people actually guilty of murdering others when they fulfill their desires? James's expression begs a thoughtful answer. People are, in fact, capable of killing in pursuit of desires or as a reaction to frustrated desires. Our shock over the leap from "wanting" to "murdering" must be tempered by remembering how Jesus took the key words of the Ten Commandments and gave them applications that strike very close to home. For Jesus, the commandment against murdering applied equally to verbal assassination as to physical killing (see Matthew 5:21–22; see also 1 John 3:15). The word kill can be taken as a hyperbole for bitter hatred. But desires, if not controlled, could lead to such extreme violence. Hardly a week goes by without some story in the news of a person who, claiming to love another deeply, ends up murdering that person because the "love" was not returned in kind. (See [James - Page 92](#))

**Albert Barnes on murder** - The correct reading undoubtedly is, ye kill. This expression is probably to be taken in the sense of having a murderous disposition, or to stering a brutal and murderous spirit. it is not exactly that they killed or committed murder previous to 'desiring to have,' but that they had such a covetous desire of the possessions of others as to produce a murderous and bloody temper. The spirit of murder was at the bottom of the whole; or there was such a desire of the possessions of others as to lead to the commission of this crime.

**R C H Lenski on murder** - We cannot assume that murders were literally committed. For such murders the criminals would have been executed by the secular government. (BORROW [the interpretation of the epistle to the hebrews and the epistle of james](#))

**You murder** - It is to be taken literally [ICC, TNTC, WBC]. It is possible that some of them were in the Zealot movement which fought against the Roman rule [WBC].

As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, one does not have to physically slay another person to be guilty of murdering them!

You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT **MURDER**' and 'Whoever commits **murder** shall be liable to the court.' 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is **angry** with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Mt 5:21-22+)

**Commit murder** (5407) (**phroneuo** from **phonos** = murder) means to kill unjustly, "to deprive a person of life by illegal, intentional killing." (Louw-Nida) Reaffirmation of the sixth commandment prohibiting murder is found in Mt. 5:21+; Mt 19:18; Mk 10:19; Lk 18:20; Ro 13:9; Jas. 2:11.

**Phroneuo** - 12x in 10v - commit murder(5), commits murder(1), murder(3), murdered(2), put to death(1). Matt. 5:21+; Matt. 19:18; Matt. 23:31; Matt. 23:35; Mk. 10:19; Lk. 18:20; Ro 13:9; Jas. 2:11; Jas. 4:2; Jas. 5:6

**Gilbrant** - The Septuagint uses this word commonly to translate the Hebrew *rātsach* which is used in the commandment, "Thou shalt commit no murder" (Exodus 20:13; Deut 5:17, free translation). Though there are 10 Hebrew words (Old Testament) and 6 Greek (New Testament) words translated "kill" in the King James Version, *phoneuō* and its Hebrew counterpart clearly imply the taking of human life for intentional and personal evil reasons. Such conduct is specifically forbidden by God and is certain to be judged with severity (Matthew 5:21; 19:18; 23:31,35; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; James 2:11; 5:6). (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Phroneuo** in **Septuagint** - Exod. 20:13; Exod. 21:13; Num. 35:6; Num. 35:12; Num. 35:19; Num. 35:21; Num. 35:25; Num. 35:26; Num. 35:27; Num. 35:28; Num. 35:30; Num. 35:31; Deut. 4:42; Deut. 5:17; Deut. 19:6; Deut. 22:26; Jos. 10:28; Jos. 10:30; Jos. 10:32; Jos. 10:35; Jos. 21:13; Jos. 21:21; Jos. 21:27; Jos. 21:32; Jos. 21:36; Jos. 21:38; Jdg. 16:2; Jdg. 20:4; Jdg. 20:5; 1 Ki. 20:40; 1 Ki. 21:19; 2 Chr. 25:3; Neh. 4:11; Neh. 6:10; Ps. 62:3; Ps. 94:6; Prov. 1:32; Prov. 7:26; Jer. 7:9; Lam. 2:20; Hos. 6:9;

**You are envious and cannot obtain** - As with **lust**, **are envious** is in the [present tense](#) describing one in a continual state of "burning" or "boiling over" with envy (see word study below). I like the picture of the verb [seethe](#) which describes a person "filled with intense but unexpressed anger" or "in an agitated or angry mental state, as if boiling." And so you burn with envy and anger and are not able to obtain the gratification, contentment, and happiness that your fallen flesh desires.

**You are envious** (eagerly seek) (2206) ([zeloo](#) from [zelos](#) = zeal in turn from [zeo](#) = boil; source of our English word "zeal") properly, to bubble over from getting so hot (boiling) and figuratively to burn with zeal (or intensity), to be fervent, to "boil" with envy, to be jealous. It can be used commendably to refer to a striving for something or showing zeal. **Zeloo** is (an onomatopoeic word imitating the sound of boiling water!) means to be deeply committed to something, with the implication of accompanying desire – 'to be earnest, to set one's heart on, to be completely intent upon' **Zeloo** takes the notion of burning or boiling and applies it metaphorically to burning or boiling emotions, stance, or will for earnest striving, for passionate zeal, or for burning envy. **Zeloo** in the bad sense can be manifest in two forms, one in which the person sets their heart on something that belongs to someone else (That seems to be the main sense here in James 4:2) or a second form in which one has intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success.

[So] **you fight and quarrel** - Both verbs are in the [present tense](#) describing this as this as an ongoing struggle. Clearly such a life is an unsatisfying life! There can hardly be soul satisfaction when there is such hostility.

**Don Anderson** - All of these things are the work of Satan (IN CONCERT WITH OUR FALLEN FLESH). He wants to foster dissension, antagonism, and misunderstanding, to wreck harmonious family and happy relationships. The work of the Spirit of Christ is the very opposite. It is to reconcile, to harmonize, to enlighten, to cement happy relationships. Christians of all people should be promoters of enlightenment, understanding and harmony, both among themselves and all the people. So James is hitting hard on this old nature in us. And when it acts it's embarrassing and we must be doing battle daily with that nature.

**Fight** (3164) ([machomai](#)) means to war, quarrel, dispute fight or strive. This word describes a serious conflict, either physical (especially military combat as with armed combatants who engage in a hand to hand struggle - cf literal use in Acts 7:26) or non-physical, but clearly intensive and bitter. It was used of those of those who contend at law for property and privileges. **Machomai** in secular Greek is used to describe a wind of such high intensity that it leveled everything in its path, much like a hurricane. The servant of the Lord must not engage in a "war of words" and "blow away" those who block his path in one way or another.

**Fight** (4170) ([polemeo](#) from [polemos](#) = war) literally means to make or wage war (Rev 12:7; 13:4; 17:14) Figuratively [polemeo](#) means to be in opposition to, be hostile invoking military imagery which depicts the hostile attitude of opponents in a literal war. And so it means to be treated in a hostile manner and then to quarrel or wrangle with someone

**Polemo** - 7x in 6v - make war (1), quarrel (1), wage war (2), waged (1), wages war (1), waging (1). Jas. 4:2; Rev. 2:16; Rev. 12:7; Rev. 13:4; Rev. 17:14; Rev. 19:11

Revelation 2:16<sup>±</sup> "Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will **make war** against them with the sword of My mouth.

Revelation 12:7<sup>±</sup> And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels **waging war** with the dragon. The dragon and his angels **waged war**,

Revelation 13:4<sup>±</sup> (Rev 13:3 "the whole earth was amazed") they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

Revelation 17:14<sup>±</sup> (Second Coming) "These **will wage war** against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."

Revelation 19:11<sup>±</sup> (Second Coming) And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and **wages war**.

**Warren Wiersbe** comments on this use in James writing that this shows that "The **wars among us** are caused by the **wars within us**. We want to please ourselves, even if it hurts somebody else." (Borrow [With the Word](#) page 826)

**Spurgeon** - The whole history of mankind shows the failure of evil lustings to obtain their object.

## THE PROBLEM OF PRAYERLESSNESS

**You do not have because you do not ask - Amplified** = "Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it."

**Guzik** on **you do not ask** - The reason these destructive desires exist among Christians is because they do not seek God for their needs (you do not ask). James reminds us here of the great power of prayer, and why one may live unnecessarily as a spiritual pauper, simply because they do not pray, or do not ask when they pray. We might state it as a virtual spiritual law: that God does not give unless we ask. If we possess little of God and His Kingdom, almost certainly we have asked little. "Remember this text: Jehovah says to his own Son, 'Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that he may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?" (Spurgeon). "If you may have everything by asking, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital prayer is, and I beseech you to abound in it. . . . Do you know, brothers, what great things are to be had for the asking? Have you ever thought of it? Does it not stimulate you to pray fervently? All heaven lies before the grasp of the asking man; all the promises of God are rich and inexhaustible, and their fulfillment is to be had by prayer." (Spurgeon) ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Lehman Strauss** - Here we are shown just why we "**have not**" real satisfaction of soul. There are two reasons given. **First, prayerlessness.** "Ye ask not." We failed to make our desires a matter of prayer. Our heavenly Father gives liberally to those who ask of Him (James 1:5, 6, James 1:17). "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Mt. 7:7, 8<sup>±</sup>). Examine your prayer life, and I believe you will agree with God's Word that one reason we do not get things from God is that we do not ask things of God. I said prayers for many years before I could lay claim to having received one thing as a direct answer to my prayers. Not all prayer is **petition**, but certainly all who read the Scriptures know that **asking** is an essential part of one's prayer life. When we do not make our desires the subject of selfless, sincere, earnest prayer, we cannot hope to be satisfied. Indeed prayer is the secret to peace and contentment. Paul adds to the message of James: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6, 7<sup>±</sup>). The Christian who walks in unbroken prayer fellowship with his Lord is content in whatsoever state he finds himself (Phil. 4:11<sup>±</sup>). **Where Christians depend upon God, the restlessness and discontent that generate strife are absent. Learn to trust your heavenly Father not only in spiritual matters that affect your eternal well-being but for all temporal needs amidst the cares of this world. We can depend upon Him for the life to come and for the present as well.** (Borrow [James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James](#) - page 152)

**Ask** (154)(**aiteo**) means to ask for something or make petition (request, beg). It can mean to ask with a sense of urgency and conveys the sense of pleading, begging, imploring.

James used **aito** in James 1:5-6<sup>±</sup> "But if any of you lacks wisdom, **let** him **ask** ([present imperative](#) - command to continually ask see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he **must ask** ([present imperative](#) - command to continually ask) in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

**THOUGHT - Strauss on "do not have... cannot obtain....do not have"** - If this verse tells us anything at all, it thrice reminds us that the natural heart of man is never contented. The awful craving for the pleasures, the privileges, and the preeminence in mundane things, fills us with jealousy and envy, which in turn produces an unholy restlessness with inevitable confusion and strife. Satisfaction in the things of this world is like a mirage, seemingly within our reach, but always eluding us, leaving us fretful and fighting like spoiled children. We all have passed through these experiences and we admit that under the sun all is vanity and vexation of spirit. "**Ye lust... ye kill... ye fight... ye ask,**" and all to satisfy the lustings of the flesh which never can be satisfied. Our Lord said: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again" (John 4:13). **The natural heart is always thirsting. If a man gets power, he craves more power. If he gets money, he wants more money. If he enjoys a season of sinful pleasure, he seeks more of the same. And so it goes! When one's body, mind, and spirit are not fully yielded to God, life becomes one vicious circle of seeking but never satisfying. Oh, my reader, can't you see that the desire for the wrong things, prompted by wrong motives at work in our members, wages ceaseless warfare against everything and everyone that stand in the way of their gratification?** (ED: AGAIN THINK OF MARRIAGES) **And when we get what we thought we wanted, we are left still empty, unsatisfied, and seeking!** "Ye... cannot obtain." (Borrow [James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James](#) - page 150)

#### Related Resources:

- [Articles on prayer](#)

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**Thomas Guthrie** - If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of God, any table better than the Lord's Table, any persons better than Christ, any indulgence better than the hope of heaven, take alarm.

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**THE ONGOING BATTLE IN EVERY BELIEVER'S HEART AND MIND** - On October 31, 1999, a full airplane took off from JFK International Airport, New York, on the routine flight to Cairo, Egypt. The final report of the National Transportation Safety Board concluded that, a short time after take-off, the relief first officer waited for the pilot to leave the cockpit and then disengaged the autopilot. He proceeded to move the throttle levers from their cruise power setting to idle, cutting the engines. Seconds later, the airplane began to pitch nose-downward and descended into a freefall. In the final moments before impact, the horrified pilot dashed back to his seat and battled the co-pilot for control of the plane. The pilot pulled back on his controls, desperate to bring the nose of the plunging Boeing 767 up, while the suicidal first officer pushed his own controls forward to keep the jet in its lethal dive. The result was a tragic crash of Egyptair Flight 990 into the Atlantic Ocean south of Nantucket, Massachusetts. It killed all 217 people aboard. The battle in that airline is the battle that's going in your heart and mind right now. So many times we have made peace with it. We think we're content with where we are. But spiritually, reality is here. We're at war and we have an enemy inside the gates and we must deal with that. The writer says: The battle in that airliner's cockpit is a picture of the inner life of a Christian. Each day, we choose either to hijack control of our lives—plunging ourselves into sin—or to remain locked in the direct of God's will. That's why WE ALL NEED TO BE in the Word EVERY morning so that we will go forth "locked into" the will of God which is found in the Word of God. And you take it a day at a time and stack 'em up because we don't have a whole lot of them left.

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#### **CHURCH WARS - Weapons and strategies used in church fights and quarrels.**

- Missiles = Attacking church members from long range.
- Guerrilla tactics = Ambushing the unsuspecting.
- Snipers = Well-aimed criticisms.
- Terrorism = No one is immune from being hurt.
- Mines = Ensuring that others will fail in their efforts to serve God.
- Espionage = Using friendships to get potentially damaging information about others.
- Propaganda = Using gossip to spread damaging information about others.
- Cold War = Freezing out an opponent by withdrawing or refusing to talk to him or her.
- Nuclear Attack = Being willing to sacrifice the church if the goals of my group are not met.

James tells us the exact location of the manufacturing plants for all these weapons. The trouble is in ourselves. (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

**James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.**

Amplified - [Or] you do ask [God for them] and yet fail to receive, because you ask with wrong purpose and evil, selfish motives. Your intention is [when you get what you desire] to spend it in sensual pleasures.

NET James 4:3 you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, so you can spend it on your passions.

GNT James 4:3 α τε τε κα ο λαμβ νετε δι τι κακ ς α τε σθε, να ν τα ς δονα ς μ ν δαπαν σητε.

NLT James 4:3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong-- you want only what will give you pleasure.

KJV James 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

ESV James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

ASV James 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures.

CSB James 4:3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.

NIV 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.

NKJ James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

NRS James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

YLT James 4:3 ye ask, and ye receive not, because evilly ye ask, that in your pleasures ye may spend it.

NAB James 4:3 You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

NJB James 4:3 when you do pray and do not receive, it is because you prayed wrongly, wanting to indulge your passions.

GWN James 4:3 When you pray for things, you don't get them because you want them for the wrong reason-- for your own pleasure.

BBE James 4:3 You make your request but you do not get it, because your request has been wrongly made, desiring the thing only so that you may make use of it for your pleasure.

- **and do not receive:** Jas 1:6,7 Job 27:8-10 35:12 Ps 18:41 66:18,19 Pr 1:28 15:8 Pr 21:13,27 Isa 1:15,16 Jer 11:11,14 14:12 Mic 3:4 Zec 7:13 Mt 20:22 Mk 10:38 1Jn 3:22 5:14
- **so that you may spend it :** Lu 15:13,30 16:1,2
- **on your pleasures** Jas 4:1
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PRAYING WITH WRONG MOTIVES

In this section James highlights three common problems in prayer - don't ask, ask for wrong things, ask for wrong reason.

**You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives - Amplified** = "[Or] you do ask [God for them] and yet fail to receive, because you ask with wrong purpose and evil, selfish motives." **NLT** = "And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong." **Ask** is in the middle voice meaning "you ask for yourselves." In context James is describing selfish prayers, self-centered requests. Little wonder such prayers go unanswered (or answered with a divine "no").

One trap we've all fallen into is to seek God's approval for something we have already planned to do. We just want His divine seal of approval. Little wonder we do not receive!

**Don Anderson** - What he's saying in essence, God is not in the business of just filling your agenda as you come to Him with all your requests. And selfish requests that are outside of the will of God are going to get a no. And what he's saying here is that when you pray selfishly, in the flesh rather than prompted by the Spirit so that you know the desires of God even before you make requests....The big question comes, every time you pray do you say "Thy will be done" and you really mean it? Or are you saying "My desires be satisfied"? That will tell you whether your prayer is going to get out of the rafters or not. In fact you really want His will and you're agonizing over knowing it, then it will be revealed. But if you are yielding to your passions and you're praying from the flesh, then you've got to say "My desires be satisfied." ([Notes](#))

What is the answer for unanswered prayers. The answer is given by John and in short calls for praying in the will of God

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will (HIS WILL IS BEST DISCERNED IN HIS WORD - SO PRAYING HIS WORD IS ALWAYS "SAFE" AND EFFICACIOUS! ALSO BE SURE TO [Pray in the Spirit](#)), He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:14-15+)

**Comment** - A wise father or mother will not give a little child something harmful just because he begs for it. When we pray for things which God knows will harm us, He purposely, out of love, withholds them. Why not thank Him that He never permits His children to make Him chargeable for their own lustful pleasures? We earthly parents are sometimes guilty of so injuring our children, but God never!...I am sure we shall be eternally thankful in heaven for our unanswered prayers, but while we pass through this earthly experience, let us not pervert the true Biblical practice of prayer by asking for those things that pander to our fleshly desires. When a Christian learns the Biblical rules of prayer, he will not unwittingly abuse its privileges nor belabor the ears of God. When we ask according to His will, we ask unselfishly in moderation for His glory (cf 1 Cor 10:31). (Strauss)

**Guzik** - After dealing with the problem of no prayer, now James addressed the problem of selfish prayer. These ones, when they did ask, they asked God with purely selfish motives. We must remember that the purpose of prayer is not to persuade a reluctant God to do our bidding. The purpose of prayer is to align our will with His, and in partnership with Him, to ask Him to accomplish His will on this earth (Matthew 6:10)....Destructive desires persist, even if we pray, because our prayers may be self-centered and self-indulgent. ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Peter H. Davids** - This is not the trusting child asking for a meal, but the greedy child asking for the best piece or the spoiled child demanding his or her own way.

**Spurgeon** on asking **with wrong motives** - When a man so prays he asks God to be his servant, and gratify his desires; nay, worse than that, he wants God to join him in the service of his lusts. He will gratify his lusts, and God shall come and help him to do it. Such prayer is blasphemous, but a large quantity of it is offered, and it must be one of the most God-provoking things that heaven ever beholds.

**Barton** - Sometimes we actually do get just what we wanted, only to discover that we still do not have what we really needed—the deep contentment that only comes when we are right with God. Trusted alone, our desires will only lead us to the things of this earth and not to the things of God. (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

**So that** ([hina](#)) introduces a [purpose clause](#) and always begs the question "What is the purpose?" Pause and ponder and give the Spirit time to speak!

**You may spend it on your pleasures** ([hedone](#)) - The idea of spend in context is our English word "squander" which means to to spend thoughtlessly, foolishly, extravagantly; to throw away or waste in a reckless manner. Clearly God does not respond positively to prayers that have one's own pleasures as as one's chief goal.

**Spend** (1159) ([dapanao](#) from [dapane](#) = expense, cost; BDAG says it is from [dapto](#) = devour, of wild beasts) means to spend freely. It is notable that this same verb is used to describe the Prodigal Son who "had **spent** everything." (Lk 15:14+). James is saying when they pray with this selfish motive, even if God answered, they would be like the prodigal, squandering their inheritance on self and/or selfish interests.

**Strauss** sums up this first section - Would you live at peace with God, with yourself, and with your brethren in Christ? If you would, ask God not for what you want but only for those things He wants you to have; not for what you want to do, but for enablement to do that which He would have you do. (Borrow [Commentary](#) page 154)

He whose main pursuit is pleasure will never attain to righteousness.

- Walter J. Chantry

**Barton** - Prayers are not automatically answered with a yes from God. Although God gives many promises about the power of prayer (see Matthew 7:7-11; 17:20; Mark 11:23-24; Luke 18:1-8; John 14:13-14), these promises hinge upon the attitude of the person praying—how in tune he or she is with God. True prayer must express dependence on God. Especially when we are praying for ourselves, our attitude must be "Your will be done." A selfish person cannot say that to God. (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

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### **James 4:1-3 THE WAR WITHIN - Theodore Epp**

James was well aware of the fact that conflict among believers comes from the personal war that goes on within each person.

This conflict within the believer is also referred to in Romans 7:23: "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Also, Peter warned, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11+).

James's reference to killing was not necessarily referring to taking a person's life but to destroying someone's character. Previously, James dealt with the viciousness of the tongue. When the tongue is out of control, it can be a lethal weapon used for character assassination. These are sobering words from the Bible, and today more than ever we need to carefully examine our lives. Much bitterness is displayed not only among the unbelieving world but also among those who call themselves Christians. Sometimes, in the name of Christ and in a desire to be separate from sin, Christians commit sin by bitterly attacking fellow believers. We are to take a stand against sin, but we must guard our hearts so that the old nature does not take over, allowing the bitterness of hatred to grip us. Even though we may totally disagree with what another person is doing, we are still commanded as believers to seek that person's highest good.

"He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool"

-- Proverbs 10:18

**James 4:4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

Amplified You [are like] unfaithful wives [having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God]! Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God.

**Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse**

- [James 4:4 Commentary](#)

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### **James 4:4-7 DON'T COURT THE WORLD - Theodore Epp**

Consider the accusation of James concerning the illicit love affair with the world as stated in the following paraphrase: "You [are like] unfaithful wives [having illicit love affairs with the world and breaking your marriage vow to God]! Do you not know that being the world's friend is being God's enemy? So whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God." (James 4:4, Amplified Bible).

Being a friend of the world indicates that the person agrees with the values of the world system. The Old Testament Prophet Amos asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

The believer who is able to be in agreement with this evil world system is woefully out of fellowship with Almighty God, who saved him from the penalty and power of sin.

If a person has a consistently worldly life-style, it is a clear signal that he has never trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

On the other hand, there are believers who are out of fellowship with the Lord and who are worldly for a time. Perhaps this is because many want Christ as Saviour but not as Lord.

They want the assurance and peace of knowing that they are saved from eternal condemnation, but they also want to live to please themselves rather than letting Christ be the Master of their lives.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John

2:15).

**James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?**

Amplified Or do you suppose that the Scripture is speaking to no purpose that says, The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love?

Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse

- [James 4:5 Commentary](#)

**James 4:6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."**

Amplified But He gives us more and more grace (power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this evil tendency and all others fully). That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but gives grace [continually] to the lowly (those who are humble enough to receive it).

Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse

- [James 4:6 Commentary](#)

**James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**

Amplified So be subject to God. Resist the devil [stand firm against him], and he will flee from you.

Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse

- [James 4:7 Commentary](#)

**James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

Amplified Come close to God and He will come close to you. [Recognize that you are] sinners, get your soiled hands clean; [realize that you have been disloyal] wavering individuals with divided interests, and purify your hearts [of your spiritual adultery].

Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse

- [James 4:8 Commentary](#)

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**James 4:8-12 YOU GET NEARER BY GETTING LOWER - Theodore Epp**

Concerning James's command to "draw nigh to God" (James 4:8), we must remember that it takes time to be holy. Although our position in Christ at the moment of salvation provides an absolute holiness, as we live the Christian life from day to day, it takes time to apply the principles that result in holy living. But as we move toward God, we can count on God's moving toward us. **However, we must remember that our moving is the result of His indwelling power** (see Phil. 2:12,13+). James said, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). He added, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (v. 8). This injunction to cleanse oneself is most likely a reference to believers who have fallen into worldliness. God will not work through dirty hands that are contaminated by the value system and sins of the world. Hebrews 10:22 tells us, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." The lesson for each believer is to humble himself, not to wait for the Lord to humble him. True humility is to comprehend our own

utter unworthiness apart from Christ. Of course, seeing ourselves as we really are is also impossible apart from the grace of God. As we appropriate all the grace that God has bestowed upon us, we will become humble before Him.

"By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life" (Prov. 22:4).

**James 4:9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.**

Amplified [As you draw near to God] be deeply penitent and grieve, even weep [over your disloyalty]. Let your laughter be turned to grief and your mirth to dejection and heartfelt shame [for your sins].

Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse

- [James 4:9 Commentary](#)

**James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.**

Amplified Humble yourselves [feeling very insignificant] in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you [He will lift you up and make your lives significant].

The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is.

Click the link below for in depth comments on this verse

- [James 4:10 Commentary](#)

**James 4:11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.**

Amplified [My] brethren, do not speak evil about or accuse one another. He that maligns a brother or judges his brother is maligning and criticizing the Law and judging the Law. But if you judge the Law, you are not a practitioner of the Law but a censor and judge [of it].

GNT James 4:11 Μ καταλαλετε αλλλων, δελφο. καταλαλν δελφο κρ νων τν δελφ ν ατο καταλαλε ν μου κα κρ νει ν μον· ε δ ν μον κρ νεις, ο κ ε ποιητ ς ν μου αλ κριτ ς.

NLT James 4:11 Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

KJV James 4:11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

ESV James 4:11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

ASV James 4:11 Speak not one against another, brethren. He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

CSB James 4:11 Don't criticize one another, brothers. He who criticizes a brother or judges his brother criticizes the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

NIV James 4:11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

NKJ James 4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

NRS James 4:11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

YLT James 4:11 Speak not one against another, brethren; he who is speaking against a brother, and is judging his brother, doth speak against law, and doth judge law, and if law thou dost judge, thou art not a doer of law but a judge;

NAB James 4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brothers. Whoever speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

NJB James 4:11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who slanders a brother, or condemns one, is speaking against the Law and condemning the Law. But if you condemn the Law, you have ceased to be subject to it and become a judge over it.

GWN James 4:11 Brothers and sisters, stop slandering each other. Those who slander and judge other believers slander and judge God's teachings. If you judge God's teachings, you are no longer following them. Instead, you are judging them.

