

## Where There's A Will, There's A Way James 4:13-16

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

So goes the poem 'Invictus' penned in 1875 by William Ernest Henley. It's a poem that could have been written in any era by any person who believes that they forge their own destiny, that their lives are the product of their chance circumstances. As a matter of fact, another poet of song, Frank Sinatra, sang that he did things his way. It is this very person to whom James may be writing, the person who ventures each day by pursuing their own path without inviting God on the journey.

Turn to **James 4:13-16**, where once again we travel down the road we call the Christian life. We will consider from this passage that there are only two paths to follow. These verses show us one path that is haughty and one that is humble. **Which path are you on?** While the path has been laid out, we determine if we are going to follow it. It is a matter of the will. Let's talk first about the haughty path.

### I. THERE IS A PATH THAT IS HAUGHTY – vs. 13-14, 16

In **verses 11-12** by slandering and judging, we play God where others are concerned. In **verses 13-16** James shows that we play God where we are concerned.

James begins by getting the attention of a certain group of people to whom he is writing turning his attention to merchants or businesspeople to incite them into some action. His words have application to all of us as he addresses the path and the problems that are evident when God is ignored in our planning. Now notice that the things these people were involved in were everyday endeavors, things that in and of themselves are not wrong. They have to do with things like planning a business venture, moving to another city, even making a profit off that business. There is nothing inherently wrong with these activities. Proverbs tells us to consider the ant who plans and prepares in the summer for their ongoing care in the winter.

The problem lies in that these merchants were planning without any direction from God. I believe that James is still talking to Christians here. It says to me that when it comes to life, they have compartmentalized their lives into the sacred and the secular. God is in charge of the sacred. The person is in charge of everything else. Maybe they figure God is too busy to care about the mundane details of everyday life. Or maybe they figure that their plan is better. Or maybe they know the way God wants them to go, but they go ahead and just ignore God's will altogether. God can have things like overseeing the religious issues of life, moral matters, and questions about faith. But when it comes to decisions about relationships, finances, and business, we'll handle those. We don't want God involved in decisions about who we marry or where we live or what career we pursue.

James has a couple things to say about that. In **v. 16** James calls that kind of attitude pride. Notice first from our passage how they outlined their own life.

### A. They Outlined Their Own Life – v. 13

I knew a doctor who went on a medical missionary trip to India, met a nurse, proposed to her four days later, returned home, mapped out how many kids they would have and how far apart they would be and followed that plan almost to the day.

James is talking about those who ignore God

altogether in their plans and forge ahead without considering any part He might have in directing their path – and these were Christians.

Scripture provides us with some examples of people who moved ahead without seeking God's will for direction. There are many, but I'm just going to give you two. Both are found in the book of Joshua.

The first is in **Joshua 7**. It was God's will for Israel to march into and take possession of the Promised Land. In **chapter 6** God's will was for the army to march around the city of Jericho each day and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day march around it seven times and then shout. They did exactly what God had told them to do, with one exception. God told Joshua that everything taken was to be dedicated to Him as an offering of first fruits. We read in **chapter 7** that Achan had sinned by taking things that were to be dedicated to God. Because they soundly defeated Jericho, Joshua sent spies to Ai to scope it out. They returned reporting that it was a small city and wouldn't require the whole army, only a few thousand soldiers. Without inquiring of the Lord, they went and were defeated. After some heart wrenching soul searching, God revealed that there was sin in the camp that needed to be dealt with. There was confession and judgment and then deliverance as we see in **chapter 8** where Joshua listened to the will of God on how to defeat Ai.

One would think they learned their lesson, but we come to **chapter 9**. God had made His will clear that all the nations within the Promised Land were to be destroyed so that they wouldn't lead the Israelites into idolatry. Word spread quickly throughout the land and the Gibeonites hatched a plan to deceive the Israelites. They made it look like they had traveled a great distance to make a treaty. What we read in **verses 14-15** should be a lesson and warning to all of us. **“The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let the live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.”**

Proverbs reminds us that there is a way that seems right to a man. We play God when we don't inquire

what we should do. We think we know better than God. When we don't inquire of God, we lean on our own understanding.

These merchants outlined the path for their lives. See if their pattern is familiar to us.

### 1. We see the proximity of their path

**“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow.’”**

This simply means they are setting their schedule. They planned the timing of their trip. Now again, it's not wrong to plan. James isn't saying we should ignore making preparations and just fly by the seat of our pants. This person is making plans without asking God as if He didn't exist or care He existed.

