

If The Lord Wills

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn in them to James chapter 4.

! And our scripture this morning will be verses 13 through 17. James chapter 4 verses 13 and 17. And if you're there in your Bible, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together.

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. 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. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance.

All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin. May God add a blessing to the reading of your Word. Would you please be seated?

[1 : 14] If you grew up reading the comic strips in the newspaper, you're probably familiar with the character Ziggy. Remember Ziggy? A little bald-headed guy with a big nose. And Ziggy had a lot of problems.

Ziggy always seemed to come across a series of misfortunes. And oftentimes in that comic strip, he's pictured meeting with a wise old man on the top of a mountain. Ziggy usually has a walking staff in his hand and he's got his backpack on indicating that he's traveled a long way to visit this wise old man with the questions that are perplexing him about life.

Chief among those questions is, what is life's purpose? Remember the wise man didn't really have an answer for Ziggy, but that was where the punchline was in the comic. And if you're here this morning, or if you're watching at home, you are either a Christian or God is now calling you to be one.

You wouldn't be here and you wouldn't be listening now if it wasn't a work of God in your life. And unlike Ziggy, you don't have to go to take some pilgrimage to walk up some mountain in some secluded place to meet with some mystical guru to answer the questions about life and what its purpose is. About 400 years ago, a group of Puritan preachers and elders came together and produced the Westminster Shorter Catechism. That document has been used all over the English-speaking world to teach the basic doctrines of Christianity. And the document is laid out in a series of questions and answers. And the very first question is this, what is the chief end of man? In other words, what are we here for? What is the purpose of life? And the answer that it gives is simply this, man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That answer finds its basis in Scripture, a lot of Scripture. But the one I want to draw your attention to this morning is 1

Corinthians 6, verses 19 through 20. There the Apostle Paul says,

If you're a Christian, that means that your life is not your own. Christ has bought you at the price of his own life. And so you belong doubly to God. He made you. He bought you. Your life belongs to Him.

[4 : 23] Therefore, the Bible says, glorify God in your body. He bought you for this. He made you for this, that you would know Him and enjoy Him forever. That is the meaning of your life.

If you aren't a Christian, this is what Jesus Christ offers. Doubly belonging to God, being all that He made you to be, and not wasting your life. Some of you may have read John Piper's book, Don't Waste Your Life. And if you haven't read that book, I highly recommend it to you.

And in that book, he pleads for his readers to live their lives in passionate pursuit of experiencing and displaying the excellencies of God in every aspect of their lives, instead of wasting them on trivial pursuits. And he warns them to not get caught up in a life that ends up amounting to nothing. And so in that book, he shares a story. His father was a pastor, and he shares a story that he remembered as a child that his father told about a man who was converted one day at his church.

This is what he said. As the tears ran down his wrinkled face, and what an impact it had on me to hear my father say this through his own tears. I've wasted it. I've wasted it. This was the story, Piper says, that gripped me more than all the stories of young people who died in car wrecks before they were converted. The story of an old man weeping that he had wasted his life. In those early years, God awakened in me a fear and a passion to not waste my life. The thought of coming to my old age and saying through tears,

I've wasted it. I've wasted it, was a fearful and horrible thought to me. The concern that Piper shares in that book is God's concern for you in this book, the Bible.

[6 : 54] It's James's concern for you in this passage that we've read, that you not waste your life by ignoring God's will for you. And so we've been going through this book. We're in chapter 4 of James now, and I don't know about you, but I'm kind of thankful that there's only one more chapter to go after this. And that's not because I haven't enjoyed studying James or teaching through James, but because of how convicting it is to read James. And I've told you many times that before I preach, when I sit down at my desk on Monday to begin studying for that Sunday's sermon, my first prayer is that God convict me, and he's answered that prayer. But he's done so for my good. He's done so for our good, and I hope for your good as well. You can say the same, because James, what he's doing here is he's continuing to test the genuineness of our faith. And in James chapter 4, verses 13 through 17, we are presented with yet another test from him. This test determines the genuineness of your faith based upon how you respond to God's will for your life. And so the main idea for our morning's, this morning's sermon is this, how you respond, how you respond to God's will for your life matters.

