

How does faith work for life planning?

- Alrighty, we are in a great book of the Bible called James. If you've got a Bible, go to the book of James, and it's a book written by Jesus' kid brother. If you could just even fathom sharing a bunk bed growing up, attending homeschool with Jesus. I mean, you know, I'm never gonna be the valedictorian of my school. Jesus is my big brother, we're homeschooled together, and we like to call James the blue-collar scholar of the New Testament. He's a guy who grew up in a small town, rural, blue-collar family, swinging a hammer growing up, but then as his big brother, Jesus, starts preaching, ultimately he's there to see his brother die and then rise and then return to heaven. James follows in His legacy and goes into ministry and becomes a pastor and writes a book of the Bible bearing his name, that's where we get the book of James. So the big theme of James is that faith works. And the question is, as you're living your life very practically, how does faith integrate itself to the decisions you make, the days you live, the deeds you decide? So today we're looking in James 4, how does faith work in life planning? And so let me just start with this big idea. We're always trying to figure out what comes next so we can get ready for and plan for it. This starts when you're a kid. We've got five kids. When your kid's born, you're holding your kid, thinking, who are they gonna be when they grow up? What are they gonna do? And then you start school if you're a kid, and then you start to compare yourself to other kids. You realize, okay, they got an A and I got an F, This is probably not my subject matter. I'm an athlete, or I'm a kid who's good at music, or I'm good at math, or whatever the case may be. And you start to figure out, comparing yourself to others, maybe this is who God's made me to be and maybe this is what I'll do when I grow up. Well, then you hit high school and then the pressure really intensifies. You've gotta focus a little bit on your studies. You start taking personality tests and career assessments. And then as you head toward your senior year, there's all this pressure like, okay, what are you gonna do now? What's your plan? Are you going into the military? Are you going into the workforce, you going into college, you going jail? Those are your four options. Which path are you taking? And then you graduate, and you've gotta jump into that path. And if you go to college, boy, then there's a lot of pressure 'cause you gotta pick your major. What am I gonna study? And what am I gonna focus on? And now it's costing money and my parents are saying, hurry up and pick a major, and you get into your major and you realize you're probably not very good at that, and then you graduate. And spoiler alert, if you're a college kid, you will not get a job that has anything to do with what you studied in college. I'm just telling you. Amen, right? I talked to a guy recently, he's like, "I got a art degree." Oh, great, you get cuts to the front of the unemployment line. That's all you get with an art degree, right? You know, there's nothing for you. That's a cliff, right? You know, so happy graduation. So what happens then, you go into the workforce, and you're trying to figure out, okay, what's the plan? Okay, what's the plan for my career and my income, and how do I work my way up the ladder and get up the org chart and make better income? And then finally life starts to come together and then you decide, hey, let's get married. Let me just tell you this, as soon as you get married, just shred all of your plans because there's one person with a plan, another person with a plan, they gotta shred their plans, they gotta come up with a brand new plan for this brand new family. And then you finally get your plan together. Okay, we're going to live here, maybe we're gonna buy a house, here's where we're gonna work, we're gonna pay off

our college debt, we're gonna drive this car. And then you get pregnant. When you get pregnant, burn all of your plans to the ground. Whatever plans you had, they are over. I always think it's cute when somebody's pregnant with their first kid and they've got a plan. Just any plan at all, I think it's adorable. Oh yeah, they're gonna be born, and in the morning we're gonna read Leviticus and then they're gonna take a nap, and then they're gonna go to bed at 8:00 o'clock and then they won't wake up until 6:00. No, that's not true. They're gonna yell at you from 2:00 to 6:00 a.m. and we your bed, that's their plan. It doesn't matter what your plan is, they got their plan and their plan always wins. Then you settle into your life and you're trying to figure out, okay, what comes next? Where are we gonna send the kids to school? How are we gonna pay off this mortgage? What are we gonna do with the in-laws? What are we gonna do for the holidays? And then finally you hit your 50s and 60s, and then your plan is, how do we have enough money so we can stop working? And all of life is just plan, plan, plan, plan, plan, trying to figure out what's coming, what's next, how do we prepare for it, how do we anticipate it? And the question is, how does faith work for life planning? Now what happens when we are planning, one of two things happen. How many of you are like me, you're planners, you like plans, Excel, budgets, spreadsheets, cashflow, calendars, you like that? Right, that's you, okay? These people all raised their hand, they're like, tell me something to do. I like things to do. Tell me what to do. Okay, great, so they like to raise their hand. And so that's me. I took a test, I'm a strategic planner, I like plans. I like plans about the plans. I like backup and contingency plans. I just like extra plans, just in case. Here's the problem with a plan, does it ever happen the way you planned?

- [Congregation] No.

