

The Shortest Way to Blessing

Learning to Live with Humility

Discovering Practical Christianity (James) Series - Pt. 7

Oct 8/9

James 4:13-5:6

Introduction

- **The Problem of Pride** – At the heart of so many problems with mankind is the issue of pride. The belief that we are above others. Pride against man is sinful, but pride against God is an atrocity. The concern with people is that we would harm them in our pride, but that's not the problem with God (we can't hurt Him). The problem with God is that it's a challenge to His authority. We've talked enough about this in this series, so we'll move on. But just remember it's a big deal.
- **The Necessity of Humility** – A better use of our time today is the antithesis of pride and the solution that James is going to suggest to us: Humility. Humility doesn't mean thinking less of ourselves, but less ABOUT ourselves.
 - **Confident Humility** - I truly believe in what I call 'Confident Humility'. It simultaneously appreciates what God has made in us and glorifies Him for His design and secures our identity as children of the King, while also turning our eyes from ourselves onto God and the world around us.
 - **Not Humiliation** - Humility is not humiliation, but a decision to put ourselves on the back burner for attention toward greater things. Humility is not degrading ourselves or convincing ourselves that we are garbage. It's not letting our dysfunctional flesh speak condemnation on us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are of infinite value to God.
 - **Not Faking it** – one of the biggest challenges among Christians is false humility. It's when we know that we need to be humble, so we do the minimum to act humble but allow our hearts to continue to swell with pride. Although humility is a choice to not promote ourselves, it is also a solid anchor in reality. We need to realize that the most important being in the universe is God, not us. We pale in comparison. Since we live in light of God's reality, and we live knowing Jesus as our Savior who did the impossible for us. Since we know the Holy Spirit of God indwells us, we need to see ourselves rightly and there's no room for remaining impressed with ourselves.
 - **Humility is Honest Assessment** – **If we knew what God knew, we would be humble**. We would be able to appreciate the glory within us, while firmly locked in our position in the universe as servants of God. Pride can only take root when we allow ignorance or selfish ambition to distort one of those two definitions (God/self). Humility is reacting to the truest reality. Pride is belief in a distortion of reality.
- **The Blessing we seek** – If we are wise, **the greatest blessing we can have in life is the hand of God upon us**. In Him is found everything wonderful and good. To be in His will and aligned with His heart allows the flow of all of His power, sweetness, and blessing. The surest way to alignment is to submit in the fear of the Lord.

The Shortest Road to BLESSING is HUMILITY

Lesson

- **Prideful Plans**

- **The Arrogance of Planning Wrongly**

- **James 4:13-16** – “Come now¹, 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”² — ¹⁴ 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. 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.”

- **The Danger of Planning (Assuming) – How many of us are planners out there?**

Pride reveals itself in the most unusual and subtle ways. One that almost none of us are tracking is in planning. Even if we aren’t an official planner by personality, we plan. Planning means that you are organizing the future based upon an agenda and set of resources. It can be simple or complicated. BUT here’s the fascinating part about it, most planning is built upon the assumption that we know what’s really going on and it’s built upon the assumption that we can make it happen. AND it’s built on the assumption of what WE want to happen.

- **Example #1 – The Innocent Planning (Family Vacation)** - As part of my job I have to plan a year in advance because so many people’s roles are contingent upon the church calendar. I have to plan out the sermon plan, the times I will have other speakers in the pulpit, and my vacation or PTO times. So, let’s say that I schedule out my vacation with my family and we are going to go to Santa Cruz for a week. Sounds simple, no big deal. Nothing sounds terribly wicked or selfish about that. Right? In fact, me planning it is trying to be nice to the church and to my family so everyone can know what to expect. Sounds pure. BUT underneath that decision are these elements:

