

HOW TO NOT FEAR THE FUTURE

James 4:13-17

Good morning! Happy New Year! How's the new year so far for you? Many people, usually, at the start of something or anything, feel nervous. There's a certain feeling of uncertainty. There are doubts, fears. Like in this new year, we're not sure about what the new government is going to be like especially for us Christians. Will they take away some of our freedoms? We're not sure about whether the vaccines are truly efficacious. Should I or should I not get a vaccine? But I think we should. We're not sure whether Alex Smith will play well tonight. Will the Washington Football Team make it to the playoffs? We'll know later.

Seriously, the whole world, the whole country, and our church are undergoing changes and facing challenges this year. That can really make us feel nervous. What's in store for us this year? Will we meet in-person soon? Will our ministries continue to thrive? Can I travel again in the near future? Can I shop without fear? Will we be able to share Jesus more effectively?

I want us to think as we start a new year on how to overcome the fear of the future, how to face our future confidently. Every time about this time of year all kinds of articles come out in magazines -- everything from *The National Enquirer* to *Time* magazine -- making predictions. Just not sure about the so-called Feng Shui experts in the Philippines. Are they still making any predictions?

What's going to happen in the new year? Everybody's got their ideas. We have an innate desire to know the future. People try all kinds of things. Tea leaves, astrology, palm reading, etc. The fact is, none of those things work. The Bible says in **Ecclesiastes 8:7** "*Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come?*" The answer is, nobody can. Only God knows the future.

That's why we often fear it because we fear the unknown. It's wise to watch trends, but even our best guesses are just educated guesses as to where the world is going.

So, we're like the ancient Israelites led by Joshua after Moses died. They're charting a new territory. They're entering a new phase in their journey. Things are uncertain. What lies before them are great challenges, mountains to climb, rivers to cross, cities to conquer, pagans to vanquish, and so on. They are afraid. Their leader is afraid. So, God says to Joshua, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." God is telling us the same thing this year. Don't be afraid. Be courageous. I know there's still a lot of challenges before us, as a church and as individuals. But this is the year when God will do great things in our midst I believe. God is still alive and his purposes will prevail, Amen? So, I've chosen as our theme for this year, "The Year of Living Courageously". Not dangerously. There'll be dangers, life is full of them. But you can conquer dangers by being courageous. And courage can come when you believe that God fights for you, Amen? He will be with you.

In line with that, we're starting a new series today to make our footing sure as we face the challenges of this year as a church and as individuals. I'm calling it "Conquering Your Fears". This series will show us how to be bold and do things unimaginable. It will help us to move forward with confidence. For starters, I would like to begin this 5-part series with a message about not being afraid of the future. "How to Not Fear the Future."

You know why we're afraid? We're afraid when we don't plan. We're afraid when we don't know how to deal with our fears. We're afraid when all we do is

just worry instead of trusting God. Today, I'd like to talk about planning for the future with the help of God. You see, many of us make plans.

But our plans fall short or we fail to execute because our plans are never God's plans in the first place. In this message, I'd like to share with you how to make effective plans. Benjamin Franklin said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail".

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 4:13-17.

James tells us avoid three mistakes and you don't have to fear the future. Now, let me give you the three mistakes to avoid when planning:

First, he says

1. **Planning without God is a mistake.** That's the first mistake. He illustrates this by a conversation between two businessmen. v. 13 *"Now listen you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money.'" What's wrong with that? It sounds like he's thinking ahead. Sounds like a typical business plan.*

Notice the detail. He plans when? Today or tomorrow. Where? This or that city. How long? Spend a year. Doing what? Carrying on business. Why? To make money.

What's wrong with that? Nothing is wrong with that. But it's not so much what he did that was wrong, it's what he didn't do that was wrong.

Question: Do you find the word "God" used anywhere in that sentence? Not at all. There's not a single mention of God in his planning.

The point here is God says, "Sure you ought to do planning." In fact, if you don't have a plan for the new year, you need to spend some time thinking out, "What are my goals?" But you need to plan with God in mind. You need to let Him be a part of your plan.

A lot of people are believers, they love the Lord, but when it comes to planning, they act like unbelievers.

It's like "Sure I love God but this is my business plan, this is my career plan, this is my educational plan, this is my recreational plan, my plan for my family, these are my goals." Did you pray about them? Did you ask God if that's what He wanted? You just did it.

God says that's not the way we ought to plan. We ought to plan with God at the center of our planning. v. 15 *"Instead you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we'll live and do this or that.'"* Note the word "if". That's the way we ought to live. Life is one big IF. "IF" is in the middle of "LIFE". There are a lot of "ifs" in life.

In 1983, Alexander Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Let me quote an excerpt from his acceptance speech: (quote) "Since I've spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of the Russian Revolution, in the process I have collected hundreds and hundreds of personal testimonies, read hundreds of books, contributed eight volumes of my own. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible, the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million Russians, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat this phrase, 'Men have forgotten God.' That's why all this has happened.' What's more...if I were called upon to identify briefly the principal trait of the entire twentieth century... I would be unable to find anything more precise...than to repeat once again 'Men have forgotten God'." (end of quote)

God is saying, "Sure, make your plans for the New Year. But when you make your plans the solution is to pray as you plan." You need to include God in your goal setting.