BBE James 4:11 Do not say evil against one another, my brothers. He who says evil against his brother or makes himself his brother's judge, says evil against the law and is judging the law: and in judging the law you become, not a doer of the law but a judge.

- Do not speak against one another: Ps 140:11 Eph 4:31 1Ti 3:11 2Ti 3:3 Tit 2:3 1Pe 2:1
- He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother: Mt 7:1,2 Lu 6:37 Ro 2:1 14:3,4,10-12 1Co 4:5
- speaks against the law: Ro 7:7,12,13
- you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it: Jas 1:22,23,25 Ro 2:13
- [James 4:11-12 The Sin of Judging Others](#) - Steven Cole - read this sermon especially the 7 ways we judge wrongly - excellent!
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **A SPIRIT OF SLANDEROUS SPEECH AGAINST SAINTS**

James has dealt with the problem of the tongue in James 3:1-12+ but not returns to address a specific problem associated with the tongue. In addition, in the immediate context James has commanded his readers to manifest an attitude of humility, hardly possible when one is speaking against another brother! If we are right with God (humble), it will show by being right with people. James is saying they were not right with other people. In fact in a sense one is "exalting" himself over the other brother and in effect putting himself in the position of God, Who alone is the Judge (Jas 4:12).

James' warning command in this passage recalls what he had just addressed in James 4:1 regarding "quarrels and conflicts" in their midst. Another problem with church wars is that the lost world watches saying in effect "O, how they hate each other," which is a far cry from Jesus' prayer in Jn 17:21 "that they (BELIEVERS) may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that (PURPOSE OF THE BEAUTIFUL ONENESS IN BELIEVERS) the world may believe that You sent Me."

**POSB** notes that "God hates all sin, but there are a few sins that are *constantly and strongly condemned* by Scripture. Judging others—condemning, criticizing, backbiting, gossiping, speaking evil, and talking about others—is one of the sins that Scripture never lets up on. Judging others is severely condemned....All of us are really guilty of the terrible sin of evil speaking against other persons, but the temptation strikes at the gifted more often." (Borrow [James Commentary](#) - can be helpful in sermon prep)

**Speaking against another** is an "old" sin and even Moses' own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, spoke against him for marrying a Cushite woman (see Nu 12:1-8, note Moses' character in Nu 12:3!). And again in Numbers we find the people of Israel speaking against God and Moses by complaining about their conditions in the wilderness (Nu 21:5)! Job's friends spoke against Job (not in the classic sense of slander which is speaking bad when one is not present), insulting, tormenting and crushing him to his face with their malicious words (Job 19:1-3).

**Swindoll** bluntly says that "James is suggesting that Christians who "speak against" their brothers or sisters in Christ include

themselves in that biblical register of rebellious mumblers, moaning grumblers, deceitful slanderers, crushing insulters, and wicked slanderers. Not exactly the best company! Let me show you how this game works. You speak against the other person in the ears of the hearer, hoping to lower their estimate of the person—and in the process you hope to make yourself look all the better. Of course, you have to cover up your malicious intent with creative sentimentality. So, you begin your statements with “Now, stop me if I’m wrong, but . . .” or, “Now, I don’t mean to be critical, but . . .” or, “Perhaps I shouldn’t say this about him or her, but . . .” or even, “I really like so-and-so as a person, but . . .”(Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter)

**Steven Cole** - YOU JUDGE SOMEONE WRONGLY WHEN YOU CRITICIZE HIM OUT OF JEALOUSY, BITTERNESS, SELFISH AMBITION, OR SOME OTHER SIN, RATHER THAN SEEKING TO BUILD HIM IN CHRIST. In other words, your motive is crucial!...Slander, which means maligning someone or damaging his reputation by sharing false or deliberately misleading information, is always sin. But the word that James uses has a broader meaning that includes any form of criticism or running someone down from selfish motives. In other words, what you are saying may be true, but the reason you’re sharing it is to make yourself look good and to put the other person in a bad light. If your motive in criticizing someone is jealousy, selfish ambition, rivalry, pride, or hatred, you are judging wrongly. ([The Sin of Judging Others](#))

**Do not speak against one another, brethren** - James issues a command for them to cease slandering and speaking evil of one another. And here he clearly identifies this group as brethren indicating he is speaking to the members of the church. He is saying cease censorious speech! The command is in the [present imperative with a negative](#) which means stop doing this (or don't let it begin). And remember one much rely on [the Holy Spirit to obey the NT commands](#). Our flesh slanders, but the Spirit enables us to speak well of our brothers and sisters. The upshot? Be filled continually with the Spirit (Eph 5:18+), for then you are supernaturally enabled to speak "to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (Eph 5:19+),

**ESV Study note** - James restates the basic problem behind the issues discussed in James 3:1-4:10: the misuse of the tongue to speak evil or to slander others. Speaking ill of others is the result of all the arrogant boasting (James 3:5+), jealousy (James 3:14, 16+), self-centered desires (James 4:1, 3), and pride (James 4:6) that James is warning against. Such slanderous conduct is decried in both the OT (Lev. 19:16; Ps. 50:20; Jer. 6:28) and NT (Ro 1:30; 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Pe 2:1). (Borrow [ESV study Bible](#))

**Andrew Bennett** explains that "One of the problems with James’s audience was an inner conflict within individuals that spilled over into external conflicts with fellow believers. We saw in James 4:1–5 that this was due to a love for the world and the things of this world. One of the ways this manifested itself was in a hyper-critical or judgmental spirit. There are many ways in which someone call speak evil against another: slander, gossip, etc. These believers were leveling false accusations against one another. James’s solution is simple: stop it! But more than that, they needed to recognize why they should stop. ([James 4:6-12](#))

James is like Hamlet who warned Ophelia, "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape [calumny](#) [a false accusation of an offense or a malicious misrepresentation of someone's words or actions]" ([Shakespeare, Hamlet, act 3, scene 1](#)).

**Do not speak against** (2635)([katalaleo](#) from *katá* = against, down + *laleo* = to speak; see [katalalia](#)) means literally to speak down or against and so to speak evil against (usually when they are not present). A modern phrase is "to tear someone to pieces" (verbally speaking)! To criticize, [backbite](#) (talk maliciously about someone who is not present), gossip, censor, condemn, and grumble against another person. It means to expose to shame or blame by means of falsehood, misrepresentation or evil speaking. *Katalaleo* refers to the act of defaming or slandering another person, in this case a brother or sister in Christ, speaking evil or malicious words intended to damage or destroy their reputation! The greatest slanderer of course is the Devil (false accuser, slanderer) also called Satan (means adversary), the one who continually opposes God’s people, slandering them and accusing them before God. This is another reason we must continually put on the full armor of God, especially (Eph 6:16+) "taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one," especially flaming arrows designed to tempt us to speak evil of our brethren!

**THOUGHT** - Bottom line is the Spirit forbids any speech that runs down another person created in the image of God. How have you done today?

"Most people think it is okay to convey negative information if it is *true*. We understand that lying is immoral. But is passing along damaging truth immoral? It seems almost a moral responsibility! By such reasoning, criticism behind another’s back is thought to be all right as long as it is true. Likewise, denigrating gossip (of course it is never called gossip!) is okay if the information is true. Thus many believers use truth as a license to righteously diminish others’ reputations." ([R Kent Hughes](#))

The only other uses of *katalaleo* are by Peter, describing slander of believers by unbelievers...

1 Peter 2:12+ Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1 Peter 3:16+ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

**William Barclay on slander** - It is the psalmist's accusation against the wicked: 'You sit and speak against your kin; you slander your own mother's child' (Psalm 50:20). The psalmist hears God saying: 'One who secretly slanders a neighbour I will destroy' (Psalm 101:5). Paul lists it among the sins which are characteristic of the unredeemed evil of the non-Christian world (Romans 1:30), and it is one of the sins which he fears he will find in the warring church of Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:20). It is significant to note that, in both these passages, slander comes in immediate connection with gossip. Katalalia is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential tidbits of information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves. The same sin is condemned by Peter (1 Peter 2:1). This is a much-needed warning. People are slow to realize that there are few sins which the Bible so unsparingly condemns as the sin of irresponsible and malicious gossip. There are few activities in which the average person finds more delight than this; to tell and to listen to the slanderous story - especially about some famous person - is for most people a fascinating activity. We do well to remember what God thinks of it. ([James 5 Commentary](#))

**John Phillips** - Sins of the tongue! How terrible are sins of the tongue! Sins of the tongue can kill a person as surely as the sword. So David Livingstone discovered. His wife died a premature death, thanks to the backbiting tongues of some people in the white settlements of Africa. No wonder James waxes so eloquent when it comes to sins of the tongue! (Exploring the Epistle of James: An Expository Commentary)

**My brethren...brother...brother** (80)([adelphos](#) from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means brother or near kinsman. Adelp'hós generally denotes a fellowship of life based on identity of origin, e.g., members of the same family, specifically referring to believers. Recall the Jewishness of his audience in James 1:1+ "To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad." So again James again appeals to them as those who are genuine believers.

**Adelphos in James** - Jas. 1:2; Jas. 1:9; Jas. 1:16; Jas. 1:19; Jas. 2:1; Jas. 2:5; Jas. 2:14; Jas. 2:15; Jas. 3:1; Jas. 3:10; Jas. 3:12; Jas. 4:11; Jas. 5:7; Jas. 5:9; Jas. 5:10; Jas. 5:12; Jas. 5:19;

Notice that the sin of slander keeps close company with the sin of judging others! In effect the one slandered is then condemned (presumably for that which he was slandered!) Paul had strong words for this attitude/action in Romans writing

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things....But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? (Ro 2:1, [3+](#))

Paul alluded to a similar sin in his letter to the believers in Galatia...

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. (Gal 5:15-)

Comment: Then Paul gave the solution for biting and devouring one another = Galatians 5:16+ "Walk (continually - [present imperative](#)) by the Spirit."

**He who speaks against ([katalaleo](#)) a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law- Amplified** = "He that maligns a brother or judges his brother is maligning and criticizing the Law and judging the Law." NLT = "If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law." In short James says, when we speak against others or judge them (pronounce condemnation upon them), we are guilty of sin because we have broken God's law, we are out of His will! And we in effect put ourselves in the place of the law (which judges) and so in a sense we act as a judge of the law (see God's warning in Ps 101:5)!

**Phillips** - The person who judges another brother or sister in Christ sets himself up as a substitute for the law itself. More than that, he actually becomes a critic of the law. The function of the Word of God is to monitor our lives and the lives of others. It is the work of the Spirit of God to apply the Word of God to the consciences of the people of God. That is not our work but God's work.

### **CRITICISM IS A VERY SUBTLE FORM OF SELF-EXALTATION**

**Don Anderson** adds explains "for if I can run him down, it puts me in a better light because I don't do those things." The criticizer is passing judgment without knowing or wanting to know the truth. The one who is criticizing is also acting apart from humility because he feels he is taking God's place and judgment. So often the most critical are the most guilty. In the act of criticizing, we are breaking the LAW of LOVE that James has mentioned in James 2:8+. ([Notes](#))

**POSB** says "When we criticize a brother or sister in Christ, we are slandering one of God's own children. Just think; we are actually

slandering a son or daughter of God. This alone should keep us from speaking evil of our brothers in Christ." (Ibid)

**THOUGHT-** There are several reasons why people tend to judge and criticize.

- 1) Criticism boosts our own self-image. Pointing out someone else's failure and tearing him down makes us seem a little bit better, at least in our own eyes. It adds to our own pride, ego, and self-image.
- 2) Criticism is simply enjoyed. There is a tendency in human nature to take pleasure in hearing and sharing bad news and shortcomings about others.
- 3) Criticism makes us feel that our own lives (morality and behavior) are better than the person who failed.
- 4) Criticism helps us justify the decisions we have made and the things we have done throughout our lives. We rationalize our decisions and acts by pointing out the failure of others.
- 5) Criticism points out to our friends how strong we are. Criticism gives good feelings because our *rigid beliefs* and *strong lives* are proven again. Proven how? By our brother's failure.
- 6) Criticism is an outlet for hurt and revenge. We feel *he deserves it*. Subconsciously, if not consciously, we think, "He hurt me so he deserves to hurt, too." So we criticize the person who failed. (Borrow [The Preacher's outline & sermon Bible](#))

**Why does the one who speaks against a brother speak against the law?** The Law says "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." (Lev 19:18+) When you are speaking against or judging your brother, you are speaking against and judging the truth written in the law (Lev 19:18+). Similarly, you are speaking against and judging the "royal law" to "love your neighbor as yourself." (James 2:8+) Just try loving your neighbor while you are speaking against them! Slander is passing judgment and that is God's purview not ours as he goes on to say in the next passage "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge." Only God is the perfect Judge. All of our judgments are tinged with our flesh and are therefore imperfect at best and sometimes are outright sin against the one we judge! Beware when you are tempted to speak against or judge a brother or sister in Christ!

**Slander slays three persons:  
the speaker, the spoken to, and the spoken of.**

**Alexander Ross** explains that "such censoriousness in speech leads to one of the worst forms of pride; the man who is guilty of it does not merely criticize his brother but really criticises the Law of God, that is, no doubt chiefly the Royal Law of love (James 2:8+). That kind of thing lands us in moral chaos. It is one of the fundamental axioms of the spiritual life that there is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy (cf. Matt. 10:28) and the thought of His august majesty and illimitable power ought to restrain the promptings of human pride. ([The Epistles of James and John](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** offers an antidote for a critical, censorious spirit in the church - Christians are to speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15+); they are not to speak evil in a spirit of rivalry and criticism. If the truth about a brother is harmful, then we should cover it in love and not repeat it (1 Peter 4:8+). If he has sinned, we should go to him personally and try to win him back (Matt. 18:15-19; Gal. 6:1-2+). ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

To criticize is easy as you pass along life's road.  
It is easy to condemn and sneer when another bears the load.

But if you know an easier way, lend a helping hand.  
Do not let a worker sweat while you criticize and stand.

To criticize is easy as you pass along life's road  
but a better and a nobler way is to help to bear the load.

**Ridenour** - Be genuine, be acceptant, be understanding. These three simple rules were practiced and lived by the same Person Who, one day, will judge us all. The best cue for criticism and judging others is to remember each of us will stand personally before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Each of us will give account of himself to God. (Borrow [How to Be A Christian Without Being Religious](#))

**Judges (2919)** ([krino](#) English - critic, critical) basically means to divide out or separate off and thus means to decide between in the sense of considering two or more things and reaching a decision, specifically in this context passing an adverse sentence on a brother. James is not saying do not show discernment in the church (cf Mt 7:15, 16+ which takes discernment), but just don't take God's place in passing judgment. As Jesus says below, we are to do a "speck check" before we a "saint critique!" Remember the inherent dangers in judging a brother - we cannot see their heart motive (only God can) and we do not have all the facts in the case to make a just and accurate judgment (only God does).

**Steven Cole** illustrates - Years ago in another church I had a secretary who was often abrasive in the way she dealt with people. She needed to grow in that area, but many of us would criticize her behind her back rather

than help her. One day I asked her to type a story about a little girl whose father suddenly told her that he was leaving her mother. He promised his daughter that she could visit him often. But he walked out of that room and she never saw him again. My secretary told me, "That's exactly what happened to me." I sat down and listened to her story, and after that I was much more patient with her shortcomings. I wasn't as judgmental toward her because I now knew more of the facts about her past. ([Sermon](#))

**Hughes** sums it up that "What the Scriptures forbid is *judgmentalism*, a critical and censorious spirit that judges everyone and everything, seeking to run others down." ([Preaching the Word – James: Faith That Works](#))

**James** echoes Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount...

**"Do not judge** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) so that you will not be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Mt 7:1-5+)

**Comment** - Jesus is clearly not saying we should NEVER judge, but when we do judge we need to avoid doing so without a Pharisaical better-than-thou, legalistic attitude! (cf Paul's words to the church at Corinth - 1 Cor 5:12-13) Perhaps a better word for what Jesus affirms is right (righteous) discernment as He called for in John 7:24 "**Do not judge** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) according to appearance, but **judge** ([present imperative](#) which calls for one to be [Spirit filled and Spirit led to obey Jesus' commands](#)) with righteous judgment."

**Swindoll** adds "Remember, in his own letter James confronts fellow Christians about their sins. But there's a difference between confrontation for the purpose of building up and condemnation for the purpose of tearing down." ([Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter](#))

In Luke Jesus commands not to judge and gives a warning against judging

**"Do not judge** ([present imperative with a negative](#)), and you will not be judged; and do not condemn ([present imperative with a negative](#)), and you will not be condemned; pardon ([present imperative](#)), and you will be pardoned. (Lk 6:37+)

#### Related Resource:

- Interesting Chart comparing teachings of James and Jesus - [Echoes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount](#)

**But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it** - In other words what you do when you judge others you are judging the law and in essence have excused yourself from accountability to God. You have made yourself a judge of what is right or wrong, instead of obeying God and doing what is right.

**Douglas Moo** - Such a person, becomes a judge of the law and sits himself 'outside' and 'above' the law. Thus the law is not kept but is 'disdained.' (Borrow [The Letters of James](#) - Pillar Commentary)

**Chris Benfield** - That is powerful when we consider the depth of what James reveals. Judgmental attitudes convey that we know what is best for others, regarding how they should behave and respond to the Word, and whether we realize it or not, convey that we have the right to judge the Word of God, determining what is acceptable and what isn't. Keep that in mind the next time you want to offer a judgmental word to another! ([James 4:11-17 What is Your Life?](#))

**Gregg Allen** says "When we determine to speak against a brother or judge a brother in this way, we are, in essence, telling God that His laws aren't sufficient enough. We are presuming to know how to modify God's for living and make them even better! We are actually claiming have a better standard of judging people than God does! And when we judge our brother, we are sitting in judgment of God's law. And when we willfully sit in judgment of God's law, we are not, ourselves, doing it and are arrogantly unsubmitted to it (James 1:22+)." ([Sermon](#))

**Hughes** sums it up by noting that James' "argument here is meant to deliver us from mind games which tell us it's okay to be judgmental because we are so spiritually sensitive and insightful, or because we have the Kingdom's good as the motivation behind our judgments. God says this is stupid arrogance of cosmic dimensions. Perhaps we should have been on Sinai with Moses!" ([Preaching the Word – James: Faith That Works](#))

A little seed lay on the ground

and soon began to sprout.

Now which of all the flowers around, it mused,  
shall I come out?

The lily's face is fair and proud,  
but just a trifle cold.

The rose, I think, is rather loud  
and then, its fashion's old.

The violet is all very well,  
but not a flower I'd choose,  
nor yet the Canterbury bell,  
I'd never cared for blues.

And so it criticized each flower,  
this supercilious seed,  
until it woke one summer hour  
and found itself a weed. (  
source unknown)

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**STEVEN COLE** - I once served on a jury for a drunk driving case. The defendant had a blood alcohol level twice the legal limit. The judge carefully instructed us that our job was to determine if this woman had, in fact, broken the law. I naively thought that the case was a slam-dunk. We shouldn't have to deliberate longer than a few minutes.

We got into the jury room and one guy piped up, "I can drink that much and drive without any problem!" Someone else chimed in with similar comments. Some ladies said how nice the young woman seemed to be. I couldn't believe it! They were totally ignoring the judge's instructions! After three hours of wrangling, another juror and I finally had persuaded everyone of the woman's guilt, except for one woman. She said, "I could never vote to convict her, because the Bible says, 'Judge not, lest you be judged.'"

It was late in the day, and I knew that if we didn't convict her, we'd all have to come back the next day. So I said, "None of us wants to come back tomorrow. We're going to convict her, so you just keep quiet!" That's how justice was done!

There is hardly any verse of the Bible that is more misunderstood than Jesus' words, "Do not judge so that you will not be judged" (Matt. 7:1). And there is hardly any verse that is more frequently disobeyed among Christians than that verse! For years I have had it on my prayer list for myself, yet I have disobeyed it many times. I'm sure that I'm not an exception. Also, keep in mind that it is a sin to judge another person in your heart, even if you keep your thoughts to yourself. Judgmental words eventually will flow out of a judgmental heart, but the sin begins in the heart. It is a manifestation of pride; we think that we're better than others are. ([The Sin of Judging Others](#))

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### Christians Don't Slander

I was in Japan with a friend since gone to be with the Lord. We were walking down the street in Yokohama, in conversation. The name of a mutual friend came up, and I said something unkind about that person—a sarcastic, nasty put-down. My older friend stopped, turned, and faced me until his face was nearly touching my own. With slow, deliberate words he said, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God wouldn't talk like that about a friend." He could have put a knife into my ribs; the pain wouldn't have been any less. I hurt because he had me. He'd done what a prophet does. But I bet there've been ten thousand times in the last 20 years I've been saved from making a jerk of myself. Whenever I've been tempted to say something unkind about a brother or sister, I hear my friend's voice once again, saying, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God wouldn't talk like that about a friend."

## QUOTES ON SLANDER AND GOSSIP

- Slander, like coal, will either dirty your hand or burn it. Anon.
- Slanders are the devil's bellows to blow up contention. Anon.
- Slander is almost invariably verbal coward ice. John Blanchard
- The surest method against slander is to live it down by perseverance in well-doing. Hermann Boerhaave
- No one should say behind a man's back what he dare not, or would not, say to his face. William Booth

- No greater injury can be inflicted upon men than to wound their reputation. John Calvin
- Slander is best answered with silence. Ben Johnson
- Slander has a marvellous way of driving us into the arms of our heavenly Father. Stuart Olyott
- Lies and false reports are among Satan's choicest weapons. J. C. Ryle
- Slander is a vice that strikes a double blow, wounding both him that commits and him against whom it is committed. Jacques Sauin
- Whispered insinuations are the rhetoric of the devil. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- A gossip's mouth is the devil's mailbag. Anon.
- A gossip usually makes a mountain out of a molehill by adding some dirt. Anon.
- Gossip is halitosis of the brain. Anon.
- Gossip is like mud thrown against a clean wall; it may not stick, but it leaves a mark. Anon.
- Gossip is something that goes in the ear and comes out of the mouth greatly enlarged. Anon.
- Gossip is the art of confessing other people's sins. Anon.
- No one can have a gossiping tongue unless he has gossiping ears. Anon.
- Whoever gossips to you will gossip of you. Anon.
- Gossip is what no one claims to like but what everybody enjoys. Joseph Conrad
- A lie has no leg, but a scandal has wings. Thomas Fuller
- There would not be so many open mouths if there were not so many open ears. Joseph Hall
- Gossip is the lack of a worthy theme. Elbert Green Hubbard
- A gossip is one who talks to you about others; a bore is one who talks to you about himself; and a brilliant conversationalist is one who talks to you about yourself. Lisa Kirk
- Never report what may hurt another unless it be a greater hurt to conceal it. William Penn
- I hold it to be a fact, that if all persons knew what each said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world. Blaise Pascal
- When tempted to gossip, breathe through your nose. T. N. Tiemeyer
- Trying to squash a rumour is like trying to unring a bell. Shana Alexander
- A rumour is about as hard to unspread as butter. Anon.
- Rumour is one thing that gets thicker as you spread it. Anon.
- There's only one thing as difficult as unscrambling an egg, and that's unspreading a rumour. Anon.
- It is said that 'where there's smoke there's fire'; but the smoke may be no more than dust and hot air. John Blanchard
- There is no such thing as an 'idle rumour'. Rumours are always busy. F. G. Kernan
- I know nothing swifter in life than the voice of rumour. Plautus
- Believe not half you hear; repeat not half you believe; when you hear an evil report, halve it, then quarter it, and say nothing about the rest. C. H. Spurgeon
- Rumour is a loud liar, like a snowball that gathers as it goes. John Trapp
- The first tale is good till the second be heard. John Trapp
- The tale-bearer is an incendiary. Thomas Watson

### Answering Slander

Once a man who had been slandered by a newspaper came to Edward Everett and asked him what to do about it. "Don't do anything," Everett advised. "Half the people who bought the paper never saw the article. Half of those who saw it did not read it. Half of those who read it did not understand it. Half of those who understood it did not believe it. And half of those who believed it are of no account anyway."

### Job 1:1-12 JUST ASKING A QUESTION?

"Do not speak evil of one another." - James 4:11

Slanderers slaughter reputations. Sometimes they attack with the bold strokes of a butcher. At other times they do their evil work with the finesse of a surgeon.

Satan is an expert in subtle slander. Knowing the power of a well-placed question to destroy a reputation, he simply asked, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1:9).

Satan's question is shrewd because it evades the dangers of an outright lie. An accusation flirts with the embarrassment of being proven wrong. But no one can call you a liar or a slanderer if you merely ask a question.

A question also avoids punishment. It's difficult for someone to attack you if you have simply asked a question. It's unlikely that you

can be sued or pulled into court. Yet, Satan's query savaged a good man's motives by implying that all of the good Job did was a coverup for selfishness.

When we are inclined to ask a malicious question, let's stop and remind ourselves that we will be playing the devil's game. Our tongues were not given to us to rip people apart; they were given to us to build people up. We ought to speak well of others not only to their face but also behind their back. -- H W Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The tongue can be a blessing  
Or the tongue can be a curse;  
Say, friend, how are you using yours:  
For better or for worse?

Our words have the power to build up or to tear down.

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## Trash Disposal

Do not speak evil of one another. —James 4:11

Today's Scripture: James 4:11-17

While riding in a car, I passed a sign that warned: \$100 FINE FOR THROWING LITTER ON HIGHWAY. Soon I saw another sign that stated: LITTER BARREL—1 MILE. A short time later, I passed a garbage truck on its way to the disposal plant.

There are three things you can do with garbage: You can collect it, scatter it, or dispose of it. Some people are garbage collectors; they are always listening for some choice bit of gossip. If they were only collectors, it would not be so serious. But these collectors are often litterbugs, and insist on scattering it all along life's highway. Thank God, there are also those who know how to dispose of it. They put the refuse where it belongs—in the "litter barrel" of forgetfulness.

James 4:11 tells us, "Do not speak evil of one another." If you can't say something helpful, don't say anything. If you hear a damaging rumor, immediately put it in the "litter bag." Then breathe a prayer for the person being talked about, as well as for the one who told you. Don't spread gossip, but dispose of it by silence. Gossip soon dies if it is not repeated.

