

#14 in series “Doing What We Believe”
(A Study in the Book of James)

When it comes to the subject of God’s will – we could actually have a whole series in its study... But, we are simply going to stay as close as we can to our text, here in the book of James:

James 4:13-17 (NASB)

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.”

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. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance (Or *pretensions*); all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the right* (Or *good*) thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

In his commentary on this passage, Warren Wiersbe noted that – “James began chapter 4 talking about war with God, and he ended it talking about the will of God. But the two themes are related: when a believer is out of the will of God, he becomes a troublemaker and not a peacemaker.” If Dr. Wiersbe’s observation is true – that explains why so many “Christians” are actually miserable troublemakers rather than joyful people of peace... Have you ever seen evidence for such a claim?... Well, we certainly see examples in Scripture where God’s own people have gotten out of the will of God and ended up creating a lot of trouble for themselves and those around them – even those they love:

- Lot settled in Sodom and ended up bringing trouble to his family.
- David committed adultery and brought trouble to his family and his kingdom.
- When Jonah sought to run away from God’s will, it almost sent a shipload of unbelieving sailors into a watery grave.
- Even the Apostle Peter, for a period of time, was guilty of trying to impose upon Gentile believers requirements that were not within God’s will, and as a result was influential in leading other Jewish believers to be stand-offish toward Gentile believers... Paul tells us in Gal. 2, that he confronted Peter on these matters, then Peter and others repented.

The simple point is – whenever we get outside of the will of God, it creates trouble for us and those around us...

Why is God’s will – the desire for it – the assurance of it, so difficult for us to know? Of all people, Christians should be convinced that God – in His goodness and wisdom – has only the best of desires for us! Afterall –

- God is sovereign – He is a God of purpose and control.
- God is wise – He knows what is best, and when and how to bring about His purposes.
- God is love – He desires only that which is best for His children.

We need to think of God’s will for our lives more as the evidence of His love for us, rather than something akin to *bitter-tasting medicine* that we simply must take...

I have enjoyed Warren Wiersbe's commentary on the book of James – and am influenced greatly by him in the preparation of this message... I especially appreciate his transparency in telling the story of his personal struggle with God's will at one point in his life –

“I was going through a difficult time in my own ministry some years ago, questioning the will of God. While on vacation, I was reading the book of Psalms, asking God to give me some assurance and encouragement. Psalm 33:11 was the answer to that prayer: ‘The counsel of the Lord standeth forever; the thoughts of his heart to all generations.’

‘The will of God comes from the heart of God,’ I said to myself. ‘His will is the expression of His love, so I don't have to be afraid!’ It was a turning point in my life to discover the blessing of loving and living the will of God.”

The passage before us – reveals some great insight into how Christians are to go about their lives – in the will of God. In fact, as we unpack this passage we can see evidence of three different attitudes that Christians have toward God's will for their lives.

The first we will call –

1. The Dangerous Attitude of Ignoring the Will of God :13-14, 16

James begins by talking about the approach many take to life. They just “go about their business”, making their plans, without any thought of seeking what God would have to say about those plans... But James will give us four arguments that reveal the outright foolishness of living life ignoring God and His will for our lives:

The first argument is –

Life gets busy and complex :13

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.”

This seems to describe what many people would call an ideal life. Their lives are filled with planning, buying, selling, making money, and enjoying all the world has to offer...

Life is made up of people and places, activities and goals, days, years and decades... And our days are filled with “decision-making”, sometimes crucial decisions, and more often than we realize, they are life-changing decisions concerning our future.

The second argument is –

Life is unpredictable and uncertain :14a

¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow (Or *what* will happen tomorrow)

It sounds like James has been reading his Bible:

Pro. 27:1 (NASB) “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” James addresses those who are planners – not to condemn the practice of planning – but to correct their presumptions...

The same book in the Bible that James just referenced also tells us to learn to prepare for the future – Pro. 6:6 (NASB) “Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise”

Pro. 30:25 (NASB) “The ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer” So, those whom James is addressing were, what many would call, “good planners”. Those who “plan their work, and work their plan”... What's wrong with that?

What seems to be wrong is the presumption in their plans. By that I mean, they were assuming that they will be successful in fulfilling *their* plans to fulfill *their* goals, for *their* purposes... There is NO sense that God is a part of their strategy at all!

They were planning a year in advance. “*Counting their chickens before they hatch*”...

No one but God knows what the future will be.

Listen – “tomorrow never comes”!

We live in the present! – NOT the future!... No one is promised another day in this life!...

So – there is nothing wrong with making plans – but we would do well to remember that God, and God alone holds tomorrow in the palm of His Hand.

