

evil.

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it for him, it is sin. Pray with me, pray for me, pray for me. And let's ask God to teach us tonight.

[7 : 20] Lord, we come now under the authority of your word and we ask that you would talk to us. We enter into this year with lots of different dreams and hopes and plans and goals that we want to accomplish. And tonight, this passage needs to speak into our lives, to give us a proper mindset and framework of how we live as a Christian. It's very, very different than the way others approach life. So I pray, God, that you would come now by your spirit and teach us through your word and strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for we pray it in his name and God's people said, amen. I mean, you can be seated.

David Brainerd had his life all planned out. He, he wanted for reasons I cannot understand to be a pastor. I don't know why anybody would want to do that, but David Brainerd was convinced that this is what God had called him to do and that this was the direction of his life. Now in Brainerd's day, which was the 1700s, in order for you to be a pastor, you had to have a university degree. And so he enrolled at Yale University, which of course, in those days was Christian. And everything David thought was going according to how he planned it. He was extremely smart and exceptional student rated the top of his class. In addition to being smart, Brainerd was, and I quote, or he had, and I quote, an intemperate, indiscreet zeal, close quote. Let me translate that for you. He had a big mouth. He was like some of you, don't point.

He had the tendency to open his mouth before using his brain. Now keep in mind, in Brainerd's time in the mid 1700s, you have the great awakening that's happening here in America. God is doing awesome things and he is turning universities on their head, one of which was Yale. And students were becoming passionate for God, but some of the faculty at Yale were not so enthusiastic. There was a certain professor of Brainerd's that was not supportive of the great awakening. And Brainerd said this of his professor, quote, he has no more grace than a chair. And it's a wonder he doesn't drop dead, close quote.

Now, in our modern society, such a comment would seem maybe mild or quickly dismissed, but not in Brainerd's day. Brainerd was overheard by a fellow student. He was reported to the administration and expelled immediately. Top of the class, months from graduation, on the path to fulfilling his dream of becoming a pastor. And every one of his plans were gone in a moment. Brainerd spent the next several months trying to reevaluate the direction of his life. He had no idea what to do now. Everything he thought was going to be had now been taken away from him.

[10 : 58] And on November the 8th, 1742, David Brainerd received a letter asking him to consider becoming a missionary.

And the rest is history. David Brainerd would go on to become one of the greatest missionaries ever to serve the American Indians.

Faith family, show of hands, and those of you watching online, you can raise your hand if this applies as well. How many of you have ever had a plan for your life only to discover that God had a different one?

Show of hands, anybody? Anybody had a plan for your life? And at some point along the journey, you discovered that God had a different plan for your life.

You had everything mapped out, everything planned out. You had goals with corresponding dates. You had even downloaded it into an Excel spreadsheet. Only to watch all of those plans crumble like a stack of cards.

[12 : 05] And maybe this happened in your life in a big way like it did with Brainerd, his entire vocation. Maybe it happened to you in small ways. Maybe for you, you planned to get married, but that never happened.

You planned never to get divorced, but it did happen. You planned to retire by 60, but it didn't quite work out that way.

You had planned out your entire day and week and nothing went according to how you had it planned. Some of you would even say you didn't plan to be a Christian, but God.

Some of you planned to live in Hawaii, and here we are. Most of us at some point in life have said these words, that's not how I planned it.

Amen? Why does that bother us so much? Why does that get to our core? Why is that such an issue, a problem?

[13 : 14] It's because deep down you and I want to be in control. We want the steering wheel in our grip. We want the account in our name. We want the ball in our hands. We want to control our days and our destinies.

And what I want to ask you tonight, because that is particularly how we think as we enter into a new year, is have you ever, faith family, stopped to consider how evil that is?

And you say, evil? That's not evil. And yet it's exactly what James, the brother of Jesus, calls it.

Look at verse 16. As it is, you boast in your arrogance, and all such boasting is, say it, evil.