Today you will find plenty of garbage. You can collect it, scatter it, or dispose of it. Ask God to help you do what pleases Him and is helpful to others. By: Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Button up your lip securely  
'Gainst the words that bring a tear,  
But be swift with words of comfort,  
Words of praise, and words of cheer.  
—Loucks

Do your part to silence gossip—don't repeat it.

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## Devotional - James 4:11 "Do not slander one another"

James reminds us that one of the most difficult things for us to do is to control our tongues. This is a point that Proverbs certainly makes as well, since it has so much to say about harmful speech. Here James simply instructs us not to slander one another, for anyone who speaks against a brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When we judge the law, we are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. And there is only one Lawgiver and Judge. So who are we to judge our neighbor?

Judging other people and slandering them are twin violations of the law of love. Slander is the willful destruction of another person's character and reputation by speaking maliciously against or about him. Slander often repeats gossip and insinuation in order to smear the reputation of someone else. It is driven by the desire to have a superior position over the one slandered. The word of God prohibits this sin without qualification.

Judging another person also is a way of destroying a person's reputation, even though in this case there may be some substance to the charge that is made. Here the person who judges also adopts a superior, self-righteous attitude, as if he had the right to judge other people. God is the one who judges, because he is the Lawgiver, the only one able to save and destroy.

Christians are to exhibit love and compassion for one another. That means that the Christian is to try to safeguard the reputation and integrity of fellow believers; and if there are faults and difficulties that surface, there are procedures that love would follow which leave no room for slander or judging. What we say about each other must be uplifting and helpful; and how we respond to one another's weaknesses and mistakes must be with compassion and understanding. (Allen Ross)

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## **SILENCING SLANDER**

To silence slander we must regularly examine our attitudes and actions toward others. Do we build people up or tear them down? When we are ready to criticize someone, we ought to remember God's law of love and say something good instead. Saying something beneficial to others will cure us of finding fault and increase our ability to obey God's law of love. For those immersed in a culture that thrives on criticism and slander, Jesus set a standard to guide each of us: "I tell you, forgive your brother not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22 niv). One practical approach to silencing a slandering habit is to practice making seven positive, encouraging statements for every critical one we make. (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

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**Thomas Watson** - The evil tongue is the censorious tongue, "Who are you that judge another?" (James 4:12). Some make it a part of their religion to judge and censure others. They do not imitate their graces—but censure their failings. Such an one is a hypocrite, for this comes from pride. Were men's hearts more humble, their tongues would be more charitable. The censurer sits in the chair of pride, and passes sentence upon another, and reprobates him; this is to usurp God's prerogative, and take his work out of his hands; it is God's work to judge, not ours. He who spends his time in censuring others spends but little time in examining himself, and does not see his own faults. There is not a greater sign of hypocrisy than to be overhasty in judging and censuring persons.

The evil tongue is the slanderous tongue, "You sit and slander your own mother's son" (Psalm 50:20). Slandering is when we speak to the harm of another, and speak that which is not true. Worth and eminency are commonly blasted by slander; holiness itself is no shield from slander. "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" (Matthew 11:18-19). Come and let us smite him with the tongue! A slanderer wounds another's name—and no physician can heal these wounds! The sword does not make so deep a wound—as the tongue! The Greek word for slanderer, signifies devil. Some think it is no great matter to slander and defame another; but know, this is to act the part of a devil. The slanderer's tongue is a two-edged sword, it wounds two at once; while the slanderer wounds another in his name, he wounds himself in his conscience. This is contrary to Scripture, "Speak not evil one of another" (James 4:11). God takes this evil at our hands—to speak evil of others, especially such as are eminently holy, and help to bear up the honor of religion: "Were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Numbers 12:8). What! My servant who has wrought so many miracles—whom I have spoken with in the mount face to face—were not you afraid to speak against him? So will God say, You must take heed of this—it is a sin your nature is very prone to! Remember, it is no less sin to rob another of his good name—than to steal his goods or wares out of his shop! "Brothers, do not slander one another!" James 4:11 ([The Evil Tongue - see full article](#))

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**Speak not evil one of another' (James 4:11).** I ([Thomas Watson](#)) have read a story of one, Idor, that he was never heard to speak evil of any man. Augustine could not endure that any should eclipse and lessen the fame of others, therefore he wrote those two verses upon his table:

"Whoever loves another's name to blast,  
This table's not for him; so let him fast."

---

## **Our own imperfections unfit us for judging fairly (J.R. Miller)**

"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law." James 4:11

"And why do you look at the mote in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam in your own eye?" Matthew 7:3

Our own imperfections unfit us for judging fairly. With beams in our own eyes — we cannot see clearly to pick motes out of our brother's eye.

One of the qualities which make us incapable of impartial judgment of others, is envy. There are few of us who can see our neighbor's life, work, and disposition — without some warping and distortion of the picture. Envy has a strange effect on our moral vision. It shows the beautiful things in others, with the beauty dimmed. It shows the blemishes and faults in them, exaggerated.

Then, the lack of personal experience in struggle and pain, makes many people incapable of sympathy with sorely afflicted ones. Those who have never known a care, nor felt the pinching of poverty — cannot understand the experiences of the poor.

Thus in very many ways, we are unfitted to be judges of others.

"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls." Romans 14:4

"You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?" Romans 14:10

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## **The Fine Art Of Slander**

Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. —Proverbs 10:18

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 6:12-19

God hates slanderers. They are scoundrels and villains with hidden hatred in their hearts and deceit in their mouths.

Some people have turned slander into a fine art. They would never use a meat cleaver to cut down another person. They are more subtle than that. They have learned to slander with a gesture, a wink, or an evil smile.

Jonathan Swift, an author who knew well the ugliness of slander, described a man who could "convey a libel in a frown, and wink a reputation down." Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." When someone is attacked in a conversation, the listeners can join the mugging with a nod.

The book of Proverbs describes people in the ancient world who used body language to destroy others (6:12-15). They winked, motioned, or gave a shrug to work their slander, and they felt safe in their attacks. After all, it is difficult to refute a gesture or to prove evil in a wink. Their actions were subtle, yet as deadly as bullets piercing the heart.

What are your gestures saying about others? Ask the Lord of love and truth to help you guard your speech and actions. For His sake, for your own sake, and for the sake of others, do it now! —Haddon Robinson ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Today let only thoughts that bless  
Dwell in my heart and mind;  
Silence my lips and tongue to all  
That wounds or is unkind.

—White

**The tongue, being in a wet place, is apt to slip!**

---

## **Put Out The Fire!**

Read: Proverbs 26:20-28

Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. —Proverbs 26:20

To extinguish a fire, you must remove one of the essential elements needed for combustion. For example, eliminating what is fueling the blaze is a method often employed in fighting a forest fire. A controlled backfire is started from a cleared line ahead of the advancing flames. When the two fires meet, no timber is left to burn.

The Bible tells us that for lack of wood "the fire goes out" (Prov. 26:20). This refers to extinguishing something much more devastating than the combustion of physical elements. It's the fire of an irresponsible tongue and the resentment and pain that burn in the hearts of those who have been seared by its heat. What deep and lasting wounds the tongue can inflict on others! Families and friendships have been disrupted and individuals hurt for life because of the effects of backbiting and slander.

How necessary it is for God's people to eliminate from their conversation all thoughtless words! This would prevent many of the fires that ruin relationships.

By yielding our tongue to the Lord Jesus, who alone can control it, we can put out the harmful fires of slander and gossip. By Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

How many fires have swept the land  
And left an ugly scar!  
But of the blazing flames that burn,  
The tongue's the worst by far.  
—Anon.

**Better to bite your tongue than to have a biting tongue.**

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### Whispering Gallery

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise. —Proverbs 10:19

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 10:11-23

London's domed St. Paul's Cathedral has an interesting architectural phenomenon called the "whispering gallery." One Web site explains it this way: "The name comes from the fact that a person who whispers facing the wall on one side can be clearly heard on the other, since the sound is carried perfectly around the vast curve of the Dome."

In other words, you and a friend could sit on opposite sides of architect Sir Christopher Wren's great cathedral and carry on a conversation without having to speak above a whisper.

While that may be a fascinating feature of St. Paul's Cathedral, it can also be a warning to us. What we say about others in secret can travel just as easily as whispers travel around that gallery. And not only can our gossip travel far and wide, but it often does great harm along the way.

Perhaps this is why the Bible frequently challenges us about the ways we use words. The wise King Solomon wrote, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise" (Prov. 10:19).

Instead of using whispers and gossip that can cause hurt and pain while serving no good purpose, we would do better to restrain ourselves and practice silence. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, help us bridle what we say  
And tend our conversations,  
Avoiding careless gossiping  
That murders reputations.  
—Sper

Gossip ends at a wise person's ears.

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### Cutting Remarks

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. —Proverbs 12:18

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 12:17-22

The writer of Proverbs describes an unwise person as "one who speaks like the piercings of a sword" (12:18). Our tongues can be like a multi-bladed Swiss Army knife when it comes to the variety of ways that we cut and destroy each other.

Unhealthy attitudes of anger, irritation, frustration, and impatience—even disappointment, stress, guilt, and insecurity—all contribute to our damaging speech. And as we cut with our words, we wound and divide friendships and relationships. It's no wonder that the infamous list of seven things that are an abomination to the Lord includes anyone who "sows discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:16-19).

How do we stay off that list? For starters, we need to watch what we say. Gossip and slander are out, and words that hurt instead of heal are not welcome. Boasting, lying, and all the rest of the ways we use words to hurt and divide need to be gone as well. In their place, words that extend love and the healing power of forgiveness, mercy, and truth should rule our words and relationships. After all, where would we be if Jesus hadn't spoken words of forgiving love and grace to us?

So, put the "knife" away and use your words to help and heal. By: Joe Stowell ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand](#)

[Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Lord, put a seal upon my lips,  
Help me to guard with care  
The things I say and swift repeat;  
O tongue of mine, beware!  
—Bosch

Our words have the power to build up or tear down.

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### Wise Words

The tongue of the wise brings healing. —Proverbs 12:18

Today's Scripture & Insight: Proverbs 10:18-21; 12:17-19

What is the strongest muscle in the human body? Some say it's the tongue, but it's hard to determine which muscle is the most powerful because muscles don't work alone.

But we do know that the tongue is strong. For a small muscle, it can do a lot of damage. This active little muscular organ that helps us eat, swallow, taste, and begin digestion has a tendency to also assist us in saying things we shouldn't. The tongue is guilty of flattery, cursing, lying, boasting, and harming others. And that's just the short list.

It sounds like a pretty dangerous muscle, doesn't it? But here's the good thing: It doesn't have to be that way. When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, our tongues can be turned to great good. We can speak of God's righteousness (Ps. 35:28) and justice (37:30). We can speak truth (15:2), show love (1 John 3:18), and confess sin (1 John 1:9).

The writer of Proverbs 12:18 spells out one of the best uses of the tongue: "The tongue of the wise brings healing" (niv). Imagine how we could glorify the One who made our tongues when He helps us use it to bring healing—not harm—to everyone we talk to. By: Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Please guard each word we say so we reflect You and Your love. Help our tongues speak words of healing and not harm.

Encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11NIV

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### The Silent Pen

The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. —James 3:18

Today's Scripture & Insight: James 3:1-12

Former US President Harry Truman had a rule: Any letters written in anger had to sit on his desk for 24 hours before they could be mailed. If at the end of that "cooling off" period, he still felt the same sentiments, he would send the letter. By the end of his life, Truman's unmailed letters filled a large desk drawer.

How often in this age of immediate communication would even 24 minutes of wise restraint spare us embarrassment! In his epistle, James addressed a universal theme in human history when he wrote about the damage an uncontrolled tongue can bring. "No man can tame the tongue," he wrote. "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (3:8).

When we're gossiping or speaking in anger, we find ourselves outside the lines of what God desires. Our tongues, our pens, and even our keyboards should more often fall silent with thanks in our hearts for the restraint God provides. All too often, when we speak we remind everyone of our brokenness as human beings.

When we want to surprise others with the difference Christ makes, we may need to look no further than restraining our tongue. Others can't help but notice when we honor God with what we say—or don't say. By: Randy Kilgore ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Help me, Lord, to use my words not to

tear down others or build up my own reputation,  
but to seek the good of others first, and in so doing  
to serve You and Your kingdom.

Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles. —Proverbs 21:23

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## Zero Tolerance

You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people. —Leviticus 19:16

Today's Scripture: Leviticus 19:11-18

When Shayla McKnight applied for a job for an online printing company, she was surprised to learn that they had a zero-tolerance policy for gossip. The employees are encouraged to confront one another, instead of gossip about their fellow employees. If employees are caught gossiping, they are reprimanded, and if they continue, they are fired.

Long before this kind of policy was ever implemented by a company, God spoke of His own zero-tolerance policy for gossip and slander among His people (Lev. 19:16). Idle talk that foolishly or maliciously spreads rumors or facts about another person was forbidden.

Solomon said that speaking badly of others could have disastrous effects. It betrays confidence (Prov. 11:13), separates close friends (16:28; 17:9), shames and saddles you with a bad reputation (25:9-10), and perpetually fuels the embers of a quarrel (26:20-22). People rarely can undo the damage their untrue words have done to a neighbor.

Let's ask the Lord to help us not to engage in harmful talk about others. He wants us to set a guard over our mouths so that we'll instead speak all the good we know about everybody. By: Marvin Williams ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Reflect & Pray

Many things that others say  
Are not for us to tell; Help us,  
Lord, to watch our tongue—  
We need to guard it well.  
—Branon

Destroy gossip by ignoring it.

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**INCOMPATIBLE** - A quote in Sports Illustrated magazine expresses a truth that we as people of faith sometimes neglect: "What counts most in creating a successful team is not how compatible its players are, but how they deal with incompatibility." When we don't get along with others, we are tempted to ignore them and shove them aside.

God calls us to take a different approach: "All of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another· love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this' (1 Peter 3:8-9+).

Oswald Chambers reminds us in My Utmost For His Highest: "In the spiritual life, beware of walking according to natural affinities. Everyone has natural affinities; some people we like and others we do not like. We must never let those likes and dislikes rule in our Christian life. If we 'walk in the light,' (1 Jn 1:7+) as God is in the light, God will give us communion with people for whom we have no natural affinity."

It is natural to have likes and dislikes. But when we seek to honor the Lord in our relationships, compassion, love, humility, and kindness are the God-ordered supernatural steps in dealing with incompatibility. - David McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

THINKING IT OVER Do you think unity is an unattainable goal?

Read [Developing The Art Of Gracious Disagreement](#)

The way to preserve the peace of the church is to promote the unity of it.

## James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

Amplified One only is the Lawgiver and Judge Who is able to save and to destroy [the One Who has the absolute power of life and death]. [But you] who are you that [you presume to] pass judgment on your neighbor?

NET James 4:12 But there is only one who is lawgiver and judge— the one who is able to save and destroy. On the other hand, who are you to judge your neighbor?

GNT James 4:12 ε ς σ τ ι ν [ ] νομοθ της κα κριτ ς δυν μενος σ σαι κα πολ σαι· σ δ τ ς ε κ ρ νων τ ν πλησ ον;

NLT James 4:12 God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

KJV James 4:12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

ESV James 4:12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

ASV James 4:12 One only is the lawgiver and judge, even he who is able to save and to destroy: but who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?

CSB James 4:12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

NIV James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-- who are you to judge your neighbor?

NKJ James 4:12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

NRS James 4:12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

YLT James 4:12 one is the lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy; thou -- who art thou that dost judge the other?

NAB James 4:12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save or to destroy. Who then are you to judge your neighbor?

NJB James 4:12 There is only one lawgiver and he is the only judge and has the power to save or to destroy. Who are you to give a verdict on your neighbour?

GWN James 4:12 There is only one teacher and judge. He is able to save or destroy you. So who are you to judge your neighbor?

BBE James 4:12 There is only one judge and law-giver, even he who has the power of salvation and of destruction; but who are you to be your neighbour's judge?

- There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, Isa 33:22
- the One who is able to save and to destroy: Mt 10:28 Lu 12:5 Heb 7:25
- who are you who judge your neighbor: 1Sa 25:10 Job 38:2 Ro 2:1 9:20 14:4,13
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### GOD IS THE ONLY LAWGIVER AND JUDGE

**Hughes** comments that "The second parallel argument takes the absurdity of a critical spirit a step higher, suggesting that a judgmental person sets himself not only above the Law, but above God." ([Preaching the Word – James: Faith That Works](#))

**There is only one Lawgiver and Judge** - God's judgment is perfect because not only did He give the Law and thus perfectly understands its intent, He alone can see the thoughts and intentions of one's heart and thereby Judge with perfect justice and righteousness. The best Supreme Court judge in American history cannot even come close to this divine standard! God is the only One Who is above the Law because He gave the Law!

**Brian Bell** adds that "It is highly probable we don't have all the information on our friend, thus we could very well be mistaken, partial, misled! Only God knows the deepest facts! (HE ADDS THAT) Playing God ignores or excuses our own failures. (James 4:12a) One of the easiest ways to hide our sins is to expose the sins of others." ([Sermon](#))

**Ronald Blue** says that God is "not only authored the Law; He also administrates the Law. He serves as both the executive and judicial branches of the divine government. God is King; He institutes and declares His Law. God is Judge; He upholds and enforces His Law." ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

**Lawgiver (3550)**(**nomothetes** from **nomos** = law + **tithemi** = put, set) is used only here in the NT and means one who gives or sets the law. God is the supreme Lawgiver. So we should not speak against the law.

**Judge (2923)**(**krites** from **krino** = to judge) is one who decides, the one who makes decisions based on examination and evaluation. Krites is used of men but James uses it of God twice, here and James 5:9+ (cf Heb 12:23; 2 Ti 4:8; Acts 10:42).

**The One who is able to save and to destroy** - God alone has the power to save or destroy for He alone has the absolute power of life and death. It follows that only God has the right to judge. For a creature to usurp God's right to judge is the epitome of pride (exactly what Satan attempted in Isaiah 14:13-14 with his infamous 5 "I will's"!).

**THOUGHT** - May the Holy Spirit recall this truth to our mind every time we are tempted to slander a brother or sister in Christ!

**Blue** comments that "There is one Author of the Law, one Judge over the Law, and but one Savior from the Law's condemnation. This reminder of a truth well known by James' Jewish readers was also a rebuke to their haughty attitudes and judgmental actions." ([Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Passages describing God's absolute power over life and death...

Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

Job 5:18 "For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands also heal.

Psalms 68:20 God is to us a God of deliverances; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.

1 Samuel 2:6 "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.

**Henry Morris** - This is a striking statement of faith in the resurrection on the part of Hannah. At this time, no records show a dead person being revived, nor had there been any explicit revelation given as yet concerning a future bodily resurrection. Yet Hannah, like Abraham and Job, believed that God could and would do this (Genesis 22:5; Hebrews 11:17-19; Job 19:25-27).

Isaiah 43:13 "Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?"

Hosea 6:1 "Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.

Matthew 10:28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy ([apollumi](#)) both soul and body in hell.

Luke 12:5+ "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

Hebrews 7:25+ Therefore He is able also to save ([sozo](#)) forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Revelation 1:17; 18+ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

**Able (present tense)(1410)(dunamai)** conveys the basic meaning of that which has the inherent ability to do something or accomplish some end. Thus *dunamai* means to be strong enough to do or have power to save and to kill.

**Save (heal, make well or whole) (4982)(sozo)** has the basic meaning of rescuing one from great peril. Additional nuances include to protect, keep alive, preserve life, deliver, heal, be made whole. Jesus said "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk 19:10+)

**Destroy (622)(apollumi** from **apo** = away from or wholly + **olethros** = state of utter ruin <> ollumi = to destroy <> root of apollyon [Re 9:11] = destroyer) means to destroy utterly but not to cause one to cease to exist. Apollumi as it relates to men, is not the loss of being per se, but is more the loss of well-being. It means to ruin so that the person (or thing) ruined can no longer serve the use for which he (it) was designed. To render useless. The gospel promises everlasting life for the one who believes. The failure to possess this life will result in utter ruin and eternal uselessness (but not a cessation of existence).

**John MacArthur** adds "The sin of slander, James warns, is no trivial matter. It is brazen, reckless treason against the Sovereign lawgiver and judge of the universe. No one has expressed the seriousness of sin any more clearly than the seventeenth-century English Puritan [Ralph Venning](#), who wrote the following sobering words in his book [The Sinfulness of Sin](#):

The sinfulness of sin not only appears from, but consists in this, that it is contrary to God. Indeed, it is contrariety and enmity itself. Carnal men, or sinners are called by the name of enemies to God (Romans 5:8 with 10; Colossians 1:21); but the carnal mind or sin is called enmity itself (Romans 8:7). Accordingly, it and its acts are expressed by names of enmity and acts of hostility, such as, walking contrary to God (Leviticus 26:21), rebelling against God (Isaiah 1:2), rising up against him as an enemy (Micah 2:8), striving and contending with God (Isaiah 45:9), and despising God (Numbers 11:20). It makes men haters of God (Romans 1:30), resisters of God (Acts 7:51), fighters against God (Acts 5:39 and 23:9), even blasphemers of God, and in short very atheists, who say there is no God (Psalm 14:1). It goes about to ungod God, and is by some of the ancients called *Deicidium*, God-murder or God-killing. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993; 29-30)

To control the sin of slandering others we must recognize the seriousness of sinning against the supreme lawgiver and judge. ([MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James](#))

## YOU THERE! WHO ARE YOU...?

**But who are you who judge your neighbor?**- Another of James' pithy, pungent, penetrating rhetorical questions! The Amplified says it well - "[But you] who are you that [you presume to] pass judgment on your neighbor?" The idea is "*Who in the world do you think you are sitting in condemnation of someone?*" and in so doing God turns the spotlight away from others and puts it full force on the one with a judgmental spirit! Notice that now James says not just brethren, but our neighbor, which is a word that literally means near or close by and so our "neighbor" is the person who is close or near by! We must remember even though saved, we are still infested with sin and secondly we are not omniscient, so both sin and ignorance will mar every judgment we make on other people! [William Beveridge](#) spoke of how our old sinful flesh in some way "contaminates" (so to speak) even our most holy thoughts, words and deeds (if what he says offends you, read it again and then read the glorious last line which should free you of all offense)...

I cannot pray,  
except I sin;  
I cannot preach,  
but I sin;  
I cannot administer, nor  
receive the holy sacrament,  
but I sin.  
My very repentance needs  
to be repented of;  
And the tears I shed  
need washing in the  
blood of Christ.

**THOUGHT-** Far too often, Christians criticize others before we get all the facts. We observe an event, catch a few words of a conversation, or gather a handful of random facts. We then leap to conclusions and start flapping our jaws about it. The jabbering catches on and spreads, and before you know it the "gossip" becomes "news." There's nothing more contagious in a church, student body, business, staff, organization, or home than a negative spirit. That infection is contagious—it spreads like a cold in a kindergarten!...The principle bears repeating: only God is qualified to judge, because only He has all the facts. ([Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – James, 1 & 2 Peter](#))

**Barton** - James takes away any rights we might claim for criticizing our neighbors. Behind the critical spirit is an attitude that usurps God's authority and is full of pride. There should be no critical, harsh faultfinding in the body of Christ. Romans 14:4 says, "Who are

you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (niv). WHO ARE YOU, INDEED? It is the height of arrogance to judge others because the right to judge belongs only to God. So the person who judges assumes God's role. Before passing sentence on others we ought to look in the mirror of our own identity. There we will find: sin, shortcomings, guilt for the very failure we see in others, personal need for God's grace and mercy . (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

**Neighbor (Near) (4139)(plesion** from **pélas** = near, near to or from **plesios** = close by) literally means near (literal use only in Jn 4:5), quite near, nearby = position quite close to another position. Figuratively, plesion means to be near someone and thus be a neighbor. Generally, plesion refers to a fellow man, any other member of the human family. TDNT explains that "Ho plesion" is the "neighbor," the person next to one" then more generally the "fellow human being." James used plesion in James 2:8+ "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

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## A PRAYER OF SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL LAW

It is helpful to examine in prayer how well we are doing at loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. We can ask God to help us examine our way. Several questions to ask are:

- Have I given myself the benefit of the doubt, but refused it to my brother or sister?
- Have I made excuses for my shortcomings, but remained intolerant of others?
- Have I judged my brothers and sisters according to the letter of the law while expecting grace for myself? (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

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**J R Miller** - One reason why judging is wrong—is because it is putting one's self in God's place. He is the only Judge, with whom every human soul has to do. Judgment is not ours—but God's. "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?" James 4:12. In condemning and censuring others—we are thrusting ourselves into God's place, taking His scepter into our hands, and presuming to exercise one of His sole prerogatives! ([Do Not Judge](#))

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**THE TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES OF A SLANDEROUS TONGUE** - They were a happy little family, living in a small town in North Dakota, even though the young mother had not been entirely well since the birth of her second baby. But each evening the neighbors were aware of a warmth in their hearts when they would see the husband and father being met at the gate by his wife and two small children. There was laughter in the evening too, and when the weather was nice father and children would romp together on the back lawn while mother looked on with happy smiles. Then one day a village gossip started a story, saying that [the father] was being unfaithful to his wife, a story entirely without foundation. But it eventually came to the ears of the young wife, and it was more than she could bear. Reason left its throne, and that night when her husband came home there was no one to meet him at the gate, no laughter in the house, no fragrant aroma coming from the kitchen—only coldness and something that chilled his heart with fear. And down in the basement he found the three of them hanging from a beam. Sick and in despair, the young mother had taken the lives of her two children, and then her own. In the days that followed, the truth of what had happened came out—a gossip's tongue, an untrue story, a terrible tragedy. ([MacArthur](#))

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**Steven Cole has a good application of James 4:11-12** - What should you do if someone shares damaging or critical information about another person with you? Bill Gothard offers some helpful questions to ask. He points out that often the person with the evil report will test your spirit to detect if you're open to hearing it. He may ask for your opinion of the person, or he may drop a negative comment about the person and watch your response. He may try to get your curiosity up by asking, "Have you heard about so-and-so?" He may pose as asking you for counsel on how to help this person, but you discover that he has no intention of helping the person. You may discover that he's already shared the situation with many others that had no need to know.

