

Who Do You Trust? Pt.1- The Illusion of Control

Discussion Notes- August 3, 2025

1. If you could control one thing in life, what would it be?

This week's sermon challenged the illusion that we are in control of our lives, highlighting how easily we make plans without acknowledging God. James warns that such self-confidence is rooted in pride, not in faith. We are reminded of our fragility—that our lives are like a mist, here one moment and gone the next. Instead of boasting about tomorrow, we are called to live with humility, saying, “If the Lord wills.” True obedience means not just knowing what is right but actually living it out, with trust and dependence on God leading the way.

Read James 4:13-17

“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 sin.”

In James 4:13–17, James confronts those who confidently make plans for the future without considering God's will. He isn't condemning planning itself, but rather the prideful attitude that assumes we are in control of our own lives. The passage reminds us that our lives are short and uncertain—like a mist that appears briefly and then vanishes. This perspective challenges us to approach life with humility, recognizing our dependence on God in every decision. The sermon used this truth to highlight the illusion of control and call us to trust God's plans instead of boasting in our own.

2. What does it mean to you that James says our lives are like a mist? How does that shape the way you view your plans or your future?

Read Proverbs 16:2-3,18

“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit. Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established... Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

The word “haughty” means arrogant, superior, or disdainful. Pride often causes us to grip tightly to control, thinking we can manage outcomes on our own. But Scripture consistently warns us that pride leads us away from dependence on God and toward frustration, anxiety, and even destruction. Trying to control everything is not just exhausting—it's rooted in arrogance. When we humble ourselves, recognizing that we're not in charge and trusting that God is, we actually find freedom, peace, and direction. Living with open hands doesn't mean we don't plan—but it means we plan with humility, always acknowledging, “If the Lord wills.”

3. Where in your life are you trying to maintain control instead of trusting God?

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.’”

Jeremiah 9 is part of a larger message where the prophet is confronting Judah's rebellion, idolatry, and false sense of security. The people had placed their trust in their own wisdom, military power, and wealth. They believed these things could protect them from disaster. But God, speaking through Jeremiah, warns them that judgment is coming, and that their confidence in themselves is misplaced. These verses are a rebuke of prideful self-reliance. God is saying that human accomplishments and strength mean nothing without a relationship with Him. The only thing worth boasting about is truly knowing and understanding God, especially His character—His love, justice, and righteousness.

Just like in James 4, the people in Jeremiah's time thought they were in control because of their success, status, or resources. But God reminds them (and us) that boasting in our plans, power, or possessions is empty. True confidence comes from knowing God and living in alignment with His will.

4. What does this sermon and passage reveal about how we measure success?

Read Psalm 34:1-4

“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.”

Letting go of control is hard because it forces us to confront our fears—fear of the unknown, fear of failure, and fear that things won't go the way we want. Deep down, we often believe that if we're not in charge, things might fall apart. But the truth is, trying to control everything only leads to anxiety and pride. God invites us to a better way—a life of humility, trust, and obedience. When we choose to surrender our plans to Him, we aren't giving up—we're actually stepping into peace, purpose, and the freedom to walk confidently in His will.

5. What's one step of obedience in giving up control that you want to take this week?

Prayer/Closing:

- Pray for humility to surrender control and trust God's will above our own.
- Pray for freedom from fear that keeps us holding tightly to our plans.
- Pray for courage to walk in obedience, even when the future feels uncertain.

A Deeper Dive

The Danger of Self-Reliance vs. True Wisdom from Above

Read James 3:13-18 (shortened below)

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom... But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere...”

In the passage just before James 4, James addresses the contrast between earthly wisdom (driven by selfish ambition and pride) and heavenly wisdom (rooted in humility and peace). This sets the stage for James 4:13–17, where he continues confronting prideful self-reliance and the illusion of control. James 3:13–18 calls us to examine the source of our thinking: Are we relying on our own understanding and asserting control out of pride, or are we walking in the “meekness of wisdom” that comes from God? This deeper wisdom doesn’t boast, control, or manipulate outcomes—it trusts God, pursues peace, and reflects Christlike humility. In essence, James challenges us to not just avoid sinful actions, but to live with a posture of submission, dependence, and peace—the opposite of worldly control.

1. According to James 3:13–18, how can you tell the difference between earthly wisdom and God’s wisdom in your own decision-making?
2. How would your approach to control change if you were operating from “wisdom from above” instead of fear or pride?