Now, it feels on the surface that's a bit too much. It's a bit too strong, James. I mean, I know you're the brother in Jesus of all and all, but seriously, that's a bit strong.

[14 : 17] Because that's not how we would typically respond to this. Imagine if we took prayer requests tonight, and somebody stood up and said, Pastor, pray for me. The last three weekends, I've been drinking wild turkey and watching Nicolas Cage movies.

And I'd be like, well, we need to pray for you, all right? I'm not sure which is worse, the Nicolas Cage movie or the wild turkey, but we should pray for you, all right? Somebody else stands up and says, Pastor, pray for me.

Every time I'm around my 80-year-old grandmother, I just want to punch her in the face. I don't know why. Well, we should probably pray for you. You've got some anger issues. And then somebody else stands up and says, Pastor, pray for me.

You don't understand how much evil is in my life. What did you do? I planned a trip to Chicago. And not a single one of us here tonight would call that evil.

And yet James is saying, and I hope we're listening, that if you're not careful as to whose plans are primary in your life, that's exactly what it can become.

[15 : 30] Look at verse 13. Come now, you who say today or tomorrow, we're going to go into such and such town and we'll spend a year there and we'll trade and make a profit.

The first point here that James is addressing is the assumption we have of self-sovereignty. He's given a generic example of somebody that's planning a trip, something that many of you, all of you have done at some point in your life.

Now, be clear. James is not suggesting that planning is evil in and of itself. Jesus even talks about planning. Luke chapter 14, he talks about you wouldn't build a tower without counting the cost and not be able to finish it.

So don't hear me wrong tonight saying that planning is in any way evil. Planning is a good thing.

Planning is living on purpose and living with purpose is a great thing.

And as you enter into the new year, I encourage you to plan a budget, to set goals, to have those kinds of directional things in your life.

[16 : 39] But here's what James is talking about. Notice this on the screen. This will preach. James is not condemning plans. James is condemning pride. If you're not careful, there can be something behind your plans that make your plans evil.

Now, where am I getting this idea of pride from? Well, it's actually throughout the context of what James is writing about. Let me give you just a few other examples. This is in James 3, verse 14. Here, James is talking about the use of your tongue and the way you talk to other people or about other people. He says, If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. Tell us how you really feel, James. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

So that was the example of how we use our tongues, the way we talk. Here's another example as it relates to relational conflict. This is James 4, verse 1. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

[18 : 03] Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. That's probably not physical murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You kill one another. You destroy one another. You rip each other apart. Why? Because you desire and do not have. Because you want what you want, and you don't care about what somebody else wants.

Here's the kind of summary. James 4, verse 6. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Here's my point. If you look at the context, James is giving a series of issues where people put their personal desires as primary. As though, are you listening, faith family?

As though their desires are the only thing that really matters. I'm going to say whatever I want to say to you because I don't really care how it hurts you.

[19 : 08] That's selfishness and pride. Or, I'm going to do whatever I desire because my desire matters more than the relationship. That's selfish.

That's pride. That's pride. And now you're seeing the context here where we say, I'm going to go and I'm going to plan whatever I want to do because my plans matter most.

In fact, look back at James 4 at just how exhaustive they think their knowledge of the future is. Look at verse 13. Come now, you who say, today or tomorrow we'll go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.

Here's the summary. Notice this on the screen. They know when they're going to go, right? What is it? Talk to me. Today or tomorrow. So they know when they're going to go. Secondly, they know where they're going to go.

We're going to go to such and such a town. I'm going to Chicago. I'm going to Duluth. I'm going to Elko because who wouldn't? All right? Thirdly, they know.

[20 : 13] We laugh at that. That hurts my feelings. They know how long they're going to stay. We're going to be there a year or so. They know what they're going to do. We're going to trade.

And they know what they're going to receive. We're going to make a profit. In other words, they're God. They know everything. Their knowledge is exhaustive.

They've made their plans, and nothing could possibly keep those plans from happening. Are you ready? This is going to hurt a bit. Here it is on the screen.

