

**A. The Problem of \_\_\_\_\_ (13)**

**B. The Realities of \_\_\_\_\_ (14-16)**

**1. Life is \_\_\_\_\_ (14)**

**2. God is \_\_\_\_\_ (15)**

**3. Boasting is \_\_\_\_\_ (16)**

**C. Know and Do \_\_\_\_\_ (17)**

## Homework

- **Read James 5:1-6.**
- **Read Max Lucado's "Lesson 10: Warnings to the Rich" (pp 97-104).**
- **Reflect on these questions posed by Lucado.**
  1. What kind of attitude is James addressing with his forceful words in this passage?
  2. What were the wealthy people doing in this congregation that drew James's condemnation?
  3. How have you seen people oppress others for personal gain?
  4. What are some of the ungodly attitudes that cause oppression?
  5. How does James say God responds to the oppressed?
  6. What are the end results of greed and self-indulgence?
  7. What are some *negative* effects that increased wealth can have on people's lives?
  8. How can money actually keep believers from doing God's work?
  9. How can you use your financial resources for God's glory?
  10. Why does it take faith and courage to "pioneer new models of sharing for our interdependent world"? What does that involve?
  11. What particular attitudes about money do you feel you need to change?
  12. How can sharing the resources God has given to you improve the state of the world?
- **Bonus Journaling Question:** How content are you with your financial situation? How has this impacted your attitude?

**Introduction**

1. Twenty-five years ago this past March, I was ordained by Old Greenbrier Baptist to the gospel ministry.
  - a. When we are young, we all wonder what we will be when we grow up. We dream; we plan; we work toward life goals. In reality, we do this our whole life long. What's next, we ask?
  - b. Growing up during the moon race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, I wanted to work at NASA.
  - c. I dreamed, planned, worked hard, and made it to NASA working on Space Shuttle computer systems.
  - d. But God interrupted my life plans and my career. He had other plans for me, and after a bit of a struggle for control, I got on board with Him.
  - e. Looking back over the past twenty-five years, it has been quite a ride.
  - f. Looking forward to the future, I know it will continue to be an interesting journey.
  - g. I don't know all the twists and turns of what the future holds. In fact, I don't want to know them all.
  - h. I simply try to walk each day with the Lord and listen for His direction.
  - i. Each small step, day-by-day, leads me and you somewhere. Hopefully, we go forward in God's will.
  - j. I want to stay on the path with God—not running ahead of Him and not lagging behind—faithfully taking each step as I walk with Him day-by-day.
2. James warned against presumptive, self-centered planning in life. He encouraged his hearers to submit themselves to the Lord and to seek His will day-by-day into the future.

**3. Read James 4:13-17.****A. The Problem of Presumption (13)**

1. The structure of the Book of James is often perplexing, but Jm 4:13-5:6 is clearly a new section.
  - a. James uses strong statements in his transitions
    - 1) "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (Jm 1:2).
    - 2) "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" (Jm 2:14)
    - 3) "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly".(Jm 3:1).
  - b. In Jm 4:13 he says, "Come now, you who say . . . ."
    - 1) He has changed his target audience from the envious and selfish "teachers" of Jm 3:1-4:12 to traveling businesspersons who may or may not be Christians.
    - 2) Note that he does NOT address his audience as "brothers and sisters" in this section.
    - 3) It may be that he addressed Jewish merchants who commonly travelled and traded within the diaspora community. They may have been nominal Christians of suspect faith.
2. The primary issue addressed in Jm 4:13-17 is that of human presumption concerning our control over life.
  - a. Who is on the throne of your life? Who is it that directs and controls what you do, when you do it, for how long you do it, and what you do with your life?
  - b. Is it your boss, spouse, parents, teachers, friends, the world?
  - c. Well, no one is more qualified to sit on the throne of your life than you! Right? That's what the world says anyway. You know yourself and what is best for you. It's all about you and what you want.
  - d. That is worldly wisdom. The kind of wisdom that James says comes from "the devil" and is filled with "selfish ambition," boastfulness, and a denial of the truth (Jm 3:14-15).
  - e. God, your Creator and Sustainer, is the only One who should be on the throne of your life.
3. The most self-deluding of all the human games that we play is to believe we are in control of our lives.
  - a. We believe that we are the final authorities over our lives.
  - b. We take God out of the picture, ignore His existence, and try not to depend on Him except in a crisis.
  - c. We play King of the Hill; we have the high ground; and we keep the top spot in directing our lives.
  - d. Those to whom James wrote were living by worldly wisdom as "friends of the world" (Jm 4:4). They were playing by the world's rules of life and made five bold claims about their lives.
    - 1) Timing: "Today or tomorrow we will go . . ." – Choose our own time/schedule
    - 2) Location: ". . . to this or that city . . ." – Choose our own location.
    - 3) Duration: ". . . spend a year there . . ." – Choose our own length of time.
    - 4) Activity: ". . . carry on business . . ." – Choose our own activities.
    - 5) Outcome: ". . . and make money." – Believe that we control the outcome.