You see, planning without prayer is presumption. The Bible says that we need to plan with God. Pray as we plan. **Proverbs 16:9 (NLT) "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps."**

What are your goals for the New Year? How's your life going to be different? Have you set some family goals, financial goals, spiritual goals? You need to set these things but you need to plan with God in mind. Say, "What do You want me to do, God? What's Your plan?"

My homework assignment for you today is spend some time thinking through "Where am I headed? God, what do You want me to do with my life?" Avoid the first problem of planning without God by praying when you plan. Don't get ahead of God.

There's a second problem that causes problems when we think about the future.

2. THE MISTAKE ABOUT PRESUMING ABOUT TOMORROW

v. 14 & 16 "Why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes...As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil."

He says don't brag about tomorrow because nobody has any guarantee of it. We should not presume about next week, much less next year. Life is unpredictable. You don't know what's going to happen. That's what causes fear. The fact is, you don't know but God does. If God knows what's going to happen then that's ok. Trust Him and He can help you prepare in advance. You don't have to know. If you knew everything, it'd probably overwhelm you.

He says don't presume about tomorrow because it's unpredictable anyway. And he also says don't presume about tomorrow because life is brief. "You are a

mist that appears for a little while." He says your life is like a fog. It comes in the morning but it disappears soon after.

Do you remember when you were a little kid and had cold windows? You'd breathe on the window to see it fog up and then watch it disappear. That's how long your life really is. When you consider eternity, living 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 years is like a finger snap.

So, he says, because life is brief it's dumb to assume you've got plenty of time. We go quickly from hot wheels to wheelchairs -- overnight. From diapers to dignity to decay. There's no guarantee.

I have no guarantee that I'm going to be here next Sunday. I'm a heartbeat away from eternity. So are you! Don't presume on the future. An example of that kind of thinking is in **Isaiah 56:12** *"Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better."* Sounds like a New Year's Eve verse.

Proverbs 27:1 *"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring."* What's the solution? The solution now is to make each day count. If there is anything I want to say as we begin a new year, it's make your time count! If you want to be an effective person, you've got to make your time count every day. You don't have any guarantee of tomorrow.

Matthew 6:34 (TLB) *"So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time."* In other words, don't worry! We can plan for tomorrow but we can only live today. Life is usually what's happening while we're planning something else.

Don't worry, trust God, live one day at a time. If you were to face all the things that were going to happen to you in the next 365 days, you'd probably be overwhelmed. But fortunately, the future comes to us in bite-size pieces. It comes

in 24-hour segments called days. You don't have to live it all at once. You live it one day at a time trusting God. It's like the old saying, "Life by the yard is hard, but by the inch it's a cinch."

What does the Lord's prayer say? Give us this day our annual bread? Our monthly bread? No, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" You ought to pray for daily strength in 24-hour increments. Don't sweat the future. Live it one day at a time and make the most of each day as it comes.

There's a third common mistake we make when we make plans.

3. PUTTING OFF DOING WHAT'S RIGHT.

That's procrastination. Procrastination not only destroys your potential, it not only wastes your life, but the Bible teaches that procrastination is a sin. A rhyme goes,

"Procrastination is my sin.
It only brings me sorrow.
I know I ought to change my life
In fact, I will! Tomorrow."

Now, let's look at v. 17 "*If anyone, then, knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*" When you procrastinate doing what you know you ought to do, you're wrong. We don't usually think that way. We think sins are something you commit, not something you omit. Sins are some evil activity out there that's evil, wicked, mean, bad and nasty!

God says, "No, you can sin by doing nothing." Anytime I know the right thing and I don't do it, it's wrong, it's sin.

We come up with all these great excuses like, "Someday I'll..." do this, do that. "One of these days..." One of these days is actually none of these days.

1 John 2:3-4 " *We know that we have come to know him (Jesus) if we keep his commands.*"

How do you know you're a Christian? The Bible says you know you're a Christian by looking at your lifestyle. Are you following his commands?

What does He command us? Lots of stuff. Love one another. Love your neighbor as yourself. Seek first the kingdom of God. There are lots of commands.

"... Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar."

Actions speak louder than words. Delayed obedience is actually disobedience.

We're beginning a new year. What is it that God told you to do the past year that you still haven't done? Whatever it is, you'd better get with it!

Don't carry it over and procrastinate into another year. Do it now. Don't wait. Whatever He's told you to do, do it now.

Some of you, God's told you to break off some kind of relationship. You know it's wrong. But you still hold on to it. You need to break it off.

Some of you, God's told you to restore a relationship. You've had a fight with somebody at work or a relative. There's bitterness. God says, "I want you to go and offer forgiveness to them or ask forgiveness." Don't carry resentment over into a New Year. Get a fresh, clean slate for the New Year. Whatever God commands you to do, do it now. God says, Commit your life to Christ. Do it now! God says, "Be baptized." Do it now! God says, "Find a church home." Do it now! "Give your tithe." Attend the prayer meeting. Do it now!

