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Your Life is Not Your Own
James 4:13-17
November 29th, 2015, Jeff Germino

How many of you watched the lunar eclipse at the end of September? I always find it fascinating witnessing these kinds of cosmic performances. Watching the earth's shadow slowly move across the face of the moon made me think about how big our universe is. The image on the screen is from the eclipse in September. I also took a couple of pictures of an eclipse in 2008. They aren't real clear, but they do tell a story.

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The first one was taken just shortly before the eclipse was completed.

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The next one was taken slightly before that, and you can see in this one, if you look carefully, there are two stars visible. One of those stars is actually the planet Saturn, and the other is the star Regulus. Regulus is apparently 79 light years away.

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This kind of science is way above me, but in one year light will travel 9,460,528,400,000 kilometres.

And Regulus is 79 times further than that. That is crazy.

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As I was watching this incredible eclipse transpire, my mind wandered back to July 20th, 1969. How many remember that day? Do any of you younger folk know what historic event happened on that day? Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Edwin [Buzz] Aldrin Jr. landed Apollo 11 on the moon.

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And at 7:56 pm Neil Armstrong became the first person in history to step on to the surface of the moon. What were his first words when he first placed his foot down? "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Those words have become immortalized.

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I remember that day. I was 8 ½ years old, and I didn't really understand the significance of what had just happened.

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But, I do remember being in awe of what man had just done. And looking at the lunar eclipse back in 2008 and seeing Regulus beside it, made me sense the bigness of our universe and how small we are in light of that.

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Here is a graphic of some of the planets we are familiar with. The earth looks pretty dominant. But, take a look at this next one.

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Some of the planets near us are significantly larger. And earth looks even more insignificant compared with some other planets and stars.

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Here is a graphic of the size of the sun and other planets compared to the size of the earth. We are pretty small. And that is nothing compared to some of the other planets. Look at this next one.

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Jupiter, which is much larger than earth, takes up just one pixel on this graphic, compared to the star Arcturus. Our universe is huge. When I think about the vastness of the universe it makes me feel very small. And when I think that God made all of that and more, and keeps it all doing what it's supposed to do, I am awed at the bigness of God. And maybe the most amazing thing of all is that in the middle of God's massive universe is a tiny planet called earth, not even visible in this graphic, where there are almost 7.4 billion people, and God is in charge of it all. He created it all with a purpose in mind, including my life, and yours.

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God is huge, and has a purpose for his creation. But, you know, sometimes, even as Christians, we live our lives as if we were atheists. Sometimes we could be called **functional atheists**. We say we believe in God, but the way we live, the way we make decisions, the way we go about our business, at times, you would think God does not exist at all. We act as if God has no purpose for our lives, or he has no interest in being involved. We sometimes make our decisions independent of him as if we know what is best for ourselves. God might just as well be dead.

Well, James has some things to say about that. Let's walk through the passage together. Before we do I want to give you three points that we're going to pull out of the text and we'll talk about those things as we go along.

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1. **My life is not my own**
2. **My life is short**
3. **God created me with purpose in mind**

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James 4:13-17 (ESV)

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"— ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

What is James saying here? Is he saying that we shouldn't make plans, or that we shouldn't set goals for ourselves? Not at all! This is not an argument against making careful plans, but a caution to include God and submit to him **in** our planning.

James was speaking to travelling merchants here. It was common for merchants to look for new markets for their wares and go to a new town, village or city with the goal of trying to make a profit. These people would plan things out carefully. They would research a new target market and then produce enough of their product to reach their goals and then expect to come back with a handsome profit.

James was not implying that there was anything at all wrong with this. He was not arguing against making good careful plans. As a matter of fact, there is great wisdom in careful planning. It is silly not to plan carefully. Jesus talked about the importance of counting the cost (Luke 14:25-34). What James was doing here, though, was cautioning them about leaving God out of their planning, living as if God doesn't exist, as a functional atheist.

We should plan our futures. It's silly and irresponsible not to. But, we need to realize that we can do all the planning we want and be as careful as we can, but it may not turn out the way

we planned. There are things we have no control over. We don't have control over the weather. We have no control over the financial markets. We have no control over the behaviour of other people. We can plan as carefully as possible, but in the end we need to trust God with the outcome, and ask him to guide our steps. Don't leave God out of your plans.

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Proverbs 16:9 (ESV)

9 The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

Ruthie and I met at Bible college in 1985. For some of you that makes us very old now. For others, we are still kids. We got married about a year and a half later and we were pretty sure that we would end up in ministry of some sort. We made all kinds of plans. The specifics changed quite often as we learned more about our strengths and the gifts God gave us.