It matters because it determines the genuineness of your faith. Is God's will for your life something that you regularly talk about and think about? Are you actively seeking to pursue God's will for your life? How often do you consider God's will for your life when you make plans for the present and for the future? Do you take the duration of your life for granted without passing or pausing, I should say, to consider just how fragile and how brief it is in the big scheme of things? And so through this passage in James today, God tells us that how we respond to his will for our lives matters. It should shape and it should change the way that we live. And so in our text today, James gives three instructions and how we ought to understand and how we should respond to God's will for our lives. And the first instruction is this, what you say about your life matters. What you say about your life matters. Look again with me at verse 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. So in the Greek, you who say literally reads like this, the ones who are saying, which indicates James understanding that some people in the churches that he were, he was writing to were in the habit of living their lives, making plans and talking about their future as if God didn't exist. They'd acknowledge God's existence and sovereignty on Sunday, but come Monday, as they made their plans for the present and for the future, their speech revealed something totally different. Acting like a Christian, talking like a Christian on Sunday, but behaving and talking like an atheist throughout the rest of the week. James wants us to imagine now a scene where a group of businessmen are hovering over a map or a chart of some kind, a group of businessmen. As they are identifying the most lucrative routes or trade centers in cities where they can go and they can make a great profit. They are discussing time frames for their visits and they're crunching the numbers to ascertain their potential profits. They are portrayed as setting goals and determining the most effective means to achieve those goals. Now, please don't misunderstand James's point here. He's not condemning setting goals or making wise plans.

He's not denouncing trade or business or capitalism or making an honest profit. He is not suggesting that it is sinful to read the Wall Street Journal or invest in the stock market or in a retirement account. Neither is he arguing that it is sinful for those of you who are students. He is not discouraging you from thinking about the future.

What James is condemning is speech, which reflects an attitude that enters into such planning without humbly acknowledging that the authority and power to determine what the future holds belongs to God, not to you.

[12 : 17] Jesus addressed this issue in the sin of talking about the future and making plans as if God doesn't exist in a parable that he told in Luke chapter 12. Luke chapter 12 verses 16 through 21.

Jesus told them a parable and he said, the land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, what shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops?

And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.

But God said to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared. Whose will they be? So is the one, Jesus says, who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

The man in that parable, his sin has nothing to do with his success. He didn't acquire his profits dishonestly. His problem, his sin, was his self-centered perspective that failed to acknowledge God in any way.

[13:43] Notice how many times he's using first-person pronouns. He refused to acknowledge God as the source of the success and the wealth that he had acquired.

He consults only with himself. He determines his future plans based only on how it will affect him. He credits himself for his present achievement and hopes only in himself for his future security. His life consisted of the treasures that he had amassed, but in the end they would pass into the hands of someone else and all of his plans would come to nothing.

And so Jesus is saying that living in such a way is a tragic and terrible waste of life. And so in verse 15, James says, instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

Think about Jesus and how he spoke about his life. When his disciples were being earthly minded, Jesus said to them, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work in John 4.34.

[14:58] In John 6.38, Jesus defined his mission when he said, for I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Then when facing the agony and the awful reality of the cross and what he would endure there in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, falling on his face, saying to the father, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

Likewise, the apostle Paul understood the importance of acknowledging God's will with his words as it pertained to his ministry travels. In Acts 18.21, he bids the Christians in Ephesus farewell as he plans to head to the Christians in Antioch.

And there he says to them, I will return to you if God wills. In Romans, Paul speaks of his desire to visit the Christians there.

And he says to them, I mention you always in my prayer, asking that somehow by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you. Then again, in Romans 15.30 through 32, he urges them to pray like him, that by God's will, he says, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

[16:22] And he makes similar statements in Corinthians and Philippians. And those statements that he makes aren't religious cliches designed to be used by him to make himself look humble or pious.

They are expressions of a firmly held belief that God's will determined where he goes, when he goes, and what he accomplishes if he goes.

And so I ask, is that how you speak about your life, about your plans, about your goals? Or do you speak in ways that reveal that either that you don't much care about God's input?

Or maybe you think that God isn't really interested in the plans that you're making for the life that he's given you. Why does what you say about your life matter to God?

Well, again, I think John Piper has provided a great answer for that question. Coming from the same book, he said, Because God created us not just to do things and go places with our bodies, but to have certain attitudes and convictions and verbal descriptions that reflect the truth, a true view of life in God.