I find that sometimes I cannot stop the person before they share the judgmental information, but I try to ask at least the first question as soon as I can. The questions are: (1) What is your reason for telling me? If the only reason I need to know is so that I can pray, I probably don't need to know. (2) Where did you get your information? If the person will not reveal his sources, he is probably spreading rumors or unreliable information. (3) Have you gone to those directly involved to seek to restore them? (4) Have you personally checked out all the facts? If he has not gone directly to those involved and has not checked out the facts, he isn't interested in helping. If he really needs counsel on how to do it, he will not be asking for such help from several sources. I often say, "After you've gone to him, let me know how it went." This holds him accountable. (5) Can I quote you if I check this out? If someone is spreading judgmental falsehoods or half-truths, he won't want to be quoted!

Setting yourself up as judge leads to conflict and broken relationships. Humbly submitting to God and His Word and obediently

seeking to love and build up others leads to harmony and restored relationships. The next time you're tempted to run down someone, remember James' pointed question, "But who are you who judge your neighbor?" Judge yourself instead! ([Sermon](#))

**James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."**

Amplified Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city and spend a year there and carry on our business and make money.

NET James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that town and spend a year there and do business and make a profit."

GNT James 4:13 γε ν ν ο λ γοντες, Σ μερον α ριον πορευς μεθα ες τ νδε τ ν π λιν κα ποι σομεν κε νιαυτ ν κα μ πορευς μεθα κα κερδ σομεν·

NLT James 4:13 Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit."

KJV James 4:13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

ESV James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"--

ASV James 4:13 Come now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain:

CSB James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit."

NIV 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."

NKJ James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";

NRS James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money."

YLT James 4:13 Go, now, ye who are saying, 'To-day and to-morrow we will go on to such a city, and will pass there one year, and traffic, and make gain;'

NAB James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we shall go into such and such a town, spend a year there doing business, and make a profit"--

NJB James 4:13 Well now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we are off to this or that town; we are going to spend a year there, trading, and make some money.'

GWN James 4:13 Pay attention to this! You're saying, "Today or tomorrow we will go into some city, stay there a year, conduct business, and make money."

BBE James 4:13 How foolish it is to say, Today or tomorrow we will go into this town, and be there for a year and do business there and get wealth:

- me now, you who say: Jas 5:1 Ge 11:3,4,7 Ec 2:1 Isa 5:5
- Today or tomorrow we will go: Pr 27:1 Isa 56:12 Lu 12:17-20
- engage in business and make a profit: Isa 24:2 56:11 Eze 7:12 1Co 7:30
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **PRESUMPTUOUS PLAN IN PURSUIT OF PROFIT**

**Come now** - This is an interjection, a word which is defined as "an abrupt emphatic exclamation expressing emotion." Come is in the [present imperative](#) a command calling for the reader to give continual attention to what follows. It's important is the idea. James

says in effect "Now listen," which Hiebert comments is "an arousing interjection implying disapproval, (and which) marks the transition to a new form of worldliness....The adverb now (nun) increases the sense of urgency." This was a common expression in everyday Greek but this is the only Biblical example. One writer calls it "the signal for an attack."

**Michael Andrus** sums up James 4:13-16 - We play God with our own lives when we leave Him out of our plans. ([When Christians Play God](#))

**Don Anderson** entitles James 4:13-17 - "Develop Dependence on the Designer" ([Notes](#))

**You who say** - The [present tense](#) identifies these individuals as the ones continually saying this, so that this is typical of how they speak or characteristic of what they would be saying, speaking of individuals who habitually live without regard for God's will. In what follows James deals in essence with our short time on earth. We all think we have a "long" time left, but we never know what God has on His "Daytimer" exactly what James alludes to in the following passage! James is **seeking to call all of us who follow Christ (including yours truly) away from a temporal view of life and unto an eternal view of life.**

**THOUGHT** - Dear reader, if you have fallen of living for this life more than for the life to come, then you need to watch this video by Francis Chan, one of the best illustrations I have ever seen regarding the brevity of our time on earth - [Rope Illustration](#). Does this sobering truth motivate you to live with an eternal view ("Future Focus", which I like to call "[Vertical Vision](#)") like Jonathan Edwards America's greatest theologian who prayed "O Lord, please stamp eternity on my eyeballs!" Jonathan Edwards was saying that he DESIRED that every choice he made WOULD BE ASSESSED IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS POTENTIAL ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES. Dearly beloved, may that be our prayer also. Yes Lord, stamp eternity on our eyeballs. Amen

**Zodhiates** on you who say (legontes) - The word used by James to express the way in which these merchants speak is légontes. There is another Greek word, lalóúntes, which would indicate haphazard talking without necessary reasoning and thought. The Greek verb légō used by James comes from the noun lógos, which means "reason, intelligence." Their talk is the result of careful planning and reasoning. The complaint which James has against such people is that they do such planning without asking God's guidance and permission. Of course, it is good and necessary to plan, but God is highly displeased when we leave Him out of the picture. He is interested in all that we plan, say, and do. It is sinful not only to do things without submitting to God, but also to plan them without Him. If we keep Him out of our planning, He will leave us out of His planning. Our planning will lead to ultimate failure and tragedy, while His planning for our lives will lead to happiness and victory. Financial success does not necessarily lead to success and happiness in life. (Borrow [Faith, Love, and Hope: An Exegetical Commentary on James](#))

**THOUGHT** - What is sad is that it is so easy for us to fall into the trap of "doing our own thing" without giving even token [deference](#) to God and His good and acceptable and perfect will for our lives (Ro 12:2+). Bishop Beveridge in his discussion of the attributes of God (see [Theological Works - Volume 1](#)) has a wonderful illustration of God's Name, "I Am" which relates to this issue of doing our own thing. Beveridge says when God "speaks of Himself and His own eternal essence, He saith "I am that I am;"...He saith "I am."..."He does not say, I am their light, their guide, their strength, or tower, but only 'I AM.' He sets, as it were, His hands to a blank, that His people may write under it what they please that is good for them. And as if He should say, Are they weak? *I am strength*. Are they poor? *I am riches*. Are they in trouble? *I am comfort*. Are they sick? *I am health*. Are they dying? *I am life*. Have they nothing? *I am all things*. *I am wisdom and power*. *I am justice and mercy*. *I am grace and goodness*. *I am glory, beauty, holiness, eminency, super-eminency, perfection, all-sufficiency, eternity*. *Jehovah, I am*. *Whatever is amiable in itself, or desirable unto them, that I am*. *Whatsoever is pure and holy, whatsoever is great or pleasant, whatsoever is good or needful to make men happy, that I am*." As you ponder Beveridge's vivid description of "I Am," you can see how tragic it is to leave Him out of our daily life (be it business as in the present context or whatever). We surely deprive ourselves of the joy and happiness in experiencing communion with and dependence on His Person and His Power. The famous missionary [Hudson Taylor](#) dare not leave God out of his daily activities writing "We cannot exhaust His fullness. The greater our need, the more we understand that He is inexhaustible in Himself, so we are able to draw from Him continually, and yet never able to fathom the fullness of His mighty love. What Bishop Beveridge says is quite true: "When God says, 'I am that I am,' He puts His hand to a blank, that His people may write under it what they please that is for their good." Thanks be unto God that we can ask all we need (NOTE: needs not greeds!), even labourers for every county in China, believing He will do it for us exceeding abundantly (Eph 3:20+), for it is always the way with Him." (from a letter in Taylor's book [China's Millions](#).)

"When God would teach mankind His name,  
He calls Himself the great, 'I am,'  
And leaves a blank; believers may

Supply those things for which they pray.”

**Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit-**

Today or tomorrow reflects that they had it all planned out, except they left God out! Go to such and such a city identifies them as [itinerant](#) businessmen, which calls to mind the picture of a traveling salesman or a "medicine man" of the old west. In any event what a presumptuous declaration they are making. They express an arrogant self confidence, glibly assuming the execution of their plans is totally in their hands! There is no mention of dependence on God or the uncertainty of life, including their own personal life. Not only do they presume their investment will be a winner (nothing is a sure winning investment other than one's faith in Jesus Christ!) but it assumes that there will be time for the investment to accrue a profit! Hiebert says "Behind it all James sees a reprehensible attitude." . ([Hiebert's Commentaries – James](#))

In a nutshell they refused to acknowledge that God is [sovereign](#) and they were not sovereign! Plans were not the problem. Profit was not the problem. The problem was planning to make a profit without acknowledgment of God's [sovereignty](#). They were not only being presumptuous, but were arrogant and ultimately were foolish! They assumed they were in control and forgot only [God is in Control](#) (they should have listened to the [Twila Paris' song](#)) They need to acknowledge the Lord's will in what they were doing (James 4:15).

**PLAN VERSUS PRESUMPTION** - Mike Andrus has a helpful discussion of the difference between plan and presumption. For the full discussion of each of the 4 bullet points below see his full sermon [When Christians Play God](#)

When James denounces those who develop detailed schedules for their lives, he is not suggesting that planning is ungodly. What he is condemning is the arrogant attitude that presumes upon the future and leaves God out of the plans. Again I think it is important that we define terms, for neither of these words, "planning" or "presumption", is found in this passage, but the concepts are there. I would offer these simple definitions. A plan is a flexible, detailed design for action based on careful consideration of all the facts. Presumption, on the other hand, is a superficial design for action built on partial knowledge, inadequate objectives, and questionable motives. James denounces presumption in no uncertain terms. Here are some biblical distinctions I see between these two concepts.

1. Planning recognizes the uncertainties in life; presumption ignores them....
2. Planning recognizes the brevity of life; presumption ignores it....
3. Planning considers the will of God; presumption ignores it....
4. Planning is rational and humble; presumption is irrational and boastful.

None of us knows if we have tomorrow, much less a year from tomorrow! James will correct this aberrant mindset in the next verse.

**Adam Clarke** on **such and such a city** - This was the custom of those ancient times; they traded from city to city, carrying their goods on the backs of camels. The Jews traded thus to Tyre, Sidon, Caesarea, Crete, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Rome, &c. And it is to this kind of itinerant mercantile life that St. James alludes." ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Guzik** - This attitude that James challenged goes far beyond making wise plans for the future. "Not, let us go, but, we will go, in the indicative mood; noting the peremptoriness of their purposes, and their presuming upon future times and things, which were not in their power." (Poole) ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Spurgeon** - "Notice, that these people, while they thought everything was at their disposal, used everything for worldly objects. What did they say? Did they determine with each other 'We will to-day or to-morrow do such and such a thing for the glory of God, and for the extension of his kingdom'? Oh, no, there was not a word about God in it, from beginning to end!....There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass – one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know."

**Zodhiates** feels that in James 4:13-17 James "shows us man's disregard of the [providence](#) of God. Man in his pride does not want to acknowledge that he cannot determine his own fate and make his own plans. Proud man forgets God when he plans his life and his business for the future....As we toil and labor, we forget that the actual increase cannot come from anyone else but God....Robert Horton has well said that the greatest lesson he learned from life was that people who set their minds and hearts on money are equally disappointed whether they get it or not. It binds alike the poor who crave money and the rich who make it their god. Let us, therefore, ask God's partnership in all that we plan for our lives, if we want our lives to count, not only for time and men, but also for eternity and God..... These merchants did well to look into the future, but they did not look far enough. We must look into the future in terms of eternity and not only in terms of tomorrow's gain. Their aspirations were high, but they were not high enough. They stacked up profits, but not heavenly treasures while here on earth. Fontenelle, the French skeptic, was right when he wrote, "*Man is born to aspire at everything and enjoy nothing; to go always forward, but to arrive nowhere.*" This is very true when man leaves the

perpendicular dimension out of his business and travel. Let us remember that time and space are divine gifts to humanity, and humanity should not leave the Giver out of the gift." (Borrow [Faith, Love, and Hope: An Exegetical Commentary on James](#))

**Utley** comments that "This refers to the specific plans of...businessmen who do not take God into account. It is a glaring example of practical atheism."

**Robertson** comments that "One would point out the city on the map (Mayor) as he made the proposal (we will go)."

**John Wesley** has an interesting comment "Realizing the future is uncertain not only teaches us trust in God, it helps us to properly value the present. To be obsessed with future plans may work our failure to appreciate present blessings or our evasion of present duties."

**Hiebert** says that James is rebuking his reader's self-sufficient attitude, first by describing their attitude in James 4:13 and then exposing their arrogant presumption in James 4:14. ([Hiebert's Commentaries – James](#))

It is so easy to see our daily business as something God is not interested in, thinking falsely that He is only interested in the supernatural. What we miss is that it is all sacred to God and for a believer there should be no distinction between secular and sacred. As someone has said "Truly, in the view of St. James, no gulf separates the divine from the human, the transcendent from the terrestrial, the spiritual from the practical."

**THOUGHT - PRACTICAL ATHEISM** - If we fail to recognize the divine element in the human, our prosperous humanity will be calamitous. To leave God out of our common human affairs intentionally is sometimes worse than belligerent atheism. Practical atheism, as we could very well characterize the life attitude of the merchant spoken of by James, is unfortunately far more common than reasoned unbelief, and we may well wonder what the judgment of God will be upon this practical atheism which plagues the Christianity of the twentieth century just as it has apparently plagued the Christian Church throughout the ages. (Zodhiates) Are you (am I) guilty of practicing "practical atheism?"

**Engage in business (1710)**([emporeuomai](#) from **en** = in + [poreúomai](#) = to go, to trade from **poros** = a passing) literally means to go in, then to travel about and so to travel about as a merchant or trader on a large scale. It means to do business or to trade involving either buying and/or selling. The KJV translates it to "make merchandise". [Emporeuomai](#) was used in secular Greek both in the sense of travel and of traveling for business reasons.

In the only other NT use in 2 Peter 2:3<sup>+</sup>, the verb is used in a negative sense to refer to doing business by "misrepresenting the merchandise" so to speak, the figurative use in Peter picturing the deceiving of others for one's own personal advantage. Hiebert comments that [emporeuomai](#) in 2 Peter 2:3 "denotes deceptive exploitation. This significance is eloquent testimony to the cheating that too often attended ancient trade, but James's words do not imply this evil. James is not charging them with immoral activities but rather with presumption."

**Hiebert on make a profit** - It pictures vividly these industrious and ambitious small businessmen who were constantly alert and eager to move to areas where business was most profitable. James is not condemning such trade or the acquiring of profits from legitimate trade. But clearly their hearts lay in their ability to reap rich profits, which was required as the mark of true success. For James, the fatal defect in their planning is their presumptuous self-centeredness, resulting in the effective exclusion of God from the practical affairs of their daily lives. They were guilty of living a life of practical atheism." ([Hiebert's Commentaries – James](#))

**Make a profit (2770)**([kerdaino](#) from [kerdos](#) = gain) means literally to procure an advantage or profit, to acquire by effort or investment as in this passage in James (and as in the parable of the talents Mt 25:16,17, 20, 22). The root word [kerdos](#) means gain but also describes the desire of gain, the love of gain. In other words, the passion of these businessmen was for profit! Making a profit was their goal (even their "god"), not glorifying God! Beloved believer, if this describes you, James would suggest you take a personal inventory of your heart -- is it set on the things of this world or on God Who is out of this world? Profit making is not sinful in itself, but when it becomes our passion, it has become our "master" and it is sinful.

**Jesus** uses [kerdaino](#) asking "For what will it profit a man if he gains ([kerdaino](#)) the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26) While the use of [kerdaino](#) in James is not an identical context, it is similar for James is also portraying the [evanescent](#) nature of temporal gains in business in light of our uncertain and [evanescent](#) nature (James 4:14)!

**Solomon** (who was one of the richest men in history) warned "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity." (Eccl 5:10)

**Zodhiates** writes "If we put God first in our business, He will surely take care of the profit-making. If we leave God out and make Him secondary in our business life, even the profit that we realize may bring us misery and unhappiness. After all, profit should neither be the motivating power nor the ultimate goal of life, for profit in its last analysis is only a means to an end and not the end

itself. Great profits will not make a man happy, because profit-making without God may make others unhappy and bring sorrow to the heart of God in whom the Christian businessman professes faith. Oh, for merchants whose primary goal is not the accumulation of wealth for selfish purposes, but the glory of God and the service of humanity! If our primary aim is profit, we may even rationalize ourselves into some business which Christ could not sanction; while if it is first the glory of God, then the service of humanity, and finally the satisfaction of our personal needs, we would only engage in business which Christ would not hesitate to engage in if He were down here. Let the Christian businessman watch the motivation of his trading and its goal, for what will the profit profit him if it brings him unhappiness and heaviness of heart and scruple of conscience?" ((Borrow [Faith, Love, and Hope: An Exegetical Commentary on James](#))

**James'** description reminds us of Jesus' parable of the rich man in Luke 12

And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21+)

Beloved, we can't see ahead for even one day. God's reply to the farmer's boasting was he would die that night. God has a way of disposing our proposals. Because we have no guarantee of tomorrow, we need to make each day count for Christ. If you have never asked Christ to be your Savior and trusted Him to take you to Heaven, you need to make that decision now. If you are a Christian, then serve the Lord each day and do the will of God in your life. Never make plans without consulting the Lord. There is nothing wrong in planning for tomorrow as long as you get direction from the Lord. The ant prepares for tomorrow and is considered wise. Proverbs 6:6-8

**Other passages** related to James 4:13

Matthew 16:26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Matthew 6:34+ "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

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**GOD'S WILL AND OUR PLANS** It is good to have goals, but goals can disappoint us if we leave God out of them. There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist because the future is in his hands. The beginning of good planning is to ask: "What would I like to be doing ten years from now? One year from now? Tomorrow? How will I react if God steps in and rearranges my plans?" We can plan ahead, but we must hold on to our plans loosely. If we put God's desires at the center of our planning, he will never disappoint us. (Borrow [Life Application Bible Commentary – James](#))

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**Henry Jacobsen** - This is sinning through side-stepping of God. It is practical atheism to be planning without taking God into consideration. If we continue to shut God out of our lives, we commit sin.

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**James 4:13-17 GOD WILL GUIDE YOU - Theodore Epp**

We do not need to be in a state of unrest about the future. Some worry needlessly and wonder, "Why doesn't God let me know what He has in mind for me in the future?" Some young people may be thinking about the mission field and wondering what God's will is for them five or ten years from now. It is important, however, that we recognize that God knows everything about the future, even if we do not, so the important thing is to trust Him today with our lives and leave the future to Him. If God is calling you today into some particular ministry, then obey Him, even though you do not know what the future holds. As we are sensitive to God, we can expect Him to guide us. Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." I'm so glad He guides us with His eye because He can see far beyond anything we can see. Because God knows the future completely, He will never be too late in telling us exactly what we need to know. Some things we need to plan for in the distant future, but most things are achieved simply by walking by faith today. As we trust God to give us wisdom for today's decisions, He will lead us a step at a time into what He wants us to be doing in the future. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9).

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**James 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.**

Amplified Yet you do not know [the least thing] about what may happen tomorrow. What is the nature of your life? You are [really] but a wisp of vapor (a puff of smoke, a mist) that is visible for a little while and then disappears [into thin air].

NET James 4:14 You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life like? For you are a puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes.

GNT James 4:14 ο τινες ο κ π στασθε τ τ ς α ριον πο α ζω μ ν· τ μ ς γ ρ στε π ρ ς λ γον φαινομ νη, πειτα κα φανιζομ νη.

NLT James 4:14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog-- it's here a little while, then it's gone.

KJV James 4:14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

ESV James 4:14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

ASV James 4:14 whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

CSB James 4:14 You don't even know what tomorrow will bring-- what your life will be! For you are like smoke that appears for a little while, then vanishes.

NIV James 4:14 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 vanishes.

NKJ James 4:14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

NRS James 4:14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

YLT James 4:14 who do not know the thing of the morrow; for what is your life? for it is a vapour that is appearing for a little, and then is vanishing;

NAB James 4:14 you have no idea what your life will be like tomorrow. You are a puff of smoke that appears briefly and then disappears.

NJB James 4:14 You never know what will happen tomorrow: you are no more than a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears.

GWN James 4:14 You don't know what will happen tomorrow. What is life? You are a mist that is seen for a moment and then disappears.

BBE James 4:14 When you are not certain what will take place tomorrow. What is your life? It is a mist, which is seen for a little time and then is gone.

- You are just a vapor that appears for a little while Jas 1:10 Job 7:6,7 9:25,26 14:1,2 Ps 39:5 89:47 90:5-7 102:3 Isa 38:12 1Pe 1:24 4:7 1Jn 2:17
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## UNCERTAINTY AND FLEETING FRAGILITY OF LIFE

**Our life** -- a vapor, a puff of smoke, a cloud of dust, a shadow, a breath, a blade of grass, a cloud, a flower, etc [see metaphors](#)

[below](#)), here today, gone tomorrow. Our time on earth is a short time! Only God knows how many grains of sand so to speak remain in the hourglass of our lives! But you can be sure of this, that as you read this note, grains of sand are continuing to drop through the hourglass and one day it will be empty, perhaps sooner than you think. Upshot? Redeem the Time beloved! See [discussion of redeem the time below](#).

In this passage James give 2 reasons that it so foolish to leave God out of one's plans for their life - (1) Uncertainty about what the future holds and (2) the brevity of life.

**Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow-** A good "commentary" on this statement is Proverbs 27:1 which says "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." Amen to that proverb! Indeed, tomorrow is not certain! James says in essence the one certainty in our life is that it is uncertain.

Tomorrow cannot be found on God's calendar.

Tomorrow is the road that leads to the town called Never.

Tomorrow-is the locked door that shuts people out of Heaven.

Tomorrow is the nursemaid of perdition.

Tomorrow is Satan's word.

Those who expect to repent tomorrow usually die today.

Don't count on tomorrow.

2 Corinthians 6:2 He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"–

- For the unbeliever, today is the day you need to believe in Jesus. You may not have tomorrow!
- For the believer, today is the day you need to surrender in brokenness and humility to His purpose and plan for your life.

Yesterday is a canceled check, gone forever.

Tomorrow is a promissory note, it might never be redeemed.

Today is cash in hand, spend it wisely!

**The ESV (NET, et al)** have a different translation than the NAS - Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." One of the greatest questions ever asked is that by James "What is life?" The Greek adjective [poios](#) (= a qualitative interrogative - of what character) is more literally read "What kind of life?" Or "Of what nature is your life?" He is going to tell us with the metaphor "vapor" that it is a swift life, a transitory life. James is not asking about the origin of life, but is referring specifically to the span of our conscious existence on earth. So James is not worried about how we got here, but is more interested in what we do while we are here!

**Solomon** writes "If no one knows what will happen, who can tell him when it will happen?" (Eccl 8:7)

**Spurgeon** - The apostle emphasizes the folly of this supposed foresight by telling us that we cannot even reckon upon another day.....Even in the morning we cannot make sure of the eventide, nor in the evening can we reckon upon the morning. James puts the matter strongly when he asks: "What is your life?" You do not know what is going to happen on the morrow, for you do not know your own life. What is it?

**Know (understand)(1987)(epistamai)** means to understand and in this case is modified by an absolute negative (ou), which indicates to put it in modern vernacular "They don't have a clue about their life tomorrow!"

**Life (2222)(zoe)** in Scripture usually refers to supernatural life in contrast to a life subject to eternal death (Jn 3:36). Richards writes that "Zoe in classical Greek refers to natural life--the principle that enables living things to move and to grow."

You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away - James uses a striking metaphor which is translated "mist" (NRSV), "like a puff of smoke." The word transitory is defined as lasting a very short time. Vapor (steam, smoke) is transitory and is a perfect picture of our life. Imagine the steam rising from the tea pot, a puff of smoke from a cigar, one's breath on a cold day. All gone in an instant. James says that is our life on earth! Given that fact how foolish we are to plan our lives without serious consideration of God's will for our life (see [resources below](#))! The Bible gives many pictures to help us understand the transitory, brief nature of our life (See [Excursus below](#)). It seems that God really wants us to grasp this vital truth.

This is the second time James has emphasized the uncertainty and brevity of life for in James 1:10-11 he said

"the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises

with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

**Appears (shines)(5316)(phaino)** means to bring to light, become visible. James says we appear, then we vanish.

**THOUGHT** - We need to make our brief "vapor like" appearance in time count for eternity. Paul gives us some help here as he uses the same verb *phaino* to encourage us "to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear (or shine) as lights in the world." (Php 2:15+) Beloved, how is your light shining before the lost? The verb *phaino* is also used of to describe another appearance that will change everything! Jesus said "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear (*phaino*) in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." (Mt 24:30+).

The truth of the [Second Coming](#) is mentioned directly or indirectly in 1 in 30 NT passages so clearly the Spirit wants the Second Coming on our "spiritual radar."

**APPLICATION** - GOD knows that what we are looking for will (or at least should) impact what we are living for. What would happen if the church began to look expectantly for Jesus' Return?

**QUOTE** - The primitive church thought more about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ than about death or about heaven. The early Christians were looking not for a cleft in the ground called a grave but for a cleavage in the sky called Glory. They were watching not for the undertaker but for the Uppertaker. – Alexander Maclaren

The early church was on fire preaching the word – they were fueled by the truth that Jesus might return in their day. They had a secret way of identifying with one another – they would whisper "[Maranatha](#)." (See [A Maranatha Mindset](#); play "[Maranatha](#)")

What impact might an expectancy of the imminency of the Second Coming have on our sermons? [D L Moody](#) the greatest evangelist of the 19th century testified that "For many years I have never given an address without the consciousness that the Lord may come before I have finished." Do you think he preached the word with Spirit empowered passion and a sense of urgency?

**ILLUSTRATION** - Many years ago I heard a true story about Shepherd's Home for children with developmental disabilities where they taught that Jesus would save them and one day heal them of all disabilities. The director said that his biggest problem was dirty windows Because the disabled children would press their hands, noses and lips against the windows always looking to see if today might be the day that Jesus would return for them and take them home where they will be healed of all their disabilities. Talk about having your priorities in the right place! Oh, to have the heart attitude of these precious little children! Amen!