- Nothing ever happens the way you plan. And so how many of you, because of that, you've gone the other direction and you just don't plan anything? You're like, you know what? We make plans, it never happens, so just flush it. I'm gonna sleep like I'm on Benadryl and have faith and I'll just wake up tomorrow and we'll see what happens. How many of you that's you? Hey, this is where we tend to go. Me, I tend to be the person, if I make a plan, stick with the plan, stick with the plan. My wife Grace is like, the plans never happen, so she doesn't plan anything. My wife doesn't plan, she doesn't like to plan. And so pray for her. I mean, we gotta work on this. And so what happens is, when you put the plans together and things keep changing and nothing ever comes together, and it's very frustrating, some of us just stick with the plan, like I got so much time and energy and research in the plan, let's just stick with the plan. Sometimes other people go the other way, like my wife does, and it's like, you know what, forget it. We're not even gonna make a plan. We'll just see what happens, take it as it comes. And James gives us this middle way of faith, how to have God enter into, not just our life in the present, but also planning for the future. And he starts here. He starts in James 4, and he's gonna have some principles for us, two about life, one about God, and two about us. Here's what he says, life has uncertainty. James 4:13-14, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town,'" so here's a business entrepreneur, "'and spend a year and trade and make profit,' yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring." That life has a lot of uncertainty. And what he says is, first and foremost, is that no one really knows what's gonna happen tomorrow. True or false,

in the last year or two, we've kind of all experienced this? How many of you the last year or two wasn't according to your plan? How many of you didn't plan for us to shut down the earth, cripple the economy, have a brutal election, and not be able to get things off of boats? How many of you planned for that? There were a few variables we did not anticipate. And what God is not against is planning, but He's against presumption. There's a whole book of the Bible called Proverbs, and it has nothing but a lot of good things to say about planning, and that wise people do make plans and responsible people should have plans. But what God is against here is presumption, arrogance, hubris, and pride. He already told us that God opposes the proud, He gives grace to the humble. And the proud person says, well, I know what the future holds and I can make a plan. And the truth is, we always need to have our plans in pencil. It's good to have a plan, but your plan needs to be in pencil because we don't know what the future might bring. Now, for those of us who are leaders, there's always this pressure because as people look into the future, they tend to have anxiety and worry, like what's coming, what's gonna happen, how do we prepare for it? And so it gives an opportunity for leaders to over-promise and under-deliver. And this happens all the time. Let's say this happens every four years. Somebody gets up and says, here's what's happening. I know exactly what's gonna happen. I know exactly how to fix it. I got a plan and it's all gonna be great. And we believe in them and then we vote for them and then we hate them, and then we vote for another guy who says the same thing. And we've been doing this for a few 100 years. And at some point, somebody should say, I don't think anyone knows what tomorrow holds. We do this in business. The boss brings everybody together. We'll call this a staff meeting at work. And the boss is like, okay, here's what's gonna happen. You're like, no, it's not. Last time we had a meeting, you told us what was gonna happen, it didn't happen. That's why we're having another meeting. This happens in every sports team. The coach gets up at halftime, tells you what's gonna happen, it never does happen. Politicians, business leaders, investment bankers, pollsters, and pundits, they all try to tell us what the future's going to hold. And the truth is, only God knows what's gonna happen tomorrow. And what he says is, you can make your plans, but ultimately God only knows your future. So if you're honest, you're gonna have margin and contingency. And how many of you have hired this general contractor, who's a false prophet, and what they tell you is, we'll be done in two weeks for \$5,000? It'll be done in six months for \$70,000. And so we have to just be a little more honest and integres as we plan for the future. And so what I would say to you is, I like to say that there's two kinds of planners and leaders. There's pivot and process. Process are the people who, they like a plan, they like a structure, they like an order, they like a routine, they like a predictability. The pivot leaders are, well, as things change, I will make adjustments accordingly. How many of you are more process people? Once you get locked into a routine, hard to get you out of it. How many of you are pivot people? You're like, I just wait and see what happens and respond and react as I go. And the truth is, if you're going to live your life in faith, you need to pray and seek God's will and have a process, and then wait and see what tomorrow brings and make the pivot. I'll give you two examples. So this last week at Real Men, meet on Wednesday night, see you guys on Wednesday night, we had a gentleman visiting us, podcaster online and seemed like a really great guy. And he just got engaged. I got to pray for him, it was good to meet him, welcome him. He's on business visiting us here in the Valley. But he got pretty emotional coming to church, and I was like, what's going

on? He said, "My church has been closed for 18 months." He said, "This is the first time I've been in church with people singing in 18 months." He said, "It's just kind of emotional." Like, that's incredible. And he comes from a country called Maryland. And so he came to visit us here in America and so, welcome. And so I asked him, I said, "Well, what's going on?" And basically what his church is doing is what a lot of churches have been doing. And I'm not criticizing. I love pastors and churches and it's been a hard season for all leaders, but they're process leaders and so they're waiting for things to get back to normal. They're like, well, we've got an annual schedule and a routine and a budget and a flow and our way of doing things, and we can't do it that way just yet. So we're just gonna wait until things go back to normal and we can hit play on our process that we have thus far hit pause on. And the truth is, if you're waiting for things to get back to normal, you will be waiting forever. Jesus will come back, look at you, and ask, "What were you waiting for?" Right, how many of you have learned that in your business? How many of you have learned that this last year? Like, if you're just stuck in your process and you're waiting for life to go back to normal, opportunity passes you by. So then there are times you've just got to make a pivot. You're like, new information, new data, things have changed. And we've had this perhaps more than any time in our lifetime, in the recent two years. How many of you moms you're like, I will never homeschool, I'm homeschooling, okay? How many? And some of you are making major pivot life decisions. People are deciding, do I live in this state or this state, depending upon who my governor is.