[17:37] God means for the truth about himself and about his providential and sovereign control over all of life to be known and felt and spoken as part of our reason for being.

God doesn't desire to just be a part of your life, but to be your life. Colossians 3, 2 through 4 says, Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear with him in glory.

You know, sometimes parents, you get frustrated with your kids, and you might have said these words before. I brought you into this world, and I can take you out, right? Now, that's not really what you mean. You shouldn't murder your children for misbehaving. But this is what you are implying.

[18 : 43] I'm someone who loves you, who sacrificed for you, who knows what's best for you. And so you should respect and obey me and my will for you.

God has made you. Christian, God has saved you. And he plans to heap heavenly rewards upon you one day.

And so he's not someone whom you should just trust with your life, but someone whom you should worship and obey as well with your life. And what you say or don't say about God's will reveals who you truly believe God to be.

Do you treat him as your personal advisor or your cosmic genie or as your Lord? Not using him to accomplish your will, but being used by him to accomplish his will.

So, James' next instruction about responding to God's will for your life is that what you think about your life matters. What you say about your life matters. What you think about your life matters.

[19 : 53] In the beginning of verse 14, James says, Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. Now, a lot of us think that we would like to know what tomorrow will bring.

A lot of people make their living off of trying to predict the future. Stock market traders, meteorologists, etc.

You know, if you predict Farley Dickinson to win this past week, you know, good for you. Don't forget the church and your winnings for that. But I think, for example, that shows us how bad we are at predicting the future.

At least it is for me. But it is better that tomorrow remain a mystery to us. Why is that? Because if you knew that tomorrow would bring prosperity, you would probably become careless and presumptuous in the present.

If you knew that tomorrow would bring adversity or disaster, you would become fearful and you would retreat into your closet, refusing to step foot outside.

[21 : 04] So in his wisdom, God has given you a memory in order to learn from the past. And he has hidden the future so that we are compelled to trust in him who holds the future.

But even though we can't predict how our life will be in the future, that doesn't stop us from trying sometimes, does it? It's not sinful to think about the future.

It's not sinful to establish goals and to have an outline of plans again and seeking God's will as you do that. But sometimes, oftentimes, when we think about tomorrow and the days after, our minds and our thoughts are filled with worry.

Jesus addressed that issue in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells us not to be anxious or to be worried about tomorrow, not to fear the future, but to think completely differently about it.

And he concludes that portion of his sermon with these words in Matthew 6, 33 through 34. Jesus says that how you think about your life and the future matters.

[22 : 44] You don't know what tomorrow will bring, but God does. And you can trust him. When tomorrow comes, his love, his grace, his mercy, his provision will be there for you.

So seek him today. Walk with him in the present. Pursue his will now. I don't know about you, but I need to constantly be reminded of that truth.

And I think that's why Proverbs 3, 5, and 6 is my favorite verse. Out of necessity. It says, It says, Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Likewise, I've found Ephesians 2, verse 10 to be incredibly helpful to suppress worries and fears and troubling thoughts about the future.

There it says, James says, James says that the way you think about your life regarding the future matters because, comparatively speaking, life is short.

[23 : 56] And so in the rest of verse 14, he says, What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. This morning when I got in the car with Jack to come to church, it was cold.

And my first breath was one I could see, right? And that's how I know, ooh, it's cold outside. But then it immediately vanished. Disappeared. Your life, the Bible says, is brief.

One moment it's here and it's visible, and the next moment it's gone. And this kind of comes as a gut punch to us, doesn't it?

No, it does to me. James is forcing us here to think about something that we'd rather not think about. But he's not the only biblical author to describe life in such terms.

Job repeatedly stresses the shortness of human life. He said, My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Again, he says, My days are swifter than a runner. In chapter 14, verses 1 through 2, he says, Man who is born of woman is a few days and full of trouble.

[25 : 03] He comes out like a flower and withers. He flees like a shadow and continues not. David said in Psalm 39, 4 through 5, O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days.

Let me know how fleeting I am. Behold, you have made my days a few hand breaths, and my lifetime is nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath.

Those texts, those verses aren't meant to depress you. They describe the quantity of life, not the quality of life.

They are not suggesting that life is unimportant, but that it is brief. And so the point they are making, the point that James is making, is that it is because life is so brief, it's important.

It's valuable. And so we must be diligent in how we spend it and purposely pursuing God's will for our lives.

