

# Wiseguy

Studies in the Book of James

Text

James 4:13-5:6

Topic

James blasts believers who omit God from their planning

Title

*"Planning Omissioners"*

## Introduction

I'll admit, the prescription drug ads on TV scare me. Drug makers are legally required to tell you their products might lead to a series of horrifying side effects, up to and including death.

They try to soften the effect by having a narrator off camera read the list while they show pleasant images of people being helped by the drug, but the possibilities for harm are overwhelming.

ABILIFY – (For depression) "Side effects include bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, coma or death... **And** trouble swallowing."

MIRAPEX – (For Restless Leg Syndrome) "Side effects include hallucinations, as well as increased gambling, sexual, or other overpowering urges."

ALLI – (For weight loss) "Side effects include an increased number of bowel movements, an urgent need to have them, and an inability to control them."

If you hear, "sleep disturbances" mentioned, that's Big Pharma's code for the psychotic nightmares you'll suffer if you suddenly stop taking the drug without slowly weaning off of it.

Scary stuff. **But not as scary as the ads for retirement.** They let me know that I'm several million dollars behind in securing a future that includes having a roof over my head, and food on the table.

AARP says you should aim to have a nest egg of \$1 million to \$1.5 million. Another way of approaching it is that your savings should amount to 10 to 12 times your current income.

Outliving your money is a modern nightmare. No one has devised a hard and fast formula for just how much money we will actually need in retirement. That's because nobody knows how long we're likely to live. We don't know if we should be planning financially for 20 years of post-retirement life, or 30... *Or even 40.*

The National Institute on Aging says that "the oldest old people age 85 or older are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population."

I'm 61; my dad died in his nineties, and my mom is still alive at 95.

Before you either pat yourself on the back for your foresight in planning, or you chastise yourself for your lack of planning, **you're going to want to hear what James has to say.**

These verses are about planning, but factoring in, at all times, "if the Lord wills."

We will explore what that means by organizing our thoughts around the following two points: #1 Your Plans Must Always Be Submitted To The Will Of God, and #2 Your Plans Must Never Be Steered By The Wealth Of The World.

## #1 Your Plans Must Always Be Submitted To The Will Of God

(4:13-17)

Salesmen like to say, "Plan your work, then work your plan."

It sounds like great advice - until you read what James has to say about planning that omits considering "if the Lord wills."

Jas 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";

James is using someone we might call a traveling salesman as an example of the planning we all do, or are encouraged to do, in life.

You don't have to be in sales to relate to planning. From the first time anyone ever asks you, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" you are prone to making future plans.

There is pressure put upon you to finish high school, and to go on to college, and beyond.

There is nothing wrong with planning. The disciples and apostles of Jesus made plans. For that matter, Jesus made plans. His incarnation followed a plan that had been determined in eternity past. We like to say that He has a plan for our lives.

James wasn't suggesting we do not plan. He was suggesting, as we will see, that we can leave God out of our plans.

Before he says that, he suggests a reason why all planning, apart from God, is flawed.

Jas 4:14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

You could die tomorrow. For that matter, you could die today.

You might conclude that James is a glass-half-empty kind of guy; but I'd say he was more of a glass-overflowing guy.

It isn't so much that he was saying you could die, as he was suggesting you might finally experience eternal life.

If you are a Christian, you're not on the brink of death; you're on the verge of really living by going home to be with Jesus.

He was reminding born-again believers that we are more than physical beings living in a material world. We are spiritual, and should therefore always take spiritual things into consideration before and while making any plans.

James was giving us a last-day-on-earth pep talk. Realizing today might be your last day on the earth, and that tomorrow you'll be with Jesus, how should you plan?

You should plan according to things that are the Lord's will.

Jas 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

I think we all know that we shouldn't make plans on our own, then say, "if the Lord wills," and think we're covered.

We don't want to say, "Lord, these are my plans, and if You "will" something else, You're going to have to stop me."

"How do I know God's will?" is one of the most asked questions by Christians.

Truth is, we already know a great deal about what God wills for us. I think James is telling us to remember to hold dear the things God wills and to factor them into our planning.

So what is it that God wills for us? For one thing, He wills for you to be saved. He says that he "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (First Timothy 2:4). He says also that he is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (Second Peter 3:9).

Are you saved? If you're not, no amount of planning is going to be productive for you in the long run. We are here, on this earth, to determine where we will spend eternity. Will it be in Heaven? Or will it be Hell?

God doesn't just will for you to be saved. He wills for you to be a witness to others, so that they might be saved. He says that He "sent his Son into the world to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The Great Commission comes to mind; as well as other verses that indicate He is sending you forth, into the world, as light and salt, to sew the Word of God, to be a savor of life to those being saved, and of death to all who are perishing.

We are living epistles, to be 'read' by others, to communicate the grace and love of our God and Savior.