You can praise like a Christian and plan like an atheist. Oh, holy, holy, holy.

Raise our hands. This is our Father's world. We praise like a Christian. And we leave tonight and plan like an atheist. Well, of course this is going to happen next week.

[21 : 19] Well, of course it's what's going to happen in 2022. Because who would know more than I do about my life? I don't know. Maybe the one who created it.

Maybe you don't know it all. And some of you are like, I'm so glad I brought my spouse here tonight. She, Pastor, you don't even know.

She is a control freak. This woman is like just always about plans. And really, you think this is about somebody else? You think this is about someone with you?

I'm talking to you. I'm talking to me. How many of you have ever wanted to control the outcome of a game? Need I go any further?

How many of you hate being told what to do? How many of you complain when your plans get changed or ignored? How many of you get nervous when you're not the one driving?

[22 : 23] Now, that might be for good reason, okay? So let's be clear. But sometimes you're so used to driving and being in control that when you get in the passenger seat, you freak out because now it's not in your control anymore.

How many of you are bitter with God because he didn't answer your prayer the way you asked him to? It was this. God, I know your plans are not my plans, but they really should be.

I mean, I kind of experienced this with the Guatemala trip. I mean, if you're traveling globally now, many places require a 24-hour test, a negative test for COVID to be able to get in.

The U.S. requires that coming back in. And so, like, I was getting ready for the trip, and I had all my bags were packed, my plane tickets purchased, I've got all the arrangements of who's going to meet me once I get to Guatemala City to pick me up from the airport.

I've got all these plans made, and I'm going in to get that test, realizing that if this test's positive, all those plans are shot. And I don't know if I'll get to go, or I don't know what day I'll go.

[23 : 36] Everything I thought was certain might not come to pass. That's an uncomfortable feeling, is it not? I mean, I tested negative going and coming, if you didn't figure that out, all right?

But anyways, that feeling of this is out of my control, and everything that I've planned may not go according to plan, can reveal our hearts, and can show us who we really want to be in control of our lives.

And I'm telling, actually, I'm not telling you, James, the brother of Jesus, is telling you, this is an insane way to live. It's an insane way to live.

That is, to live as though your plans are primary, what we might call prideful planning. And there's three reasons here, three reasons that James gives us why prideful planning is an act of vanity. It is foolishness to live this way, and not that we don't plan, but we don't plan as though our plans are primary. God always has the final say over our calendar.

[24 : 46] Amen? Whether that's Monday, or the next 10 years of our life. And here's why it's crazy to think otherwise. Number one, life is uncertain. Life is uncertain.

In verse 14, he says, yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. You have no clue what will happen tomorrow, do you? If there's one thing that's certain in life, it's that life is never certain. Amen? I mean, how many of you look back at age 18? Some of you, that's a ways, I know. But you look back to 18, how many of you can say that life went exactly as you knew it would from age 18? No, there's been all kinds of recalculating and didn't see that coming, and who knew about this, and you already know that life is uncertain, and you don't know what tomorrow will bring.

So why in the world would you plan with pride? Why would you live as though your calendar runs the universe? Secondly, I don't actually notice this on the screen.

[25 : 55] When you make plans, you're not making them with all the information regardless of how much you think you know. You do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Here's the second point, is life is fragile. James goes on to say, what is your life? It's a mist. Many of you have lived this.

You are one doctor's visit, one car ride, one day away from a change of plans. Life is that fragile. Amen?

It is uncertain. It's fragile. Here's the third thing. Is it short? Life is short. He goes on in verse 14. The last part of that verse says, your life is a mist.

It's here today, and then it vanishes. It's here for just a little bit of time, and then it is gone. And if you've ever heard of the mayfly, the mayfly waits a year, an entire year to be born, and then has a lifespan of somewhere between 30 minutes to 24 hours.

[27 : 00] That's a bummer, right? You wait a year, a whole year to get born in 30 minutes. It's over, right? You're born, you have kids, you graduate college, and retire all in 30 minutes, right?