### 2. We see the place of their path

**“Now listen, you who say, ‘we will go to this or that city.’”**

They had done a marketing plan and saw what they believed to be the perfect location for their little business venture and began to take the necessary steps of making their dream deal a reality.

### 3. We see the plan for their path

**“Now listen, you who say, ‘we will spend a year there.’”**

They knew when they were going. They knew where they were going. They knew how long they would be there. In one year, they expected to saturate the market with their business venture and pull up stakes and either move on or close shop.

### 4. We see the purpose for their path

**“Now listen, you who say, ‘we will carry on business.’”**

From the Greek word, we get the word enterprise. It can mean initiative, creativity, readiness, willingness. A related word is merchant or trader, one who goes in and gets the job done. The picture James is painting is a person who is a go-getter.

One year in college we had a lot of snow. Grand Rapids is in the snow belt and gets a lot of lake effect snow. My brother and I talked about the next year going to the more upscale community in Grand Rapids and offering to shovel snow off people's houses and get paid for it. We thought we had a good plan. It never panned out because the next year it didn't snow much.

When I was in High school, we had fund raisers to raise money for class trips. One time we sold candy and some of my classmates had the idea to go into the local bar and sell candy to guys who had been drinking too much. They sold a lot of candy.

People hatch all kinds of creative things to make money. It takes initiative and if you have ever gone to a craft show or had a booth at a craft show, you know that there are a lot of talented and creative people with initiative. These merchants had a plan on when, where, how long, and why they would follow this path.

## 5. We see the profit from their path

**“Now listen, you who say, ‘we will make money.’”**

Isn't the reason you go into business to make money? It's not wrong to make a profit. Maybe they figured that if they left right away, they could get a jump on the competition by going to a certain location, be in business for a year during which time they would make a good return on their investment. They were making decisions as if they were the final authority in their planning.

Let me stress once more that all of this is being done with seeking God. They outlined their life and had it all figured out.

I think another picture James paints here from this verse is that life is complex. When it comes to the important decisions of life, this person habitually makes plans without regard for God.

Warren Wiersbe states that **“apart from the will of God, life is a mystery.”**

Let me ask you this. **Do you make decisions without seeking God's will?**

In **verse 13** they outline their own life. In **verse 14** they overlooked their own limitations.

## B. They Overlooked Their Own Limitations – v. 14

They are living and planning as if they are in control of their own lives. James tells us first that it is an uncertain future.

### 1. It is an uncertain future

A traveling pastor was confronted by a gypsy asking to read his palm and tell his future in return for some money. He asked if she could really tell him what would happen to him tomorrow. She said she could. He then said he would pay her twice as much if she could tell him what he did the day before. She declined.

These merchants were making all kinds of plans, predicting their outcome and they had no clue what would happen the next day. **Twenty years ago**, people in the twin towers or the Pentagon or the flight over Pennsylvania were making plans for vacation, dinner, going for a run later on, grabbing some groceries after work – any number of activities, but in a moment lives and plans were forever altered. Ours is an uncertain future because we just don't know as we see in the story Jesus told in **Luke 12:16-21**.

We can't see the unexpected. We can't foretell a downturn in the economy. We can't determine if there will be a disaster that will impact our plans. Think back a year ago February and the plans people were making for their future only to have dreams and desires changed because of COVID. We were told it would be over in two weeks, then two months and here we are still being impacted. Businesses have been shuttered. People have lost jobs. Travel plans were cancelled. Lives have been changed. We can't predict the future.

We can't know what will happen tomorrow because we are finite. Man's plans are temporary at best and there is no way anyone can know what will happen

in the next minute, the next hour, the next day, the next month, the next year, the next decade.

**Proverbs 19:21** says (TLB) *Man proposes, God disposes.*” In other words, we can plan all kinds of things and never know if they will come to fruition, but only God can make His plans happen.

I chuckle a bit at advertisements where some person says they are living longer because of taking some new medication. Now I readily admit that with advancements in science and medicine life expectancy has improved. But never forget that it isn't medicine that numbers our days, it's God who knows and has determined how long any of us will live. Our future is uncertain as we see in **verse 14**. **“What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”**

James not only says that it is an uncertain future, he also says it is an undeniable frailty.

## 2. It is an undeniable frailty

When I lived at Camp, I would sometimes go down to the lake early in the morning before the sun came up. In the cool air a mist hung low over the lake. But as the sun rose and heated the air, the mist vanished. Life is like a mist. It's temporary. One day we are healthy as a horse and the next day we are fighting for our lives. We are frail at best. Job says his days were swifter than a weaver's shuttle and like a cloud that vanishes (**Job 7:6, 9**). In **9:25** he said his days flew away like a runner. In **14:1-2** he said his life was like a flower which is here today and then withers away.