- [Congregant] Amen.

- Welcome. Welcome. How come people are making decisions like, do we send our kids to school or do we homeschool, or do we pivot into Christian school? People are making decisions like, do I get the vaccine or not get the vaccine? Do I lose my job or my career? I mean, people are making major, major, major life decisions and it's good to have a process and then you have to make the pivots. And what he's saying is, have a plan for tomorrow, but know that only the Lord knows tomorrow. Therefore, you and I, all of our planning needs to be in pencil. And the greatest pivot you can make is becoming a Christian. The greatest pivot that anyone can make in their entire life in history is receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And so let me just say to you right now that the most important decision you will ever make is whether you start living as a Christian. And I just would invite and encourage all of you to make that decision. If you have not, that's why you're here. Literally you're pivoting your life from hell to heaven. That's a big deal. You're pivoting your life from living independent to living dependent on God. You're pivoting your life from dealing with the weight and burden of your sin and failures and shortcomings and giving those burdens to Jesus Christ who died that you might be forgiven and lives to help you carry that burden. You go from living without any consideration of God's Word to then living under the authority and the life-giving authority of God's Word. And so let me just say, whatever you have committed your life to, this is the day that God has chosen for you to pivot and to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It's the biggest change you'll ever make and it's the greatest thing that can ever happen. So he starts by saying that life has uncertainty. True or false, we've experienced this? You just you're like, I didn't know that tomorrow was gonna look like that. In addition to uncertainty, the second thing he has to say about life is that

life has brevity. And he says it this way in James 4:14, "What is your life?" Good question. "For you are a mist," one word. We're gonna focus on that. "That appears for a little time and then vanishes." So in the Bible, there's a whole genre of literature. And the Bible is a library of 66 books written by 39 authors over the course of a few thousand years. And there's a whole genre of literature contained therein called the wisdom literature. And wisdom is practical and it's pithy and it's poetic. It's about life and the stuff of life. And the Bible uses this language and analogy that believing in God is having a walk with God, and wisdom is, what's my next step? God, do You want me to live there or here? Buy the house, sell the house? Do You want me to get married or wait? Do You want us to have a kid now, or is it not time? Do You want me to work this job or quit this job? Do You want me to choose this degree or choose that degree? Wisdom is, what's your next step in that walk with God? And so in the Old Testament, the wisdom literature is first philosophy. God saved me at the age of 19 in college. And I was studying philosophy is one of the areas that I was delving into. And they told me, they said, "Philosophy started with the Greeks, Epimenides, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and I guess you could throw in Alexander the Great. And then I started reading the Bible and I learned that actually the first philosophers were God's people. 1,000 years before the Greeks, the Hebrews, the Jews, they had philosophy, called the wisdom literature. And so Song of Solomon is about love. And Job is about suffering. And Psalms is about how to worship God through the highs and lows of life. Ecclesiastes is about the meaning of life. It's the exact same question that James posits here, and James is the New Testament book of wisdom literature. And what I believe James is doing here is I believe he is pulling up and commenting on the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, which is one of my favorite books of the Bible. It's 28 chapters and about 38 times in the English translations there's a little word called hebel in the original Hebrew. Not to get super nerdy on you, but this word hebel, it defines life. And he asked the question here, what is life? Well, that's the question that Ecclesiastes similarly seeks to answer. And it starts with this word. "Hebel, hebel, says the teacher. Everything is hebel." And the book begins and ends with this Hebrew word, hebel. And how you define that word is how you understand your life. So it's a big deal. Now, not surprisingly, the word for our life is very complicated, 'cause life is very complicated. Various English translations will translate it meaningless, vanity, and emptiness. Life can be meaningless, but it doesn't need to be. If you love God and neighbor, it can actually be very meaningful. Life can be lived in vain, just pointless and worthless, a wild goose chase with no goose, or it can be lived very purposefully and not be empty, but be filled with the Spirit. And so how we define this word is really important. And this word is elsewhere interpreted in the Old Testament as vapor, breath, or mist. I believe that's exactly what James is saying, that our life is like a vapor breath or mist. So think of it in this way. How many of you, on a cold morning, have breathed that? And if you've always lived in the Valley, Google this. You wake up on a crisp, cool morning and you take a breath and what do you see? You see the mist of your breath, and there it is and then it's gone. And what he says is, that's your life. It's very sobering. And what he's saying is that life is very brief and short, and this is more of a pastoral sermon, and I love you, but let me just tell you this, the older you get, the faster life goes. When you're young, it feels like it's taking forever. The older you get, it just feels like you can't keep up. Like, I went to the store the other day and they've got all the Christmas stuff up. I'm like, we just had Christmas 17 minutes ago. I mean, it's crazy. My youngest son is getting ready to get his driver's license. I've