James is like, that's your life. It's a mist. I mean, how many of you, I mean, those of you that are parents, how many of you look at your kids, and you're like, where in the world did the years go? What in the world happened? Okay? You don't do this, but some of you, some of you may be like me, you look in the mirror, and you're like, what happened, right? Where did the young guy go? There's all this gray coming in here. Life is a mist. It's uncertain. It's fragile. It's short. So why would you think that you can plan your life as though you are sovereign over it?

Listen to what Peter says. Listen. All flesh, humanity, all flesh is like grass. And all its glory, that is the glory of humanity, the glory of flesh, like the flower of grass.

[28 : 13] The grass withers, the flower fails, but the word of the Lord remains forever. Let me ask you, who's sovereign?

Flesh or the word of the Lord? God or us? This is the perspective James wants us to have. And this is all a setup for our series that starts next week, From the Ashes.

Namely, we're going to look over several weeks, Lord willing, I've got a plan. I'm planning a series, but Lord willing. We're going to look at individual stories in the Bible of people who thought they knew how life would turn out.

And life didn't turn out the way they thought it would. And from the ashes, God did something beautiful. From the ashes, God brought something new.

He was in control all along, which leads us to the next point that James has for us quickly, verse 15. Instead, here's a different way to live, a different way to think.

[29 : 21] You ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. In other words, he shifts here from the assumption of self-sovereignty.

Well, I'm going to go here, and I'm going to do that, and I'm going to stay here this long, and I guarantee I'll make a profit. You don't have a clue about your life. You don't even know what tomorrow holds. Instead, instead, the way you ought to live, the way you ought to think, the way you ought to plan, is if the Lord wills, we'll do this or that.

Now, James does not intend this to be some kind of Christian cliché where you're not allowed to say anything without prefacing it with, if the Lord wills. Hey, see you tomorrow. If the Lord wills, right?

Got to sound spiritual and biblical. You know, it's almost kind of like that. Hey, brother, you sound so Christian-ese. No, that's not what James is giving us here. James is, because remember, he's talking about pride versus humility.

Are you ready? This isn't even on the screen, but you may want to write this down or remember it. He's not concerned about what comes out of your mouth. He's concerned about what's in your heart. It doesn't really matter if you say, if the Lord wills, if really in your heart, it's, but I'm going to will it.

[30 : 43] He's concerned about a heart. Notice this on the screen. He's concerned about a Christian that lives with a submissive heart to the sovereign plan of God. Is that not, after all, what separates a Christian from everybody else?

Namely, that we live by faith. Go through, we won't do it now, but go through the list of Hebrews 11. What set all of them apart? They lived by faith.

Noah, I want you to build this. I never saw this coming. You think Noah was like, I have a dream. One day I'm going to build an ark.

No. God comes to him and says, this is what I'm calling you to do. And he's like, that's not what I had planned for my life, but I trust you.

Abraham, you're going to have a son. Ha! Do you know how old I am? I'm way past the planning days of that. But I trust you.

[31 : 55] This is what James is getting at. It's a heart that is submissive to the sovereign plan of God. We live by faith, not by our calendar.

You don't like this sermon, do you? Trust me, I hate it as much as you do. All right? But this is where the rubber meets the road with Christian living, is trusting God and his plan when our plan doesn't come to pass.

Here is what a Christian believes. Just very quickly, notice these on the screen. Number one, God has a plan for my life. Do you believe that? God has a plan for my life. I don't fully know it.

I certainly don't understand it because I'm not God. How could I understand God's plan for my life? I'm me. He's God. It's his plan. So I can't understand all of it, but I believe that based on God's word, he has a plan for me.

And I'll get into this a little bit in the series starting next week because this may throw some of you for a loop, but that's okay. Is this even includes the sinful actions of others.

[33 : 08] Joseph's brothers sinned against Joseph. Amen? And yet God was taking him to Egypt. Elimelech sinned when he took Naomi and their sons to Moab.

