

ANGEL TREE ANNOUNCEMENT

WELCOME

Alright, if you’ve got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to James chapter 4. James 4. That’s where we’re going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to James 4. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, James 4 will be on page **1013**.

INTRODUCTION

I want to ask you a question:

- How do you know God’s will?
- How do you know what God wants you to do in any given circumstance?
- How do you make plans that honor the Lord?

James will show us that those with genuine faith submits to God’s will.

But how do you know his will?

Remember a few weeks ago when I told the story

- of the youth mission trip to Mexico I led...
- where the middle school girl was convinced...
- that it was “God’s will”...
- for she to save all the homeless Mexican cats?

And I promptly told her that was NOT God’s will for her?!?

Well, how does she know it’s God’s will? How do I know it isn’t?

Other than cat’s being demonic...of course...

EXPLAIN: THEOLOGY

Well, I want us to do a little theology work before we get into our text today.

- Theology is the study of God.
- Who is God?

And probably the most commonly used classification when discussing God's attributes are God's:

- COMMUNICABLE attributes
- and his INCOMMUNICABLE attributes.

Now, I know those are big theological words...INCOMMUNICABLE...

- and a lot of church growth experts
- say to dumb down from big words
- so that your church will grow...
 - but...if you can figure out a
 - half-caf skinny caramel macchiato with light whip,
 - then you can handle some big preaching words.

So, COMMUNICABLE attributes are attributes that God shares with us:

- like love,
- and mercy,
- and justice.

But INCOMMUNICABLE attributes are things that are unique to God alone.

And there are three incommunicable attributes of God that you might be familiar with. They are sometimes known as the three omnis.

- Omni means "all".
- And so, the three omnis are:

- omnipotence,
- omniscience,
- and omnipresence.
- That is:
 - God is all-powerful,
 - God is all-knowing,
 - and God is present everywhere.

And these INCOMMUNICABLE attributes of God are widely agreed upon in all theological circles...

- Calvinists or Armenians agree on these things.
- Baptists and Presbyterians agree on these things.

And remember, these are incommunicable.

- They are God's attributes...not ours!

TRANSITION

So, to our text. James 4 starting in verse 13.

JAMES 4:13–14

[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"—[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.

POINT 1

So, James really hits all three omnis in these verses. And he's essentially saying this... **SLIDE YOU ARE NOT GOD.**

- Now, I don't think any one of us would disagree with that point,
- BUT James is going to argue that we often live like we are!

James says: **to those who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go there and spend a year there and do business"—but YOU DO NOT KNOW!**

Translation?

- You are not omniscient!
 - You're not all-knowing!
- You are not omnipresent!
 - You aren't currently in tomorrow...
 - or even later today, for that matter.
 - No, you are stuck in this one very specific time and place.
- And even if you did somehow guess or prognosticate correctly what will happen today or tomorrow...
 - WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?
 - You're a mist!
 - You're not omnipotent.

But James is saying we functionally trust in our plans, acting as though we were God!

We've all got plans for our lives, and James is asking:

is your trust in your plan...or in the person of Jesus?

Many times we think our strategies are more sufficient than our Savior!

But YOU ARE NOT GOD!

ILLUSTRATION: CALEB

So, in college I lived with a guy who was a super type-a planner.

What's more, is when I was in college,

- Apple laptops were just becoming the standard,
- and thus, the app iCalendar was the hot thing.

Well, my roommate got seriously hyped on iCal

- and he started putting his classes in the app.
 - You know, filling in those colored bubbles.
- Then he added social events
 - and dates with girls
 - and even workouts.
- Then he added meals. Ok?
 - So, there was a bubble for breakfast at 7:30am.
- And then he added his discipline schedule,
 - so, bible reading time had a bubble.
 - And prayer time had a bubble.
- But he got to the point where he literally created
 - a five-minute time bubble on iCal for showering.
 - He had two-minutes scheduled to brush his teeth.
 - He had thirty seconds for flossing...
 - in his iCal!

Listen, when you have to iCal flossing time...

- it's time to loosen up your schedule.

APPLICATION

James is saying, “*You have no idea what tomorrow is going to bring.*”

The great prophet Mike Tyson said: “Everyone’s got a plan...until they get punched in the mouth.”

- You can plan it all out...
 - every single little point...
- But you don’t know everything.
- You can’t be everywhere.
- And you aren’t powerful enough to really control anything!

ILLUSTRATION: SPRAY BOTTLE

He calls you a mist! What is your life? I’ll show you.

- [Spray] That’s you!
- “Well, I’ve got a plan!”
 - [Spray] There’s your plan!
- “Well, I work out!”
 - [Spray]
- “Well, I crossfit...it’s not a workout...it’s a way of life!”
 - What...you eat clean and take vitamins?
 - You gonna live to 100?
 - Here you go: [Spray – Spray]

What is your life?