**A little while (*pros oligon*)** - It is interesting that the identical Greek phrase is found in the context where Paul commands Timothy "discipline ([gumnazo](#) in the [present imperative](#) - one can only carry out this command by relying on [the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourself for godliness" (1 Ti 4:7+) and then explains "for bodily discipline is only of little (*pros oligon*) profit, but godliness is profitable ([ophelimos](#)) for all things, since it holds ([present tense](#) - continually holds) promise for the present life (LIFE THAT IS A VAPOR) and also for the life to come (LIFE THAT IS EVERLASTING)." (1 Ti 4:8+). So what Paul is commanding Timothy in 1 Ti 4:7 present us a perfect [segue](#) to James' warning that life is just a vapor. In other words given the brevity of life described by James, pursue the practice of godliness described by Paul which will benefit you not only in this short life, but even better will benefit you in eternity, the life to come!

Write your plans in pencil,  
Then give God the eraser.

**Vapor (822)(*atmis*)** literally means steam, mist, vapor, smoky vapor (like that of a volcanic eruption). James metaphorical use obviously speaks of the transient nature of our brief life on earth. BDAG says it is used in 1 Cl 17:6 as "steam that rises from a pot, typical of nothingness." The only other NT use is in Peter's Pentecostal sermon to the Jews describing that God will grant wonders in heaven and earth which include "blood, fire and vapor of smoke." (Acts 2:19+). Robertson adds *atmis* is "like *atmos*, from which our atmosphere."

The metaphorical description of life as a vapor would have been familiar to James' Jewish readers for Jewish apocalyptic literature compared the wicked are to a vapor or mist suggesting they were transitory (4 Ezra 7:61; 2 Baruch 82:3; 1 Enoch 97:8–10).

**Atmis in the Septuagint (Lxx)** - Ge 19:28 = "like the smoke of a furnace"; Lev. 16:13 = "the cloud (atmis) of incense may cover the mercy seat"; Ezek. 8:11 = "cloud of incense rising"; Hos. 13:3 = "like smoke from a chimney" Joel 2:30 "Blood, fire and columns of smoke" (Peter quotes the Septuagint in his sermon)

#### Related Resources:

- [Will of God - extensive notes](#)
- [How can I know God's will for my life? What does the Bible say about knowing God's will?](#)
- [What is the difference between God's sovereign will and God's revealed will?](#)
- [What is the key to hearing God's voice?](#)
- [Does God have a plan for me?](#)

**John Butler** - Our text is to help us set our clocks correctly. It is about time and how little we know about tomorrow. It is about the shortness of life. While this text is very true most people live without reference to this text. Everything is for today. They ignore their ignorance and go pell-mell towards hell.

**Zodhiates** - Oh, vain man, who with one hand holds the present and with the other the future, you do not stop to realize that it is only by the sustaining grace of God that you own this very instant in which you live! (Borrow [Faith, Love, and Hope: An Exegetical Commentary on James](#))

**William Arnot** was right when he wrote "'To-morrow" is the devil's great ally—the very Goliath in whom he trusts for victory. "Now" is the stripling sent forth against him.... The world will freely agree to be Christians to-morrow, if Christ will permit them to be worldly to-day."

**George Bernard Shaw** astutely observed, "The statistics on death are quite impressive. One out of one people die."

After John Brown was arrested at Harper's Ferry he made this very significant observation about life: "There is an eternity behind and an eternity before, and this little speck in the center, however long, is comparatively but a minute." In view of the extreme brevity of this life, it greatly and eternally benefits us to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:5).

Since we have already spent a certain portion of our life in pursuit of earthly trinkets which have no lasting value, surely we would see the wisdom of laboring now "for that food which endures to eternal life . . ." (John 6:27). How clear it is from an eternal perspective that our past life as an unbeliever is "sufficient" or enough time to have "worked out the will of the Gentiles (non-Christians)." (1 Peter 4:3+) Rousseau once wrote, "When a man dies he clutches in his hands only that which he has given away in his life." While we were unbelievers the only thing we could give away were the works of the flesh; let us therefore, "knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light" (Ro 13:12,13+). (Dwight Edwards)

**A T Robertson** - We are "a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Aristotle (Hist. An. vi. 7) uses these two verbs of the appearance and the disappearance of a flock of birds as they sweep across the sky. The usage occurs also of the eclipse of the sun. The transitoriness of human life should lead to full and hearty recognition of God, not to careless slighting of him. ([Commentary on James](#))

**Zodhiates** - When the eastern emperors were crowned at Constantinople, it is said to have been a custom for the royal mason to set before his majesty a certain number of marble slabs, one of which he was to choose to be his tombstone. It was thought well for him to remember his funeral at his coronation. Life is time, and the purpose of time is to prepare for eternity. A Greek philosopher, Anaxagoras, was asked what he thought he was born for. His answer was, "That I may meditate upon heaven." That is exactly what James wishes to impress upon us, that we are here to prepare for eternity and not primarily to amass wealth and have a good time (Borrow [Faith, Love, and Hope: An Exegetical Commentary on James](#))

**W. M. Lewis** said "The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it. "

**Here's a lie from the devil** - You have your whole life ahead of you. Serve God later on in your life. James corrects that false thinking. Because life is short, live for God while you have the time. Don't waste your life by selecting an inferior purpose that has no lasting value. Only God can make your life worthwhile, purposeful, and meaningful.

**Spurgeon** - "There are a thousand gates to death; and, though some seem to be narrow wickets, many souls have passed through them. Men have been choked by a grape stone, killed by a tile falling from the roof of a house, poisoned by a drop, carried off by a whiff of foul air. I know not what there is that is too little to slay the greatest king. It is a marvel that man lives at all."

**Vanishes away (853)**([aphanizo](#) from **aphanes** = hidden or literally "not appearing" from **a** = without + **phaino** = to appear) means to

cause to vanish, make disappear, make unseen, render invisible or unrecognizable. Aphanizo in the passive voice as here in James 4:14 means to be removed out of sight or to become invisible.

**THOUGHT** - It is notable that of the 5 NT uses of aphanizo, 2 of the other uses are by Jesus who describes the destructive effect of rust on "treasures" on earth (Mt 6:19+), and hence His charge to "store up ([present imperative](#) = command to make this your life's purpose or goal! Only possible as you rely on [the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) for yourselves treasures in Heaven where....rust" does not destroy (aphanizo). (Mt 6:20+) So while our temporal life on earth will vanish like a vapor, enabled by the Spirit (cf Jn 15:5), we can use our brief time here on earth to store up eternal treasures in Heaven! I would call that Amazing Grace indeed!

Knowing that you will soon vanish from earth, does this not motivate you to desire to store up treasure where it will not vanish and where you will not vanish?

**ILLUSTRATION** - Some years ago, I happened to have contact with two quite wealthy men during the same week. One was a former professor at a major university who, through a long series of good investments in real estate, had accumulated a fortune of possibly a hundred million dollars. But in the process he lost his family, his happiness, his peace of mind, and had aged far beyond his years. The other man, a pastor, also acquired his wealth through investments, but they were investments to which he paid little attention. Because of his financial independence, he gave to his church over the years considerably more than he was paid for being its pastor. He is one of the godliest, happiest, most fruitful, and contented persons I have ever met. (John MacArthur).

'Only one life twill soon be past,  
only what's done for Christ will last.'  
Are you doing anything that will last for eternity?

Related Resources:

- [What does the Bible say about saving for retirement?](#)
- [What is the Christian view of retirement?](#)
- [Should a Christian invest money in the stock market?](#)

## REDEEM THE TIME

IN LIGHT OF JAMES 4:14 WE NEED TO BE DILIGENT TO REDEEM THE TIME WE HAVE LEFT TO REDEEM!

Before reading on, pause and make a list of the things you value most in life. Undoubtedly God, Jesus, family, etc are at the top of your list. But did you list "TIME?" Play the song entitled "[Redeem the Time](#)" - It is beautiful vocal by David Smallwood with well done, and very moving graphics. Father, may the words of this song cause us to soberly ponder the length of eternity and the brevity of our opportunity to live our life in the power of the Spirit for the glory of Christ. Amen

**Ephesians 5:15-16+ has been called the Bible's key to TIME MANAGEMENT. In these passages Paul commands all believers**

**Therefore (because we have been awakened from spiritual stupor and spiritual death and have the light of Christ - Eph 5:14+) BE CAREFUL how you walk, not as unwise men ("fools"), but as wise, REDEEMING (making the most of) THE TIME, because (explains why we must redeem the time) the days are evil (Corollary: The evil of our day should motivate us to redeem the time)." (Eph 5:16+)**

Paul uses three Greek words or phrases that are very instructive, the first being the command to "**be careful** (present imperative = command to make this vigilant attitude our lifestyle) how you walk." The idea is we as believers are commanded to continually take heed, be alert, be vigilant, to discern with Spirit enabled vision. This command which calls for us to continually live our life wisely and continually dependent on and filled with or controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

**C H Spurgeon** paraphrases it "See then that ye walk circumspectly (being careful to consider all circumstances and all possible consequences), not carelessly, not thinking that it is of no importance how you live; but looking all round you, "walk circumspectly," watching lest even in seeking one good thing you spoil another." In other words, if we walk wisely, we will be careful not to let the good steal God's best!

**Charles Hummel** (borrow [Tyranny of the Urgent](#)) wrote that our "greatest danger is letting the urgent (secular) things crowd out the important (divine things)." Our problem is that too often we live by life's demands, instead of by God's priorities. Remember that life is too short for us to do everything we want to do, but it is long enough for us to do everything God wants us to do.

The second word is **REDEEM** (Eph 5:16+) is the Greek word *exagorazo* which literally means to "buy out of the market place." The picture is of a merchant who diligently seeks to buy up the best bargains in the market place, taking care not to miss the fleeting opportunities! REDEEM is in the present tense which calls for us to make it our lifestyle, our daily, moment by moment practice, to buy up for ourselves (to our eternal advantage) the strategic opportunities which God providentially places in our path. If we are walking wisely (Eph 5:15+), filled with God's Spirit (Eph 5:18+), we will be spiritually alert to those divine opportunities in the "marketplace", and will begin to view people and circumstances not just as encounters (or irritations) in time but as opportunities to impact eternity (read 2Cor 4:18+).

Each new day brings us 24 hours, 1440 minutes, 86,000 seconds, each moment a precious gift from God (Jas 1:17+), each calling for us to be good stewards, mindful that one day we must give an account for how we spent the time God loaned us, how effectively we "bought up" the opportunities He provided. If someone gave us \$1440 each day and said spend it or lose it, how diligent would we be to comply? Yesterday is but a cancelled check. Tomorrow is a promissory note. Today is all of the cash that you have. Spend it wisely. As someone has well said

I have only just a minute, only 60 seconds in it;  
forced upon me; can't refuse it;  
didn't seek it, didn't chose it.  
But it's up to me just how I use it.  
I must suffer if I lose it, give account if I abuse it.  
Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it.

A survey asked "What do you have to live for?" to which 94% answered they were just enduring today and living for tomorrow. That is living unwisely (Eph 5:15). Too many people miss today because they are worrying about tomorrow (Read Jesus' advice Mt 6:34+). Worry does not make us ready but unready to redeem the time. As Adrian Rogers said "We face the future out of breath, because we have been fighting tomorrow's battles today!"

Wisdom is taking every opportunity today and fully using the time granted us. We have each been given the same amount of time but the difference is how we redeem this divine gift. Instead of killing time, redeem it. Instead of counting the days, make your days count. Indeed, "ETERNITY will be appreciated only in the measure that we have rightly handled TIME!" Redemption of time is preparation for eternity. The present should be viewed as preparation for the future. As Spurgeon rightly observed "'NOW' is the watchword of the wise." LATER may be too late! Right NOW counts for ever. How goes your preparation for the future dear saint? It's now or never. "Time is the seed of eternity." To make our life count for eternity, we must be wise in how we spend our time today. What will your eternal harvest be? H A Ironside agrees that "Time is given us to use in view of eternity."

Psalm 107:2+ says "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Paul would say let the redeemed of the Lord DO so (redeem the time in the power of the Spirit for the glory of God!). We should redeem the time because we are redeemed!

In a letter to his wife John Wesley wrote "Redeem the time. Catch the golden moments as they fly." May the Spirit (Eph 5:18) enable us to live wisely (Eph 5:15) and catch the golden moments as they fly by (Eph 5:16)! Amen.

The word TIME (Gk = *kairos*) is better translated OPPORTUNITY and refers to a fixed and definite period of time during which something can be accomplished that cannot be accomplished after the time has passed. The idea of *kairos* is not "clock time" (Gk - *chronos*) but what one writer refers to as "kingdom opportunities." Wuest adds that Paul's "idea is not to make best use of time as such, which is what we should do in the sense of not wasting it, but of taking advantage of the OPPORTUNITIES that present themselves." The time/opportunity for bringing forth fruit is the spring SEASON (*kairos*) in which the tree bears fruit, in contrast to late autumn, when there is no fruit. And so *kairos* is the time which God allots to each believer to bring forth for themselves "spiritual fruit." This truth calls for us to "Seize the Day" (*Carpe diem*) because "Time flies" (*Tempus fugit*). As Horace Mann put it "Lost yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward is offered, for they are gone forever." *Kairos* represents the best time to do something, the moment when circumstances are most suitable. *Kairos* can be a moment or a season, but always refers to specific times in which opportunity is "ripe", so that when the time passes, so does the opportunity - "Opportunity only knocks once."

The word OPPORTUNITY is derived from the Latin "ob portu." In ancient times before modern harbors, ships had to wait for the timing of the tide before they could make it safely to port. Thus "OB PORTU," described the ship waiting "FOR PORT," ready to seize the crucial moment when it could ride the tide into safe harbor. The captain knew that if he missed the passing tide, the ship would have to wait for another tide to come in. God gives each of us many "ob portu's", but we must be spiritually wise and Spirit

filled in order to see and seize them. As Charles Swindoll said "We are all faced with a series of great opportunities (opportunities) brilliantly disguised as impossible situations." Shakespeare's famous line from Julius Caesar conveys the same thought: "There is a tide in the affairs of men (an opportunity), Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat; And we must take the current when it serves, Or lose our ventures." In short, KAIROS conveys the sense of an "opportune time," a "window of opportunity".

**John Broadus** said "Opportunity is like a fleet horse that pauses for a moment at one's side. If you fail to mount him in that moment, you can hear the clatter of his hoofs down the corridors of time. That opportunity is gone forever."

**Jonathan Edwards** America's greatest theologian understood Paul's charge to REDEEM THE TIME and as a young man wrote "Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved: to live with all my might while I do live." "Time that is past you can never recall, Of time to come, you are not sure at all; Only the present is now in your power, Therefore, redeem and improve every hour."

**John Piper** reiterates that the "OPPORTUNITY will never come again. The days are evil; opposition is great; be wise as serpents (Mt 10:16). Understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph 5:17+)... These words ring with a sense of urgency. They are like the words of a platoon leader addressing his unit just before they enter combat. The air is tense and your heart is beating fast and, even if you love battle, your hands are sweaty. "Watch your step; be smart; don't miss your opportunity; keep yourself lean for the battle!"... In other words, the Christian life is a vigilant life, defensively guarding itself from the subtleties of the evil days and offensively redeeming the time to strike for love and righteousness again and again. We are a vigilant people at war with unbelief and evil. O to be a faithful steward of the breath God has given me... Surely God means for our minutes on earth to count for something significant. Paul said, "In the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain" (Php 2:16+). In the same way, I have good hope from the Lord that my "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1Co 15:58+). And I commend this promise to you. No minute need be lived in vain. Eternity will render it significant if lived in faith for the glory of God. In the end we rest in this: "My times are in Your hand" (Psalm 31:15).

**Time** is a strange commodity-we can't save it, retrieve it, relive it, stretch it, borrow it, loan it, stop it or store it, but can only use it or lose it. We can't call time out in the game of life. Indeed, there is no such thing as a literal "instant replay." That appears only on film. "When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept. When as a youth I dreamed and talked, time walked. When I became a full grown man, time ran. When older still I daily grew, time flew. Soon I shall find in traveling on, time gone." The pioneer missionary, Robert Moffatt, said, "We shall have all eternity in which to celebrate our victories, but only one short hour before the sunset in which to win them." Jesus said "I must work the works of Him Who sent me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work." (Jn 9:4) It's not how long we live that counts, but how we live, so "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Ec 9:10a).

"We cannot afford to be idle; neither do we desire it. The call is, REDEEM THE TIME. Be always doing something that will last; be always stretching forward to the prize (Php 3:13-14+). It will soon be ours, for the Lord is at hand. It is a prize worth all our labour and sorrow here. The very thought of it is enough to put to flight all murmuring, or selfishness, or sloth. To labour here is as blessed as it is to rest hereafter. Work on, work on, till the day of recompense arrives."

"The time is short! If thou wouldst work for God, it must be now;

If thou wouldst win the garland for thy brow,

Redeem the time. With His reward He comes;

He tarries not; His day is near;

When men least look for Him will He be here;

Prepare for Him!"

(H. Bonar)

**Paul exhorts believers** "while we have OPPORTUNITY (kairos), let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." (Gal 6:10+) If one misses the "seasonable opportunity", he will miss the eternal harvest associated with that spiritual opportunity. Yesterday is past and cannot be changed, and tomorrow may not come, so make the most of the opportunities God gives you today. May God's Spirit enable us to seize the day, while we may! And so again Paul commands us "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of (redeeming, buying up) the OPPORTUNITY (kairos). Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person." (Col 4:5-6+)

**Harry Ironside** exhorts us "to be as alert for witnessing to the lost as bargain hunters are to purchase goods to advantage. Yet how often we neglect to use the circumstances which are put in our way, where we may say a word for our Lord and endeavor to point the lost to Him. Our intentions are good, but we become so occupied with other matters, many of them trifling in the extreme, and before we realize it the person to whom we should have spoken is beyond our reach." "

We are to be alive to every opportunity to witness in the chance encounter, the unexpected turn in conversation, the opening that

comes in the expression of a need or the asking of a question, the signal given by what may appear casual but reflects something deeper, the unplanned incident that brings the "outsider" into our life in a way that mind and heart can meet. We are to seize the critical moment when it comes... There are intersections upon which we sometimes come abruptly. We have to choose, and destiny is in the choice. There are flashes of insight that break in upon us, guidance, intuition, discernment, which, if we do not receive, record, and act upon, we lose." Our few days here on earth are so short and precious, in relation to eternity, that we ought never to waste time on selfish trivia, but to use it only on that "which is good, to the use of edifying" (Eph 4:29±). (Dunnam)

**Adoniram Judson** a famous missionary to Burma wrote that "A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity... the same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever... each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny... How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness! It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, (enabled by God's Spirit) resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly (forever) marked."

**David Brainerd** whose candle burned so brightly that God brought him home at the relatively young age of 29 wrote in his diary "Oh, how precious is time; and how guilty it makes me feel when I think I have trifled away and misemployed it or neglected to fill up each part of it with duty to the utmost of my ability and capacity. Oh, that I might not loiter on my heavenly journey!" It's too late to redeem the time that is past, but not the time that is passing!

Some novel ways to redeem the time - Ask your waiter if there is anything you can pray for him (her) when you pray over you meal. You will be surprised at the variety of responses, some of which open a door for the Gospel! When you get one of those irritating calls asking for money, turn it into an opportunity to ask your caller if they know Jesus as Savior. As an aside it is interesting how the number of calls decreases! Pray daily for an unreached people group (see [Why you should redeem the time to interceded for unreached peoples](#))

Let us not just "mark time," but use time to make our mark!

Yes, time flies, but remember that you (with the aid of the Spirit) are the "navigator!"

**Adrian Rogers** offers some other practical thoughts on redeeming the time:(1) Learn to live in the eternal now. Today is the only day you have. Redeem the time. (2) Stop saying, "If I had time." You do have time. (3) Stop worrying about tomorrow, and stop waiting for tomorrow. Give God today, and He will take care of tomorrow. (4) Cut yourself loose from the past. Bury your failure in the grave of God's forgetfulness (read Mic 7:18-19, Isaiah 43:25, 44:22), and let Him give you a brand new day. (5) If you have not accepted Christ, now is the time "for He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME (kairos = the opportune time!) I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU"; behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME (kairos)," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION" (2Cor 6:2)

### Let us pray like the old Puritan

Turn my heart from vanity, from dissatisfactions, from uncertainties of the present state, to an eternal interest in Christ. Let me remember that life is short and unforeseen, and is only an opportunity for usefulness; GIVE ME A HOLY AVARICE TO REDEEM THE TIME, to awake at every call to charity (love) and piety (godliness), so that I may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, instruct the ignorant, reclaim the vicious, forgive the offender, diffuse the Gospel, show neighborly love to all. Let me live a life of self-distrust, dependence on Thyself (Thy Spirit), mortification, crucifixion, prayer." (Borrow [Valley of Vision](#))

Dear reader, may God by His Spirit cause each of us to so order our steps that when that great day comes we might hear those glorious words

"Well done, good and faithful servant, you were faithful in a few things, I will put your in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your Master." (Mt 25:21)

"So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom." (Ps 90:12)

Now take a moment, as you ponder the few moments of your life which remain and the poignant words of Robin Mark's song...

When It's All Been Said and Done  
There is just one thing that matters.  
Did I do my best to live for Truth?  
Did I live my life for You?  
When It's All Been Said and Done  
All my treasures will mean nothing.

Only what I've done for love's reward,  
Will stand the test of time.

[Play "When It's All Been Said and Done"](#)

**C. T. Studd** amply illustrated the importance of making your one life count for the Lord when he penned these powerful words.

Two little lines I heard one day,  
Traveling along life's busy way;  
Bringing conviction to my heart,  
And from my mind would not depart;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,  
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;  
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,  
And stand before His Judgement seat;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice,  
Gently pleads for a better choice  
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,  
And to God's holy will to cleave;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years,  
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;  
Each with its days I must fulfill,  
living for self or in His will;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me sore,  
When Satan would a victory score;  
When self would seek to have its way,  
Then help me Lord with joy to say;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,  
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;  
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,  
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn,  
And from the world now let me turn;  
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,  
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,

Now let me say, "Thy will be done";  
And when at last I'll hear the call,  
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";  
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last."

Only one life, 'twill soon be past,  
Only what's done for Christ will last.  
And when I am dying, how happy I'll be,  
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee."

A farmer's clock ran amuck one morning and struck seventeen. The man of the house jumped up and ran all over the place, saying, "Get up, it's later than it ever has been before!" It is later than it ever has been by God's eternal timepiece. It is later than you think.

**Larry Moyer** - Decide now what you want written on your tombstone, then live your life backward from there. Life is short and ought to be taken seriously. Decide now how you'd like to be remembered, then live your life accordingly. Do you want your tombstone to read, "He was the head of his corporation," or, "She was the best in her field"? Or would you rather it reflect an important contribution you've made to life?... If, at the end of your life, you want to say "I did," instead of "I wish," alter your course today. (31 days to contagious living: a daily devotional guide on modeling Christ to others)

**ILLUSTRATION**: Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel awoke one morning and read his own obituary in the local newspaper. It read, "Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in a war than ever before, and he died a very rich man." It was Alfred's older brother who had died; a newspaper reporter had bungled the epitaph. But that account had a tremendous impact on Nobel, who decided he wanted to be remembered for something different. As a result, he initiated the Nobel Prize to reward individuals who foster peace. He said,

"Every man ought to have the chance  
to correct his epitaph in midstream and write a new one."

When one door closes, another one opens, but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one that has opened for us.—Alexander Graham Bell

**TICK, TICK, TICK** - Do you have a clock or watch available with a secondhand on it? Stop and follow that hand as it ticks away 1 minute. Those seconds, of course, are the way we measure time, and time is the very essence of our lives. By the time you reach the age of 75, the clocks and watches of this world will have ticked away a total of nearly 2.5 billion seconds.

**Bernard Berenson**, an internationally famous art critic, had a zest for life. Even when he was in ill health, he cherished every moment. Shortly before he died at age 94, he said to a friend, "I would willingly stand at street corners, hat in hand, asking passersby to drop their unused minutes into it." Oh, that we would learn to appreciate the value of time!

We certainly don't want to be so time-conscious that we become driven workaholics, neglecting our families, never relaxing with our friends, too busy to smell the roses or admire a sunset. Yet Paul urged us to redeem the time (Ephesians 5:15-16), and Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days (NOT OUR YEARS), that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). Let's ask the Lord to help us appreciate the value of time. May we wisely invest our seconds, minutes, hours, and days, realizing that beyond time lies eternity.

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**Spurgeon** - God has given us memory that we may look backward, and it were well if we used our memories better for remembrance, reflection, and repentance, but God has given us no eyes wherewith to pry into the future. He unveils the past to our penitence; but he veils the future from our curiosity. Dark days may be near at hand for some of us, but we do not perceive them. Let us be thankful that we do not, for we might multiply our afflictions by the foresight of them, and the prospect of evil to come might cast a gloom over pleasure near at hand. As we may feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, so may we faint under a thousand lashes in dreading a single stroke. It is good also that our God conceals from us our earthly joys until the time for their arrival. Great prosperity may await you, and a considerable enlargement of your temporal comfort, but you do not know it; and it is as well that you should not, for you might be none the better for the prospect. Earth's goods are like bird-lime, and are fearfully apt to glue us down to things below, and prevent our soaring towards heaven. If then we could know all the pleasurable events that may happen to us we might become more worldly and more earthbound than we are. None of us could desire that this present evil world should have an increased influence over us: we are glad that it should have less, and therefore we rejoice that its future has such slight power over us because of its being unknown.

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**Augustine** rightly said, "God will not suffer man to have the knowledge of things to come: for if he had prescience of his prosperity, he would be careless: and understanding of his adversity, he would be senseless."

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A millionaire in New York came to the end of his journey and died. On his deathbed he gave continual expression to his remorse for what his conscience told him had been an ill-spent life. "Oh," he exclaimed, "if I could only be spared for a few years, I would give all the wealth I have amassed in my lifetime! It is a life devoted to money-getting that I regret. It is this which weighs me down and makes me despair of the life hereafter!" What this man regretted at the end of his life, James wants us to realize at the beginning of ours. (Zodhiates - Borrow [Faith, Love, and Hope: An Exegetical Commentary on James](#))

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"The past is dead and has no resurrection, but the future is endowed with such a life that it lives to us even in anticipation. The past is, in many things, the foe of mankind; the future is in most things our friend. For the past has no hope; the future is both hope and fruition. Those who are solely governed by the past stand, like Lot's wife, crystallized in the act of looking backward, and forever incapable of looking forward." - Unknown

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## **The Brevity Of Life**

What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

As the second millennium was drawing to a close, the publishing industry poured out a flood of books about the end—not just the conclusion of a thousand-year period, but the ending of everything imaginable.

