

The Sin of Presumption
James 4:13-17

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Do these statements sound familiar?

“I’ll do it when I get around to it.”

“Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow.”

Well-intended tasks in life are often put off, presuming that we will have opportunity and/or time to accomplish them.

The Apostle James wrote to a group of people, merchants and traders, who made presumptions about their life and their trade. Their presumptions included time (today/tomorrow), plans (we will go), place (a city), tenure (a year), activity (buy/sell) and profit (get gain). Their plan was to go to a new city, get in on the ground floor as one of the founders, trade for a year or so, make lots of money and return rich.

James had to remind those to whom he was writing that man couldn’t make presumptions about life and tomorrow. No man has the right to make confident plans about tomorrow for no man knows what even a day will bring. “Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” (Proverbs 27:1) There may or may not be a tomorrow and the best laid plans can fall through. Life is like a vapor, here today and gone tomorrow.

The problem, as James saw it, was not the effort of planning for life. Everyone has to plan, prepare and “flesh out” life. The problem was that the people were leaving God out of their lives when it came to their business and probably their personal lives. The uncertainty of life is not a cause for fear or inaction. It is a reason for accepting and realizing our complete dependence upon God. James admonished them to do their planning in the light of God’s will. Creator and

sustainer God may choose to let us live, have good health, and live a long, blessed life. However, in His sovereignty and divine will, He may choose a different route for our lives. We can not presume too much about life, but we must pray and seek God's will for our lives on a daily basis. Some plans we will be able to carry out, while others will fall apart. The future is not in the hands of man and no man can arrogantly claim that he has the power to decide it.

During my thirty years of pastoring, I have seen the sin of presumption in so many lives. The presumption that I want to speak about today has to do with life, living and the things we will leave behind. I would challenge each of us to ask, "Am I presuming about areas in my life and if so, what can I do about it?"

First of all, we presume that life is going to continue.

One of my favorite commercials is the one about the Energizer bunny. The point is that the Energizer battery will just keep on going and that all others will die. This is the attitude we possess when we are young. We think that because we are young and strong, we too will go on and on.

I am reminded of a story I read about a young girl who attended her first funeral, stood on her tip toes, looked at the deceased, and then said to a nearby aunt: "If that ever happens to me, I'll just get up and walk away."

Ecclesiastes 3:2 reminds us that, "there is a time to be born and a time to die". We presume that death will not occur until we are old, but the reality is that we may not live to see the sun go down today. We can not presume life will go on and on.

Secondly, we presume that our standard of living will remain the same.

For whatever reason or circumstance, it seems the poor stay poor, the middle class stay middle class and a few get richer. Some move from one financial state to another. We dream, work hard and hope for a better life, but often find "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Anyone who invested in the stock market from 1997-2000 knows how easily wealth can accumulate. Anyone who invested in the stock market from 2000-2003 knows how quickly wealth can disappear. We hear time and again of lottery winners who in three years are poor again. To presume that we really know what is going to happen to us financially is foolish. Like the people to whom James wrote, we need to ask for and seek the will of God.

Finally we presume too much or too little about what we will leave behind and what will happen to it.

In Luke 12, we read of a certain rich man whose ground brought forth abundant crops. This presented a dilemma about holding on to and storing his blessings. He decided to build bigger barns, relax and enjoy life only to learn he would die that night and leave it all behind. The question raised was "then whose shall those things be?" The answer, "it depends." It depends

upon what plans he made for his own demise, if any. It is obvious from his decision to build bigger barns that he presumed he would live much longer. In this parable, there are no less than six “I’s” indicating he relied on his effort rather than acknowledgement and dependence on God.

Many people refuse to think about, let alone talk about death and the things associated with it. A will is the furthest thing from their mind. On the other hand, there are people with considerable means who cannot enjoy their wealth because of worrying about losing it and they worry about what will happen to it when they are gone. There must be a better way. I believe it is found in the recognition that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Since God owns it all and has provided all we have, He expects us to be good stewards of our possessions, both now, and at death. Therefore, it behooves us to seek His will, do our planning and not presume upon the future.

In conclusion, may I ask, are there areas in your life about which you make presumptions, rather than trusting God’s will? You can not presume you will live forever on this earth...you won’t. You can not presume your standard of living will remain about the same...it probably won’t. You can not presume too much or too little about what you will leave behind...seek God’s will, do your estate planning, honor God with your resources and leave behind a blessing for God’s kingdom, your loved ones, your church and perhaps for your friends. James concluded, “to him that knows to do good and does it not, it is sin.” But what a joy to do good and be in the center of God’s will! May the hymn of our heart, head and hands ever be “Have Thine Own Way, Lord! Have Thine Own Way!”