got five kids. I can remember, you know, giving him piggyback rides 13 minutes ago. At least that's what it feels like. How many of you, the older you get, it's like, man, every day just feels like a minute and every year just feels like a day? It just moves so fast, it goes so quick. I mean, it's crazy. I turned 51 here last month. And you know, I don't know how old I'm gonna live to be. Probably depends on what I do with burritos, but. And I'm praying about it, but like I'm in the second half of my life, and I can't believe how quickly time goes. And what he says is that life has uncertainty, you don't know what tomorrow's gonna bring, and life has brevity, you don't know how many days you've got. Let me give you two stories on this and why this is so important. What he's saying is that life has these sacred windows of opportunity and memory, and if you miss them, they're gone forever. And the truth is, we tend to think that, well, tomorrow. Tomorrow we'll forgive them, tomorrow we'll love them, tomorrow we'll pray for them, tomorrow we'll grab a meal with them, tomorrow, we'll visit with them, tomorrow we're going to encourage them, tomorrow we're gonna serve them, tomorrow we're gonna be generous toward them. And the truth is, none of us is guaranteed tomorrow. I still remember the first person that I loved and lost, it was my grandpa George, I've talked about him quite a bit. I loved him with all my heart. He was one of my favorite people. I just have nothing but good memories with my grandpa. He was a diesel mechanic, he wore overalls. At some point, he just gave up on anything with a waist, just gave up, just: ♪ I surrender all ♪ Just keeps letting out the overalls and eating caramel apples. That was my grandpa George. And so I have nothing but good memories. And I would go stay at his house and hang out and we had a great time. And I remember I was scheduled, supposed to go stay the night at his house, and my mom said, "Marky," she still calls me Marky, I talked to her this week, she said, "Marky, you've got like standardized tests at school in the morning, you can't stay at your grandpa's tonight. Maybe the next night or the night after that." I was like, "Okay, Mom." And so I called my grandpa George, I was 10, I said, "I can't go to your house tonight, but maybe tomorrow night or the night after." He's like, "Great. You know, anytime you're welcome at my house. I look forward to seeing you." The next day I took the test, I went to, it was either Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts or something, and I saw my mom and dad pull up, and my mom and dad got out of the car and my mom was very emotionally distraught, my dad was comforting her, and I could tell that something was wrong and they were showing up early. I wasn't supposed to leave yet. And so I ran to my folks, I was like, "What's going on?" My mom was very distraught, and she said, "Your grandpa died." And that was her dad. She loved her dad very much. They were very close. And I was like, oh my gosh. I talked to him last night and I was supposed to go to his house tonight. Like we were supposed to go to breakfast the next day and it's over. And I had never as a kid, 10 years old, I had never once thought of not having my grandpa, and now he's gone. Some years ago, Grace lost her dad. His name was Gibb, Grandpa Gibb is what kids called him. And I will just publicly say my kids, they got first round draft picked on both sides for grandparents. My mom and dad, Grace's mom and dad, incredibly good to our kids, incredibly good. Very invested, involved in their life growing up. And Grandpa Gibb was a pastor. He planted a church. He called it Trinity Church. We named this church in honor of him and in memory of him, and he pastored there 40 some years. And some years ago we had Grace's whole family over for Christmas Day. We had my family over on Christmas Eve, her family over on Christmas Day, and Grandpa Gibb was there and he did what he always does. He loved the kids, he prayed for them. He was a pastor, very compassionate,

kind-hearted, loving man. And we enjoyed our time with him, had dinner with him, he prayed over the kids. And then we took the kids to California to get a little sunshine and Disney trip post-Christmas, and we got a call, "Hey, grandpa Gibb's in the hospital, he's not doing good." So I immediately put Grace on a plane to get her there as soon as possible 'cause it was her daddy, and I was like, okay, let me figure out what to do with the kids and get flights and cancel where we're staying, and let me figure out how to get us coordinated, but honey, you go see your dad. And I talked to Grace, she's like, "You and the kids need to get here immediately. He's not doing well, he's in the hospital. It doesn't look like he's gonna make it." And so I grabbed the kids, we got on a plane, we flew up, then we had to get a car, a couple hour drive over a snowy mountain pass. We show up, there he is. He never said another word. He died. He died. And we saw him just sort of breathing his last, but he couldn't communicate. It's like, man, we just had Christmas with grandpa Gibb. The last thing I heard from Grandpa Gibb was him praying over the kids. What a great final memory. I'm glad it wasn't arguing with the kids or yelling at the kids. He wasn't that man. The point is this, life has uncertainty and it has brevity. You don't know what tomorrow holds, and tomorrow may not come. And we get so busy planning to live that we forget to live. We get so busy trying to figure out how to get ready for tomorrow that we overlook the opportunities provided today. I want you to be present in your life. I don't want you to just work on your life. I want you to live in your life. As a dad, there was a, I didn't even know that I had done this until very recently. Ever since my daughters were born, we've got two girls, three boys, two girls, every time that they entered the room or I entered the room, I approached them and I kissed them on the head. I don't know if I've ever missed, if so, it was an accident. The point is that every time one of my daughters and I are in the same room, I wanna pursue them, I wanna love them, and I wanna bless them because someday I won't be there. So I wanna make sure I don't miss any of those opportunities to bless them and to love them and to pursue them. I don't wanna miss any of those opportunities. You think, well, you know, I'll forgive my spouse tomorrow. I'll tell my folks I love them tomorrow. I will look my kid in the eye and pray over them tomorrow. Why not today? You know, when the kids were growing up, life was busy and full, especially with five kids, and I just wanted to be there, call this the ministry of presence, just be there for those sacred memories and windows of opportunity. There was one year, the three boys, they all played baseball, and they had enough games as boys, but they had more games than a Major League Baseball team does in a season. That's 162 games. I looked at the calendar, I was like, oh boy, because none of them can drive, you know? So we gotta figure this out. And I just remember putting the boys' schedules on my calendar and saying, I'm going to make every year, did this for years, as many games as I possibly can, because someday they're gonna hang up their cleats and they're gonna hang up their glove and I can't go to any more games. And someday I'm gonna go home to be with the Lord. And so I spent my whole life going to kids' baseball games. And it was in terrible weather. It was always raining and cold and they're playing through storms. I saw my oldest son pitch through a snow flurry one time. And so we traveled all over the place. So I was the crazy dad, I got a chair that had an umbrella over it, and I got thousands of books on my laptop with Logos Bible software, and I got a hotspot on my phone, and I would wear a parka and I had fingerless gloves and I am writing systematic theology books at little league games. And then they'd get up to bat, you know? But every time they got up, they would look over and I just wanted them to know, you are a priority and I am