- **Problem A: I never prayed about any of it** – Maybe I should have, maybe I shouldn’t but **the fact that I didn’t says something about how I view my relationship with the Lord.** I am assuming that my time is my own. I am assuming that I get to say how I spend it. I am assuming that I get to say where I do and what I do.
- **Problem B: I didn’t consider deeply God’s opinion on the finances involved** – Usually something like a family vacation is an automatic pass for me. I think through the lens of spending time together and how a lot of what I work for is to bless my family and create an environment where I can provide both for their needs and for some of their fun and relaxation. So, I chalk a lot of what I spend on my family as free-pass-

¹ “The vigorous come now is the signal for an attack, in good OT prophetic style, on the godless merchants, pictured planning future business ventures... Nor is this confined to “merchants,” for we are all to some degree prone to the sin of presumption, which is a form of practical atheism.” James Adamson, NICNT

² “The skillful use of the repetitive we will go ... and stay ... and trade ... and make a profit, and the mention of the year’s stay, both suggest deliberate and calculated arrogance. They would go where they liked, and for as long as they liked.” NICNT

spending, if not holy-spending. But even that decision is assuming I know what God wants and how I am supposed to bless my family, how I'm supposed to use the resources God gave me.

- **Example #2 – The Wicked Planning (Selfish Business Practice)** – If we take the example over to a more overt wickedness side, one that James seems to be challenging here, we end up in selfish business practices. Let's say that we realize that our business could make more money if we make some unhealthy adjustments to our product and get a little more in our pocket. So, we say we own a communications technology company, and we realize that if we can get our people addicted to our product, they won't put the phone down. We examine psychology and use it against our customers. We ping on their desire cortex, we manipulate their emotions, we listen in to their conversations so that they intentionally get ads for what they mentioned. In other words, we increase temptation, debt, dissatisfaction, and addiction. Some may say it's only using our intelligence to make a highly effective product, but what's not considered or valued is the damage to society and the hearts and well-being of people. **This model is wicked because it doesn't submit to the agenda of God.** It doesn't put people first; it puts product first. It takes advantage of the ignorant and the weaknesses of our flesh. The goal wasn't to ruin people, it was to make money, but in doing so, it ruined people.
 - **Who Does Something Like That?** – And we have to ask the question, who does something like that? Who thinks this is okay? And **the answer is, someone who thinks that they are in control of their lives, and they get to make a call like that.** In other words, **a prideful person.** There was no consideration of God's Kingdom plans. There was no denying of self for the health of others. There was no fear of God's retribution for harming His people. It was done completely in a humanistic mindset of I can do whatever I want. But this time the impact was significantly higher.
- **Assuming on Tomorrow** – **The problem isn't planning.** Planning is good and healthy and wise. **The problem is the assumptions that underly our planning.** We are assuming on tomorrow. We are assuming on our ability to make decisions independently from God. We are assuming that we get to make the rules. But a Christian is supposed to be ever vigilant to remember God. A Christian's life is supposed to be sold out to Kingdom purposes and God's agenda. A Christians life is ordered on Heavenly priorities.
 - **What do we practically do about this?** – **the most practical way to honor the Lord in our planning is to be mindful of who we are versus who He is.** It means BEFORE we make plans, we check ourselves and examine our hearts. It means BEFORE we make plans, we do a quick check in with God. It means BEFORE we plan, we remember we are working with His stuff on His timeline.
 - **A good quote** – James Adamson said, *"Realizing the future is uncertain not only teaches us trust in God, it helps us properly to value the present."*

- **Application for Us Today – Defining something as sinful is a bit elastic.** I know that sounds heretical but hear me out. To one person something can be sin and to another person it could not. The reason is that many opportunities for sin, especially sin in what we call ‘gray areas’³ are not in the actual conduct but in the meaning the conduct has for them and their context. I know this all sounds terribly confusing, but I’m picking my words carefully. So, let me clarify by examples. If one person is highly impacted by fear, by images and by story, watching a scary movie will have more impact on them in a negative way than someone who is emotionally distant from the film, observing with a full heart, healthy and strong. In other words, context matters when it comes to sin. Here’s another example. To the pure hearted a walk through a display of intimate clothing fashion is helpful. To those bound in lust and sin, walking through a display of intimate clothing fashion becomes an opportunity of temptation. To the alcoholic a bar is a dangerous place, to a non-drinker, it’s a place of community.
 - **The Failure of Justification** – Here’s a practical concern. **Just because you can justify your behavior that is SHOULDN’T be sinful for you, doesn’t mean it ISN’T.** God may have laid on your heart the danger that lies in wait for you specifically and you are wanting to ignore it. **Others may have freedom where you have warning.** Remember, it’s not about comparison with others, but hearing God for how He instructs us to steward how He built us.