YOU ARE NOT GOD.

BLANK SLIDE

TRANSITION

So, then, how do we plan? How do we know what God's will is for us?

Well, James has some real practical advice. Verse 15.

JAMES 4:15-16

[15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

EXPLAIN

So, is it a problem to have plans? No!

Is it sinful to have a schedule? Certainly not.

But there's a difference between being a planner...and being proud.

James calls it **boasting in your arrogance**...and that's **evil**.

ILLUSTRATION: COVID

I mean, just think about these last two years?

- Did anyone plan for this? Did anyone see this coming?

Can anyone open their 2020 New Year's Resolutions and read:

- *"Global Pandemic is coming...so, I'd better:*
 - *Stock up on toilet paper.*
 - *Cancel that cruise.*
 - *Buy stock in Zoom.*
 - *Order than new dishwasher 6 months early,*
 - *cause you ain't getting one off a ship anytime soon!"*

NO! We had no idea!

POINT 2

You see, James is saying, “*WHEN you plan...*”

- notice, he isn’t saying that we NEVER plan...
 - James isn’t giving us permission
 - to just do whatever...
 - to go with the flow...
 - come what may.

This isn’t the go-to verse as to why you are disorganized and never make commitments or plans. No!

James isn’t against planning.

But WHEN you plan...he says to:

SLIDE **SUBMIT TO GOD’S WILL**

He says: **If the Lord wills...**

ILLUSTRATION: CLICHE

Now, this isn’t meant to be a Christian cliché, ok?

And you know creepy Christians who’ve made this into a cliché.

You know someone like this?

- “You wanna go to the movies tomorrow?”
 - “Man...if the Lord wills.”

Like it’s some holy code we must add to our prayers.

But some Christians will do this.

- “If the Lord wills it...”
- Lord willing.
- Lord willing.”

You're at dinner...

- "Can you pass me the butter?"
 - "Lord willing..."
- "Well, Lord willing...I might not punch you in the neck..."

I sometimes ask people this:

- "Hey, will I see you at church on Sunday?"
- "Ahh...Lord willing..."

Where else do you think the Lord wills you to be on Sunday?

No! Get you to church!

This text isn't a command to add that cliché to all prayers.

It's not meant to be a cliché...it's meant to be a conviction.

James' point is that our future plans,

- should be fueled by,
- a knowledge that YOU ARE NOT GOD...
- and a SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL.

APPLICATION

"Well", you ask, "how do I KNOW God's specific will for MY life?"

Man, I get this question a lot!

"How do I know God's will?"

- *Where should I go to college?*
- *What should I major in?*
- *Where should I go after graduation?*
- *What job should I take?*
- *Who should I get married to?*

- *Should I get married at all?*
- *Should we have kids?*
- *Should we send them to public, private, or home school?*
- *What church should we be a part of?*
- *How much money should we save for retirement?*
- *When should we retire?*
- *What should we do in retirement?*

What's God's will for me?!?"

I get this question more than any other question in ministry, and let me give you a really practical way to help when it comes to your plans and God's will.

It's called a DISCERNMENT PROCESS. And there are three grids to run your plan through in this process.

DISCERNMENT PLAN 1: GOD'S WORD

The first is **SLIDE GOD'S WORD**.

- What does God's word say about this thing?

You see, in life, there is a SPECTRUM OF FAITHFUL OPTIONS.

There are lots of potential faithful options to the questions we just listed.

- But before we get into those,
- there are also UNFAITHFUL options,
- that go against the revealed word of God.

APPLICATION

So, is your plan in line with God's Word?

And this may seem like a bit of a no brainer, right?

“Don’t do things that go against God’s Word...”

- But how many Christian marriages end for unbiblical reasons?
- How many Christians in business fail to practice ethical standards?
- How many Christians are giving up the biblical sexual ideal because it seems a bit old-school in this cultural moment?
- Goodness...how many churches have jettisoned God’s Word as their go-to source of authority?!?

Church, if you are attempting to discern God’s will for an area of your life, the first place you need to dig into is God’s word.

God will never guide you to do something outside of what his word permits.

- God’s word is the primary way that God communicates to us.
- This is why we put such a high value of the scriptures.
- We want all things to be discerned through God’s Word.

DISCERNMENT PLAN 2: GOD’S WISDOM

The second grid to run your plan through is **SLIDE GOD’S WISDOM**.

And here’s where we come back to the spectrum of faithful options.

- There is not always a clear cut yes or no
- on certain plans or decisions...
- and we call those wisdom issues.

ILLUSTRATION: GAMBLING

So, I know of a guy who was at a church, and this is a true story.

- He had a gambling addiction,
- but he had been through a recovery process.

And at the church he was attending, he made a proposal to the elders.