James Gleick has pointed out that analysts of our culture have been prophesying the end of acting, aging, the alphabet, architecture, art, beauty, bureaucracy, capitalism, certainty, Christendom, . . . well, the list is far too long for us to reproduce here in its entirety. While Gleick doesn't concern himself with biblical prophecy, he writes that all these publications "suggest a kind of destiny in human affairs, a one-way path toward fulfillment or climax."

Scripture, of course, has much to say about endings, especially the end of history. Jesus Christ promised to return and bring an end to the present order of things (Matthew 24).

Important as it is to study what the Bible reveals about the endtimes, it's even more important for us to pray as David did: "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am" (Psalm 39:4). We are to ask God to give us an understanding of the vapor-like brevity of life. This can motivate us to seek God's will and to put His interests first (Matthew 6:33). By: Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Life's fleeting day will soon be gone  
And we will pass away;  
So teach us, Lord, to know Your will  
That we may choose Your way. —DJD

It's never too soon to invest in eternity.

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## **James 4:13-17 GOD WILL GUIDE YOU**

We do not need to be in a state of unrest about the future. Some worry needlessly and wonder, "Why doesn't God let me know what He has in mind for me in the future?"

Some young people may be thinking about the mission field and wondering what God's will is for them five or ten years from now. It is important, however, that we recognize that God knows everything about the future, even if we do not, so the important thing is to trust Him today with our lives and leave the future to Him.

If God is calling you today into some particular ministry, then obey Him, even though you do not know what the future holds. As we are sensitive to God, we can expect Him to guide us.

Psalm 32:8 says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." I'm so glad He guides us with His eye because He can see far beyond anything we can see.

Because God knows the future completely, He will never be too late in telling us exactly what we need to know. Some things we need to plan for in the distant future, but most things are achieved simply by walking by faith today.

As we trust God to give us wisdom for today's decisions, He will lead us a step at a time into what He wants us to be doing in the future.

"The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9). (Theodore Epp)

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## Tomorrow's Terrors

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. —Hebrews 13:8

Today's Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-8

Peter Marshall, whose dynamic preaching attracted crowds of people, died suddenly on the morning of January 25, 1949, at the age of 46. In one of his sermons he had said: "When the clock strikes for me, I shall go, not one minute early, and not one minute late. Until then, there is nothing to fear. I know that the promises of God are true, for they have been fulfilled in my life time and time again. Jesus still teaches and guides and protects and heals and comforts, and still wins our complete trust and our love."

Do you and I share that same fear-dispelling conviction? Can each of us, like David, say to our Lord, "My times are in Your hand"? (Psalm 31:15). Are we confident that God holds us in His almighty hands? Can we boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6).

True, we may have concern about the days ahead. As Scripture reminds us, we "do not know what will happen tomorrow" (James 4:14). But we do know that whatever happens He will always be with us (Hebrews 13:5). That knowledge can lighten any burden of worry about the future.

Some anxiety about the process of dying is normal. Yet, by the grace of God and by the comfort of His Spirit, we can face tomorrow's terrors with courage. By: Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I don't know about tomorrow,  
Nor what coming days will bring;  
But I know my Lord is with me,  
And His praise my heart will sing.  
—Fitzhugh

Worry can do a lot of things to you;  
prayer can do a lot of things for you.

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## An Uncertain Future

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

The patriarch Isaac was an old man when he said, "I do not know the day of my death" (Genesis 27:2). That is true of us whether we're young or old. We never know when the thread of life is going to be broken. This fact was vividly illustrated by something that happened in France in 1965.

A lawyer, Andre-Francois Raffray, agreed to purchase the apartment of Jeanne Louise Calment in the city of Arles. There was a legal arrangement under which he, then age 47, agreed to pay Mademoiselle Calment, then age 90, \$500 a month for the right to move into her splendid apartment when she died. What a bargain! Or so he thought. She went on living for 32 more years, while he lived for only 30. He died at 77, after paying \$184,000 for an apartment he never occupied. His widow and heirs had to continue paying Mademoiselle Calment the agreed monthly payment until she died—at age 122! On her 120th birthday she had commented, "In life, one sometimes makes bad deals."

What a great reminder that none of us can know when we will die. It may be that "this night your soul will be required of you" (Luke 12:20). How vitally important, therefore, that you make sure of your eternal destiny! You can do that right now by asking Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior. —By: Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If you know Christ as Savior,  
you can face the future with joy.

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## Spend Them Wisely

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. —Psalm 90:12

Today's Scripture: Psalm 90:1-17

A high school teacher in Los Angeles had a unique way of stimulating her students to think. From time to time she would write brief messages on the chalkboard that were unrelated to their current studies.

One morning, the students found the number 25,550 written on the board. One pupil finally raised his hand and asked the instructor why that particular number was there. She explained that 25,550 represented the number of days in the life of a person who lives to be 70. The teacher was trying to emphasize life's brevity and the value of each day.

When I was young and looked ahead, time seemed to move so slowly. It was hard to imagine what older folks often said—that time passed so quickly they wondered where it had gone. But as I grew older, the years seemed short and fleeting, especially when compared with eternity.

This underscores what James said about life: "It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Therefore, it's important that we make the most of our opportunities to honor God, serve others, and proclaim Christ. Let's ask God to "teach us to number our days" (Psalm 90:12) so that we will spend them wisely! By: Richard DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Don't just spend time; invest it.

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### **"Nothing Is Ever Sure"**

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture:

James 4:13-17

In November 1975, the huge freighter Edmund Fitzgerald sank in the cold waters of Lake Superior during a fierce storm. Only a week before the tragedy, chief steward Robert Rafferty had written to his wife, "I may be home by November 8. However, nothing is ever sure." The prophetic irony of his words was noted in a newspaper article listing the 29 crew members who perished in the disaster.

Not a day passes without a reminder that our earthly life can end at any moment. All we need to do is read the obituary column. One message comes through loud and clear: We're here today, but we may be gone tomorrow! "What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14).

Is our only certainty, then, the sobering prospect that at any moment we may be thrust into eternity? No! Christ is the anchor of the soul. He paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. If we admit our guilt before God, we will receive forgiveness and eternal life by trusting Him. He has promised to remain with us, even in the hour of death.

Does your earthly life seem futile because "nothing is ever sure"? Then trust Christ! He provides a joyous certainty about eternity that can be yours right now. By: Dennis J. DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Life is uncertain,  
Death is sure,  
Sin is the cause,  
Christ is the cure!  
—Anon.

It's never too soon to accept Christ,  
but at any moment it could be too late.

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### **Will You Live To Be 100?**

Read: James 4:13-17

What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. —James 4:14

Magazine publisher J. I. Rodale, a zealous advocate of health foods, claimed at the age of 72 that he would live to be 100. The

same week that his prediction appeared in The New York Times, he was being interviewed for a television program, again claiming that his bones were as strong as ever. Moments after making his boast, he died of a heart attack.

Dr. Stuart Berger, a nutritionist, claimed that he had the formula for living past the century mark. Although he had supposedly found the secret of youthfulness and had convinced many to follow his advice, he died in his sleep at the age of 40, grossly overweight.

Then there was author Jim Fixx, who advocated running to prevent coronary trouble. Yet at the age of 52 he died of a heart attack—yes, ironically, while running.

Common sense dictates that we ought to take every possible measure to keep ourselves healthy. But in the final analysis, each of us must pray, “I trust in You, O Lord . . . My times are in Your hand” (Ps. 31:14-15).

Because any day, even today, may be our final day on earth, we need to be sure that we are ready to depart. Are you? By Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Whether we're old or young, not one of us can say  
Just when will come to each his final earthly day;  
Thus while this life is ours, Lord, may we now prepare,  
So death may never come and take us unaware.  
—Anon.

If we are prepared to die,  
we are prepared to live.

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### **Will You Be Around?**

Read: James 4:13-17

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

I read the following account in a medical magazine: When the physical examination of a 78-year-old man had been completed, the doctor recommended that he come back in 6 months for another checkup. At this suggestion the aged patient shook his head and said, “Doctor, I don’t think I’ll be around then.”

“Nonsense!” replied the physician with a reassuring smile. “You’ll be around for years yet.”

The elderly man gave him an odd look, then explained, “I mean that I’ll be in Florida. I go there every January.”

This story may cause us to smile, but the question it raises is very sobering. Will you and I be around tomorrow, next month, next year? It surely is sensible to make plans for the future, but we must always do so with an awareness of life’s uncertainty.

As James reminded us in the Bible reading for today, life is “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (4:14). Because of this we ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (v.15).

Will you be around in 6 months? Let this question prompt you to live faithfully for the Lord Jesus Christ today. By Richard DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The present only is our own,  
Live and toil with a will;  
Do not wait until tomorrow,  
For life's clock may then be still.  
—McCartney

Settle all accounts today;  
you can't bank on tomorrow.

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### **What Will You Write?**

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: Psalm 90

In January 2006, a mine explosion in rural West Virginia threatened the lives of 13 coal miners. Having grown up in that state, I was among the millions riveted to the news for the next few days. Tragically, all but one of the miners were found dead. To compound the pain of that loss, the first reports given to the families said that all but one had been found alive. When the grim news of the deaths came, the grief was compounded with anger—and a desire to blame someone for the whole gut-wrenching event.

At one of the funerals, however, Rev. Wease Day asked the hurting to look in a different direction—within. During their last hours, some of the miners had written notes to their families, in some cases offering comfort and hope. In light of that, Pastor Day urged his congregation not to seek to fix blame. He instead challenged them to imagine what they would write in a farewell note if they had only hours to live.

In some ways we are like those miners. We are trapped in a dark world and are facing physical death. How we live our lives as followers of Christ becomes our “note” to the world. James wrote that life is “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (4:14). By God’s grace, what will you write with your life today? By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord and Savior, Christ divine,  
Reign within this heart of mine;  
May my witness ever be  
Always, only, Lord for Thee.  
—Brandt

A Christlike life is a message of hope to a searching world.

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### **Life's Uncertainty**

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

Life's one certainty is its sheer uncertainty. As Scripture reminds us, we “do not know what will happen tomorrow” (James 4:14). Real estate developer Larry Silverstein can bear witness to the truth of that text. Though he owned impressive property in New York City, he was, according to his own testimony, obsessed by the desire to add the great Twin Towers of the World Trade Center to his holdings. His wish came true. Six weeks before those two imposing skyscrapers were destroyed by terrorists, he had obtained a 99-year lease worth \$3.2 billion for that majestic center.

Sadly, the fulfillment of our dreams can sometimes turn into nightmares. This reminds us not only of the uncertainty of life, but also of the need to align our desires with God's will. Experience teaches us that if we allow presumption to run our lives, the fulfillment of our own compulsive dreams may turn to dust and ashes.

There are legitimate desires, to be sure, but the book of James tells us how to approach them. Instead of presuming that our plans and dreams will be fulfilled, we ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (4:15).

When we submit our plans to God's will, we can enjoy His peace in the midst of life's uncertainty. By: Vernon Grounds [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Our life is uncertain, our path is unclear,  
Yet we have no cause to falter or fear  
If plans that we make our dreams to fulfill  
Are born out of love for God and His will.  
—D. De Haan

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### **A Vanishing Vapor**

Read: James 4:13-17

What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. —James 4:14

Evangelist D. L. Moody told a story about a minister who was preparing a sermon on the urgency of receiving Christ without delay. After studying for some time, the preacher fell asleep in his chair and had a strange dream in which he overheard a conversation among several demons. They were huddled together, trying to devise a scheme for leading people on earth into hell.

One of the evil spirits said, “Let's tell people that the Bible is not the Word of God and that it can't be trusted.” The others responded,

"That isn't enough." Another spoke up, "Let's tell them that God doesn't exist, that Jesus was only a good man, and that there really is no heaven or hell." Again the others responded negatively. Finally, a third demon said, "Let's tell people there is a God, a Savior, and a heaven, and a hell. But let's assure them that they've got all the time in the world to be saved, and encourage them to put off the decision." "That's it!" the others shouted gleefully.

Many people will spend eternity in hell because they procrastinate, thinking they can receive Christ "tomorrow." But for them tomorrow never comes. Don't be among them. Receive Christ today! By Richard DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Come to the Savior, make no delay—  
Here in His Word He's shown us the way;  
Here in our midst He's standing today,  
Tenderly saying, "Come!" —Root

Satan says, "Procrastinate!" but God says, "Don't wait!"

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### **For A Limited Time**

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

On a crisp October morning, our local newspaper featured a stunning photo of sun-drenched aspen trees whose leaves had turned autumn gold. The caption read: FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY. The irresistible invitation to take a drive through the mountains to savor the brilliant colors conveyed the urgency of doing it quickly. Autumn leaves that are golden today are often gone tomorrow.

Our opportunities to obey God's promptings are also fleeting. James warned against an arrogance that assumes endless days will be available to carry out our good intentions. "You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. . . . Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (4:14,17).

Is there an act of kindness or encouragement that God has urged you to do for someone in His name? How long has it been since that first prompting? With so many demands on our time, the urgent tasks demand our attention while the important things can be postponed. But a time will come when even the important can no longer be done.

When we follow God's urging with our action now, today will be golden. By: David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If God is prompting you today  
To help someone who has a need,  
Don't hesitate, the time is short;  
Tomorrow is not guaranteed. —Sper

Doing what's right today means no regrets tomorrow.

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### **How To Face Another Day**

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. —Psalm 118:24

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

World-famous cellist Pablo Casals once gave this challenging testimony: "For the past 80 years I have started each day in the same manner. . . . I go to the piano and I play two preludes and fugues of Bach. I cannot think of doing otherwise. It is a benediction on the house. But that is not its only meaning for me. It is a rediscovery of the world of which I have the joy of being a part."

If that is how a dedicated musician daily started his waking hours, we Christians—by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit—can surely dedicate each new day to our Lord. No matter where we are or what our situation may be, each day we can resolve to dedicate the hours before us to God's praise. As David wrote, "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24).

If you are facing loneliness or pain as once again you pick up your burden, you can draw on the Lord's resources and be a living

testimony of His all-sufficiency. If you're filled with thanksgiving and praise, you can tell others of God's goodness.

James reminded us that we "do not know what will happen tomorrow" (4:14). All the more reason, then, to dedicate each day to rejoicing in the Lord. By: Vernon Grounds ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

This is the day the Lord hath made,  
He calls the hours His own;  
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,  
And praise surround the throne.  
—Watts

If you know Jesus, you always have a reason to rejoice.

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## Who's In Control?

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. —Proverbs 16:9

Today's Scripture: Proverbs 16:1-9

I smiled as a friend told me about his experience in a New York City taxi. The driver seemed determined to demonstrate his skill and daring in negotiating the traffic congestion of the big city. He went careening down busy streets, making abrupt turns, nearly sideswiping cars, and coming to screeching stops.

My friend was sure the trip was going to end in a cemetery. He was frustrated and afraid because he didn't have control, and he felt that his life was in unreliable hands.

As I thought about my friend's experience, it reminded me of our human tendency to want to be in charge of everything. We are nervous whenever we feel that the control of our lives is out of our hands.

As followers of Christ, we know we need to yield to Him as the Lord of our lives. We can do that without fear as we remind ourselves that He would never be reckless in the way He leads us. We need to learn to relax in Him and believe that He can handle anything He allows to come into our lives.

Although we need to plan and live responsibly, we are wise to recognize God's control (Proverbs 16:9; James 4:13-17). It is God's will, not our efforts, that keeps us alive and safe. The best place to be is in His hands. —Mart DeHaan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I know not what the day may bring—  
Tomorrow waits unknown;  
But this I know, the changeless Christ,  
My Lord, is on His throne. —Anon.

Our unknown future is safe in the hands of the all-knowing God.

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## Harvest Home

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. —James 5:8

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17; 5:7-11

The hymn "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come" is often sung at Christian services of thanksgiving. Written in 1844 by Henry Alford, it begins with thanks to God for crops safely gathered in before winter. But it is more than gratefulness for the bounty of the land. The hymn ends by focusing on God's "harvest" of His people when Christ returns:

Even so, Lord, quickly come  
To Thy final harvest-home:  
Gather Thou Thy people in,  
Free from sorrow, free from sin;  
There, forever purified,  
In Thy presence to abide:  
Come, with all Thine angels, come—

Raise the glorious harvest-home.

As we give thanks for material needs supplied, it's essential to remember that our plans are uncertain and our lives are a vapor that quickly disappear (James 4:14). James encourages us to be like a farmer waiting for his crops to grow and mature. "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (5:8).

As we thank God for His faithful provision for our needs, let's turn our thoughts to the promised return of Jesus Christ. In patient expectation, we live for Him and look for the day when He will come to gather His glorious harvest home. By: David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Work and pray! Continue faith  
When the Savior calleth, "Come,"  
Till at last we all are garnered  
To that heavenly harvest-home.  
—Stinson

Even so, come, Lord Jesus! —Revelation 22:20

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## Two Calls

What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

Novelist Bret Lott received two life-changing calls on the same day. The first told him that one of his most promising writing students had died unexpectedly from a brain aneurysm. The second call came several hours later from a popular television talk show host telling Lott that she had chosen one of his novels for her monthly on-air book club. It would mean instant celebrity status and financial success. The first call was sobering, the second was exhilarating—and he had to try to balance the two.

Lott, a Christian, took a thick black marker and wrote his student's name on a white index card and carried it for the next month. "I made a promise to myself," he said. "I kept the index card in my pocket. It would remind me, 'Don't let this [fame] go to your head.'"

The book of James compares our life to "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (4:14). Instead of becoming enamored by our success today and our plans for tomorrow, we should remember that our time is in God's hands and each day is a gift from Him.

One day, God will call us to be with Him. Knowing this should give us humility and perspective on every call that comes our way. By: David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Preparing for eternity,  
Awaiting all things new,  
Anticipating life with Christ  
Should always be our view.  
—Sper

To make the most of today, keep eternity in mind.

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## Making the Most of Life

**Psalm 39:4 "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am.**

A life-threatening experience has a way of rearranging one's priorities. That was true in the lives of former Texas Governor John Connally and his wife after he was wounded by the assassin who took the life of president John F. Kennedy in 1963. In an interview, Connally explained, "As far as Nellie and I are concerned, ... it inevitably brought into sharper focus what's really important in life... We try not to participate in things that are shallow or in the long run meaningless." I don't know how this prominent couple interpreted "what's really important in life," but there is wisdom in their conclusions. Like the inspired author of Psalm 39, they realized that life is too short to waste time on things that have no lasting significance or value (Ps 39:4-6).

Have we reached the same conclusion? Have we put our trust completely in the Lord, knowing that only He can give lasting value to our lives? As we look ahead to a new year, can we say with the psalmist, "My hope is in You"? (Ps 39:7).

God alone can deliver us from a life of meaningless activities. Let's not wait for a close scrape with death to convince us of the paramount importance of making the most out of life.-- Martin R. De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

One life for Christ is all I have,  
One life for Him so dear;  
One life for doing all I can  
With every passing year.  
- Brandt

It's not how long you live that counts,  
but how you live.

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### **Will You Be Around? Proverbs 27:1**

I read the following account in a medical magazine: When the physical examination of a 78-year-old man had been completed, the doctor recommended that he come back in 6 months for another checkup. At this suggestion the aged patient shook his head and said, "Doctor, I don't think I'll be around then." "Nonsense!" replied the physician with a reassuring smile. "You'll be around for years yet." The elderly man gave him an odd look, then explained, "I mean that I'll be in Florida. I go there every January." The story may cause us to smile, but the question it raises is very sobering. Will you and I be around tomorrow, next month, next year? It surely is sensible to make plans for the future, but we must always do so with an awareness of life's uncertainty. As James reminded us in the Bible reading for today, life is "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (James 4:14). Because of this we ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15). Will you be around in 6 months? Let this question prompt you to live faithfully for the Lord Jesus Christ today.-- Richard W. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

The present only is our own,  
Live and toil with a will;  
Do not wait until tomorrow,  
For life's clock may then be still.  
- McCartney

Thought for the day: Settle all accounts today;  
you can't bank on tomorrow

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**Rod Mattoon** - Another reason why individuals waste their opportunity to trust in Christ is they procrastinate. They put off the matter until another time because they believe they will have time later to give their life to the Lord when they are ready. They are not hostile to the Lord or the Gospel, they just don't want to make any commitments to Christ right now. King Solomon and James issued a warning about procrastination and making assumptions about the future. James 4:14—Proverbs 27:1—Have you been given the opportunity to trust in Christ, but you squandered it? Don't delay any longer. You will be accountable for your opportunity.

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### **One Life Is Enough**

By Joanie Yoder

Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. —Philippians 1:20

A mature Christian said longingly, "Oh, that I could turn back the clock 20 years and go on ministering for the Lord!" That's a commendable wish but impossible to fulfill. One life is all we're given. Within God's sovereign purposes, one life, whether long or short, is enough.

In Acts 20:22-23 and Acts 21:11, God revealed that tribulations and possible death awaited Paul in Jerusalem. But instead of avoiding Jerusalem, Paul declared, "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:24). Paul's goal was not to extend his ministry but to complete it.

Our goal, like Paul's, should be to glorify Christ in our body, "whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). Then, if necessary, we can afford to lose our liberty and our very lives. We can be sure God will use others to carry on His work and bring it to completion. Paul's death did not bring his influence to an end. In Acts 20:28, he bequeathed his ministry to the church overseers, and we're still reaping the benefits of his life today. Life is brief—"a vapor" (Jas. 4:14). With Christ's help, let's invest our lives in something that will outlast us. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Living for Christ makes life worth living.

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**Vance Havner - I WON'T BE HERE LONG. James 4:14.**

Even the hour of keenest pain or months of sad bereavement will one day seem but a fleeting moment. Time is relative. A few minutes in a medical examination may seem an hour while a young suitor's evening with his best girl friend may seem but a few minutes. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory..." (2 Corinthians 4:17+). Our threescore and ten years are short "for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psalm 90:10).

We won't be here long and we shall grieve that we misused our days  
and even the best shall regret that they did not spend them better.

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**Poet Ed Sissman wrote the following commentary on our lives:**

Men past forty,  
Get up nights,  
Look out at city lights  
And wonder  
Where they made the wrong turn  
And why life is so long.

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**Bob McKinley** lives in West Virginia. He was driving home on Wednesday afternoon on a day that was somewhat like this one, sort of drizzly and humid. He was driving up a hill. Coming from the other direction on a two-lane highway was a tractor-trailer with an empty, flatbed trailer. Just as Bob topped the hill and made the bend, the tractor-trailer came down. The tractor held the road, but the empty flatbed trailer flung around and wiped Bob off the road and into eternity.

You don't know, do you? Exactly. We don't know under what circumstances our lives will come to an end. —Rick Wolling, "You Don't Know, Do You?," Preaching Today

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**WHAT YOUR LIFE IS JAMES 4:14 - Billy Apostolon**

**I. LIFE IS A GIFT FROM GOD.**

1. God is the author of life; Gen. 2:7.
2. God holds the issues of life; Ps. 68:20.
3. God sustains life; Ps. 121:8.

**II. LIFE OFFERS A CHALLENGE.**

1. There is a challenge to receive Jesus; John 1:12.
2. There is a challenge to serve Jesus; Luke 9:23.
3. There is a challenge to do good to all men; Gal. 6:10.

**III. LIFE HAS ITS JOY.**

1. There is joy when a sinner comes home; Luke 15:6.
2. There is joy in worshipping Christ; Luke 24:52.
3. There is joy in suffering for Christ; Acts 16:25.

**IV. LIFE HAS ITS SORROW.**

1. Job became wearied with life; Job 10:18–20.
2. Elijah became wearied with life; 1 Kings 19:4.
3. Jonah became wearied with life; Jonah 4:8, 9.

**V. LIFE IS BRIEF.**

1. Life is like a vapor; James 4:14.
2. Life is like a shadow; 1 Chron. 29:15.
3. Life is but a step this side of death; 1 Sam. 20:3.

**VI. LIFE ON EARTH CAN BE EXTENDED.**

1. By honoring parents; Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16.
2. By keeping God's commandments; Deut. 4:40.
3. By respecting nature; Deut. 22:6, 7.

## VII. LIFE CAN BE EVERLASTING.

1. Jesus came that life could be abundant; John 10:10.
2. Jesus gives everlasting life; John 10:28.
3. Jesus assures of everlasting life; Phil. 1:6.

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**NOW IS THE TIME TO OBEY JAMES 4:14** You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

We discover from the Old Testament that the destructive practice of procrastination has been around for a long time (Proverbs 3:27–28; Isaiah 56:12). But the Bible has written the word NOW in large letters in the gospel message. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). The time for obedience is now! We cannot count on tomorrow, so we must take advantage of today. In business terms, yesterday is a canceled check. Tomorrow is a promissory note. Today is the only cash you have. According to James, knowledge and responsibility work together. To sin ignorantly is one thing, but to sin in the face of known truth is quite another. Statements from our Lord and the apostle Peter confirm the truth that James presents in verse 17: We are held accountable for what we know but fail (or, choose not) to do (Luke 12:47–48; 2 Peter 2:21). Sins of omission are just as serious as sins of commission. To omit God from the planning processes of our lives, knowing that we should include Him, is sin. (David Jeremiah)

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### Life Is Temporary

Average life spans are shorter than most of us realize. Unlike the great redwood trees that can last for a thousand or more years, most other things come and go quicker than we would imagine. After a little digging, I found several examples that illustrate how temporary things really are:

- Copper Plumbing—20-25 years
- Cat—15 years
- Face-Lift—6-10 years
- Vitamin—3 years
- Dollar Bill—18 months
- Painted line on the road—3-4 months
- Pro-basketball player's shoes—2 weeks
- Tornado—10 minutes

I purposely omitted human beings. There are differences of opinion, but most would agree it's somewhere between 75 and 80 years. That may sound encouraging to the young and pretty disturbing to those in their eighties. The simple fact is, nobody knows for sure how long he or she may live. When we read and believe the warnings in Scripture, there is little doubt that life is short. James pulls no punches when he writes, "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). Life? A puff of smoke...a cloud of dust...