present. And I don't miss any of that. I have so many memories. Here's what I'm telling you, making money is fine, making memories is more important, because you can't take your money with you, but you could take your memories with you into the kingdom of God. I'll never forget my daughter Ashley, she ran track. She was fast, all-state sprinter, and I would always wait at the finish line. And she always had big pigtails and glasses. She looked like the world's fastest librarian. She did. She totally did. And I would wait, and she would always look over 'cause she knew that her dad would be waiting there at the finish line. And she got injured on one occasion and she had to rehabilitate and she missed a few meets. And then she got to go back to racing, and so she had a meet, and she said, "Daddy, I'm gonna run again this week after a few weeks off." I said, "That's great." She said, "Yeah, but I'm only gonna run one race. It's just gonna be the 100, I'm gonna run the 100." And I said, "Okay, honey." I said, "Well, I'm gonna be there, I wanna see that." She's like, "No, Daddy, no, no. You gotta drive to a ferry terminal, you gotta wait for a boat, you gotta get on a long ferry ride through an island chain, you land in the middle of nowhere, and then you gotta drive a few hours to this remote school, and it's gonna be cold and windy and raining, and I'm only gonna run one race, and it's gonna take you a whole day just to get there and back." And I told her, I said, "No, I'm gonna go." She's like, "No, you can't go." She's firstborn, so we talk about things, I said, "No, I'm gonna go." She's like, "No, you can't go, Dad. That's crazy, that's a waste of time." I said, "It's okay." So I stopped arguing with her and I just went. And she ran the 100. She would run in the high 12s, low 13s, so 12 or 13 seconds I spent the whole day. I canceled all my meetings. I think I canceled a speaking engagement, a flight. Like, I shut everything down so that I could be there for 12 or 13 seconds. She didn't know I was there, she crossed the finish line. It's freezing, it's a driving rain, it's windy. She looks over, she smiled, she said, "I knew you'd be here." And I said, "Yeah, I'll always, I'll always be here until I'm not here." Life has uncertainty and it has brevity. Don't be looking so forward into the future that you overlook the people and opportunities that are right in front of you. Today's a good day to say I'm sorry. Today's a good day to say I forgive you. Today's a good day to say I love you. Today's a good day to say I've cleared my calendar and I'd like to see you. Life has uncertainty, life has brevity. Here's the good news, he then speaks of God. He says that God has sovereignty. In a world that has uncertainty and brevity, it's nice to know that God has sovereignty, There is actually a God, I have good news for you, and He's in charge and He's good. In fact, He calls Himself a Father. Here's what it says. "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will do this or that.'" He's talking about God has sovereignty. And this can be for us either a cliché or a conviction. Sometimes religious people will say this just as a platitude or a cliché, well, Lord willing, if the Lord wills, you know, whatever God wants, that can be a cliché or it can be a profound and deep conviction. And it's saying, you know what? Life does have uncertainty, but not for the Sovereign. God knows what's gonna happen tomorrow. And let me just say this to you. This is gonna be just a verbal process, kind of what the dad had on kind of sermon, but I hear this from people all the time, especially young people, like, I just wish I knew what the future holds. Let me tell you this, I've lived a while, you don't wanna know. You'd just be freaked out. Right, how many of you, if God told you exactly what would happen in your life, you would have been too paralyzed to even live it? And what he's saying is, if the Lord wills, meaning the Lord knows tomorrow, and the Lord knows if we even have tomorrow. So the uncertainty and the brevity are under His sovereignty. And understanding this is, you're not the