The third argument James is making at this point is –

Life is fast and brief :14b

You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away

As of this past Tuesday, when I was writing about this point, the oldest person alive in the world is **Kane Tanaka** of Japan. She is 117 years, 131 days old... and upon checking the same website this morning she is still alive...

The longest living person in modern times was **Jeanne Calment** of France. She died Aug. 4, 1997 at the verified age of 122 years, 164 days of life.

Wow – that sounds like a long time... NOT compared to eternity! Which is the reality for the future of ALL of us!

We count our life in years, but David asked the Lord in –

Ps. 90:12 (KJV) “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

As of today, I am 22,249 days old... That really doesn't seem like a lot to me... If I live just 25,000 days, I will be 68 years, 5 months, and 10 days old...

James is expressing the brevity of life in a similar way that Job spoke of it –

Job 14:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil. ² Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.

Since life is so brief – we need to be guarded not to merely “*spend*” our lives, and certainly don't “*waste*” our lives – but “*invest*” our lives in that which is eternal!

Do you remember the parable Jesus told in Luke 12 about the man who had the bumper crop? His barns were too small, so he determines to tear those barns down, build bigger ones and began to brag how he was just going to set back and selfishly enjoy the rest of his life... But what was God's response to this man? –

Luke 12:20 (NASB) “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?’”

But pay attention to Jesus' point with this parable:

Luke 12:20-21 (NASB)

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.”

What's the point?... Life is not uncertain to us – but not to God! And when we know Him, and are living in, and pursuing His will – we can always be confident in the purpose and meaning for our lives! Now some may say, “*There's no hurry – I have the rest of my life to live for God!*” Friend nothing could be further from the truth!

Are you staying with me? **There is a Danger in Ignoring God's Will** for our lives – because **life is busy and complex**. It is **unpredictable and uncertain**. It is **fast and brief**... And a fourth argument James gives is that –

Life gets distorted and selfish

¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance (Or *pretensions*); all such boasting is evil.

James paints a picture that people – living life ignoring God's will – are deceived into thinking that **THEY** are the ones in-charge! They have a braggadocios, self-centered focus for life!... Life is **ALL-ABOUT** them!

They think that they are so strong – so in control... Yet, if one cell the brain mutates and becomes

abnormal it changes everything!

One tiny microscopic virus can utterly destroy our lives... And that is not only true with the threat of Covid-19, but viruses have been around since sin entered the garden!... Still there is the deceived perspective that leads people to take credit for who they are – for what they have – and totally ignore how God’s hand is at work in their lives!

WE cannot control the future, (which is the reason so many people worry). Man does not possess the ability to see the future, much less the power to control it.

For us to boast about our successes is to make ourselves to be God – and James says that kind of boasting is evil!

These are just a few of the dangers that come against us – IF we are living life “ignoring” God’s will. There is a second approach to God’s will that people will often take – and we will address that as –

2. The Dangerous Position of Disobeying the will of God :17

Here is where I believe far too many – who think themselves to be Christians – are living today... They have read the Word of God enough to clearly know many aspects of the will of God – and they chose NOT to obey it!

This is a worse position to take than the first – because this person says to God – “*I know what your Word says – but I don’t want to do that!*”...

It is a defiant position to take. This person is saying that they know more about their life and what they need than God does!

Peter said –

2 Pet. 2:21 (NASB) “For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.”

It’s one thing for a deceived “false prophet” (for that is who Peter was actually talking about in that chapter) to *disobey* God... And their disobedience is based in *pride*!

But have genuine Christians ever been, knowingly disobedient to God’s will for their lives?... Why? Perhaps those reasons have to do more with our ignorance, than our pride.

It is ignorance about the nature of God’s will... You see, God’s will is GOOD – and good for us – even if it may not seem so at the present moment.

Elisabeth Elliot – “The will of God is never exactly what you expect it to be. It may seem to be much worse, but in the end it’s going to be a lot better and a lot bigger.”

But – God’s will is not only good – it is right – and to disobey Him is to choose the “not-so-good” and that which is wrong!

Warren Wiersbe says it better than I can – “(Man) acts as though the will of God is something he can accept or reject. In reality, the will of God is not an option; it is an obligation. We cannot ‘take it or leave it.’ Because He is the Creator and we are the creatures, we must obey Him. Because He is the Savior and Lord, and we are His children and servants, we must obey Him. To treat the will of God lightly is to invite the chastening of God in our lives.”

Some people think that if they submit to God and His will for their lives they are only going to be miserable!... The reality is – it is DISOBEDIENCE to the will of God that makes people miserable!...

