

Prayer

Break through the driving pressures of my day, O Lord, and nurture me, I pray. Lead my spirit to dream its dreams and see the greater visions of Your awesome glory. Guide my soul to cast aside its consuming, worldly aggressions, and take my rest in You and in Your Word. And in those precious moments, gracious Lord, restore me, so that I may face this day. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Wait on the Lord in silence and in expectation, and listen for what He has to say to you

On-going prayers

- ***This week, give thanks for the blessing of life.*** *Pray for your parents, whatever you think of them, for God gave you life through them*
- *Pray against the prevalent evils of 'suicide bombing'*
- *Pray for those who feel that life holds no hope for them*

Meditation

Do you feel uneasy, has peace slipped from your grasp?
The Lord could be speaking; so be willing to listen:

- Is He asking you to stop and think?
- Is He calling you to face what you dislike?
- Is He reminding you to turn to Him for help?
- Is He challenging you to grasp the unknown?
- Is He telling you to offer unconditional forgiveness?
- Is He doing a work in you which is not yet clear?
- Is He offering you help, but you have not yet accepted?
- Is He saying, 'I am here, so please don't turn away'?

Each of these challenges can be hard to accept,
But the Lord never turns His back on us; only we do, from Him.

Bible Study - James 4:13-17

¹³ Now listen here, you who say, 'One day soon we will go a town somewhere and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' ¹⁴ You don't even know what will happen in your life tomorrow! You are like a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears. ¹⁵ Instead, what you should say is this; "If it is what the Lord wants, we will live and do what we need to do." ¹⁶ As it is, you take pride in your arrogance, and all such boasting is evil.

¹⁷ So then, anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

Review

Much of James' letter focuses on his objections to the way that the rich were doing each other favours at church (2:1-7). Almost everything He writes is been set against this background, including his discussion of words and the use of the tongue (3:1-12) and his description of 'faith' and 'works' (2:14-26). In this passage of scripture, James attacks the rich people of the church again, because of his firm belief that what they did would lead people astray to live in an unworthy manner. It is a stunning attack.

This passage addresses specifically the rich who trade to make more money for themselves; but we should be careful. The general practice of commerce is not under attack here; but rather the manner in which people presume to do what they want for themselves without reference to God. James' words are also directed at people in the church, not outside it, because he wanted the rich people of the church to recognise that they had to live up to higher standards than those in the pagan world. His phrase, 'One day soon we will go to a town somewhere and spend a year there, doing business and making money' (4:13) is James' way of

attacking the self centred and smug extravagances of the 'haves' in society, and he did not expect to find such attitudes amongst God's people.

What James says is not just a complaint, but a careful analysis using Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus to suggest a more modest approach to commercial affairs. Despite his disgust at the rich within his church, James offered them a Gospel way of living. The first part of verse 14 is taken from Jesus' teaching, 'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.' (Matt 6:34). So when James says 'you don't even know what will happen in your life tomorrow' (4:14), this is a straightforward Gospel challenge to the rich of the church to consider their priorities; what is more important, plans for making money or faith in God?

Next, James says to the rich 'You are like a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears' (4:14). Again, this is not merely a poetic turn of phrase; it is a passage from the prophet Hosea, as most people of those days would have recognised; 'What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.' (Hosea 6:4). This was Hosea's desperate cry to the wealthy Jews of the old Kingdom of Israel just before it was invaded and obliterated by the Assyrians (1 Kings 17) as a consequence of extravagance sins and injustice that offended God. James used this as an unmistakable warning to the rich in his own church of the dangers of their ways.

Verse 15 contains another famous phrase; 'If it is what the Lord wants, we will live and do what we need to do'. This is James' advice to the rich by which they consider what the Lord wants when making their plans. These words have become famous through the Authorised Version translation 'If the Lord wills it, we shall live to do this or that', and for some, the expression 'if the Lord wills' has unfortunately become a phrase to add to all plans, in order to cover the eventuality that God might have alternative ideas! James did not write these words to give us a religious insurance policy. He wrote them to give us wise spiritual counsel that God's plans are not human plans, and all too often, we forget this. When read properly, James's words redirect us to God's will instead of our own, and challenge us to consider that what we naturally plan for any day may not turn out to be the God's will for us.

As with much of James, this can be a problem for God's people today who live in a world of work in which they cannot easily allow their faith to influence their work. Christians who are relatively rich and who work in the world of business need to take note of James' words, because they strike an important cautionary note about right attitudes and the place of God in life. James' advice is also important for those who are not rich but who are also involved in trying to make enough money by which to live; for those who remember that the Lord has greater plans for them will not be tempted to leave their faith at home when they go to work!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage tell us about riches, and how does this affect people today?
2. Do you think that rich people would listen to the advice found in this passage of scripture? And if not, why not?
3. What does James' advice in verse 15 mean to people today? Have you the saying found in verse 15 used today? Should it be used?

Discipleship

Some of the discipleship issues found in this text

- *Riches and wealth in the Kingdom of God*
- *Being conscious of God's will in daily life*
- *The sin of wilful ignorance*

Personal comments from the author:

It is hard to read the letter of James because it feels as if he is trying to strike at the heart of those Christians who live in the more wealthy countries of the world, but he is surely right to say what he does. I know what it is like to try and earn enough money to keep a family going in a Western society, and it is not easy; but James makes me feel guilty! Nevertheless, I know that I need to heed what he says, and remain conscious of the Lord's will and His presence in every aspect of daily life.

Ideas for exploring discipleship issues

- *Take an opportunity to put time aside with your spouse (if you are married) or other family members with whom you are close, and discuss how you meet your financial needs and whether it is done in a godly way.*
- *How does James' advice affect you, and your church? What can you do about this? These are not easy questions, but they aim to help us remain conscious of the Lord's presence with us all the time.*

Final Prayer

Jesus, stand amongst Your people with power and authority. Dispel the powers of darkness that attempt to disrupt the light You would shed on the lives of your people, and save us from every work of the enemy. We ask this through our Saviour Jesus Christ, who overcame death and hell by His death and Resurrection. Alleluia! AMEN