In the letter to the Ephesians we get more insight into what the Lord wills:

Eph 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, **but understand what the will of the Lord is.**

Eph 5:18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

It is God's will for you to "be filled with the [Holy] Spirit." What does that look like?

Eph 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Eph 5:20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Eph 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

We don't have the time to go through all this. Think of it as a gauge to measure where you are at with the Lord.

Are you joy-filled? Thankful "for all things?" Are you in fellowship with other believers, "submitting to one another?" That is what He wills for you.

Then we read,

1Th 4:3. **For this is the will of God**, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;

1Th 4:4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

Sexual purity - both yours and that of those you know - is important to God. We remain physical beings, but are encouraged to control our impulses using the spiritual means made available to us.

This one is tough, in our sex-saturated culture. It's easy to become desensitized to sexual immorality.

Finally, here is a tough one regarding the will of God. God might want you to suffer. Twice, the apostle Peter mentions suffering according to the will of God. In one place he says, "It is better, if **it is God's will**, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (First Peter 3:17). In another place he says, "So then, those who suffer **according to God's will** should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (First Peter 4:19).

Those are a few things - big things - that we must always factor in to our plans. We'll say more about that in a moment. But first James adds,

**Jas 4:16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.**

The "boast" was what they were saying in verse thirteen. They were boasting in their iron-clad plans to go and establish themselves and make their fortune. It was "arrogance" to omit the Lord's will from those plans.

**Jas 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.**

This is a great stand-alone verse. Sin isn't just doing things that we know to be wrong. It is *not* doing things that we know to be good and right.

At home, I may not mistreat my spouse. But do I treat her the way I should? If I, as a husband, don't love my wife as Jesus loved and loves the church, it is sin - because I know it is right, and I can do it in the empowering of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

If, as a wife, you are not submitting to your husband as unto the Lord, it is sin - because you know it is right, and you can do it in the empowering of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Verse seventeen can stand alone, but let's look at it in context. James is saying, "if you don't seek to do "good" by factoring what you already know to be the Lord's will in to all your plans, it is sin.

Maybe a few examples of factoring-in the Lord's will might help. We saw that witnessing to others is the Lord's will. When you really believe it is, it cannot help but affect your plans.

If you'll allow me to exaggerate. If your plans are to live somewhere isolated, practically as a hermit... That may not be the Lord's will, because you will have no one to share the Gospel with.

On a less extreme scale, it being the Lord's will that you share Him with others might affect job and career choices, or promotions within your profession.

You need to submit your plans to the question, "Will this increase or decrease my witness to others?"

We saw that it is the Lord's will you be filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus you will want to plan in such a way that you do not quench the Holy Spirit, or grieve Him.



And you will want to be engaging in those activities that please Him, like fellowship and Bible reading and prayer.

It is God's will you be pure, sexually. If your plans involve sex before marriage, or marrying a nonbeliever - those are *never* the Lord's will.

Finally, you may need to suffer in the will of God. How might this affect planning? Let's say you are being persecuted or otherwise mistreated at work. It might be that your plan is to get out of suffering by, say, quitting your job. That, however, may not be the Lord's will. He may want you to endure suffering, in the power of the Spirit, as a witness to your employer, and to your fellow employees.

It's the Lord's will you be saved... Be a witness to others... Be filled with His Holy Spirit... Live a pure life, especially sexually within biblical boundaries... And suffer with supernatural endurance when called upon.

Always factor those things into your plans. We can use the man in verse thirteen as an example. He said, "Today or tomorrow [I] will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit."

"Today or tomorrow" tells us that it may be God's will we go immediately; or that we wait. He knows what divine appointments He has set-up for us.

Filled with His Spirit, I pray, and seek His wisdom on when - of if - to go.

Also on where to go. "To such and such a city." Do you think you are always going to be sent by God where you want to go? Are you dragging Him to your next desired destination?

It isn't true that God will always send you where you don't want to go. But He may send you where you need to go - spiritually speaking; and that may not be where you would choose based on geography and climate.

The traveling salesman said he was going to "spend a year there." He must have calculated how long it would take to make the money he wanted. But couldn't God grant him success sooner?

Or couldn't circumstances be such that his gains turned into losses?

He needed to make money, sure. But he was being sent for other reasons, e.g., to be a witness, and therefore his time there was more in God's hands.

Finally he said he'd "buy and sell, and make a profit." What if God asked him to donate all his profit?

It wouldn't make sense from a material standpoint. But can you envision a scenario where God asks you to give everything? To leave everything?

Sure you can, because, after all, we are stewards of God's resources that He gives us to use to further His Gospel on the earth.

Here is something else that is the Lord's will. He is conforming you into the image of Jesus. He has begun a good work in you - a spiritual work - and He will complete it. One day you will be like Jesus.

As we factor His will into all of our plans, we cooperate with God's ultimate plan for us. His will sets godly, loving parameters and boundaries.