## EXCURSUS ON THE FRAILTY AND FLEETING NATURE OF OUR LIFE

Note the emphasis on the brevity of life in Job, who may have lived as long as 200 years. Of course, he suffered a completely unexpected loss of his children (Job 1:18, 19), which may explain some of the focus of this book on the fleeting nature of our lives. God could have just said "Life is short," but instead He gives us a plethora of pictures (shadows, breath, grass, flowers, etc, things we are all familiar with) to help us get a genuine grip on just how short life really is in light of the (endless) length of eternity!

### (1) A SHADOW

Job 8:9 “For we are only of yesterday and know nothing, Because our days on earth are as a shadow.

Job 14:2; Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.

Ps. 102:11 My days are like a lengthened shadow, And I wither away like grass.

Ps 109:23 I am passing like a shadow when it lengthens; I am shaken off like the locust.

Ps 144:4 Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.

### (2) A BREATH

Job 7:7 "Remember that my life is but breath; My eye will not again see good.

Job 7:16 "I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath (Hebrew = Hebel = vapor, breath, vanity in Ecclesiastes)

Ps 39:5 "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths (equivalent to the width of four fingers = one of the smallest measures used by Israelites), And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah (Ponder this Passage!)

Ps 39:11 "With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity; You consume as a moth what is precious to him; Surely every man is a mere breath. Selah.

Ps 78:33ESV So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror.

Ps 144:4 Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.

### **(3) A CLOUD**

Job 7:9 "When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.

Job 30:15 "Terrors are turned against me; They pursue my honor as the wind, And my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.

### **(4) A FLOWER/GRASS**

Job 14:2; Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.

Ps. 103:15-16 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. 16 When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer.

Ps. 102:11 My days are like a lengthened shadow, And I wither away like grass.

2 Ki 19:26 Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, They were dismayed and put to shame; They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb, As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.

Isa. 40:6-8 A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

1 Pet. 1:24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,

James 1:10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

### **(5) VANITY**

Eccl. 1:2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

Eccl 1:14; I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.

Eccl 11:10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting. (Same Hebrew word hebel - translated "vanity" above)

Eccl 12:8

### **(6) OTHER PICTURES**

Job 7:6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope.

Job 9:25 "Now my days are swifter than a runner; They flee away, they see no good.

Job 9:26 "They (my days) slip by like reed boats, Like an eagle that swoops on its prey.

Job 14:1 Man, who is born of woman, Is short-lived and full of turmoil.

Psalm 90:4-6; 9; 10 For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in

the night. 5 You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. 6 In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away. (90:9) For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. (90:10) As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.

Psalms 102:3 For my days have been consumed in smoke, (Literally "for my days come to an end in smoke.") And my bones have been scorched like a hearth. (The English of the Septuagint has "my days have vanished like smoke.")

Isaiah 38:12 "Like a shepherd's tent my dwelling is pulled up and removed from me; As a weaver I rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom; From day until night You make an end of me.

## What Is Your Life? James Smith, 1865

"**What is your life?** You are a mist that appears for a little while — and then vanishes!" James 4:14+

**If God asks a question — we should listen to it, think of it, and prepare an answer.** Here the Lord puts a question to us; it refers to the brevity of our mortal existence; he asks each one of us, "**What is your life?**"

- We think much of it.
- We make great provision for it.
- We spend much thought upon it.
- We are very careful to preserve it.

But what is it? Let us ponder this question. Let us give it the attention it deserves. It is especially suitable to us when shut up in our sick chamber, when afflicted and tried with losses and crosses, or at the commencement of a new year.

Our sufferings may be great, our trials may be many — but they must be short — for what is our life? Let us look at the DURATION of our life. It is exceedingly brief. **No one figure can set forth its brevity, or sufficiently affect our minds with it — and therefore many are employed.**

Our life is like a flower, which springs up under the influence of an eastern sun, which blossoms for an hour, and then fades and dies.

Our life is like a shadow, which lessens and lessens until in a few minutes it is gone.

Our life is like the shuttle which flies in the weaver's hand, and passes before the eye so swiftly, that one can but just see it and say — it is gone!

Our life is like the wind which rushes by us; we hear it, we feel it — and it is no more.

Our life is like the dried leaf which is made the sport of the breeze, and soon carried out of sight.

In one passage in the book of Job, we have figures taken from three elements, to represent its rapid flight.

"My days are swifter than a runner; they fly away without a glimpse of joy. They skim past like boats of papyrus, like eagles swooping down on their prey!" (Job 9:25, 26).

My life is like the swift ships, with all their sails spread, which, with the canvas crowded, glide along the watery way. My life is like the eagle hastening to its prey, compelled by hunger; with strong pinions it cuts the air, and is soon at the point where it would be!

**What then, is your life?** "You are a mist that appears for a little while — and then vanishes!"

**What is your life in retrospect?** Look back over the past ten or twenty years; how swiftly they have passed away, and every year appears to pass more quickly than the last!

**What is your life in comparison?** What are your thirty, or forty, or even seventy years — if compared with the age of the antediluvian patriarchs — Methuselah, for instance? But what are they in comparison with eternity? Think of endless duration, of interminable ages; and while you think of them, ask, "**What is my life?**" Ah, what? No comparison can be drawn — but the thought

may be improved. May the Lord help us to improve it.

This naturally leads us to inquire —

- What is the DESIGN of our life?
- Why was life given us?
- Why is it continued to us?

Our life has reference to three parties:

**First, to ourselves** — the design is to prepare us for eternity. We must live forever; but how depends upon the present. If we live in sin here — we must live in suffering forever. If time is spent in folly — eternity will be sent in bitter, unavailing remorse and sorrow. But if we believe in Jesus, exercise repentance toward God, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and devote our lives to God's service — then eternity will to us be an endless existence in pleasure, satisfaction, and unspeakable delight.

**In reference to God** — the design of our life is to glorify him, which we can only do by believing his promises, embracing his Son, observing his precepts, and consecrating our time and all our talents to his praise. Here we should live for God — and then in eternity we shall live with God. Here we should aim in all things to honor God — and then in eternity God will honor us.

**In reference to our fellow-men** — the design of our life is to benefit and do them good. No one is created for himself. Each one is bound to his fellow, and every one should aim to benefit the whole. We should serve our generation by the will of God.

- Our life is misapplied,
- it is squandered,
- it is wasted in folly.....

if we do not use it to secure our eternal salvation, to promote God's glory, and to advance the holiness and happiness of our fellow-men.

**What is the CHARACTER of our life?**

**Looking at its natural character** — it is a gift conferred upon us by our beneficent Creator. **A gift which, if rightly used, will prove invaluable; but which, if abused, will be an occasion of eternal regret.** God gave us life; He placed us highest in the scale of His creatures; He made us capable of serving, enjoying, and glorifying Him for ever; He has given us also the means of grace, set before us the way of salvation, and promised his Holy Spirit unto those who ask Him. Having given us life, He has crowned that life with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and has pointed out the way by which we may obtain everlasting blessedness.

**But let us look at its moral character.**

- What is our life in reference to others?
- Is it exemplary?
- Is it convincing?
- Is it useful?
- Is it likely to make a good impression?
- What is our life in reference to ourselves?
- Is it holy or profane?
- Is it godly or ungodly?
- Is it befitting an immortal being, one who must live forever?
- This view of the subject is not sufficiently attended to by many. Is it attended to by us?

**What is the IMPORTANCE of our life?** Ah, who shall say? Who can describe, what language can set forth — the importance of our present life?

Our life is the bud of being — the flower will not open on this side the grave.

Our life is the youth of existence — we shall not be full-grown in this world.

Our life is the seedtime of eternity — what is sown now — will be reaped in an eternal, changeless state.

Our life is the introduction to immortality!

What then is its importance?

**Ask the dying sinner**, whose eyes are just opened, whose soul is just awakened to the solemnities of the eternal world. What reply will he give? Look at his death-struck countenance, mark the expression of his half-glazed eye, hear the accents of his tremulous voice; but he fails, he tries in vain to set forth the importance of the present life. He exclaims,

*"Oh, that I had my time over again! Oh, that I had one year — but one month, one week, of the time I have squandered! But wishing is in vain! The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved! The importance of life I cannot describe. The value of time I can never declare."*

**Ask the lost soul.** The soul which, like the rich man, lifts up its eyes in Hell, being in torment. Despair now rules over the immortal spirit. Agonies, beyond description, torture the never dying intellect. What is the lost soul's estimate of the importance of life? It would require a new language to describe, unearthly figures to illustrate, and a voice such as we have never heard — to set forth its estimate of the precious gift of life! **Only in the depths of Hell, or in the highest Heavens — is the value of life really known!**

The glorified saint, while he tunes his golden harp, sings his never-dying song, and drinks in pure and celestial pleasure, can estimate — but not fully describe, the importance of this present life!

### **Unsaved sinner — what is your life?**

- Is it sin?
- Time spent in opposing God?
- Time squandered upon folly?
- Time dreamed away to no useful purpose?
- Is it trifling?

On, how many trifle away their precious time! They despise their own souls. They live as if existence were bounded by time — and all beyond were annihilation. Is it folly?

How many live as fools!

They provide for the body — but they neglect the soul.

They live for time — but they lose sight of eternity.

The allotted time passes away unheeded.

The day of salvation is spent in sin!

They only lay a foundation for everlasting self-condemnation, and open in their own hearts a source of never ceasing agony!

### **Believer — what is your life?**

Is it Christ?

Can you say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ!" Does Christ live in you?

Are you spiritually minded — and do you find it life and peace?

Is it a wise preparation for eternity?

Are you living now — as you will wish you had lived by-and-bye?

### **Life is at best but short....**

**let us improve it.**

### **Life is uncertain....**

**let us make sure work for eternity.**

### **Life, if rightly viewed, is very solemn.....**

**let us spend it as intelligent and accountable creatures should.**

**And when tempted to trifle, when inclined to squander away a day or an hour — let the question influence our decision, "What is your life?"**

If it is brief — should it be spent thus? And let the Savior's question be seriously considered by all who make gain the end of life —

"What shall it profit a man — if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37+)

Reader! the time is short,  
eternity is near,  
salvation is of infinite importance!

Let us therefore decide, and accept the Savior's glorious invitation at once, and so shall we be saved forever!

## The Time is Short! James Smith, 1860

"But this I say, brethren — the time is short!" 1 Corinthians 7:29

Our time on earth is short — and it is daily growing shorter! Life quickly glides away — and death and eternity quickly approaches. In a little while — we shall close our eyes on all the scenes of earth, and be done with all the concerns of time. Few things fly swifter than time, or teach us more solemn lessons. Yet we slight them, and forget them, or fail to improve them. O for grace to derive comfort, reproof, and stimulus from the brevity of time.

### "The time is short!"

Then our troubles must be short, for they are all limited to time. They are the offspring of sin, and will not out-live their parent! Every trouble, leaves one the less to be endured. Soon the last trouble will arrive! Let us therefore bear them with patience, endure them with fortitude, and rejoice in the prospect of bidding them an eternal farewell. Our sharpest, severest trials — will soon be ended! And then, all that will remain, will be eternal peace and joy.

### "The time is short!"

Then the pleasures of time will soon terminate!

As sweet as they are, they are fleeting.

Prize them as we may — we must soon part with them.

Not one of them go with us beyond the dying bed.

Let us not, then, value them too highly, or set our hearts too much upon them. Earthly comforts, worldly distinctions and honors — will soon have passed away. The rich and the poor will soon meet together in the graveyard. The peasant and the prince, the beggar and monarch — will alike slumber in the dust.

Let us then, if tempted to think too much of the worldly distinctions, or value too highly the comforts of life — remember that time is short!

### "The time is short!"

Then our opportunities to be useful must be few and brief. A short day, at least, is all that is allotted to us, to do good below. Therefore we are admonished to work, while it is called today, for the night comes when no man can work.

If I write for God — I must do it now.

If I speak for Christ — I must speak now.

If I try to save souls from eternal death — I must do it now.

If I would comfort the sad and sorrowful — I must do it now.

Whatever your hand finds to do — do it with all your might; for there is neither work, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave to which we are fast hastening!

[Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.]

### "The time is short!"

Then Jesus will soon be here. He is coming, and his people are crying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

He is coming, and his Word assures us, "He who shall come — will come, and will not tarry."

How will many things appear, which now occupy our time, engross our attention, and steal away our hearts — when Jesus comes? On this astonishing event, we should fix our eye (ED: SEE VERTICAL VISION). On this glorious manifestation of Christ, we should set our hearts. For this majestic appearing of the Son of God, we should prepare and watch. A few short days, or months, or at the most years — and Jesus will be here. He will come, and gather His saints to Him, make all His people like Himself, and so they shall be ever with Him.

### **Lost sinner, "the time is short!"**

- Are you saved?
- Are you ready for the coming of Jesus, or the day of death?
- What will the end of time bring you?
- Where will it land you?
- How will it find you?
- Will it find you a new creature in Christ Jesus?
- Will it find you pardoned, justified, and sanctified?
- Will it find you prepared — ready — waiting, for Heaven and glory?
- Or will it find you dead in sins, without Christ, unsanctified and unsaved?

Look into the matter now, attend to your soul and its salvation at once, for it is of the greatest importance. O flee from the wrath to come! O seek, seek the Lord, that you may be hid in the day of his fierce anger, and stand accepted before Christ at his coming.

### **Backslider, "the time is short!"**

Repent and do your first works.

Go and return to your God, from whom you have so deeply revolted.

Seek afresh the application of the atoning blood, and the cleansing operations of the Holy Spirit.

Beware, O beware, lest coming suddenly, your Lord finds you sleeping!

Beware, lest you be found naked, and so be ashamed before him at his coming!

Rather, seek to be found without spot, unrebukable, and blameless in the day of Jesus Christ.

Your conduct has been base, your sin is grievous — but there is merit in the blood of Jesus, there is mercy in the heart of Jesus, and there is a full warrant in the Word of Jesus for you to return, and be fully blessed.

### **Discouraged Christian, "the time is short!"**

Go on with your work. Do not look too much at the clouds, nor pay much attention to the winds — but plow in hope, sow in hope, and watch in hope for a harvest. You are not able to command success — but you can be **faithful**; and your master has promised to reward your **faithfulness** at His coming. Yield not to fear, listen not to unbelief, give not way to Satan, for "the time is short," and your work, however feeble, however imperfect, however unproductive it may now appear — shall be fully rewarded.

**Believer, "the time is short,"** lift up your head with joy. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for tribulation will soon cease, sorrow will soon flee away, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

Time is the limit of your trials, temptations, and troubles.

Time is the limit of your conflicts, doubts, and fears.

Time is the limit of your pains, privations, and griefs.

Beyond time —

- all is peace and pleasure,
- purity and perfection,
- happiness and rest!

Lift up then your head with joy, for your redemption, your eternal redemption draws near!

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## Solitude Sweetened

by James Meikle, 1730-1799

Brevity of life

"What is your life? You are a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away!" (James 4:14)

What is all this struggle in the world for? Why so many attempts to be something, and have something—in the sphere of nothing? This struggle for passing vanities, is as if the foam and bubbles should contend for station on the rapid stream—but in a moment they are gone!

We forget that we are but of yesterday—and tomorrow we are no more. It is a shame to think so much about these few fleeting days—and so little of endless ages.

Let me look to the generations past. How few of our deceased acquaintances are remembered! And how soon, like them, shall we also be forgotten! Perhaps the names of a few, signalized by an uncommon fame, may yet tingle in our ears; but what is this to those who are fixed in their final state? Could it mitigate their misery, who have begun their everlasting howlings, that the whole world were ringing with their praises? Or, could it add to the joy of who have begun their endless hallelujahs, that every tongue were employed in praise to their memory—then well might we be pardoned in our pursuit of fame.

How frail is our life! a pile of grass, a withered leaf, dry stubble, a flower, a breath, brittle clay, fading flesh! How swift is our life! a weaver's shuttle, an eagle, a ship, a wind that passes away, and comes not again. How short is our life! a moment, a breathing. While I bewail a departed friend, death, suddenly seizing me, translates the lamentation to another tongue that is most nearly concerned in me, who also in a little time must follow me into the silent grave, and leave the protracted elegy to be continued by their nearest relations. Thus mourning is continued, though the mourners themselves are hurried away to death in a short time!

Surely I need not be so anxious about a life so short, a state so uncertain, and a world so vain—where I am only a stranger, a pilgrim, a sojourner, and shortly leaving everything below. Let the world, then, go with me as it will, this shall not trouble me, who am daily going through the world, and shall in a little while—go entirely out of the world, to return no more. How, then, shall I spend this short life, my few winged moments, which are all appointed to me? Surely, in nothing better, than in looking out, and laying up for eternity!

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

Amplified You ought instead to say, If the Lord is willing, we shall live and we shall do this or that [thing].

NET James 4:15 You ought to say instead, "If the Lord is willing, then we will live and do this or that."

GNT James 4:15 ντ το λγειν μς, ν κριος θελ σ κα ζομεν κα ποισομεν το κε νο.

NLT James 4:15 What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."

KJV James 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

ESV James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

ASV James 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that.

CSB James 4:15 Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

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

NKJ James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

NRS James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that."

YLT James 4:15 instead of your saying, 'If the Lord may will, we shall live, and do this or that;'

NAB James 4:15 Instead you should say, "If the Lord wills it, we shall live to do this or that."

NJB James 4:15 Instead of this, you should say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we shall still be alive to do this or that.'

GWN James 4:15 Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and carry out our plans."

BBE James 4:15 But the right thing to say would be, If it is the Lord's pleasure and if we are still living, we will

do this and that.

- If the Lord wills 2Sa 15:25,26 Pr 19:21 La 3:37 Ac 18:21 Ro 1:10 Ro 15:32 1Co 4:19 1Co 16:7 Heb 6:3
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DEO VOLENTE

**Deo Volente** is a Latin phrase which literally means "God willing."

**Instead (473)(anti)** is a preposition with the genitive which originally with a local sense over against, opposite; used figuratively in the NT "(1) to indicate a replacement instead of, in place of (Lk 11.11; Mt 20.28 and Mk 10.45 also belong here; Jn 1.16 indicates a successive replacement); (2) to indicate one thing as equivalent to another for, as, in place of (1Co 11.15); (3) in the sense of on behalf of, for, for the sake of (Mt 17.27); (4) to indicate a cause: for this reason, that is why ( Eph 5.31) because, in return for which (Lk 1.20); (5) to indicate a result, implying one thing for another so then, therefore (Lk 12.3)" (Friberg - Analytical Lexicon)

In this context the idea is "instead of making your own plans independently of God..."

Anti - 22x in 20v Matt. 2:22; Matt. 5:38; Matt. 17:27; Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 1:20; Lk. 11:11; Lk. 12:3; Lk. 19:44; Jn. 1:16; Acts 12:23; Rom. 12:17; 1 Co. 11:15; Eph. 5:31; 1 Thess. 5:15; 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 12:2; Heb. 12:16; Jas. 4:15; 1 Pet. 3:9

Note there are over 300 uses of anti in the Septuagint so here are just uses in Genesis - Gen. 2:21; Gen. 4:25; Gen. 9:6; Gen. 22:13; Gen. 22:18; Gen. 26:5; Gen. 29:27; Gen. 30:2; Gen. 30:15; Gen. 30:16; Gen. 30:18; Gen. 31:41; Gen. 36:33; Gen. 36:34; Gen. 36:35; Gen. 36:36; Gen. 36:37; Gen. 36:38; Gen. 36:39; Gen. 44:4; Gen. 44:33; Gen. 47:16; Gen. 47:17; Gen. 47:19;

**Matthew Henry** says "We Must Preserve a Constant Regard, and Pay the Utmost Deference to the Disposals of Divine Providence

**You ought** - These words are added by the translators.

**Burdick** comments "No Christian can safely assume that he can live independently of God. For a believer to leave God out of his plans is an arrogant assumption of self-sufficiency, a tacit declaration of independence from God. It is to overlook reality. Whether men recognize it or not, they "will live and do this or that" only "if it is the Lord's will." A study of the use of this conditional clause in the NT makes it clear that we are not to repeat it mechanically in connection with every statement of future plans. Paul, for example, employs it in Acts 18:21 and 1 Corinthians 4:19, but he does not use it in Acts 19:21; Romans 15:28; or 1 Corinthians 16:5, 8. Yet it is obvious that whether Paul explicitly stated it or not, he always conditioned his plans on the will of God." ([Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 12: Hebrews through Revelation](#))

To say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." - James uses Lord (see below) which describes the One Who is in absolute control of the Universe. Jesus created the world we live in and He sustains the world we live in as Paul wrote in Colossians

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17<sup>+</sup>)

In Hebrews we read

in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom (Jesus) also He (God the Father) made the world. And He (Jesus) is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds ([present tense](#) - continually) all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb 1:2-3<sup>+</sup>)

Given these truths about the Lord, how foolish it is to undertake business decisions (James 4:13) or any major life decision (we will live and do this or that) for that matter without seeking His will!

One of the rabbis says, "It is revealed and known before Thee that our will is to do Thy will" (*Berachoth*, 17a).

**Don Anderson** says "Real progress comes in a Christian life when we are submissive to His perfect will for our lives and the leadership of His Spirit."

**Rod Mattoon** has a good word on God's will - Our presumptions and assumptions have a way of getting us into trouble and bringing disappointment in our lives. Beloved, the will of God is not cold and impersonal. It is a living relationship between God and the believer. God is very interested in us and what happens in our lives. He is willing to reveal His will to those who are willing to obey it.

God wants us to know His will. He wants us to understand His will. (Eph 5:17+) He wants us to prove His will. (Romans 12:2+) (Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from James)

**A T Robertson** on the phrase **if the Lord wills** - The proper attitude of mind (Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 1 Cor. 16:7; Ro 1:10 Ro 15:32 Phil. 2:19, 24; Hebrews 6:3), not to be uttered always in words like a charm. This Hellenistic formula was common among the ancient heathen, as today among modern Arabs like the Latin *deo volente*.

In his commentary **Robertson** adds his comment **on if the Lord wills** - "James does not, of course, mean that one should always say these words. That gets to be cant or mere claptrap. It becomes repellent to hear one use the name of God flippantly and constantly. Besides, it comes to signify little or nothing....There should be significance in our acts and words of worship. The Jews made a point not to use the name of God too familiarly. They often used "the Name" for God, and Christians came to refer to Christ in the same way, "for the Name" (Acts 5:41). The late Jews came, perhaps under Mohammedan influence, to use the formula "if the Name wills" when about to start upon a journey (Oesterley). The rabbis (Plummer) have a story of a Jewish father who, at the circumcision of his son, boasts that with seven-year-old wine he would celebrate for a long time the birth of his son. That night Rabbi Simeon meets the Angel of Death and asks him, "Why art thou thus wandering about?" The angel replies: "Because I slay those who say, 'We will do this or that,' and think not how soon death may come upon them." The thing that matters is for us to have the right attitude of heart toward God, not the chattering of a formula. God does not have to be propitiated by a charm or amulet. God should be the silent partner in all our plans and work, to be consulted, to be followed whenever his will is made known. Paul frequently spoke of his plans, sometimes mentioning God, as in Acts 18:21 (God willing), 1 Corinthians 4:19 (if the Lord will), and 1 Corinthians 16:7 (if the Lord permit); but also with no mention of God in words, as in Acts 19:21; Romans 15:28; 1 Corinthians 16:5. But always Paul felt that his movements were "in the Lord," as in Philippians 2:24+. He never left God out of his life. Indeed, he practiced the presence of God. ([Commentary on James](#))

**THOUGHT** - I like Robertson's emphasis, not that we seek to always voice "if the Lord wills," but to always have the essence of the truth "if the Lord wills" in our heart as our guiding motive, thereby imitating Paul (1 Cor 11:1+) so that all we do is "in the Lord." The ideal is that we would willingly submit all of our plans to the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in His Word and His Spirit to lead us (Gal 5:18+, Ro 8:14+).

**As Steven Cole** says "James is not giving a trite formula that we need to tack onto every sentence." James is giving us a mindset that needs to permeate all of life. We need continually to be aware of our finiteness and dependence on God and His sovereign purpose in every aspect of life. Sometimes we should say, "if the Lord wills," but even if we don't say it, we should *think it*.

**Lord (2962)(kurios** from **kuros** = might or power, related to **kuroo** = to give authority) primarily means the possessor, owner, master, the supreme one, one who is sovereign (used this way of Roman emperors - Act 25:26+) and possesses absolute authority, absolute ownership and uncontested power.

**Wills (2309)(thelo)** primarily refers to exercising of one's will with the underlying sense of to be willing, to desire, to want or to wish (in Jn 15:7 in context of prayer). To apply oneself to something (or to will). Thelo "expresses not simply a desire, but a determined and constant exercise of the will." (W E Vine)

**Kent Hughes** writes, So pervasive is our culture's arrogant independence of God that even many (most?) Christians attend church, marry, choose their vocations, have children, buy and sell homes, expand their portfolios, and numbly ride the currents of culture without substantial reference to the will of God. More Christians never seriously pray about God's will regarding their vocation, family direction, or entertainments than actually seek God's will. They change Augustine's "love God and do as you please" to "Do as you please and say that you love God." ([Preaching the Word – James: Faith That Works](#))

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**THE LORD WILLING** - When I was growing up in Ireland and they would make announcements in church, they would say, "Monday night at 8 o'clock we're having a Bible study, the Lord willing." Every announcement was concluded with the words, "the Lord willing." Whatever plans you made, whatever you announced about the future was always surrendered to these words: "the Lord willing." We ought to live every moment of every day in this way. Ed Dobson

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**DEO VOLENTE** - If you have read letters exchanged between Christians a hundred years ago, you may have noticed the postscript, "D. V." These two letters stand for the words Deo Volente, which is Latin for "if the Lord wills." Submission to the will of God is James's proposed alternative to the presumptuous lifestyle of the businessman: "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that' " (v. 15). This would be an acknowledgment that the planners wanted God's direction and approval and would do nothing without it. Christians generally agree that three basic issues are involved in knowing the will of God. First, there must be a willingness to do God's will when we find it. Second, we must realize that God's will is always in harmony with His Word. And third, we must come to Him earnestly in prayer seeking guidance. These steps will lead us directly into the will of God.

