

BIBLE DISCUSSION GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS

In preparation for Sunday, October 23, 2011

Passage: James 4:13-17

Memory Passage: James 4:17

DAY 1 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 4:13-17.** How does this passage connect with what has preceded and what is its primary theme?

(b) What plans are the merchants about whom James writes making in v. 13? Are these necessarily wrong plans to make? What assumptions of the merchants are revealed in the plans they have made v. 13?

(c) Write down all of the plans you have made that have not yet been completed. Think through your financial goals, your career goals/plans, your desires/plans for your family, your retirement goals/plans, your spiritual goals/plans (you do have spiritual goals, right?), your educational goals/plans, your vacation plans and any other plans you have made and towards which you are working. Keep this list handy for use during our lessons this week. Make sure you write down your plans as they currently are, not how you think they should be upon your first reading of this text ☺!

(d) *Family:* Ask your family, “What are some plans that you have or we have as a family?” Help them think of an upcoming vacation or excursion, academic plans like taking a test or doing an assignment, upcoming sports/gymnastics/dance events or practices, etc. Anything you have “on your calendar” to do. Make a list of these plans on your white board. Then **Read James 4:13** and discuss the plans these merchants are making. Ask, “What assumptions are these merchants making when they make these plans?” Make sure you explain what an “assumption” is, and lead them to answers like, “They are assuming they will be alive tomorrow, they will have the resources and time and safe travel to get to such and such a town and then to stay there for a year, and that they will actually make a profit.” Then return to your white board list and ask, “What kinds of assumptions are we making according to our list of plans?” Explain that this week we will learn how to plan according to Biblical principles.

DAY 2 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 4:13-17, Prov. 6:6-8 & 27:1.** For what reason does James make the rather obvious statement, “yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring” in v. 14? Does this mean that James is against planning for the future? What do we learn about God’s view of planning for the future from Prov. 6:6-8?

(b) James reminds us that our lives are nothing more than a “mist” (the Greek word is used to speak of a swirl of smoke arising from a fire), and this idea that our lives are brief is found often in Scripture (cf. Job 7:6-10, Ps. 102:11, 103:15-16; Is. 40:6-8, 1 Pet. 1:24, et. al.). What bearing does this have on James’ argument here in 4:13-17? Is his goal to encourage or discourage us, and upon what reasoning do you give your answer?

(c) Review your list of plans from 1(c) and the list of assumptions you compiled from 1(b). As you look at your list of plans, answer these questions about each one: 1) Did I make any of these assumptions when I made these plans? 2) Did I consider that my life was only a vapor when I made each of these plans? 3) If I were to reevaluate these plans without these assumptions and realizing my life on this earth was short, would I make different plans?

(d) *Family:* **Read James 4:13.** Ask your family: “How do you feel to know that your life is nothing more than a puff of smoke, or, like a morning mist, here one minute and gone the next?” Encourage conversation and draw out their feelings about this seemingly negative and cruel statement. Then **Read Psalm 103:1-14**, pausing every few verses to remind your family of all the blessings God gives to His people. Teach them to marvel and rejoice at God’s gracious character! Then **Read Psalm 103:15-19** and show them that it is God’s steadfast love toward us who love Him that will endure forever! Then **Read 1 Pet. 1:17-25** and show them that because God is a gracious redeemer, and we have been born again of imperishable seed, that it doesn’t matter that our life in this world will fade away because we will live forever with Him! So we should be encouraged.

DAY 3 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 4:13-17.** Is James giving us a formula that should be uttered every time we make plans (v. 15)? Can one utter this phrase and still be committed to their own agenda rather than God’s?

(b) Assuming that one’s heart is committed to the words, what does it look like for someone to make plans with the caveat, “If the Lord wills?” Be specific and concrete, and you will check your answers with Scripture tomorrow.

(c) What are you saying about both yourself and God when you make plans according to James’ command in v. 15? What are you saying about both yourself and God when you make plans without abiding by this command?

(d) How does v. 16 tie this section to what has preceded in this chapter? Why does James say the merchants “boast in (their) arrogance” when they make their plans without considering the Lord’s will?

(e) *Family*: **Read James 4:15**. Ask your family, “What does James mean when he tells us to make our plans based on the statement, ‘If the Lord wills?’” After a discussion, **Read Prov. 16:3, 9, 19:21, & Ps. 37:3-6, 23-24** and teach your family from these verses what it means to make plans according to the Lord’s will.

DAY 4 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 4:13-17, Ps. 37:3-6, 23-24, Prov. 3:5-10, 16:3, 9, & 19:21**. Write down everything you learn about the Lord’s will, your plans, and how the two work together for God’s glory and our good.

(b) Now return again to your list of plans from 1(c). Evaluate every plan you wrote down (and include any others the Holy Spirit has brought to your mind since Day 1) according to what you have learned from the Psalms & Proverbs passages in 4(a). What plans need to be altered? What plans need to be completely scuttled? What plans can stand firm?

(c) Now reread all of the passages from 1(a) and record every promise God makes and every command you are given. Do any of these commands or promises inspire you to make more plans? Different plans? Plans that will advance the kingdom of God rather than your kingdom? Write them down now.

(d) If you had plans that were not made with the consideration of the Lord’s will, verse 16 says that you “boast in your arrogance and all such boasting is evil.” Remembering that it is a marvelous act of God’s grace that allows us to repent, and that the life of a believer is to be a life of repentance, and that it is the humble, repentant person whom God exalts, spend some time in prayer right now basking in God’s grace to you as you humble yourself before him, submit to Him, draw near to Him, and mourn over your sin so He will exalt you at the proper time (James 4:7-10).

(e) *Family*: Return to the list of plans your family made on Day 1. Lead your family in evaluating these plans according to the principles you have learned this week. You might not be able to evaluate them all, but choose the ones that will facilitate this activity the best. Be prepared to alter or completely get rid of plans that do not stand the test of, “If the Lord wills.”

DAY 5 – ASK FOR INSIGHT

READ THE PASSAGE

(a) **Read James 4:13-17**. We commonly think of not sinning as “not doing the wrong thing,” but v. 17 says much more. Here we are told that we are always, every time, to do what we know to be the “right thing” or “good thing,” and if we don’t, we sin. Think back on your last week of times that you might not have done what you knew was the right/good thing, even if you did not do a wrong thing. How should this verse affect your thinking for next week? Into what types of ministry might the Lord lead you if you are always looking for and doing the right/good thing? What joys await you as you obey this verse!!!!?

(b) Memorize this verse and pray for the Lord to bring it to your mind this week EVERY time there is a right/good thing for you to do. Your life may never be the same.

(c) *Family*: **Read James 4:17** and discuss the difference between “not doing what is wrong” and “doing what we know to be right.” Then **Read Luke 10:30-35 & Matt. 25:40-46** and help your family find the “right/good” things that were known but not done in each story. Then help your family think of ways during the last week that each of them could have done the good thing, even though they did not do something they knew was wrong.

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If the Lord Will

In James 4:13-17 we find James contrasting two ways of planning for the future.