In fact – the mature Christian will not be so focused on his pleasure or misery. He is focused on his Christ!

A.W. Tozer – “No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he should be.”

So what happens when a Christian is disobedient?... We invite the discipline of God.

According to Hebrews 12:5-11, the discipline of the Lord in your life is actually evidence of His love for you – not His hatred... Genuine discipline brings comfort and is evidence that our salvation is real!

Think about it... Have you ever seen an undisciplined child running around in a store unsupervised and actually in NEED of a loving, disciplining parent?... It’s not a pretty picture is it?... You wonder where is the parent, and might even go so far as to alert a store associate to page the parent – but you don’t intervene to discipline that child yourself do you!... You are not the parent!

But, a parent who truly loves their child will apply appropriate discipline / training of that child and as they mature, they too will enjoy the benefits that come from such discipline.

Heb. 12:11 (NASB) “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

It is possible to not only experience the discipline of God in this life for our disobedience – but we run the risk of losing even more in the next life.

I’m not talking about losing your salvation – because that is impossible...

I’m talking about the loss of reward.

1 Cor. 9:24-27 (NASB)

²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline (Lit *bruise*) my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

In this passage the Apostle Paul compares the believer to a runner in the Greek races. In order to qualify for a crown, a runner had to obey the rules of the game. If any contestant was found to have disobeyed the rules, he was disqualified and humiliated. The word disqualified in verse 27 does NOT refer to the loss of salvation – but to the loss of reward.

Col. 3:25 (NASB) “For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”

Well, let’s look at just what should be the Christian’s attitude toward the will of God:

3. The Appropriate Position is to Obey the will of God :15

¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”

Warren Wiersbe – “If the Lord wills” is not just a statement on a believers lips; it is the constant attitude of his heart.”

Jesus was so committed to the will of the Father:

John 4:34 (NASB) “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.’”

Following God’s will is like ... obeying the laws God has built into creation... If we operate according to the laws of physics, we can learn to fly, dive the depths of the ocean, or fly a person to the moon...

But – if we ignore the laws of creation, or worse yet, “disobey” them – they will break us!

The laws God gave this universe are general, but the will He has planned for our individual lives is specific... There are no two lives that are planned the same... Yet, there are specific aspects to God’s will that it for EVERY Christian:

He commands our submission:

2 Cor. 8:5 (NASB) “and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

Rom. 12:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

He calls for sexual purity:

1 Thess. 4:3 (NASB) “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality”

He calls us to genuine repentance:

2 Cor. 7:10 (NASB) “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

He commands our attitude and worship:

1 Thess. 5:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

And look at the very promise of God for those who live according to His will:

1 John 2:17 (NASB) “The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

Life is never easy! It is always more complicated than we are able to figure out and plan for. But God brings order, meaning, and unity to life, because He is a God of order. And He has a plan and a purpose – a will for your life!

So – what is your approach to God’s will for you?

Do you totally ignore God’s will as you make your daily plans and decisions? Or, do you know God’s will and yet refuse to obey Him?

These two approaches are wrong and can only bring sorrow and ruin to the life of the person who follows those approaches to God’s will...

But the Christian who knows, loves, and obeys God will enjoy God’s will for them... That person’s life may not be easier, but it will be holier and happier.

Let’s be like King David on this one:

Psalms 40:8 (NASB) “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.”

Questions to consider in Community Group

- How may have you struggled with the concept of “God’s will” in your life?
- What are some dangers associated with “ignoring” God’s will? How can a genuine Christian be in such danger?
- Why do we, at times, willfully “disobey” God’s known will in our lives? What is the solution for this rebellion?
- Please discuss the Elisabeth Elliot quote – “The will of God is never exactly what you expect it to be. It may seem to be much worse, but in the end it’s going to be a lot better and a lot bigger.” What did she mean – “in the end it’s going to be ... a lot bigger”?
- Have you experienced what Warren Wiersbe talked about, when he said – “(Man) acts as though the will of God is something he can accept or reject. In reality, the will of God is not an option; it is an obligation. We cannot ‘take it or leave it.’ Because He is the Creator and we are the creatures, we must obey Him. Because He is the Savior and Lord, and we are His children and servants, we must obey Him. To treat the will of God lightly is to invite the chastening of God in our lives.”?
- What is the priority A.W. Tozer was talking about and why is that so important? – “No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he should

be.”

- Can one truly be obedient to God’s will and NOT have their heart in it? (What’s the issue being identified with this question?)
- There were a few cross references shared in the message that give explicit statements concerning God’s will for Christians. Which one(s) challenge you the most? What other similar passages do you turn to in God’s Word, where something is very clearly stated about what God’s will is?