Just after we were married our goal was to be Bible translators. Ruthie had a linguistics degree and a Bachelor of Religious Education. And I had a degree from a Bible college and we knew that I liked adventure and needed a challenge so we thought this would be a perfect fit. Go bushwhack through the jungle somewhere and translate the Bible. It made perfect sense. Why wouldn't this be a good plan?

So, we moved in with my parents in order to save enough money to go to Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) to study Bible translation. Ruthie was working for a temp agency, getting lots of work. And I was doing construction with more work than I could handle. But, soon as we made the decision to go in that direction, all of our work dried up. Actually, I still had work, but it was dependent on good weather and we had the rainiest summer in years in Calgary. That may sound silly to people from Campbell River, that rain would stop us from working, but Albertans are afraid of water. They don't see much of it. So, I was stuck in the house every day praying desperately for God to bring us some sun. And Ruthie's work had suddenly become non-existent. We were desperate.

One morning I woke up and looked out the window to see what the weather was like. It was raining — again. I felt so despondent. Ruthie and I sat on the edge of our bed and cried out to God. "Father," we said, "We thought we were doing your will. We thought we were heading in the right direction. What's going on?" We had to somehow save enough for our tuition and living expenses while in school, and the summer was nearly half over. It now looked impossible. We felt totally lost and abandoned and were clueless about how to discern God's will.

Later that day we talked about it again and we prayed some more. And then for some reason, one of us said, "Maybe we should just give up on this idea of Bible translation for now and go somewhere and teach English as a Second Language for a couple of years and try to figure things out and discern God's direction for our lives."

So, we prayed about it. We said, "God if there is wisdom in this please lead us." We said, "Amen", and the phone rang. I picked up the phone and said, "Hello," expecting the big booming voice of God. But, it was our pastor. He asked us if we would teach an adult Sunday

School class in how to find God's will. After gaining control of our laughter, we said, "Absolutely not! We have no idea how to find God's will right now. We feel totally lost."

We told him our story and he said, "Well, it just so happens that another thing I am trying to do is find someone to teach English as a Second Language in Japan for a couple years. We need to find a replacement for a missionary couple that is going to language school." That was the quickest answer to prayer we have ever experienced.

We hung up the phone, elated and awestruck by how amazing our God is. As soon as we made the decision to go, the weather cleared. I got back to work, and Ruthie got lots lots of calls for work and we made more than enough money in a shorter time. We needed to make enough for airfare and living expenses to go to school for a month in Hawaii, airfare to Japan, and our first month's living expenses there. All the money came in.

We made our plans, but God ordered our steps. This has been the pattern in our lives since we have been married. I could tell you story after story, some more amazing than this one, of how God has redirected us as we humbly walked with him. We made our plans, but God ordered our steps.

In the Western world we are very individualistic. We tend to think that we are in charge of our own lives. This is **my body** I can do with it what I want. We hear that from abortionists, don't we? We also say '**my time** is my own. I can use it the way I want on the things that I want to spend it on. Nobody can tell me what to do.' **My finances** are mine to use as I see fit. I work hard for it and so I should be able to use it all for myself if I want, and if there's anything left over I might give a little to the church or help someone else if it doesn't inconvenience me, or if I don't have to sacrifice. "Mine, mine, mine, it's all mine." That's the Western way of thinking.

Well, James blows a hole in this philosophy of life. He says, 'you make all these plans for yourself and how you're going to prosper and be successful, but, you don't include God in your planning.' For all you know, you may be dead tomorrow, James said.

Here's what Paul said:

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1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 (ESV)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

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You are not your own. We were bought with a price – the blood of Jesus Christ paid for our freedom. And so now we belong to him. Our lives, our bodies, our time, our finances, our energy; every part of our lives belongs to him. None of it is ours to choose how we will allocate any part of it without first consulting the One who bought us with a huge price.

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Well, James gives some perspective to life on earth. To say that life is short is an understatement. This is our second point.

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What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

In the grand scheme of things our lives are just a speck in the line of eternity. When we were kids we thought life would go on forever. I remember going to the farm in Saskatchewan as a kid playing with my cousins and brothers and it seemed like summer would go on forever and I would be in this perpetual kid-like state all my life – always playing, always having fun. I thought I would never be old enough to be called a teenager. But before long, I was old enough to drive, and then move out on my own, and then get married.

And the older I got the quicker life seemed to zip on by. I'm only 54 now. Next week I will be 55. Yikes! And to some of you here, I am just a young whipper snapper. Where did all that time go? Life moves far too fast for my liking at times. Do you ever want life to just slow down a little? Our lives are so short. Even if we lived to be a million years old we could not even begin to explore the edges of the universe if there is such a thing.