highest authority in your life. Let me say this, you don't control tomorrow. Now you can make wise decisions that puts you in the best possible position to maximize the opportunities of tomorrow. And we all should seek wisdom and we should make plans and we should do our homework and we should seek to be responsible. And whether it's your financial investments or your schedule or your relationships or your holiday planning or your health, I think it's great to seek wisdom, to make a plan. But then to say, Lord, I don't know tomorrow and I don't control tomorrow, but You do. And realizing the sovereignty of God is simply this, number one, there is a sovereign and it's not me. You control freaks, write that down. Number two, I'm seeking to walk in God's will for my life to the best of my ability. As far as I know, I'm where I'm supposed to be, doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And number three, Lord, if You wanna redirect my steps and rewrite my plan, I welcome that. So I submit it and I surrender it and I live under Your sovereignty. This is not my life, it's Your life. Live through me. And how do You want me to live this life in relationship with You? Let me say this, don't make winning your goal. Don't make succeeding your goal. Don't make conquering your goal. Don't make maintaining or preserving your reputation your goal. Just make it your goal to live in God's will for you. At the end of the day, God will help you do what you are doing if you're doing what He has told you to do. And so oftentimes we're making plans and then telling God what our plan is rather than asking God what His plan is. So many of us just want to put our best case scenario together and then in prayer, say, okay, Lord, here's what we're doing now. And the Lord's like, you didn't start with Me and you didn't ask Me and you didn't seek Me and you didn't invite Me. And I'll just tell you this, that God could shockingly speak to you in such a way that He sovereignly knows the number of days you have and what the future holds. This happened to me at the age of 19. I was 19 years of age, brand new Christian in college, And all of a sudden it was like, okay, I am not the sovereign Lord over my life. Jesus Christ is, I'm a man now under authority. And I had never even thought, okay, God, what do You want me to do? I woke up every day and just did what I wanted to do. Now, I'm a Christian, okay, God, am I where I'm supposed to be? Am I in the church You want me in? Am I looking up to the, you know, sage saints, the wise counsel that You would have for me? Am I in the college studying the things that You... Like, where I'm at in my life, I've made all these decisions and I just met you. Okay, am I where I'm supposed to be, or do we need to pivot? Like, where are we at? I remember at a men's retreat, I've shared this story, God spoke to me, and He said, "Mary Grace, preach the Bible, train men, and plant churches," 19. So I called Grace and I asked her, I said, "Hey, how's your relationship with the Lord?" I'd just come to the Lord, she come back to the Lord. We were separated maybe 300 miles or something between our colleges, and the Lord needed to speak to her too, 'cause you can't just call a girl and say, "The Lord told me we're gonna get married." If so, you're creepy. You're creepy. But God's like, you didn't call me. Oh, he don't need to, you know what I mean? Told me to tell you, okay. That's a stalker, not a husband, okay? She's like, "No, the Lord's been speaking to me," and she said, "I wanna transfer out to your school, and I want us to go to church together, and I want us to be in Bible study together, and I believe God's put us together." I was like, great. I was like, okay, Lord, okay, I preach the Bible, okay. I'd never even thought of that. My whole life, I'd never thought I'd preach the Bible. Never even thought of that. I was like, okay, I probably should read the Bible. Before you preach the Bible, you should probably find one, you know? And so I started reading it and I went and got a speech degree

from one of the top five communication programs in the country to learn how to preach. And then I went to seminary and I got a master's degree in Bible. Mary Grace, preach the Bible, train men. So my heart has always been to invest in men. If men can be better Christians and husbands and fathers, most of the problems in our culture will be fixed.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- That's what I believe. And then plant churches. And so it's really weird, God spoke that to me at age 19, and here I am at 51. And the Sovereign knew what the future would hold, and I didn't. And this wasn't the path that I would have chosen for me, but I love my life. This is the best season of my whole life. I'm the happiest I've ever been. And to think now I have my dream girl that's my wife, and we've got five kids, and we're all serving Jesus together, and every week everybody in my family, in some form or fashion, is teaching God's Word and serving the Sovereign. What a life, Lord. What a life. But it wasn't my idea, it was His. And it wasn't my plan, it was His. And there have been times that I have said and done things that should have wrecked His plan. And sometimes He saves me from me. Life has uncertainty, life has brevity. Thankfully over it all God has sovereignty, so then there's two things for you and I, friend. And the first is that we should have humility. Here's what he says. "As it is," James 4:16, "you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." Again, God is not against planning, but He's against this deep, profound presumption, this arrogance and this boasting. Now, the way this works in our culture is, as people look to the future, we tend to have anxiety because of the uncertainty. Oh my gosh, what's gonna happen? How do I prepare for it? So then what we want is someone who knows what's gonna happen and will tell us and save us. So we're all looking for a savior. If you've got money, you're looking for an investment savior. If there's an election coming, you're looking for a political savior. If your company is struggling and you're hiring a new CFO or a CEO, you're looking for an organizational savior. And so what we're always looking for is someone who will come in and tell us what's gonna happen and save us from some bad future and deliver us into some good future. And there's always people who are proud and boastful and arrogant who step forward and are willing to assume that responsibility. I know what's gonna happen, listen to me. And what we do, we get into this cycle of what Jonathan Edwards, who I believe is our nation's greatest theologian ever produced, calls the cycle of idolize, demonize. Idolize is, you are powerful, you're courageous, you're strong. He calls it boastful and arrogant and evil, but they're self-assured. And let me tell you, here's where we're going, here's what's gonna happen. Trust me, follow me, be loyal to me, and I will save you. And we idolize them, and then they what?

- Fail.

- They fail. So we demonize them. We demonize them. Let me say this, there's only one savior and His name is Jesus Christ.