Bildad said we are born yesterday and our days on earth are like a shadow (**Job 8:9**).

The psalmist invited God to teach him to number his days (**Psalms 90:2**).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Acts sing *“You don't know which way the wind blows, So how can you plan tomorrow.”*

Compared to eternity, life is brief just a mist and it seems like the older I get the faster it's going by. It's filled with aches and pains because we are frail.

These people had no thought of God when planning their life or in thinking about their limitations.

In their actions, James points out one more wrong response by these merchants.

They outlined their own life.

They overlooked their own limitations.

They operated out of self-love.

## C. They Operated Out of Self-love – v. 16

First, their self-love was evident.

### 1. Their self-love was evident

The word boast means to be loud-mouthed or to speak loudly. The prideful person loves to brag about his plans. He likes tooting his own horn about his plans, where he's going, what he's going to do. Haman comes to mind, bragging about his plans and his position. His pride was his downfall.

*George Bailey boasted about getting out of Bedford Falls. He planned to travel the world and build skyscrapers but ended up never achieving his dreams.*

Peter boasted about sticking right by the Lord to the very end, never deny the Lord, but then the harshness of reality came with a force and he denied the Lord and ran away.

The braggart likes to boast about his plans, plans that don't include God. **Proverbs 27:1** tells us not to boast about tomorrow, because none of us know what tomorrow will bring. **Verse 2** continues by saying that we should let someone else praise us.

Second, their self-love was evil.

### 2. Their self-love was evil

Boasting is a sin.

Boasting is wicked.

Boasting dethrones God and puts self there instead. We know from **Proverbs 6:16-19** that among the things God hates is a proud heart. And when we make plans apart from God and His will then we do so out of pride. It's no different than Lucifer's sin of pride putting his plans, his ego, his will above God.

He denied God's will and when we deny God's will we act like the devil and our self-love is evil.

Let me ask again. **Do we make decisions apart from seeking God's will?** If so, it is haughty path. We're saying we don't need God, we can handle life on our own. We'll let Him handle the spiritual things, but we'll take care of everything else.

**What is our response then if we want to change?  
What is the other path we can take to avoid following a haughty path for our life?**  
James shows us a path that is humble.

## **II. THERE IS A PATH THAT IS HUMBLE – v. 15**

I would suggest first that the humble path is to pursue God's will.

### **A. The Humble Path Is To Pursue God's Will**

**“Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord's will.’”**

**Do we regularly pursue to know God's will in the everyday decisions?** Now, I'm not suggesting that we should ask God's will about which brand of peas to buy or whether we should do the laundry or call a friend or turn right out of the driveway instead of left. But there are clearly some things in the realm of everyday decisions for which we should pursue God's will.

Let me suggest that the very first decision related to God's will is your salvation. **II Peter 3:9** says that God isn't willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance. He wants people to see they are sinners. He wants people to understand that He has loved them with an everlasting love and that love moved Him to send His Son, Jesus, to take our place and pay our debt for sin. He wants us to believe that Christ's death on the cross bought our salvation and that by faith in Christ we can have eternal life in heaven.

After that, there are daily decisions for which we need to seek and then follow related to God's will. **Romans 12:2** – It is God's will that we do not

conform to the world but be transformed by God's Word.

**I Thessalonians 4:3** – It is God's will that we avoid sexual immorality. Really sin of any kind.

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18** – It is God's will that we rejoice, pray, and give thanks in all things.

As a matter of fact, every command we have been given by God is His will.

It is His will that we are not anxious.

It is His will that we share the gospel.

It is His will that we assemble with believers.

It is His will that we love others.

It is His will that we study His Word.

It is His will that we abide in Him.

It is His will that we put off the old nature and put on the new nature.

It is His will that we be joyful in our tribulations.

It is His will that we submit and draw near to Him, while at the same time resisting the devil.

It is His will that we repent.

It is His will that we humble ourselves.

And the list goes on.

Jesus said His desire, was to do the Father's will.