## Flexibility

**Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” —James 4:15**

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

Over the years, it has been my privilege to lead several study trips to the Bible lands. In the months leading up to our group's departure, we would have a series of orientation meetings in preparation for our trip. Schedules, hotel accommodations, contact information—all could be changed at a moment's notice.

For that reason, our preparation times always stressed the need for flexibility. A willingness to go with the flow and adjust to whatever changes we might encounter was especially valuable. Life has an element of unpredictability for which flexibility is the best response.

James expressed a worldview of flexibility in chapter 4 of his epistle. While it is wise to plan for the future, we must do so with the recognition that God's purposes might be different from ours. Instead of rigidly saying, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city” (v.13), James counseled us to flex to God's direction in our lives. He said, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (v.15).

The adventure of following Christ is one that rests in His perfect plans—and flexibility helps us to be prepared for wherever His purposes might take us. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

He does not lead me year by year,  
Nor even day by day;  
But step by step my path unfolds;  
My Lord directs my way.  
—Ryberg

A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.—Proverbs 16:9

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## Uncontrollable Unexpected

**Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” —James 4:15**

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

Life is full of surprises—some of which take life in unwelcome directions. I still remember the shockwave that hit our family several decades ago when my father lost his job through no fault of his own. With a house full of kids to feed, it was a jarring blow. But as certainly as Dad's job loss was beyond his control and unexpected, he still knew he could trust God for his future.

As Jesus' followers, we must recognize that there are things in life that are the “uncontrollable unexpected,” as I call them. To help us in those moments, James 4:13-15 offers this wisdom: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. . . . Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ ” The people to whom James was writing were making plans while excluding God's prerogative to direct their lives.

Is it wrong to plan for the future? Of course not. It is unwise, however, to forget that God may allow some “uncontrollable unexpected” events as He sees fit. Ultimately, all that happens is for the best—even when it's hard to see. We must trust Him and His plans for our future. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I know who holds the future,  
And I know who holds my hand;  
With God things don't just happen—  
Everything by Him is planned. —A. Smith  
We may not know what the future holds, but we can trust the One who holds the future.

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## The Other Side

## What is your life? It is even a vapor. —James 4:14

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

When someone said to my friend, "See you in a year," it sounded odd when he replied, "Yes, see you on the other side." He meant that he'd see him on the other side of a one-year deployment for the US Navy. But because the phrase is often used of heaven, it made me think about the uncertainty of life. I wondered, Who will be here in another year? Who might by then be on the other side—in heaven?

We certainly don't know what the next year—or hour—will bring. In his epistle, James wrote about this uncertainty. He rebuked the greedy merchants for boasting about what they would do that day, the next day, or even the next year (4:13). Their sin wasn't that they were making plans; it was forgetting God and arrogantly boasting about those business plans.

James reminded them: "What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (v.14). Commentator Peter Davids says that James was pointing out their foolishness and saying, in essence, "Come now, you who make plans—you don't even understand how little control you have over life itself."

No part of life is outside the control of God. So when we make plans, we need to remember, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15). By: Anne Cetas ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Tomorrow's plans I do not know,  
I only know this minute;  
But He will say, "This is the way,  
By faith now walk ye in it."  
—Ryberg

Write your plans in pencil and let God have the eraser.

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## Facing The Future

### If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. —James 4:15

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

While going through some old files, I came across a 1992 special issue of TIME magazine titled "Beyond the Year 2000: What To Expect in the New Millennium." It was fascinating to read the predictions made 2 decades ago about what the future would hold. Some general observations were on target, but no one foresaw many of the events and innovations that have radically changed our lives. The most telling statement to me was, "The first rule of forecasting should be that the unforeseen keeps making the future unforeseeable."

James reminds us that any view of the future that omits God is foolish and proud. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. . . . Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-15).

Many people used to begin their statement of plans with, "Lord willing." The phrase may have become trite, but the acknowledgment of God's overruling hand is not.

As we look ahead with God firmly in view, we can face the future with confidence in His loving plan. By: David C. McCasland ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

God holds the future in His hands  
With grace sufficient day by day,  
Through good or ill He gently leads,  
If we but let Him have His way.  
—Rohrs

Those who know Christ as Savior can face the future with joy.

**James 4:16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.**

Amplified But as it is, you boast [falsely] in your presumption and your self-conceit. All such boasting is wrong.

NET James 4:16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

GNT James 4:16 ἄλλως οὐκ ἐκκαυχῶσθε ἐν ταῖς λαζωνεαῖς μὴ· πᾶσα καυχῆσις τοιαύτη πονηρὸς ἐστίν.

NLT James 4:16 Otherwise you are boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.

KJV James 4:16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

ESV James 4:16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

ASV James 4:16 But now ye glory in your vauntings: all such glorying is evil.

CSB James 4:16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

NIV James 4:16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

NKJ James 4:16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

NRS James 4:16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

YLT James 4:16 and now ye glory in your pride; all such glorying is evil;

NAB James 4:16 But now you are boasting in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

NJB James 4:16 But as it is, how boastful and loud -- mouthed you are! Boasting of this kind is always wrong.

GWN James 4:16 However, you brag because you're arrogant. All such bragging is evil.

BBE James 4:16 But now you go on glorying in your pride: and all such glorying is evil.

- Jas 3:14 Ps 52:1,7 Pr 25:14 27:1 Isa 47:7,8,10 1Co 4:7,8 5:6 Rev 18:7
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BOASTING OF BUSINESS BONANZAS**

**But as it is, you boast in your arrogance** - Amplified = " you boast [falsely] in your presumption and your self-conceit." Boast is in the [present tense](#) indicating this is their habitual practice. They are in essence glorying in themselves and their business prowess! But their prowess is nothing but a manifestation of their pride!

**John MacArthur** has an interesting comment - The first wrong response to God's will is presumptuously ignoring it, living as though God and His will do not exist. But there are also those who, while acknowledging that God exists and has a will, nevertheless arrogantly reject it. Those in the first group are practical atheists—living as if God did not exist. Those in this second category are self-theists—refusing to submit the uncertainties of life to God, they set themselves, their own goals, and their own wills above God. God's will, though acknowledged, simply is not as important to them as their plans. Though such disdain does not characterize the life of a believer generally, even Christians are often guilty of setting aside God's will in favor of their own plans. ([MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James](#))

**Robertson** - It is not impossible to know the will of God if one will pay the price. "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." (John 7:17). The way opens to the one who is willing to put God to the test. " ([Commentary](#))

**Boast (exult, glory) (2744)(kauchaomai** akin to **aucho** = boast + **euchomai** = pray to God <> **auchen** = neck which vain persons are apt to carry in proud manner) means to boast over a privilege or possession. It can also convey the picture of one who is being loud mouthed or speaking loudly, as possibly some of James' readers were doing. The idea is they were taking pride in their accomplishments, not in God's provision to enable them to achieve those accomplishments. Is this not the mantra and method of most of the fallen world

**THOUGHT** - There is a proper boasting as described by God in the prophecy of Jeremiah. This should ever be our pattern for proper boasting! - "Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he UNDERSTANDS and KNOWS Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. (Jer 9:23-24, quoted in 1 Cor 1:31)

**James** used the same verb [kauchaomai](#) in James 1:9+ encouraging (actually commanding) "the brother of humble ([tapeinos](#))

circumstances is to glory (or boast - [present imperative](#)) in his high position ([hupsos/hypsos](#))." Note the striking [antithetical paradox](#) humble circumstances and high position. The way up in God's Kingdom is down, even as James has described above - "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." (James 4:6+) and "Humble ([aorist imperative](#) - a command) yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt ([hupsos](#)) you." (James 4:10+)

**Arrogance (212)**([alazoneia](#) - related word [alazon](#) "boastful" in Ro 1:30) means characterized by presumption in word or action, empty presumption which trusts in the stability of earthly things. Alaz It speaks of pretension, arrogance in word and deed. The only other NT use is interesting in John's description of the "boastful pride of life (which) is not from the Father but is from the world." (1 Jn 2:16+)

**Vincent** says "The kindred word *alazon*, a *boaster*, is derived from *ale*, a *wandering* or *roaming*; hence, primarily, a *vagabond*, a *quack*, a [mountebank](#). From the empty boasts of such concerning the cures and wonders they could perform, the word passed into the sense of *boaster*. One may boast *truthfully*; but *alazoneia* is *false* and *swaggering* boasting. (Word Studies in the New Testament)

**MacArthur** adds that *alazoneia* "comes from a root word meaning "to wander about" and reflects empty pretense. It was sometimes used to describe charlatans who traveled around selling phony goods. Taken together, the two words picture someone bragging pretentiously about something he doesn't have and can't obtain. Such is the arrogance, James says, of those who deny the will of God." ([MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James](#))

**All such boasting is evil** - This prideful expression regarding one's accomplishments is not just "bad" but is actively evil (see *poneros* below).

**Boasting (2746)** ([kauchesis](#)) refers to the act of boasting about something. It expresses the idea of self-congratulation with or without sufficient reason. To boast means to speak of or assert with excessive pride, to express pride in oneself or one's accomplishments and often suggests ostentation or even exaggeration. In the present context *kauchesis* denotes the assertion of a claim upon God on the ground of one's works.

**Evil (wicked, bad) (4190)**([poneros](#) from *poneo* = work or toil, cf [poneria](#) from *poneros*) means evil including evil, malignant character, pernicious, that which is morally or socially worthless. Note that this word for evil denotes determined, aggressive, and fervent evil that actively opposes what is good. *Poneros* is not just bad in character (like [kakos](#)), but bad in effect (injurious)! In sum, *poneros* describes evil in active opposition to good. Given this meaning of *poneros*, it is hardly surprising that it is used to describe Satan (*ho poneros* = "Evil one" = see 1 Jn 5:19+, also in Mt 13:38; Jn 17:15; Eph 6:16; 2 Th. 3:3; 1 Jn 2:13-14; 1 Jn 3:12; 1Jn 5:18-19), the god of this age, who is corrupting man and dragging him to destruction. *Poneros* denotes someone who is not content in being corrupt themselves. They seek to corrupt others and draw them into the same destruction!

**MacArthur** writes regarding evil that "Those who arrogantly deny God's will emulate Satan's sin, and may suffer his doom....Perhaps no one has expressed this defiant attitude toward God any more clearly than William Ernest Henley (ED: [read this note for the context in which he wrote this poem](#)) in his famous poem "[Invictus](#)". (Henley's) poem clearly reflects the attitude of those who know God exists, but arrogantly defy His will. ([MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James](#))

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,"  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

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**ILLUSTRATIONS OF BOASTING - NAPOLEON** - When Napoleon Bonaparte was about to invade Russia, someone tried to discourage him from doing so. When he realized he was not getting anywhere with Napoleon, he quoted this saying to him, "Man proposes and God disposes." Napoleon indignantly replied, "I dispose as well as propose." A Christian hearing this boast, remarked, "I marked that down as the turning point of Napoleon's fortunes." The Christian was on target because Russia was the beginning of his fall. For a man to boast of a future that he has no knowledge of, this boasting is sin. It is foolish to have the attitude that says, "I'm in control; I'll be rich; I don't need God; My way is best." God can dispose what we propose. Our boasting and pride can ruin us and make us ineffective for Christ. It robs us of the ability to be a blessing to other people. Peter boasted that he would never deny the Lord, but fell flat on his face.

**LITTLE WATCH** - There is a story of a little watch which became dissatisfied with its little sphere in a lady's pocket. This little watch envied Big Ben, the great tower clock of London. As the woman crossed Westminster Bridge one day, the little watch said, "I wish I could be up there. I could serve the multitudes." A voice said to the little watch, "You shall have your opportunity." Magically the little watch was drawn up to the tower by a slender thread. When it reached the top, the woman said, "Where are you little watch? I cannot see you." No one else could see the little watch either. The elevation of the little watch became its annihilation. The little watch may have been proud that it reached such heights, but it lost its effectiveness, and usefulness to itself and to others. It no longer fulfilled the purpose for which it was created. Beloved, don't let your boasting and pride destroy your effectiveness for Christ. If you think you are a big shot preacher and God's gift to Christianity, you're not, so stop thinking this way. It is hindering your ministry and turning people off. (Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from James)

**James 4:17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.**

Amplified So any person who knows what is right to do but does not do it, to him it is sin.

NET James 4:17 So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.

GNT James 4:17 ε δ τι ο v καλ v ποιε v κα μ ποιο v τι, μαρτ α α τ σιv.

NLT James 4:17 Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

KJV James 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

ESV James 4:17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

ASV James 4:17 To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

CSB James 4:17 So it is a sin for the person who knows to do what is good and doesn't do it.

NIV James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

NKJ James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

NRS James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

YLT James 4:17 to him, then, knowing to do good, and not doing, sin it is to him.

NAB James 4:17 So for one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, it is a sin.

NJB James 4:17 Everyone who knows what is the right thing to do and does not do it commits a sin.

GWN James 4:17 Whoever knows what is right but doesn't do it is sinning.

BBE James 4:17 The man who has knowledge of how to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

- Lu 12:47,48 John 9:41 13:17 Jn 15:22 Ro 1:20,21,32 Ro 2:17-23 Ro 7:13
- [James 4 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SINS OF OMISSION

**"A sin of omission** is a sin that is the result of not doing something God's Word teaches that we should do. It is generally used in contrast with the corresponding phrase "the sin of commission," or sins that a person actively commits.." ([click discussion](#))

**Therefore** - A term of conclusion. Douglas Moo explains that James "has urged us to take the Lord into consideration in all our planning. We therefore have no excuse in this matter; we know what we are to do. To fail now to do it, James wants to make clear, is

sin." (Borrow [The Letters of James](#) - Pillar Commentary)

**Burdick** - The word "then" (therefore - *oun*) introduces a concluding summary statement. Ropes suggests that it is a maxim that means something like "You have been fully warned" (p. 281). It is like saying, "Now that I have pointed the matter out to you, you have no excuse." Knowing what should be done obligates a person to do it. ([Expositor's Bible Commentary – Volume 12: Hebrews through Revelation](#))

**To one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin**- What James is saying is that they failed to do what they should not have done, even though they knew what should have done. They do not do it - that's a sin of omission. They know God's will, but [brazenly](#) refuse to do it!

**MacArthur** writes "The sin of disregarding and disobeying God's will is one of omission, of not doing what one knows is right (cf. Luke 12:47+). Sins of omission are rarely isolated from sins of commission." ([MacArthur New Testament Commentary – James](#))

**Douglas Moo** adds that "They cannot take refuge in the plea that they have done nothing positively wrong; as Scripture makes abundantly clear, sins of omission are as real and serious as sins of commission." (Borrow [The Letters of James](#) - Pillar Commentary)

**Guzik** - James knows that it is far easier to think about and talk about humility and dependence on God than it is to live it. Yet he makes the mind of God plain: as we know these things, we are accountable to do them. ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Rod Mattoon** - Why do people who know the will of God deliberately disobey it? There are a number of reasons: pride, unwillingness to sacrifice, fear of change, unbelief, serving a different master, fear of failure, rebellion, peer pressure, bitterness toward God, other alternatives, ignorance of the nature of God's will. Some folks act as though the will of God is something they can accept or reject. Beloved, the will of God is not an option, it is an obligation. We cannot take it or leave it. Some people feel the will of God is a formula for misery, but the opposite is true. Disobeying God's will is what leads to misery in our lives. Remember you will have an appointment with the Lord one day. (Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from James)

**Steven Cole** comments that "this verse applies to all areas of the Christian life pertaining to what are called "sins of omission." We all tend to focus on sins where we have violated some direct command of God. Perhaps we stole something in violation of God's command not to steal. Or, we lied in violation of God's command to tell the truth. Or we got angry in violation of God's commands against anger. But, we also sin when we fail to do something positive that God has commanded us to do. He commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We violate that command when we hate our neighbor, of course. But we also violate it when we ignore our neighbor and live selfishly. In the final judgment, Jesus condemns those who did not help the poor and the needy (Matt. 25:41-44). Their sin was not that they actively abused these people. Rather, they just ignored them while they pursued their own pleasure or personal goals (see also, Luke 10:25-37; 16:19-31). Obviously, we can't all do everything or there simply wouldn't be enough hours in the day. But it does seem that in most local churches, about 20 percent of the people do about 80 percent of the work, while the 80 percent of the people sit around doing nothing. If you are a Christian, it is not enough just to avoid sinning. God has given you a spiritual gift and He calls you to serve Him in some capacity. To know this and to neglect to get involved in serving is sin. Ministry is first a mindset and only secondarily an activity. If you come to church just to sit and take in whatever seems to grab you, or to meet with your friends, you do not have a ministry mindset. You are just using the church to meet your needs, with no regard of how God wants to use you. You're a religious consumer, but you're not doing what God calls every believer to do. A ministry mindset means that every day you pray, "Lord, here I am, ready to do your will. Give me eyes to see people as Jesus sees them, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36-38). Give me a heart of compassion as Jesus has, to love those who are distressed or downcast. Use me today as a worker in Your harvest, for Your sovereign purposes." By the way, you begin to serve God in your home! Now you know that God wants you to serve Him (Matt. 6:33). Not to live that way is sin. ([Sermon](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [What is a sin of omission?](#)
- [What is a sin of commission?](#) = "A sin of *commission* is a sin we take action to commit, whether in thought, word, or deed." ([click for full discussion](#))

**Right (2570)(kalos)** describes that which is inherently excellent or intrinsically good, providing some special or superior benefit. Kalos is good with emphasis on that which is beautiful, handsome, excellent, surpassing, precious, commendable, admirable.

**Do (4160)(poieo)** in this context means to carry out, to accomplish. The [present tense](#) speaks of habitual practice.

James alluded to this idea of doing what one knows is right earlier in James 1:22<sup>u</sup> writing "prove ([present imperative](#)) yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

**Sin (266)(hamartia)** literally conveys the idea of missing the mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow (in Homer some hundred times of a warrior hurling his spear but missing his foe). Later hamartia came to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. Hamartia in the Bible signifies a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of what is right in word or deed (righteous). It pictures the idea of missing His appointed goal (His will) which results in a deviation from what is pleasing to Him. In short, sin is conceived as a missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is the Triune God Himself. As Martin Luther put it "*Sin is essentially a departure from God.*"

**Jamieson, Faussett, Brown** - The general principle illustrated by the particular example just discussed is here stated: knowledge without practice is imputed to a man as great and presumptuous sin. James reverts to the principle with which he started. Nothing more injures the soul than wasted impressions. Feelings exhaust themselves and evaporate, if not embodied in practice. As we will not act except we feel, so if we will not act out our feelings, we shall soon cease to feel. ([James 4 Commentary](#))

**Constable** makes an interesting observation - Note that the verse that concludes each section of James' epistle, each chapter, is a proverbial statement. It summarizes James' point in the preceding section and states it in a pithy way that is easy to remember. ([James 4 Expository Notes](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [Will of God - extensive notes](#)
- [How can I know God's will for my life? What does the Bible say about knowing God's will?](#)
- [What is the difference between God's sovereign will and God's revealed will?](#)
- [What is the key to hearing God's voice?](#)
- [Does God have a plan for me?](#)

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**Don Anderson** sums up this section

- We would do well to develop dependence on the Designer.
- His ways are best because He knows the end from the beginning.
- MATURITY IS REFLECTED BY YOUR DEPENDENCE.
- HAVE YOU LEARNED TO TRUST GOD?

Lead kindly light amid encircling gloom.

Lead thou me on, the night is dark and I am far from home.

Lead thou me on.

Keep my feet, I do not ask to see the distant scene.

One step is enough for me.

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**Steven Cole** has a pithy but practical conclusion in light of what James has said in James 4:13-17-

In view of the fact that life is a vapor, that God is sovereign, that pride is a constant battle, and that humble obedience to God's will is the only sane course, I would counsel you to do this: Think about what God wants your life to look like on your deathbed. What will you have accomplished that matters in light of eternity? In view of God's purpose for your life, write out a single-sentence personal mission statement. Here is mine: To glorify God by being a godly husband and father, and by using my gift of pastor-teacher for the building up of the body of Christ and the furtherance of the gospel. Yours will vary depending on how God has gifted you.

Then write out some personal lifetime goals that will help you fulfill your mission statement. These may include things like your daily walk with Christ; personal holiness in thought, word, and deed; your responsibilities as a godly spouse or parent, etc.

Think through some short-term personal goals in various areas where you need to grow. Perhaps spiritually, the goal would be to spend at least 20 minutes each morning in the Word and prayer, and to work on memorizing at least one verse each week. In your marriage, the goal may be to schedule a half-hour daily to sit down and talk as a couple, or two evenings each month to go out for a date. Financially, perhaps you need to set goals to get out of debt, to live within your budget, and to give faithfully to the Lord's work. Personally, maybe the goal is to eat nutritional food and to exercise vigorously for a half-hour at least five days per week. These are just examples; your personal goals will vary. But write them down. Then, review them periodically and adjust as the Lord leads.

The aim is to number your days so as to present to the Lord a heart of wisdom (Ps. 90:12). You know that you ought to do these things. James says that if you don't do them, to you it is sin. ([James 4:13-17 Life is a Vapor](#))

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## Failing To Do Right

To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. —James 4:17

Today's Scripture: James 4:13-17

In his book *Eight Men Out*, Eliot Asinof records the events surrounding the notorious "Black Sox" scandal of 1919. Eight members of the Chicago White Sox baseball club were accused of taking bribes from gamblers in exchange for intentionally losing the World Series. Although they were never convicted in a court of law, all eight were banned from baseball for life.

But one of those players, Buck Weaver, claimed that he had played to win despite knowing about the conspiracy. Though Weaver's performance on the field supported his contention, baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis ruled that any player who had knowledge of the scandal, yet chose not to stop it, would still be banned. Weaver was not punished for doing wrong, but for failing to do right.

In his letter to the first-century church, James wrote, "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (4:17). In a world filled with evil and darkness, followers of Christ have the opportunity to shine their light. That often means we must resist the urge to do nothing.

When faced with the choice between doing good and failing to do anything at all, we must always choose to do what's right. By: Bill Crowder ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Heavenly Father, help me to honor You throughout my life by being a light in this dark world. May it never be said of me that I failed to do what I knew to be good, just, and right. Amen.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. —Edmund Burke

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## We Know

**To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. —James 4:17**

Today's Scripture: Luke 12:41-48

My son Steve knows his "floppy hat" is reserved for life's most informal times. This hat, which would look good on a fisherman by the lake, is not to be worn to church or school. So, when he grabbed it one morning on his way out of the house to catch the school bus, he knew he was breaking a rule.

Parents understand these kinds of battles. We recognize that our children will test our rules, and we are not surprised when they challenge us. They know they aren't supposed to watch certain TV programs or stay out too late or use a disrespectful tone of voice or fight with a sibling. Yet they still do.

This is not unlike the attitude we sometimes take with our heavenly Father. We know what is right and wrong (Jas. 4:17). We've read the Bible. We've sensed in our hearts the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We know. Yet we test God.

We know it's wrong to speak disparagingly of others. We know it's not right to neglect those in need. We know we should witness to our neighbor. We know we should pray. We know that when the Lord returns we should be faithfully serving and obeying Him (Lk. 12:42-43). We know!

How it pleases God when we act on what we already know! By: Dave Branon ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

"We love You, Lord Jesus," we often may say,  
But are we as ready His will to obey?  
Let's heed what God's Spirit has told us to do,  
For that's how we show Him a love that is true.  
—DJD

One step forward in obedience is worth years of study about it. —Chambers

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**CHALMERS** - Thousands of men pass off the stage of life, and are heard of no more. Why? They do not partake of good in the world, and none were blessed by them; none could point to them as the means of their redemption; not a line they wrote, not a word they spake, could be recalled; and so they perished: Their light went out in darkness, and they were not remembered more than insects of yesterday. Will you thus live and die, O man immortal? Live for something. Do good, and leave behind you a monument of virtue that the storm of time can never destroy. Write your name in kindness, love, and mercy, on the hearts of thousands you come in contact with year by year: you will never be forgotten. No! your name, your deeds, will be as legible on the hearts you, leave behind you as the stars on the brow of evening. Good deeds will shine as the stars of heaven (cf Da 12:3+).

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### **Sins of Omission James 4:17**

When we talk about sin, we usually refer to the bad things people do—lying, stealing, blasphemy, killing, etc. We sometimes forget that we can also sin by the things we don't do. These are sins of omission, and though they are more subtle, they are just as harmful. James reminds us that sin is not just doing the wrong things; it also includes not doing the right things.

God will lead you to share your faith, to help someone in need, or to forgive someone who has hurt you. If you refuse, you are sinning. If you delay, you are sinning. You may assume that you are living a blameless life because you don't steal, lie, or cheat others. But if you've neglected to do the things you know God has told you, you have sinned just the same.

God wants to use each of us to be a blessing to others. We'll never know, this side of heaven, how our obedience can benefit someone else. It's easier for us to see the harm done by blatant sins like gossip, stealing, or murder. Less obvious is knowing what could have been if only we had responded to God's prompting to get involved where he is at work. When we refuse to obey God, we rob someone else, as well as ourselves, of God's blessing.

Are you aware of some things God wants you to do? What is holding you back from obeying him today? (Henry Blackaby)

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### **James Smith - WHAT IS SIN?**

JAMES 2:9; 4:17

What a simple question! Yet how it floors many. Mark you, the question is not: "What do men say sin is," but, "What saith the Scriptures?" Give the very words of the Bible. There are seven definitions of sin in the Book—two given by James, two by John, one by Paul, and two by Solomon.

- I. Stepping Over, or breaking the Law of God (1 John 3:4).
- II. Coming Short of the requirements of the Law (1 John 5:17).
- III. Not Living Up to the Light God has already given to us (James 4:17).
- IV. We Can Sin in Thought as well as by actions (Prov. 24:9).
- V. We Sin when we do Things we are Doubtful about (Rom. 14:23).
- VI. Sin Viewed as Pride and Vanity, and the performance of legitimate and indeed essential things, such as ploughing, with a wrong motive (Prov. 21:4).
- VII. Respect of Persons (James 2:9).