

# Face the Future with Faith

Message for Sunday, March 8, 2020  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** James 4:13-17

**Children's Message:** Sing the song *If I Were a Butterfly* with the children at the front. Afterwards: What a neat song! I love the actions with that song: "If I were an elephant," I could praise God by raising my trunk in the air. And "if I were a crocodile," I could worship God with my big smile.

But I'm not an elephant, and I'm not a crocodile.  
I'm just plain old Bruce.

A lot of people waste a lot of time wishing they could be something they're not. "Oh, if only I could sing like a hippopotamus, then I would really be something!" Or, "If only I could run like a turtle, then I could really do something!"

OK, so not many of you wish you could run like a turtle. But maybe you've wished you could be more like someone else? Maybe you're even jealous of someone else?

The Bible tells us to accept what God wants for our lives.

**James 4:15, New International Version:**  
You ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

So instead of wishing for something that will never happen, just be thankful for what we have, and get on with it. "*Use what you've got, and don't worry about what you've not.*"

**Message** "Face the future with faith"

I read a fascinating book on demographics—that's the study of population trends. The author said that as the baby boomers enter their final working years, their mortgages are paid off, their salaries are at the top of their scale, and at the same time that their children have grown up and moved out. Put that together, and you have a huge number of people with large amounts of money to spend and invest.

Businesses are falling over themselves trying to cater to this age group. One example of this is the number of radio stations which play only tunes from the 60s, 70s and 80s. They are appealing to the

nostalgia of these people, their longing for the days of their youth.

Someone once said, "Nostalgia is like a grammar lesson: you find the present tense and the past perfect."

That's how a lot of people face the future: they're tense; they're worried and afraid. "Will I have enough to retire on?" "What's the world coming to?"

In this passage we're reading today, James tells us how to face the future.

## 1) Big mistake: leave out God

James starts with an story. Two business people are planning their next big move, how they're going to make their next million. Let's eavesdrop on their conversation.

**James 4:13, New Century Version:**  
Some of you say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money."

Is there anything wrong in this conversation?

### a) Is it wrong to make plans?

(They said "today or tomorrow we will...")

Answer: Not at all! When Jesus called people to follow him, he warned them to count the cost, like someone planning to put up a building [Luke 14:27-33].

### b) Is it wrong to be in business, to purposely make money?

Not at all! Many of God's people in the Bible were prosperous business people (e.g. Abraham, Nicodemus, Lydia).

### c) Their mistake is what they *didn't* do: include God

No, the mistake isn't in what they *did*. The mistake is in what they *didn't* do. They didn't include God in their plans.

It's great to have dreams, to set goals, to make plans. As a church we need to plan. The key is to include God in the plans.

You can be someone who loves God with all your heart, but you totally ignore God when it comes to

planning your business, or planning to marry, or planning your career.

I've met many people who, when they find out that I'm a pastor, tell me, "Oh, I don't believe in God." That's sad. But you know what's even more sad? To meet someone who says, "Oh yes, I believe in God," but who acts like God doesn't exist.

**James 4:15, New Century Version:**

**You should say, "If the Lord wants, we will live and do this or that."**

Circle that word "if." Do you remember learning Robert Burns' poem about how "the best laid plans of mice and men" often go wrong? Have you heard of "Murphy's Law" which says, "If something can go wrong, it will." You can depend on it! Friends, all of life is just one big "if." In fact, the word "life" has an "if" right in the middle of it! Life really is pretty if-fy.

None of us knows what's going to happen tomorrow. We can guess. We can hope. We can plan. But to do this without God is presumptuous.

The better way: include God in your plans. But how? *How* do you include God in your plans? The first step is to ask him. Pray about your plans: "God, what do you want me to do? Where are you leading me? What do you want me to not do?"

Let me put it this way: *Stop* praying like this: "God, I've decided what I want to do, and here is my plan for doing it. Everything is all worked out. Now you bless it." NO!

Instead, pray like this: "God, I am your servant, not the other way around. Instead of you bless what I'm doing, help me to do what you're blessing. How can my life and my actions be part of your kingdom?"

Ask for wisdom, and ask for a heart that delights in God's ways.

## 2) Live one day at a time

**James 4:14, New Century Version:**

**But you do not know what will happen tomorrow! Your life is like a mist. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away.**

The problem with making plans without thought for God is that we assume we have lots of time. This passage reminds us that our life is like "a mist"—it's only fleeting, temporary.

Do you know how the Bible describes your life? Read these verses. We...

- are like water spilled on the ground [2 Samuel 14:14]
- are only a shadow [Job 8:9]
- are no more than a puff of wind [Psalm 39:11]
- grow and wither as quickly as flowers [Job 14:2]
- are like a cloud that fades and is gone [Job 7:9]
- are merely tender grass that sprouts and grows in the morning, but dries up by evening [Psalm 90:5-6]

I think the point here is simply this: live one day at a time. Don't live in the past, and don't waste time worrying about the future. Aim to do your best with what God has given you each day.

## 3) Use your life for good

How many of you know you should be doing something, but you aren't doing it? You should exercise more, you should watch what you eat, you should fix the leaky tap, you should write that letter to your mother, you should pay back the money you borrowed...

My all-time favourite cartoon is *Calvin and Hobbes*. Calvin is only a six year old boy, but in one scene he says, "Mom says that what we don't get done today, we'll get another day to finish it. Right now I am so far behind, I will never die."

We're talking about procrastination, the dark side of the future. James touches on that, too.

**James 4:17, New Century Version:**

**Anyone who knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, is sinning.**

You see, sin isn't just doing bad things (like adultery, taking the Lord's name in vain, etc.) If obeying all the "Do not" rules was all there was to the Christian life, then everybody who is dead would qualify as a Christian, because they don't do anything.

Following Jesus means using our life for good.

While we're thinking about plans for the future, it would be good for us to think about what the future holds for others, not just ourselves. Climate change, with the oceans rising and storms increasing in intensity, means that many people live in danger of losing everything. Sadly, most of these people are in parts of the world which are already the poorest, unable to cope with even more disasters.

I'm encouraged that there is a group beginning in Stirling which aims to take action on climate change. Most of the people involved are people of faith in God. That makes sense: when dealing with an enormous problem, we need to include God in our plans.

### **Next Steps:**

- Pray: Ask for wisdom. Ask God to give you passion for the things God considers important.
- Then, with that in mind, make your plans for what comes next.
- But put your faith in God, not in your plans. Your grand idea may flop, but God never will.

### **PRAYER:**

Dear God, we are afraid to pass things over to you, because you may not have the same plans as we do. But God, your plans are better than we can imagine. You know the future; we do not.

Some of us here have had awful disappointments in life. Some of us are right now in the midst of anxious worrying about some problem. Some of us are full of self-pity because things did not work out like we wanted. And some of us are complacent and proud because everything is going so well. All of this is what happens when we don't include you.

It is a frightful thing to pass over to you all that is precious to us. But it is even more frightful to gamble with them. Into your hands, O Lord, we commit ourselves. Amen.