I saw a two-panel cartoon the other day that illustrates biblical boundaries. A runner is coming-up on what looks to be a hurdle. As he jumps over it, a spectator says, "It's not a hurdle; **it's a guardrail.**" In the second panel you see that it is, in fact, a guardrail, and by jumping over it, the runner will plummet into a valley below.

God's boundaries - expressed by His will - are always guardrails to keep you safe.

## #2 Your Plans Must Never Be Steered By The Wealth Of The World

(5:1-6)

There was a man who had worked all of his life and had saved all of his money.

He was a real miser when it came to his money. He loved money more than just about anything, and just before he died, he said to his wife, "Now listen, when I die I want you to take all my money and place it in the casket with me. I want to take all my money to the afterlife."

He got his wife to promise him with all her heart that when he died, she would put all the money in the casket with him.

Well, one day he died.

He was stretched out in the casket, the wife was sitting there in black next to their best friend. When they finished the ceremony, just before the undertakers got ready to close the casket, the wife said, "Wait a minute!"

She had a shoebox with her. She came over with the box and placed it in the casket. Then the undertakers locked the casket and rolled it away.

Her friend said, "I hope you weren't crazy enough to put all that money in there with that stingy old man."

She said, "Yes, I promised. I'm a good Christian, I can't lie. I promised him that I was going to put that money in that casket with him."

"You mean to tell me you put every cent of his money in the casket with him?"

"I sure did," said the wife. "I got it all together, put it into my account **and I wrote him a check.**"

James has been telling us that spiritual things are more important than material things. In these verses he exposes the folly of preferring material things over the things that are spiritual.

Jas 5:1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!

Jas 5:2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

Jas 5:3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.

James mentions "the last days." We have the knowledge that the history of the world is following a divine timeline. God is working-out His plan of redemption, heading toward the destruction of the current earth and heavens, and the creation of new ones that will go forward into eternity.

It doesn't make sense to focus on this earth, and its temporary riches. Even before God's destruction of things, garments can be moth-eaten, and gold and silver corroded.

James might have mentioned robbed as well.

In movies, there's always that one greedy guy who tries to carry-out the treasure while the mine or the cave is collapsing. He always gets crushed as a witness against greed. It's the fate of all nonbelieving materialists.

Jas 5:4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

These guys used every means to build their wealth - even illegal means like "fraud." It's amazing what you can justify to yourself if you don't factor-in the Lord's will.

The "cries" of their oppressed workers reached "the Lord of (translated) Hosts." It describes the vast, powerful armies of angels in Heaven.

In the Old Testament, God dispatched a single angel to kill 185,000 Assyrian warriors. Imagine what a host of angels could accomplish for good.

We struggle with this, do we not? These inequities, and other sufferings, are known to God, and He has the means to overcome them. Still, He waits.

Tragedies aside for a moment, *we want Him to wait*. His waiting is a good thing, even if bad things happen while He waits.

His waiting is called His longsuffering. In His longsuffering He waits, because He is not willing that anyone should perish, but that they would come to know Him, and inherit eternal life.

Eternal damnation is so severe that God allows terrible suffering to continue on this earth, in this timeline, before He says, "Enough."

If the Lord had resurrected and raptured the church five years ago... Or ten years ago... Or twenty... *Where would you be?*

His longsuffering waited, and you're here - saved.

Jas 5:5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

When the wicked wealthy indulge themselves, they think of it as pleasurable. God says they are being fattened for a slaughter.

Jas 5:6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

The "just" is a reference to believers. We are justified by faith in Jesus. When you believe in Jesus, He declares you righteous on the basis of what Jesus has done.

It is just-as-if-you'd never sinned.

Because they know it can be in the Lord's will that they suffer for Him, the just endure patiently their mistreatment.

The wicked wealthy go as far exploiting them as they can - even murdering them.

James was giving an extreme example of the disparity between the wicked and the witnesses. Nevertheless you certainly don't want to be among the wicked, no matter how much you might suffer for your witness.

There is simply too much at stake.

Since we are on the subject of God's will, you still might be wondering, "How do I know His *specific* will for things, like which job to take?"

I'd answer by saying you first need to be waking in God's will in the ways He has clearly revealed. Why would He reveal more of His will for you if you refuse to follow what He has shown you?

Then it comes down to cultivating a personal relationship with Jesus within which you start to know how He is speaking to you.

People like to joke about communication, or lack of it, in marriage. *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, was a best-selling book because it promised to close that communication gap.

I've found that the longer we've been married, the more Pam and I understand each other, and can finish each other's sentences.

It's going to be like that with Jesus. The longer you know Him, and the more effort you put in over that time, the more you will recognize His voice, whether it be Him speaking to you through the Word, or by the influences of the indwelling Spirit, or through circumstances in which doors are opened or closed, or through other believers, or through visions or dreams or similes.

One commentator suggested that, "the key is wanting God's will, not our own."

Start there, and then listen carefully.