- [Congregation] Amen.

- There's only one Sovereign, and His name is Jesus Christ. There's only One who actually knows tomorrow and could prepare you for it, and His name is Jesus Christ. And even a good leader is a bad savior. So what you and I need to have is some humility, said previously that God opposes the proud and He gives grace to the humble. And here he talks about boasting, arrogance, and it's evil. Let me give you a little line from the Lord Jesus. Jesus said some things that if you just think about it are just staggering, and this is one of them. He says in John 5:36, "The works that the Father has given me to accomplish are the very works that I am doing." I know this may not seem like a staggering statement, but how many of you could say that? Say, what are you doing? Well, I'm only doing what I'm supposed to do and I'm not doing anything that God hasn't assigned to me. Right? How many of you don't even know what you're supposed to be doing? Well, you can all raise your hand now. Most of the time what happens is, if it's good, we say yes, and we get overextended, over committed, we get burned out. This is why Americans don't sleep much. We're stressed, we're anxious. We're on energy drinks and caffeine. We're pushing the human body beyond its limits. God only gives you the energy to do the things that He has asked you to do. And so if you overextend yourself, you're not going to have energy, and this is where you start to hurt yourself physically. I've done this. Honestly, I'm in a season right now where I'm a little overextended and I need some time with the Lord. And I've got that time scheduled this week to ask Him, "Okay, Lord, if I don't have energy for everything, then there are obviously some things that You have not apportioned for me to do." So let me give you a simple analogy. Your capacity is what I'll call a plate. Some of you've got a little plate and you're like, yeah, I did something today. Done. Done. Some of you have got a pretty good size plate and you're like, I got some things done and I can get a few more things done. Some of you have got a platter. You're like, I can get done a lot of things. Watch me. Okay? But the truth is, no matter how big or small your plate is, we're finite human beings, we're limited, we all have a capacity. And at some point you find it. So the first thing is to simply come to the realization that my life is God's plate, not mine. It's not my money, it's His money. It's not my time, it's His time. It's not my energy, it's His energy. This is His life, I belong to Jesus Christ. I've been bought with a price. I belong to the Lord. I don't just give Him my sin, I give Him my everything. Okay? Number two, I've gotta ask the Lord what He wants on this plate that I call my life. And if there's someone or something on your plate that He didn't put on your plate, then you are being arrogant. Because what you're saying is, Lord, I can do more than You think I can do. And this is where some of you are people pleasers and you're addicted to this three-letter word called yes. Can you do this? Yes. You can't. You're boasting and it's arrogant and it's evil. Well, I have to do it. They need me. Hmm, really? There is a Savior and He could assign someone else or He could just do it Himself. And we tend to say yes because we're arrogant and we're evil. And oftentimes when we commit to something, people will think it's humble of us to serve, but it's our way of boasting. Yes, I can do that. Others can't, but I can. You do need me, that's true. You're welcome. Once you realize that your life is God's plate, then you ask God what goes on the plate. And then here's the powerful question, what comes off the plate? 'Cause what some of you do, you just keep stacking things and it starts falling off the plate. I'm late, I'm hurried, I'm stressed, I don't get a day off. Jesus only did what He was supposed to do. And we read the Bible, we're like, Jesus talked to that person. Yeah, and there was 1,000 that He walked by and didn't talk to because He was supposed to talk to that person but not every person. Oh, Jesus

fed those people. He did, and there's a bunch of people He didn't feed. Jesus healed that guy. Sure He did, and then there was a bunch of other guys that He didn't heal. Jesus took His day off because that was what He was supposed to do. That was His assignment. Every week the Father said today, Son, your job is to do nothing. And He was obedient. There were times that Jesus took a nap. Can you imagine? Jesus, You have nothing, You're only gonna work to 33, get up. If you don't have time for a nap, if you can't take a day off, it may be because you have put things on your plate that God hasn't put on your plate and you haven't taken things off your plate that God wants you to take off your plate. And he says, it's arrogance and it's boasting and it's evil. God doesn't tell us no to restrict us, but to save us. What are you supposed to be doing that you're not doing? What are you doing that you're not supposed to be doing? And let me say, it may even be something that was good for a season, but that season has come to an end. And God is saying, yes, for a season that was on your plate, now we're taking it off and I'm putting this on your plate. Life has uncertainty, it has brevity, God has sovereignty. Therefore we need to have humility, live under His sovereignty, and live, last point, with a sense of urgency. Here's how James says it. James 4:17, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Here's what you can't control, whether or not you're here tomorrow. Here's what you can't control, everything that is going to happen tomorrow. Here's what you can control, what you do today. What you do today. And what he says is, if you know something is right and you don't do it, that's a sin. So the big question is, how do you find God's will for your life? Well, first and foremost, I'm always gonna say the Bible. We are a Bible-believing, Bible-teaching, Bible-studying, Bible-obeying, Bible-memorizing church family. That's just who we are. I'll just come out of the closet and take one for my team. We're the Bible people. Okay? And so as you study God's Word, God will start to literally renew your mind. You'll start to say, oh, that's what God thinks, that's who God is, that's what God says, that's how life is to be lived. And so the Bible says, "Husband, love your wife." Okay, well, that's God's will, better figure out how to love this woman. "Raise your kids in the admonition of the Lord." Mom and dad, okay, that's what it says. That's obviously God's will. So much of God's will is just categorically clear. And then the other ways that we find God's specific will for particular decisions starts with prayer. You have a living God who's called a Father. When Jesus teaches us to pray, He says, "Here's how you pray, our Father." Prayer is how you talk to your Dad and listen to your Dad. That's all that it is. Okay, Dad, I don't know what to do. Would you please tell me what to do? And prayer is talking to God and listening to God. You can't walk in God's will and you can't live humbly under God's sovereignty unless you're under God's Word, in prayer and worship, and worship is how we pray together, so we're gonna sing here in a bit. That's how we pray together is through song. For me, the older I get, the more I realize that I need prayer more than I think that I do. And so you better start your day with prayer because you don't know what's gonna happen, but He does. And throughout the course of your day, you better stop and pray 'cause you're gonna need to figure some stuff out. And at the end of the day, you better pray to learn the lessons that you could or should have learned through the course of the day. That's why the Bible says to pray ceasing. So for me, this looks like every week I schedule a meeting with God. I go up to the mountains and I hike miles, and I love it. And it's just a prayer time. I talk out loud and I listen. And I'm just like talking to the Lord. And sometimes I'll sing to the Lord, and I do it in the presence of the trees 'cause my voice is so horrible that no one needs to endure that. But I

