

Faith in Action: A Study of James  
**Faith Understands Sovereignty**  
James 4:13-17

**Trust in Christ....**

- ... is not developed absent of challenge but by applying trust in the midst of challenge. (1:1-8)
- ...provides perspective to help us live God oriented lives. (1:9-18)
- ...will produce Christlikeness. (1:19-27)
- ...produces mercy as we love our neighbor as ourselves. (2:1-13)
- ...must change us. (2:14-26)
- ...must be demonstrated in our words. (3:1-12)
- ...shapes our hearts and desires with wisdom. (3:13-4:12)

**Faith Understands Time**

**4:13-15**

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

James 4:13-15

Man's plans are always tentative. His plans are not his own. Time is not his own. In fact, life is not his own. James then fired another of his famous questions: What is your life? The answer is a mist ("vapor, a puff of steam"). Believers need this godly perspective on their earthly sojourn. Among other things, it blasts boasting right out of the selfish, proud quagmire from which it emerged.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

James has nothing against making plans, but he does condemn the arrogance of those who think they can make their plans without reference to God. We must recognize that we do not control what will happen tomorrow and that our very lives are nothing more than "a mist," or smoke, that quickly vanishes (v. 14). When we recognize who we are before God, we will see the need to consider the Lord's will in everything we do.

*Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*

This entire passage is one of the most important biblical sources for a Christian ethic of business. There is nothing evil or wrong per se about anything God has made and put at our disposal. But God is not at our disposal. Neither are his standards for faith. Nothing in a person's life lies outside of faith and the good deeds that must flow from faith (cf. v. 17). Life is lived, but only if God wills, just as assuredly as deeds are done only if God wills.

*James*

But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

James 4:16-17

To attain spiritual maturity a believer must do the good he now knows. He must stand confidently on God's Word even in trials and temptations. He must compassionately serve his brethren without prejudicial favoritism but with practical faith. He must speak carefully with a controlled tongue and wise, cultivated thought. He must submit in contrition to his all-powerful Father, Law-giver, and Judge with a humble spirit, just action, and a trusting heart. He must be what God wants him to be, do what God wants him to do, speak as God wants him to speak, and sense what God wants him to sense.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

The problem of disconnecting what one does from what one knows is another expression of the double-mindedness and inactive faith so rife within James's audience (cf. 1:22-27; 2:14-26). Because they were believers and had heard the Word of God, they knew the good; but because they had not received it with meekness and humility, they contradicted what they knew and committed sin. This principle was, in all likelihood, well known to James's hearers. But they probably had not expected it to be cited in this connection. The principle of doing only what one knows to be good begins with placing all of the intentions of the heart before God. Only this doing what is good can be whole-hearted trust in God.

*James*

**Trust in Christ  
helps us have perspective  
in our limitations.**

**Questions for Application**

- Q1. What has helped you to have perspective regarding the brevity of life?
- Q2. How have you seen humility developed in your life?