4. Max Lucado asks, “What attitude does God want you to have about the future? Why?” (Lucado, *Life Lessons from James*, 93)
  - a. James is not against planning and profits but against arrogant presumption without consideration of the will of God.
  - b. “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps” (Pr 16:9).
  - c. “A person’s steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand their own way? (Pr 20:24)
  - d. Jesus said, “What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Mt 16:26)
  - e. Paul proclaimed, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ” (Ph 3:8).
5. James is not criticizing planning and organization.
  - a. We should live as if Jesus is coming today and plan as if He will come in 1,000 years.
  - b. God blesses planning: “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Pr 16:3).
  - c. Wise planning of our lives—the use of our energy, time, and resources—is not done selfishly in our will but in accordance with God’s will and with full acknowledgement of His ultimate sovereignty over us and “our” plans.

## **B. The Realities of Life** (14-16)

1. **Life is Brief** (14)
  - a. We don’t know the future – “Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.” (14a)
  - b. We don’t have a guarantee of life tomorrow – “You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (14b)
  - c. Life is transitory and passing like a morning fog or the mist after the rain.
  - d. Jesus told a wonderful parable about a rich man on this topic.
    - 1) Read Lk 12:13-21.
    - 2) What does this parable teach about priorities? Wealth? Certainties in life?
2. **God is Sovereign** (15)
  - a. God is sovereign, and all life is in his hands.
    - 1) The writer of Ecclesiastes said the things we plan and do in life (e.g., gaining wisdom, seeking pleasures, working) without God are “. . . meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecc 2:26b).
    - 2) Real meaning and satisfaction in living are found in living life in God’s will and in gratitude for all that He gives us and does for and in us.
  - b. We must look to God in everything (e.g., Vision 20/20).
  - c. The Greek text literally says, “Instead of your saying ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ You are now boasting.”
  - d. Instead of submitting to God’s will, they are boasting about their self-assured accomplishments.
3. **Boasting is Evil / Sin** (16)
  - a. We tend to “boast and brag” which is “evil.” (16)
    - 1) We are quick to take credit for good in our lives and place blame on God/others for the bad.
    - 2) We often fail to acknowledge God’s plan, purpose, and constant provision in making us who we are and giving us all we have.
  - b. The fundamental problem with boasting is “arrogance” (Gk., *alasonia*). Boasting is evidence of arrogance. Boasting is “evil” which is “sin” (Gk., *harmatia* – “missing the mark” – v. 17).
4. How do you go about determining God’s will for your life?
  - a. John MacArthur writes, “. . . nothing more clearly summarizes the character of a genuine believer than a desire to do the will of God. . . . Someone has said that about 90 percent of God’s will for our lives is already revealed in the Bible. In other words, God has already unveiled what should be the primary direction of our lives, and as we obey those broad principles, He makes the details clear. If this is true, then a careful study and knowledge of Scripture is imperative for believers. Consider your own spiritual habits. How much time per week do you spend in: hearing God’s Word read/preached/taught; reading God Word; studying God’s Word (digging deeper into specific passages); memorizing God’s Word; meditating on God’s Word (letting the truths of Scripture permeate deeply into your heart and mind? (John MacArthur, *James*, 81-82)

- b. Warren Wiersbe says, “God’s will is not a cold, impersonal machine. You do not determine God’s will in some mechanical way, like getting a soft drink out of a vending machine. The will of God is a living relationship between God and the believer” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, 143).