That was wrong. There was no excuse for that. And yet God has a plan for Ruth to meet Boaz, which will become the lineage to Jesus. It is sinful to scream, crucify him, crucify him, when the him is the perfect son of God.

And yet it was the plan of the father to crucify the son. In other words, and there's going to be beauty in this. This gives great comfort to me.

I hope it gives comfort to you. It means this. When people sin against you, you are able to say, you sinned, and God is sovereign.

You sin. Joseph's brothers are not off the hook, and neither are those when they sin against you. And yet we're able to say, in the mystery of God's plan, he's getting me to Egypt.

[34 : 21] He's getting Ruth and Boaz together. He's dying for sins. God has a plan for my life.

Do you trust him with that? Secondly, God's plan is greater than my plan. If at any point you want to just shout amen, you should probably do that, all right? God's plan is greater than my plan.

He's in control. I'm not. He's independent. I'm dependent. He has a power to accomplish anything. I have the power to screw most things up. Amen? He is all. No, I figured you'd amen that, all right?

He's all-knowing. I'm guessing it best. His plans come to pass. Mine don't always. The future is about God, not about me. And it's probably that last one that we should remember the most.

The future is about God, not about me, which is why his plan is greater than mine. Thirdly and finally, it means that God can interrupt my plan anytime he wants.

[35 : 22] God can interrupt my plans anytime he wants. This is the phrase of surrender, a prayer of surrender, that God can intervene and do whatever he wants because that's the life of humility and

faith.

Proverbs teaches this. Proverbs 16, verse 1. The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. Verse 9, same chapter.

The heart of man plans his way, but it's the Lord that establishes his step. I'm going to go this way. And God's like, no, you're not.

I love that you planned. You really should plan. It's not sinful to plan. Nice plan. I have a different one. And it's better than yours. And you planned it in your heart, but I'm God in your steps. And a Christian is okay with that. A Christian is okay with that because of faith.

[36 : 32] And without faith, it's impossible to please him. When God changes where you are, your occupation, your location, you can rest assured that he's not closing doors to frustrate you.

He is opening new doors to use you. Brainerd, I know you want to be a pastor, but there's some American Indians that need the gospel, and I'm going to use you for that.

It's not how you planned it. It's how I planned it. And Brainerd trusted his God.

Let me give you one example just quickly from the Apostle Paul, and then we're almost done. The Apostle Paul leaves Athens. He goes to Corinth, and then he goes to Ephesus. And in Ephesus, they beg him to stay longer.

They did not want Paul to leave. And this is Paul's response when they asked him to stay. This is from Acts chapter 18, verse 21. But on taking leave of them, he said, I will return to you if God wills.

[37 : 43] And he set sail from Ephesus. Another example, this is on wanting to see the Corinthians again. This is 1 Corinthians 4, 19.

Paul says, But I will come to you soon if the Lord wills. In other words, Paul approached his life this way. I'm going to plan.

I'm going to go to Ephesus. And then I'm going to go here. And then I'm going to go there. I have a plan, but I'm always open that God might have a different plan.

That was the posture of the Apostle Paul's life. So what's the application tonight as we close? Let me give you just a few things quickly that I hope this will be an encouragement to you, not only as we start a new year here at Faith Family, but as we start a new series next week.

The first is this. Go into 2022 with a crucified calendar. I don't care if that's on your iPhone or if you still use pen and paper.

[38 : 47] Whatever you use for a calendar, drive nails in it. Crucify it. Because we realize that while we may have a plan, while we may seek to live on purpose, our posture is one of a humble heart surrendered to God.

We do not want to be the kind of people that prays like a Christian and plan like an atheist. Amen? We want to have an if-the-Lord-wills mindset when it comes to our year.

Second, give thanks for all your plans that didn't come true. Amen? It's like Garth Brooks, right? I thank God for unanswered prayers, right?

