

Today and Tomorrow

James 4:13 – 5:6



Preparation: Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 156-168. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.

Beginning the group study: Pray for the ability to be fully present, right here, right now.

Read aloud from James 4:13 – 5:6

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

From Stulac (pg. 156-157; 162), printed here:

“To what extent is your life directed by the knowledge that Christ is coming back? Much of our thinking and behavior is shaped by what we can see of present circumstances or past events. Yet Scripture speaks forcefully of Christ’s return as a fact that should be directing how we live now. Christians are to be motivated by the certainty of this future event.

When I had been a Christian less than a year, I attended a conference for the InterVarsity chapters in our state. Among those in my cabin was a student from another campus who made a lasting impression on my life through one passing remark. During a discussion in the cabin about the events surrounding Christ’s return, this student suddenly commented, ‘What a great day that will be!’ He spoke briefly but with such fervor that I could not forget his words. I realized that the return of Christ was a fact of knowledge for me but had not become a moving force on my emotion, attitudes, or behavior.

James writes now about a forward-looking stance of faith in which the realities of the future affect outlooks and behavior in the present. His forward-looking stance can be summarized as: ‘don’t be arrogant; don’t be materialistic; instead, be patient.’

James fully expects that a humble attitude will be manifest in humble actions, and an arrogant attitude will be manifest in arrogant actions. It is natural for him to be saying, ‘Do not merely say that you want to know God’s will or that you recognize your dependence on his will; look carefully at what God has already said about his will, and do that.’

The worldview accepted here is that God rules over time and requires our obedience to his will in all use of it. The same worldview is extended to encompass material wealth: God rules over wealth and requires our obedience to his will in all use of it...James would be intending two purposes for Christians as they read how he would address the rich. His Christian readers are suffering many trials, including economic hardship from persecution by the rich (2:6-7). The first intended effect is encouragement from the fact that judgment will come to the rich, so the sufferers may leave judgment to God. The second intended purpose is warning: judgment does come upon such sin, so they should be careful to avoid becoming materialistic themselves.”¹

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.

Getting started:

- What's your relationship with your calendar like? Or, a better question may be: what is God's relationship with your calendar? Are you living into God's call in the here-and-now, or are you too focused on future plans?
- If we are living respectable lives, it might be tempting to believe that God's sovereignty applies less when it comes to our wealth (ex: I give of my time and energy, I don't have to give my money too, do I?). Talk about how you struggle with understanding or believing that God is completely sovereign in all of life, even wealth.

We make a lot of plans for the future; and that's not a bad thing. But it's possible that our plans make bold statements about what we believe our future to be – and we live for those moments instead of living right now for God.

- Have you ever considered the possibility that a over-busy schedule is a form of arrogance? Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25-34.
- Having long-vision, hopes, and dreams for the future – these are all good things. But we also need to consider what God is calling us to today – right now. Talk about what God might be calling you to do today; in the little things.
 - Encourage someone; be a good neighbor; call an old friend; make apologies, etc.

We make a lot of plans for our wealth, too. Does protecting your wealth end up hurting other people? Finding the best price isn't a bad thing, but considering only the price and not the labor practices of some companies may end up passively contributing to situations of injustice.

- Discuss how great prices can sometimes blind us.
 - The wonderful price can make us blind (ignorance is bliss) to the possible injustices behind such a great price.
- Talk about how the way we spend our money points to our priorities.
- What might it look like to submit our money to God's sovereignty besides giving in church?

James addresses two huge issues in our world – time and money. How we spend these two “currencies” can point to our priorities. Submitting them to the sovereignty of God may mean some changes in the way we live our everyday lives. But change is never easy. If significant changes have been mentioned, talk about how that might take patience and perseverance, and how you can support each other through changes.

What is one small change you can make about how you spend your time that will allow you to love God and others more deeply?