### C. Know and Do Good (17)

1. James quoted a popular proverb of the day: “Anyone, then, who knows the good (Gk., *kalon*) he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins (Gk., *harmatia*).”
  - a. The sentence contains the Greek particle *oun* which means “Therefore . . . .” James draws a logical conclusion from the argument that he has presented in Jm 4:14-16 against presumptive living.
  - b. The person who should follow this wisdom is “Anyone’ (Gk., *eidoti*), that is all of us.
  - c. Again James puts the focus on action.
    - 1) “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (Jm 2:22).
    - 2) “. . . Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds” (Jm 3:18b).
  - d. It is not simply knowing the good thing to do. One must obey God by doing that good thing according to his will.
2. From this saying come two steps for coming off the throne of your life and putting God on it.
  - a. Know the “good” that we are to do. We must earnestly seek and discern the will of God.
    - 1) We must acknowledge God as the only one qualified to sit on the thrones of our lives.
    - 2) We must submit our lives to God and his will first and foremost.
    - 3) We must play by God’s rules and not those of the world.
    - 4) We must go where he sends us, when he directs us, doing what he enables us to do for as long as he gives us life, while always giving him the glory for all he does in and through us.
  - b. Start doing “good”. Once we know God’s will, we must do it to his glory.
    - 1) Lucado asks, “Why is God not satisfied that you simply *know* how to do good?” (Lucado, 93)
    - 2) All the knowledge in the world does you no good until you act on it. That is wisdom.
    - 3) Knowledge is not enough. God requires faith. Again, we must show our faith by our actions.
  - c. What is the “good” that God would have us do?
    - a) Be joyous in facing trials with perseverance (Jm 1:1-4).
    - b) Ask God for wisdom without wavering in faith (Jm 1:5-7).
    - c) Live life humbly (Jm 1:9-12).
    - d) Resist temptation and don’t fall into sin (Jm 1:12-18).
    - e) Listen to God’s word and do what he says (Jm 1:19-25).
    - f) Keep your tongue under control (Jm 1:26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12).
    - g) Help the poor, orphans, and widows (Jm 1:27).
    - h) Don’t play favorites, but love all your neighbor as yourself (Jm 2:1-13).
    - i) Don’t just talk about faith, live it out (Jm 2:14-25).
    - j) Live life guided by heavenly rather than earthly wisdom (Jm 3:13-17).
    - k) Give up evil desires and friendship with the world (Jm 4:1-6).
    - l) Submit humbly to God and resist the devil (Jm 4:7-10).
    - m) Seek and do God’s will above our own (Jm 4:13-17).
3. Wiersbe concludes, “The secret to a happy life is to delight in duty. When duty becomes delight, then burdens become blessings. . . . When we serve God grudgingly, or because we have to, we may accomplish His work but we ourselves will miss the blessing. It will be toil, not ministry. But when we do God’s will from the heart, we are enriched, no matter how difficult the task might have been” (Wiersbe, 145).
4. Lucado concludes, “It is easy to fall into the trap of pride—thinking more highly of ourselves than we should—whether that takes the form of judging others with our words or making our own plans without asking God that his will be done. As James notes, ‘All such boasting is evil’ (4:16). This is not to say that we should altogether avoid making plans for the future. Rather, the counsel from James is to prepare for what we can *while* acknowledging that God is in ultimate control over tomorrow. Looking to him for guidance and affirmation is the best way to keep from being worried about the future or feeling the need to life ourselves up at the expense others. *Father, forgive us for living for ourselves and for thinking that we don’t need you. God, help us to embrace humility in our words to others and in our plans for the*

*future. Help us to remember that we can do nothing without you, because you are the source of everything.” (Lucado, 95-6).*

5. Now that you know what to do—Go do it this week. Anything else is sin!