Warren Wiersbe writes that **“the will of God is a living relationship between God and the believer.”**

**So how do we obey God's will with the right attitude?** The key to doing God's will is found in **Psalm 40:8: “I delight to do Your will, O God, Your law is within my heart.”**

The psalmist is saying that doing God's will was a joy, a pleasure, a desire, something he looked forward to doing that brought him happiness and peace. It was a delight because God's law, God's Word was in his heart. When we delight to do the will of God, it is not a burden, it is not drudgery. Doing God's will means being obedient to it, not deviate from it, not altering it to our liking or when we feel like getting around to it. If it is a delight, it is something we will do immediately because it is the right thing to do and because it brings God pleasure when we obey right away.

James tells us back in **verses 7 and 8** how we can learn to delight in doing God's will. Submit to God,

resist the devil and draw near to God.

Some people think God's will is a mystery and they can't know it or that it's difficult to do. But that couldn't be further from the truth. The psalmist said he delighted to do God's will because God's Word was in his heart. If you want to know and delight in God's will, read God's Word and draw near to Him.

**Charles Stanley wrote "As our understanding of His character grows, we'll have a better idea of how to pray in accordance with His will."**

The atheist believes there is no God so therefore there is no divine will for his life except what he makes it as we read from Wm. Henley's poem.

The agnostic believes there is a God, but that he can't know Him, so therefore he can't know His will. He just wanders around hoping he gets it right.

The passive follower of Christ believes God exists but is only interested in God's will so long as it doesn't interfere with his personal agenda or will.

The active follower of Christ believes God has a will for his life and desires to know it and delights in doing it.

**Augustine wrote that "the whole life of the good Christian is a holy desire."  
"I delight to do Your will, O God."**

Eric Liddell and Charles Abrams were competitors but with drastically different approaches to running. Abrams ran because he was driven and admitted that his soul was cheerless. Liddell, on the other hand, ran because he couldn't help it. He said, "when I run, I feel God's pleasure."

That's how it should feel when we do the will of God – sensing the pleasure of God when we are obedient – delighting to do His will. Doing God's will means we submit to Him in every area of our lives, not just in some things but in all things. When it comes to doing God's will, there is no difference between the sacred and secular. He is in control of everything and obey His will in all things. We can't brag when God is in control. If we believe in God's

sovereignty, we will completely trust His will for us and not follow our own path.

It would be great if every day a little piece of paper floated down from heaven written by God with His will for us for the day. But that doesn't happen. That's where two things are necessary. One is to trust Him that His will is the absolute best for us and the second is to read His Word every day because it contains His will for many of the things we may encounter in the day.

Sometimes knowing His will requires patience on our part because God doesn't reveal it all at once. That requires trusting Him and waiting for Him in faith to reveal His will step by step. The important thing is that we wait for Him in His timing.

On one occasion, Abraham knew the will of God, but moved ahead of God and the consequences brought generations of pain after the birth of Ishmael. If God showed us His will up front there would be no development of our faith. Had God told Abraham before he climbed the mountain with Isaac that he was going to provide a ram, Abraham would have walked by sight and not by faith. Doing the will of God requires we walk by faith.

So when it comes to doing God's will, obey all of it. Whatever part of His will He reveals, do that and then wait for Him to show you the next part. Draw near to Him and His will will be clearer.

The humble path is to pursue God's will.  
The humble path is to pursue God's way.

## **B. The Humble Path is to Pursue God's Way**

**"Instead, if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."**

If we live every day seeking to know and do God's will, it will shape what we do. Our inner desire to obey will be evident in our actions. Obeying God's will by living God's Word will transform our lives. Doing God's will sets the direction of living a godly life.

Remember, God wants us to know His will and He

wants us to know why we should know His will.

**Colossians 1:9-12** “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And then Paul tells us the reason he wanted these believers to know God’s will. And we pray this in order that you may (1) live a life worthy of the Lord and (2) may please Him in every way; (3) bearing fruit in every good work, (4) growing in the knowledge of God, (5) being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may (a) have great endurance and patience, and (b) joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”

**Ephesians 5:17** says that God wants us to understand His will.

**Ephesians 6:6** says we are to do God’s will with our heart. There’s the desire or delight in doing it.

The principle of giving in **II Corinthians 9:7** can also be applied to doing God’s will. We aren’t to do it grudgingly or of necessity, but with a cheerful heart.

Do we delight to do God’s will?

Do we love to do God’s will?

Do we live to do God’s will?

Do we long to do God’s will?

When it comes to the direction we take in life, which path are we following, whose will are we pursuing – ours or Gods? One is a haughty path, the other is a humble path.

Take my will and make it Thine –  
It shall be no longer mine;  
Take my heart – it is Thine own,  
It shall be Thy royal throne,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.