There's deep theology right there. The reason I say this is because most of us only give thanks to God when things go our way. How many of us give thanks to God when they don't go our way because we believe that God is steering us to a better way?

That's rare. Things go my way according to plan. You're the best God ever. I love you. Things don't go according to my plans. Are you even on the throne at all?

[39 : 57] That's not how a Christian should praise. God, thank you that what I thought would come to pass did come to pass. God, thank you that what I thought would come to pass didn't come to pass because you must have something else in store for me.

Give him thanks for the plans that didn't come true. Third, this is where it gets home to me is give up control to experience freedom in Christ.

Give up control of your life to experience the freedom of Christ. Here's what I mean. Some of you have a specific issue that you're trying to control in your life. It may be your marriage.

It may be your children. It could be your finances or work. Peter says this, 1 Peter 5, verse 6.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

Notice this on the screen. Freedom isn't found in controlling your life. Freedom is found in living by faith. And we think the more control I have, the more free I'll be.

[41 : 13] No, the more control you have, the more enslaved you are to your own plans. But when you, and this isn't some kind of let go and let God cliché thing.

I mean, when you truly say, God, I have crucified my life and my calendar. I'm going to plan because you've called me to live on purpose. But if you change those plans, God praise you. I'm okay with that. That's freedom. That's freedom. And you end up somewhere on Friday you never thought you'd go because that's where God wanted you to be.

For us planners, this is a really hard thing to accept. But this is the freedom of Christ. Lastly, and most importantly, give up certainty in this life for the certainty of eternal life.

Many of us are far too consumed in the uncertainties of this life that we lose sight of the certainty of eternal life. We're more concerned about where we're going to be on Friday than we are for where we're going to be for eternity.

[42 : 25] That's insane. Give up this world and all of its uncertainties and receive by faith the certainty that is yours in Christ, namely eternal life.

And it's interesting how when we have that certainty of eternal life with God, it gives us peace in all the uncertainties of this life.

Amen? So believe. Trust Him. If you have never put your faith in Jesus for the first time tonight, believe Him. Trust Him with your eternity.

And if you can trust Him with your eternity, you can trust Him with your tomorrow. So maybe you're here tonight and like David Brainerd, you've had your life all planned out and it didn't go according to your plans.

God had something else in mind. And you're wondering tonight, how can I know that God really has a purpose for my life?

[43 : 31] How can I know, pastor, with certainty that God is at work in my life? Here's the answer. Look to Jesus. Look to Jesus.

And you say, wait a minute, how does looking to Jesus upon the cross give me certainty that God has a plan for my life? Listen to Acts 2, verse 23.

This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

And God raised Him up, loosing the pains of death because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. Look at me, faith family.

I do not know what 2022 holds, but I know God has a plan for us. How do I know that? Because there is an empty grave according to the definite plan of God.

[44 : 37] And that is all the certainty I need to know He has a future for me. And all God's people said, Amen.

Will you pray with me? God, this is a hard message to preach because you know me more than anybody else in this room knows me.

And you know how I love to be sovereign. I love to be in control. I love to have plans go according to plan.

And I need to be reminded, as I'm sure many of my brothers and sisters here tonight needed to be reminded as well, that if I'm not careful, that's evil.

It's not a bad character trait. It's not a wrong decision. It's evil because all such boasting and arrogance is evil.

[45 : 35] And God hates pride. And so God, I repent of those times in my life where I thought my plan was more sovereign than yours.

I pray that we would repent for this arrogant attitude that thinks we know more than you do.

Oh, I'm going to go here tomorrow and I'm going to do this and I know, I know, I know. No, you don't. And so what we ought to do and how we ought to live is, God, I'm going into tomorrow with a plan, but you can interrupt that at any moment because your plan is better than my plan and I choose to walk by faith.

Help us as we enter into this new year with this mindset. Help us praise like Christians and plan like Christians. and help us as we enter next week into this new series according to your plan that we would see these examples throughout Scripture of men and women whose plans were turned to ashes And from that came the beauty of your glory.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.