

■ SCRIPTURE

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

■ DISCUSS

1. What attitude about our plans is James targeting here?
2. James talks about “arrogant schemes”? How would you define arrogance?
3. Do you think it is arrogant to declare your plans without first actually saying the words, “If the Lord wills?”
4. What value do we get from reminding ourselves that our plans ultimately depend on God? Does that change what we do, or how we do it?
5. Is James saying we shouldn’t make plans for the future? What’s the point of making long-range plans if you don’t know what tomorrow will bring?
6. The example James uses specifically refers to “business.” Isn’t it essential for businesses to do planning? How could a businessperson run a business according to this teaching from James?
7. How does it make you feel to be compared to “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes”? Does it make you feel insignificant, or does it encourage you to live in the now, or something else?

8. Why do you think James uses that image?

9. Verse 17 raises some questions. First, what does it mean? How would you put that in your own words?

10. Now what is it doing here? Does it go with the previous section about making plans? Or should it be put with the next chapter about rich people?

11. How would the original readers of this epistle feel about what James says in verse 17?

■ LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let's consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Prayer: What plans do you have for your life, your family, your home, your business, your church? Talk with God about these, and then listen. What does He think about all this? If your plans involve others, get them in on the praying, too.

Chart: Look back through your life and choose 1 to 3 plans that you made long enough ago to see them develop. Then trace the development of those plans. Did things turn out as you wanted or expected? How did you interact with God through all of that? Did He lead in a certain way and then change directions? Map this process out as creatively as you can, and then examine that “map” of your life. What can you learn from that?

Seek Counsel: As you consider plans for the future, find a wise Christian friend to consult with. Pray with them and ask their advice on determining the direction where God might be leading you.

Dare: Is there something God has been nudging you to do for Him that you've been resisting? Maybe you're worried about what people will think, or you might consider the action dangerous in some way. Keep tuning in to God's direction here. Get appropriate advice from others who are close to God, but then dare to do it—in the spirit of James 4:17.