[26 : 11] How you think about your life matters because it will determine how you spend your life. Life is a gift and it's subject to God's will.

And so what we say about it matters. What we think about it matters. And now thirdly, what you do with your life matters. What you do with your life matters.

Verse 16, James says, To disregard God's will and God's providential oversight of your entire life is sinful.

It leads to boasting, taking credit for things that are ultimately due to God's grace and provision. It leads to arrogance, thinking that you are the captain of your own ship, acting as if you are able to control your own fate.

These are attitudes that describe the rich fool, remember, that Jesus told about in the parable.

James is saying, Don't waste your life living and behaving like a practical atheist, acting as if God doesn't exist.

[27 : 24] And don't waste your life behaving like a self-theist, refusing to submit the uncertainties of life to God, and asserting your will, your plans, your goals over His.

Because you know what? You are, or you have, I should say, even less control over your life than you think that you do. And either that infuriates you or it comforts you based on whom you know God to be.

Then James goes on to say in verse 17, So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. It's possible to know God and to acknowledge His will, but choose not to do it.

Ever heard of a guy named Jonah? Remember what happened to Jonah? Jonah? God tells Jonah, Go to Nineveh, preach a message of repentance to them, and Jonah says, No thanks.

I hate those people. I do not want them to be saved. And so he goes in the opposite direction. What does God say? Okay, that's cool, Jonah. I'll find somebody else to go and do that instead. No.

[28 : 39] Right? He sends the storm. He sends the fish. What happens to Jonah? He becomes fish food until he obeys the will of God. And so I ask you, what do you desire to do with your life?

What do you desire to do with your life? Do you desire to do things with it that only serve yourself? That will only please and serve you instead of God?

Maybe you've convinced yourself or you've deceived yourself into believing that you are obeying God's will when the truth is you're following your own.

To know God's will and not to do it, James says, is a sin. So now we've been talking a lot about God's will, and so maybe you've been asking or wondering, Well, what is God's will?

How can I know God's will? Well, in the broadest sense, God's will is expressed in all of his commands and principles contained within his word. He wants you to know it, understand it, and live your life by it.

[29 : 54] Specifically, the Bible says that God's will is that people be saved. 1 Timothy 2.4, 2 Peter 3.9. He desires that you know him as Savior and as Lord.

He wills that you become his child. And he desires to lead you in his ways. Psalm 143.10. God is not trying to hide his will from you.

He wants to reveal his will to you. That you would be filled with his spirit. Ephesians 5.17-18. That you'd be sanctified. Be made more like Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4.3-8. And that in so, you would do good works. 1 Peter 2.15. And not be conformed to this world, but be transformed and renewed by him that you will continually be mindful of his perfect will.

Romans 12.2. This requires patience. It requires faith. But the important thing is that as you wait, you be busy doing the good that you know God has called you to do.

[31 : 10] As James says in verse 17. So the main point of application is this.

Live in submission to God's will for your life. Live in submission to God's will for your life.

As a kid, few things are more exciting than receiving your first bicycle. I remember I was the youngest of three.

And I remember getting my first bicycle and just being so happy, so excited. But it came with rules. It came with boundaries. My parents said, you can ride your bicycle in the garage and in our driveway, but you cannot take it across the street.

Now, my sisters were older. They had earned my parents' trust. And so their boundaries were larger than mine. They were able to go across the street and down the street.

[32 : 26] And it was one of those days I remember as a kid where it seemed like every kid in the neighborhood was out riding their bicycles. But they were riding their bicycles on the other side of the street.

And so I thought to myself, I'd much rather be over there than over here. And so I pedaled my little bicycle across the street. And guess what? Almost got hit by a car.

My parents didn't see, so I thought I'm in the clear. Didn't see that one right. Well, my sister saw.

And my sister told my parents. And I was grounded from my bicycle for a week.

They took it down into our basement and they stuffed it behind like the furnace or something like that. And I remember going down there throughout the week and just looking at that bicycle and just thinking, you know, I've really messed up.

I should have obeyed my parents' will for me. After that week, I got my bicycle back and I learned, you know, through that experience that my parents were right as upset as I was because they loved me.

[33 : 30] They cared about me. They didn't want me to get ran over by a car. And so I respected their will when it came to my life in the use of that bicycle.

