

Last Sunday we discussed the importance of proclaiming the Gospel. Our friends at Focus on the Family have provided what I would call a “Gospel Primer”. A primer is a concise introduction to a larger topic. I urge you to work your way through [“The Good News of the Gospel”](#) for greater clarity and insight.

“I’m going to live forever!” So sang [Irene Cara](#) in 1980, in her starring role in the movie “Fame”. As popular as that anthem may have been, few people truly believe that they will live forever. Nevertheless, this does not mean that people are immune to “**The Sin of Presumption**”.

Proposition

This theme is number ten of thirteen sermons in our current series “**Navigating Faith**” from the book of James. Previously I have noted the way in which Chuck Swindoll summarized the writing of this epistle.

Chapter 1 - genuine stability

Chapter 2 - genuine love

Chapter 3 - genuine humility

Chapter 4 - genuine patience

In the last sermon, from James 4:1-12 we learned about patience that transforms relationships. As we submit ourselves to God, He will give us grace to overcome quarrels and conflicts. Christians are called to take responsibility and repent of impatient behavior. Let’s read [James 4:13-17](#). Patience is also in view in these verses. Genuine patience also reveals itself in submission to God’s choices for our lives, even though our human tendency is to live presumptuously.

[1] The Problem – v. 13

James’ recipients were those who “*arrange their lives as though [God] did not exist and as if they alone were masters of their destiny.*” (**TNTC: James**, R. V. G. Tasker, IVP, 1983,101) Does that describe you?

There is another way of thinking about this. Do you recall the illustration from earlier in our series? At the center of the wheel is a true faith relationship with Jesus, based on the gift of God’s grace. Our work for God flow from that center. But presumption replaces humble, dependent faith in Christ with **self**.

“Now listen” (NIV) is grammatically an **interjection**, which means it is a sharp “behold!” James was faithful to pinpoint a problem to which Christians must pay attention. Note the extent of their presumption.

a. “Today or tomorrow” and “spend a year” – this is selfishly pursuing one’s aspirations

b. “Engage in business” and “make a profit” – this is selfishly pursuing one’s accomplishments

However, one has no control about the future, for time is not at our beck and call! Further, how one will fare in business is not something one can control either. Consider two Biblical cautions about this.

In the Old Testament we read of the danger of a prophet who speaks “presumptuously” ([Deuteronomy 18:22](#)). This is a serious charge. The term “*portrays boiling-over arrogance – presumptuous self-exaltation that resists divine authority and despises godly counsel. It is more than hidden pride; it is pride that has ripened into overt rebellion, verbalized contempt, or oppressive action.*” ([Bible Hub](#))

In the New Testament the parable of the farmer in [Luke 12:16-21](#) parallels what James is teaching. This farmer presumed on his personal future. His goal was to make every effort to store up goods for himself here on this earth. But like so many people doing this today, he took not thought for eternity!

[2] The Presumption – vv. 14,16-17

“If only” is a subtle yet powerful notion that burrows itself deep in the human heart. Almost without exception, people succumb to the thinking that by the rearrangement of circumstances, one will find fulfilment and happiness in life. James explained the problem of presuming further in these verses.

a. Presuming on our longevity – v. 14

How long will you live? The fact that we cannot answer this with certainty highlights why presuming is problematic! James explained that our lives are but a vapor or mist (ατμίζ) which described steam from a kettle or smoke from a fire. As he explained, our lives have an “appearing” and a soon “disappearing”. Yet many people live with significant selfish assumptions about the length of their lives. Rejecting divine control of their future, people trust many tools and techniques to prolong their earth-bound existence! In his book *From Strength To Strength*, (Green Tree, 2023, xv) Arthur C. Brooks writes,

In my field of economics, we have something called “Stein’s law,” named after the famous economist Herbert Stein from the 1970’s: “If something cannot go on forever, it will stop.” Obvious, right? Well, when it comes to their own lives, people ignore it all the time.

b. Presuming on our ability – vv. 16-17

We can also be presumptuous about our abilities. James wrote that this amounts to a (lit.) “boast about arrogance” and such boasting is evil (πονηρα)! In [Deuteronomy 8:10-18](#) we read about the presumption the Israelites could have adopted about entering the land of promise. Proactively, God cautioned them. It was definitely not because of their ability and power. Rather, they were blessed by a gracious, covenant keeping God! In [Deuteronomy 17:18-20](#) we read that if there were to be a king in Israel, he was required to make a copy of the Law of God and read it daily, all his life. This was so that he would “*not consider himself better*” and not “*turn from the law*” (v.20).

Knowing these things is not enough! We must act on our knowledge and understanding of what is “good” (καλον). Failure to do so is sin (αμαρτια). The **obeying** of God’s Word is in the **doing** of it! (1:22) So we must not arrange our lives around assumptions about human longevity or ability! “*The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*” (1 John 2:17)

[3] The Prescription – v. 15

Presumption is obviously problematic. Thankfully, James did not leave his readers without a solution to this problem. If you have ever seen the initials “**D.V.**” in a letter, the author has in mind the Latin phrase **Deo Volente** which stands for “God willing”. If you have a Muslim friend, you may have heard the phrase, “Insha’Allah” which is Arabic for “Allah willing”. But what does James mean by instructing Christians to act in accordance with this phrase: “*If it is the Lord’s will*”? In the big picture, this is an acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty! Jesus is the very source and sustaining power of our world ([Colossians 1:15-20](#)).

Both Christians and Muslims alike can merely mutter a common phrase, and it will simply be from a fatalistic view of the world. There must be a heart transformation for this phrase to have meaning! We must relinquish control of our lives to Jesus Christ, the only Savior and Lord! Thus, a proper understanding of “*If it is the Lord’s will*” is rooted in the Gospel. When Paul addressed leaders in Athens he said, “*in [God] we live and move and have our being.*” ([Acts 17:24-28](#)). Our living (ζησομεν) and our doing (ποιησομεν) is an outflow of the transformative grace of God in our lives.

Conclusion – see “Digging Deeper”

What would you think of someone who: asked for a **raise** the first day of work? expected a **diploma** but never attended class or passed exams? showed up to run a **marathon** but had never trained? Such presumption is quite obvious. But people can be very imperceptive in their presuming! James warned believers who live this way because it is so offensive to God. Living with presumption can cause disharmony in the church, also. Concerning what issue might you be living with presumption?

The answer is the Gospel, which calls us to admit our need. The Good News of God requires us to admit that we cannot control the future. We must repent of our self-reliance and self-righteousness. And we must receive God’s grace to establish us in a relationship with Jesus Christ – see [Colossians 2:1-10](#).