- **Rotting Riches**

- **Blasting the Bad Guys who Have Money**

- **James 5:1-6** – *“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. ⁴Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud⁴, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.”*
- **Redefining “Rich”** – Earlier in this series I explained that when the bible talks about the ‘rich’ it’s usually talking about a select group of wealthy people. They are the people who gained and maintain their wealth by dishonest or dishonoring practices. In other words, they are **the bad guys with money**. God is not against wealth, God provides wealth. But it is very important how we get it in this world and how we use it and how we think about it. This passage is a perfect

³ Gray to us, not to God. Gray simply means nuance is likely involved.

⁴ “On unattached workers hired by the day, see 3:14; Matt. 20:1ff. The greedy rich do not pay them at the end of the day, and there was then no practical way of enforcing the law of Lev. 19:13 and Deut. 24:14. Oppression of laborers is often denounced from early times onward (e.g., Isa. 58:9; Jer. 22:13; Mal. 3:5; Sir. 34:22; Tobit 4:14). Prompt payment of wages is also enjoined by the rabbis. Unlike the slave, who had someone who might protect his interests, the free laborer¹⁵ had none.” NICNT

example of how James is using the term rich, watch how he describes this group's actions.

- **2 Examples of What the Rich Do** – James is talking about a certain group of **rich people who treat people terribly**. He highlights two examples of the types of things they do. These examples can either be literal or figurative.
 1. **Keeping Wages from Workers Fraudulently (Stealing)** – This can be either literal or figurative. Literally it can mean that a boss or owner of a plot of land (or the workers), knew what the worker should earn and kept it back for selfish gain. That is not good business practice, that is stealing. **God is always calculating wages based on His scale not on our scale**. This puts a major responsibility on the shoulders of bosses across the world. Figuratively it can be when someone in your department did something well and you took credit for it. It could be when they needed to be elevated but your own insecurity kept them down.
 2. **Condemned and Murdered the Innocent (Killing)** – A more extreme example is the literal murdering of innocent people. Why would someone do that in business? In this context righteous means innocent. It's likely that James has in mind accusing your workers of something they didn't do and them being condemned for it in court. It could be the killing of a slave because they were in the way or not doing it the way that the master wanted. Figuratively it could be ruining someone's career out of jealousy. It could be taking such significant advantage of people that you have robbed them and emptied them of joy and peace. **God looks at the actions of the heart as well as the actions of the body**.
- **The Result = Judgment and Condemnation** – James says, 'misery is coming for you.' The treasure that you put your heart in has now rotted and become a stench standing in judgment of you. What you used to live in luxury with will be that which destroys you. In other words, your actions had consequences and God didn't miss it. You may live it up in this life, but what's awaiting you is terrifying.
 - **One of God's Pet Peeves** – there are a number of hot buttons for God. One of those is someone who elevates themselves by trampling on others. If that element is in any spirit of what we are doing, it's going to be flagged by heaven and God will come in hot. Why? Because it means we are not only acting like God but hurting those He died for. That's a double whammy.

Conclusion

- **The Blessing of Embracing Humility** - Blessing follows an obedience life, but we'll never be properly obedience in mind and body until we embrace humility. If we humble ourselves under the Lord's guidance, we will fulfill His purposes and receive His blessings. On the other hand, if we continue to charge forward on our selfish agendas we are going to hurt ourselves and others.

- **Interactive Time** – Last week we took some time with confess to see God cleansing and feel lighter and to be forgiven. This week, in light of our pride problem, let's take some time to praise God for who He is and what He's done.