And eventually, as I got older and I gained responsibility, my boundaries were increased as well and I was given more freedom. But, you know, now as an adult, I've come to know my parents so well.

And all of those moments where, you know, I could be a rebellious child and they were gracious with me and they forgave me and they loved me and they continued to tell me why what they wanted for me was best.

And I learned that their will was good. And it's gotten to the point now where as an adult, I don't have to call home to ask them, hey, mom and dad, what should I do here? What should I do about that? What do you think?

What advice do you have to give me? You know why? Because I know them so well. I know their desires for me so well that I already know what they would say. And when it comes to our heavenly father, it's no different.

[34 : 40] The more you know him, the more you spend time with him in his word, the more you spend time with him in prayer, the more you know his will for your life and his desires for you.

And that changes your desires for yourself. It changes your perspective on everything and what you're living your life for. Psalm 37 says, verse 4, Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

But understand first, you must delight yourself in the Lord. And what he says is good and what he says is right. And if you do that, he will give you the desires of your heart because the desires of your heart will be what he desires for you.

Commit your way to the Lord, it says. Trust in him and he will act. So again, you must understand that verse in its context and in the context of all of the Bible.

Don't waste your life coveting and desiring things that aren't God. Don't set your desires on things that cannot satisfy you like God.

[35 : 50] And so I ask you right now, how are you responding to God's will? What do you say about it? What are you thinking about it?

What are you doing about it? Don't waste your life. And one more thing. If you are a young man or a young woman today, you know, ministry is hard.

But ministry is wonderful. It's wonderfully hard. And I think too often we as a church, we are discouraging our young people from considering, is that God's will for your life?

It's almost like we cast more doubt on it. Now it can't be. That's hard. Do you really know what you're doing? I mean, maybe that's not God. You just ate something bad for breakfast or something like that. But I encourage you, as I was encouraged, 16 years old, today, tonight, sometime, you get on your knees and you go to the Lord in prayer and you tell him, Lord, my life is yours and I will do whatever you will.

Show me what that is. It may happen then. It may happen later. And maybe it isn't that he calls you to ministry. Maybe it's something completely different. But you do that now and you continually do that all the rest of your life.

[37 : 22] And you will not regret it. And for those of you who are working or who are retired, whatever the case may be, that's something that I think we all need to do on a regular basis.

Just get on our knees before the Lord and say, God, my life belongs to you. Whatever you want me to do, whatever it is that you are willing for me to do, my answer is yes.

And then when someone comes to you or calls you and asks you to do something, your answer ought to be yes. And you'll never regret having done that. Three questions of application.

Question number one. How can planning for the future be wise? How can planning for the future be wise? How can it become sinful? What's the difference?

Question number two. Why are sins of omission, omission so much easier to downplay than sins of commission? So the sins where you're not doing what you ought to be doing are sins of omission.

[38 : 27] The sins of commission are the ones where you're purposely like, yeah, I'm just going to go ahead and sin anyways. What are the sins of omission and why are they so much easier to downplay than the sins of commission? What are some specific struggles in your life in terms of scriptural commands that you tend to ignore?

And then finally, whose will for your life are you pursuing? Whose will for your life are you pursuing? I'm going to pray.

We're going to have a time of invitation. And I encourage you to do that in your seat up here later today after we're done. If you want to find me, that again, you go before the Lord and you make it known to him that it is your desire to do his will.

And to pursue him with the life that he's given you. Let's pray. God, we thank you for your word again. We thank you for its clear instruction. And God, we thank you for the instruction.

It's truth that sometimes it just, it hits us hard in the stomach. We don't want to think that our life is brief.

[39 : 33] We want to be of the mind that it's just going to go on forever. And Lord, we'd like to think that we have more control over what happens tomorrow than we really do. And God, so often we think that we're wiser, that we're smarter than you, and that we have plans for ourself that exceed anything that you might have for us.

God, forgive us for thinking in such ways, for speaking in such ways, and for doing things that are opposing your will for our lives. And instead, Lord, I pray that for all of us, that today, if we haven't already, that we would be more determined to commit our ways to you.

That we would be more mindful of what we say in regard to your will. That we would think more about what you want for our lives, and that we would pursue that in ways that see us doing things, that testify to this world that we have someone to trust in who is far better at predicting and knowing the future than any man ever could claim to be.

God, we thank you and we love you. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.