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

What's James saying here? Well, I don't know how many people I have heard say things like, "I have plenty of time to live my life God's way. I'll wait until I'm graduated from high school, or from university. Or, I'll wait until I get a career and get married and settle down. Or, I'll wait until I retire. Right now, my life is for me. I need to make the most of it. God can wait. For now, I just want to live my way."

James says, "No, life is too short to waste. ***What is your life? ...you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.***" Poof!

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Well, the next thing James says is, "You know what? You think it's okay to plan your life without God in mind. It's not. **God created you with purpose in mind.** That's our third point, and if that's the case, we need to go to him with our plans. He knows best." Earlier, James said, "If you lack wisdom go to God. He has lots of it for you."

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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.

So, again, James is not saying that we should not make careful plans. What he is saying is that we shouldn't live our lives as if God does not have any part in them. It is so easy to live our lives as functional atheists. We say we believe in God, but do we allow him to have a part in our day-to-day decisions? Do we allow him a say in how we run our financial affairs? Or, do we budget ourselves with no margin so he gets the meagre leftovers, if there is anything left over? Do we go to him for wisdom in how to raise our kids? Do we live our lives as if God is real and alive and actually dwelling in us?

James is not telling us to look for God's specific purpose for our lives like the proverbial needle in the haystack. He is saying that God's purpose for us is that we would live in the way God has ordained for us and that is that we would grow in the likeness of Christ and learn to love those around us so they will see Jesus. That is what it means to follow Jesus.

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

We cannot expect to feel purposeful or as if our lives have meaning if we are not living in the way God has called us to live.

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The Bible says in **Micah 6:8 (ESV)**,

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

The late J.B. Phillips, who translated the New Testament into modern English, wrote a book called *"Your God is Too Small."* And in the introduction to the book, he wrote:

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Many men and women today are living, often with inner dissatisfaction, without any faith in God at all. This is not because they are particularly wicked or selfish or, as the old-fashioned would say, 'godless,' but because they have not found with their adult minds a God big enough to 'account for' life, big enough to command their highest admiration and respect, and consequently their willing cooperation....

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If it is true that there is Someone in charge of the whole mystery of life and death, we can hardly expect to escape a sense of futility and frustration until we begin to see what he is like and what his purposes are.¹

Friends, if there really is a God who created the heavens and the earth, and if he really did create us with purpose in mind, if he is really sovereign, and if he is actually good, as the Bible says he is, and as we have all experienced many times over, then we need to live our lives as if his purposes for us really are better. If we don't, we will be continually frustrated and try to fill our lives with others things to compensate for the emptiness we feel. Too many times we make our decisions on our own and then ask God to bless them after the fact instead of humbly asking him for direction and asking him to show us his wisdom looks like.

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Proverbs 16:9 (ESV)

"The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps."

We like to use terms like 'self-confidence', 'self-assured', and 'self-made' to signify that someone is successful and capable of making it on their own, as if it is a virtue to make it through life without God or other people.

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Well, James says, ***"All such boasting is evil."***

It is not actually virtuous to call yourself, "self-made." It is not the way of Jesus. James actually says it is the way of the evil one. What do you think Jesus meant when He said, ***"Come and follow me?"***

¹ J.B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small*, 1961

If you look at the Greek translation of this, do you know what it actually means? It literally means, ***Come follow me.***” He leads. We follow. Last week I alluded to the bumper sticker that says, “God is my co-pilot”. Have you seen those? If God is your co-pilot, friends, consider changing seats. I would much prefer to have the almighty God who rules the universe directing my life than me. I don’t know the future. There are so many things I have no control over. One thing we do know though, is that God both knows the future, and he is sovereign over it. He created our lives with purpose in mind. He is all-powerful, and he has our best in mind. That’s what Paul said in Romans 8.

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Romans 8:26–28 (ESV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

We need to cling to this every day. Some of you are going through some difficult times right now, and things haven't turned out the way you planned. Can anyone relate? Some of you have health problems. Others have relationship difficulties. For some it's financial concerns. Every single one of us here has a story. We have things going on right now that are too big for us to handle.

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We need to realize that God is big enough. We can give whatever it is we are anxious about over to him and ask him to direct our steps. He is big enough and good enough. But, we need to make sure we are walking in the walk according to his purposes.



Leading People to Become Committed Followers of Jesus Christ

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Week of November 29th, 2015

Growth Group Studies will resume the week of January 10th.