He said, *“God is calling me to start a ministry to gamblers.”*

- And the elders at the church were like,
- *“Great, you could probably uniquely minister to gamblers.”*
- *So, what’s your plan?*

And he went on to present them with this plan:

- the church would give him money...
- and then he would go up to Blackhawk, Colorado...
 - and he would gamble...
 - with the church’s money...
- and as he gambled he would share the gospel...
- with the other people at the tables with him.

This was his plan. NO JOKE!

Well, the elders were smart enough not to go along with this. Right?

- And their response was,
- *“No, God is not calling you to start this ministry.”* Why?

Because it would put you outside of the Bible’s parameters for wisdom.

- Is gambling wrong?
 - Not always.
- But in this guy’s case...
- it would be very unwise to pursue this plan.

APPLICATION

Have you sought out God's wisdom?

James said in chapter 1 that **God will give you wisdom if you ask.**

So, I would say, you need to take TIME when making these plans.

- TIME for prayer,
- TIME in the Word,
- TIME asking God for wisdom.

This takes adequate TIME.

Sometimes we fail to engage God's wisdom when we move too fast!

- So, we'll make a plan,
- and then ask God to bless it.

**But the wise person seeks God in the making of the plan,
not just in the blessing of their plan.**

DISCERNMENT PLAN 3: GOD'S PEOPLE

So, God's Word, God's wisdom. And thirdly:

What do **SLIDE GOD'S PEOPLE** say about your plan?

Sometimes this is known as seeking wise counsel,

- and it's closely associated with God's wisdom...

But very often...

- when trying to discern God's will
- on issues that fit into a spectrum of faithful option...
- you will need God's people to wisely give you counsel.

This is all over the Proverbs...

- Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”
- Proverbs 11:14, “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”
- Proverbs 15:22, “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”

It’s all over the Bible.

- We need God’s people
- because we have blind spots in our lives
- where we cannot see potential pitfalls
- and potential un-wise moves.

ILLUSTRATION: AMERICAN IDOL

The illustration that comes to mind is American Idol back when Simon was on the show. You remember this?

What was the best part of that show?

- It was the first few weeks of auditions...
- where the utterly terrible singers would audition,
- and then Simon would rip them to shreds. Right?
 - You remember William Hung?
 - “She Bangs...She Bangs?”
 - Yeah you do!

That’s really the only reason we watched.

But those moments actually revealed something so much more important.

- Wasn't it always a little shocking and sad
- when Simon would say,
 - *"Hasn't anyone ever told you that you can't sing?"*
- And they would say, *"No, never!"*

Didn't anyone love those people enough...

- to tell them that they weren't gifted at singing?
 - Before they embarrassed themselves on national TV?

Or, were they too caught up in their dreams to hear the truth?

APPLICATION

Listen, I know the self-esteem movement has told you:

- that you can do anything you set your mind to,
- but unfortunately, that isn't true.

There are many things you simply are not gifted to, and should never do.

You're like,

- *"Well, I definitely don't have any blind-spots!"*
- *I took the enneagram...*
- *And I'm in counseling...*
- *I'm very self-aware!"*

Good on you! But listen, we all have blind spots.

- The fact that you think you don't,
- only proves that you do...
- because you're blind to them!

If you knew they existed...they wouldn't be blind spots!

This is a basic DISCERNMENT PROCESS.

- What does God's Word say?
- What does God's wisdom lead you towards?
- And what are God's people saying about this decision?

BLANK SLIDE

TRANSITION

James is saying, YOU ARE NOT GOD, so, SUBMIT TO GOD'S WILL!

God isn't opposed to a plan...God is opposed to the proud.

Now, the last verse of this chapter might seem not to fit, but I think it does.

Look at verse 17:

JAMES 4:17

[17] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

POINT 3

So, James ends this section with this verse, and I think it fits because sometimes well-meaning Christians think that there is only one category of sin. Sins of COMMISSION.

Sins of COMMISSION are sins we take action to commit!

And we can get so focused on sins of commission:

- *"Don't do wrong things..."*
- *don't do wrong things...*
- *don't do wrong things."*

But I think this verse is contextually talking about sins of OMISSION.
Sins of OMISSION are the things we are supposed to do...but we don't.

You see, in some cases we don't act on God's will out of FEAR...

- out of FEAR of the unknown...
- out of FEAR of difficulty...
- out of FEAR of failing!

And this can lead us to be almost crippled by FEAR.

You see, if YOU AREN'T GOD...

- then there are going to be times in your life
- where there is no clear direction
- that is obviously God's will.

And your temptation is going to be to inaction.

But I think James is calling us to **SLIDE MAKE A DECISION.**

- If you know there's something you should do,
- but you're too afraid to make the decision,
- James calls that inactivity...sin.

Sin isn't just avoiding the bad stuff...

Sin is failing to do the good stuff!

You can't fully know God's specific will for you.