We're going to take communion in a few minutes. The Bible says in **1 Corinthians 11:28** "*Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.*"

Why does God say that we ought to examine ourselves before we receive the Lord's Supper? It's very clear because any disobedience in my life that I'm holding on to, disqualifies me from the Lord's Supper. The Bible says it's dangerous to take the Lord's Supper when on the one

hand I'm saying, "God, I know you told me to do this but I have no intention of doing it." Any known disobedience disqualifies me from the Lord's Supper.

Now, what is the command that you should obey first before you can truly qualify for the Lord's Supper? We find that in Acts 16:31. The Apostle Paul says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Friend, do you believe that Jesus died for you on the cross? Do you believe that he truly was dead and was buried? Do you believe that on the third day he became alive again and went to heaven? If you do, that's all what it takes to be saved from sin and death.

The Bible says in Romans 10:9-10, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

Your good works don't count. Your religion doesn't count. Your connections don't count. You can't buy your way to heaven. You can't earn merit points to gain entrance to heaven. It's simply by the grace of God you are saved. He saved you because he loves you. He doesn't want you to be condemned to an eternity of hell because of your sins. Our sins separate us from God and only Jesus can remove those sins. He did that when he died on the cross. When he died on the cross, God has forgiven you of your sins. As the Bible says, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." And so, as your first sign of obedience, do three simple things. As simple as ABC.

First – Admit you're a sinner. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". (Romans 3:23) In fact, it also says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no

one who does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12) After admitting, make a confession of your sins to God then you can do the next step which is

Believe in your heart that Jesus died for your sins. This means acknowledging that there’s no one and nothing can save you except Jesus Christ. Then believe also that you will receive the gift of eternal life. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) And then

Commit to obey Jesus. This means being ready to live a life that is pleasing to God. You show you truly love Jesus when you obey his command.

Jesus says in John 14:21, “The one who obeys me is the one who loves me; and because he loves me, my Father will love him; and I will too, and I will reveal myself to him.” (John 14:21 TLB)

If you’re ready to take these three steps, later on I will lead you in a prayer of commitment.

Now, many of you have taken some tremendous steps the past year. You've made some real steps of faith. God's pleased with that. He's real pleased with your growth in the midst of challenging circumstances. But this year, you're going to face new challenges, new opportunities, new developments. God says it's time to take the next step.

So, what is the next step? For some of you it may be to join a home group or attend IMPACT Class or become a member of Fil-Am. It may be to get your finances together and start giving the way God's told you to. It may be to be baptized, to start sharing your faith wherever you may be, to start reading your Bible on a regular basis. And still for some of you, it means taking the step of obeying God by accepting Jesus in your heart for the first time in your life.

Whatever He's told you to do this last year, that you're still hanging on to... Don't

carry sins into the New Year. Use the moment of the Lord's Supper to evaluate your life and say, "OK, Lord, I'm going to get with the action now! I'm going to obey what You said."

Whatever God's told you to do, do it now. Whatever you're planning to do with your family, do it now. Whatever you're planning to do for the Lord, do it now. Because we don't have any guarantee of the future.

What is the secret of not being afraid of the future? Of facing the future confidently? The secret is to commit myself to trusting the Lord at all times. I may not know what lies ahead but God surely does because he is Sovereign.

As the saying goes, "I may not know what the future holds, but I know Who holds my future."

These series we're going through this month is supposed to help you conquer your fears. Next week, I'll talk about how to break free from fear, then after that, together with Bro. Brandon, we'll talk about overcoming your fear of rejection, your financial fears, and then your fear of failure.

So, let me draw you again toward our theme for this year. "The Year of Living Courageously". I want us to be courageous in every way. We can be, knowing that God is always with us wherever we go.

Let us pray. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes.

Prayer:

Whatever you intend to do for God, do it now. Whatever you intend to do for your family, do it now. Some of you have been considering all year, or at least for several months, your need to open up your lives to Christ. Don't drag it into another year. You can begin the New Year with a new life, a chance to start fresh and have your life completely forgiven and the slate wiped clean. Open your life to Christ today. Say "Yes" to Him. If that is the desire of your heart, please say these words with me, out loud or silently.

"Dear God, thank you for sending your son Jesus to die for me on the cross. I admit I'm a sinner and I confess all my sins to you. Please forgive me for all the wrongs I've done. I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. From now on, help me to live a life that is pleasing to you. Thank you for the gift of salvation. Thank you for giving me eternal life. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Now, those of you who have made that decision already in the past -- you're a Christian -- don't delay any longer with respect to what you to do. To know what to do and not do it is a sin. If God has told you a specific thing, a command you know and you haven't followed it, before we take communion, say, "Lord, I'm admitting it. I'm going to start doing this." There was a Peace Corps commercial out a while back that said, "If you're not doing something with your life it doesn't matter how long it lasts." Would you say, "Lord, I want my life to count for You." Then, start doing it.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.