- And that can lead to pride of overplanning...
- or the irresponsibility of never planning.

You can't control the outcomes...but you can control your decisions.

- And to let the FEAR of making an incorrect decision...
- cripple you from EVER making a decision...
- is the WRONG decision!

CONCLUSION

So, how do you know God's will for your life?

- You first deeply understand that YOU ARE NOT GOD
- Then you SUBMIT your plans TO GOD'S WILL.
- And finally, you MAKE A DECISION...
 - not being crippled by the unknowns of the future.

ILLUSTRATION: PLANTING FATHOM

So, let me end with this: many people ask me...

"Chris, how did you know that God's will was for you to plant Fathom?"

- And that's a tricky question
- because I didn't have some supreme dream
- or word from the Lord.

But it was a process:

- In college I found out about Acts 29,
 - the church planting network we are associated with,
 - and I became convinced of the necessity
 - of planting new churches.
- And I told Maryse, while we were still dating...
 - that I may want to plant a church one day...
 - And she said to me: *"Not if you marry me!"*
 - So, I married her...
 - But I figured if God wanted me to plant a church...
 - he'd change her heart!

So, I just spent years praying over my desire to plant a church.

- And all the while
 - I was worshipping God with my local church community,
 - and serving...
 - and learning...
 - and growing.

And after almost 10 years,

- I found myself working for another church,
- making a steady paycheck.
- My ministry was thriving.
- Maryse and I had just bought a house.
- We were trying to get pregnant.
- We had good friends and family at the church.
- I mean, things were on point.

And then right in the middle of that,

- I got this longing in my heart to start a church.

And so, I talked to Maryse about it,

- and she felt like the Spirit had softened her towards the idea!
- So, we prayed about it.

And it didn't make sense.

- I hadn't finished seminary.
- I'd never been a lead pastor.
- I was a decent worship leader.
- And I had led youth ministries for 10 years.
 - But that was it!

In fact, I had only preached a total of 6 sermons.

So, it made no sense for a 28-year-old guy,

- who had preached a whopping 6 times,
 - to quit my job,
 - with my, now, pregnant wife,
 - and our mortgage,
- to try to become a preacher...
- and start a church!

And I remember meeting with one guy who said,

- *“Oh Chris...just get a job at another established church.*
- *You do know that 9 out of 10 church plants fail!*
- *This is going to wreck your ministry.*
- *This is going to strain your marriage.*
- *You could even lose your house.”*

And I'm like:

- *“Oh...hmm...thank you...”*
- *I just want to marinate in your encouragement right now,*
- *thank you...Shhhhh...Stop there...*
- *stop there and just let me drink it in.*
 - *Are you kidding me?*
 - *You're paying for lunch!”*

And I also remember, in one of our more fearful moments, saying:

- *“Hey, what if no one comes?”*
- *Like what if none of our friends,*
- *or family,*
- *or even new people come?*
- *What if we fail?*
- *What if we look like fools?”*

And listen, my great temptation was to hedge my bets, and want to wait on moving until God gave me some securities. Right?

Like, *“Yeah God, I think you’re telling me to do this...and I will...*

- *when you provide the money.*
- *I’ll do it once you provide some people to go with me.*
- *I’m in God, after you bring me a worship leader.”*

But faith is about stepping out to do what God’s called you to do BEFORE all the circumstances have been worked out.

I mean, anyone can walk a well-lit path.

But we are called to walk by faith and not by sight.

And if you had asked me, *“Is God calling you to plant a church?”*

- I would have said, *“Um...I think so.”*
- But Maryse and I WERE sure
 - that if we didn’t make a decision,
 - it would be wrong.

So, we did it.

- We realized we weren't God and couldn't control the outcome...
- We went through the process of discerning God's will...
- And then we made the best decision we knew to make...
 - even though it looked absurd to some.

But in retrospect...it looks like it was, indeed, God's will.

ENDING

Listen, this word is for someone here today!

- Maybe you've got your plans so locked down that you are functionally acting like the God of your own life.
 - James says: WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?
 - The call is to repent...to turn from that pride!
- Or maybe you're on the other side...
- You've got a decision that needs to be made...
 - But you're so afraid...
 - Afraid of making the wrong decision...
 - Afraid of letting other people down...
 - Afraid of what might happen.

And the call for you, too, is to repent. To turn from that inaction!

Where do you need to remember that YOU ARE NOT GOD?

Where do you need to SUBMIT TO GOD'S WILL?

And maybe, where do you need to MAKE A DECISION?

Those with genuine faith submit to God's will...humbly and confidently.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Blomberg, Craig. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James.
- Chandler, Matt. *Arrogance/Humility*.
- Driscoll, Mark. *How does faith work for life planning?*
- Frame, John. *The Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence of God*.
- Moo, Douglas. Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter of James.