like to prayer hike and sing and pray and listen. And oftentimes God speaks to me and He tells me things that I need to know and do. You find God's will through Bible reading, you find it through prayer, which includes worship. You're gonna find it through wise counsel. James here is writing wisdom literature, and he is functioning for us as wise counsel. Wise counsel is finding people who love the Lord, know the Bible, and have the Holy Spirit and saying, hey, could you help me? Could you instruct me? Could you inform me? I'd never been married before, you have a good marriage. Could you tell me how to do that? I've never had a kid before, your kids like you. I've never seen that. How do you raise kids that love the Lord and like you? Like each other. Hey, you know the Bible, I don't know it. How do you study it? I've got some money, how should I invest that? We're thinking of buying a house, any advice on that? Wise counsel is finding people in your life who have wisdom and then borrowing it from them. But you can only do that if you're humble and have a sense of urgency. You find God's will through God's Word, prayer which includes worship, wise counsel, and the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will use all kinds of creative means, ordinary and extraordinary, to speak to you and to reveal God's will to you. And when you know something, you need to do that something. So many people are planning to do things rather than doing things that God has planned for them to do. So many people are living for tomorrow that they're not living today. And what he says is, if God has told you something and you don't do it, that's a sin. I mean, it's such a big deal that Jesus Christ died for it. You be like, well, it's not a big deal. God died to forgive you not doing that. What has God told you to do? It's one of those contemplative, you could just feel it in the room sermons. I just wanna take your heart out of your chest and have you take a look at it, consecrated to the Lord, and then put it back in. What has God told you to do that you're not doing? What has God told you to not do that you're doing? Don't just make plans to get to that in the future. Do that today. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you? What is God saying to you? I love you with all my heart. I don't want you to just be the typical, over committed, stressed out, burned out, frustrated, grumpy person, who doesn't enjoy their life. How much time do we waste on our phone? How much time do we waste worrying about things that may or may not happen? How much time do we waste planning to live and wasting our lives? We're gonna meet with God and He's gonna speak to you. I'm confident of that. Let me close with a story, and hopefully it'll be a testimony. A testimony is this, it's sharing God's work in your life to encourage someone else in their life. So as I told you, I'm a planner, I like plans. And so Grace and I got married, had the five kids, tried to obey the things that the Lord had said to us. And as I share this testimony, I'm gonna focus on our oldest daughter, Ashley, and I got her permission, sort of, to do so. So I had a plan, and the plan was, okay, we're gonna live in this city, we're gonna work at this job, we're gonna worship in this church. My extended family's nearby, my folks have got 20 some grandkids, so big extended family. We're gonna do vacations here. I kept buying and selling and, you know, moving real estate to get to a position where I got our dream and forever home, and I got it all set up, settled in, drop anchor. Okay, the kids have got their school, we've got our city, we've got our church, we've got our job, we've got our house, we got our friends, we got our extended family, finally I'm 45. Yes, my whole plan came together for a day or two, and then it all changed. Everything I had planned for. God spoke to Grace and I audibly and said, "You're done." Okay. This is no longer our city. This is no longer our church. This is no longer our job. This is no longer our house. This is no longer their school. Everything, upside down. I'll be

honest, looking at the future, life has uncertainty and brevity. I'm 45 with five kids, I'm like, Lord, You better tell me what the plan is. And He's like, yeah, later. I'm like, later? That's not an answer. That's a problem. Okay, Lord, where are we moving? He's like, you'll find out. Okay. I don't know what country we're going to. I call a family meeting, the kids are like, let's go to Australia. I was like, hey, hey, hey. Where are my kids gonna go to school? What am I gonna do for a job? Where are we gonna go to church? What's gonna happen? I was anxious. Now, Grace, as I told you earlier, she wasn't. She's like, I'll figure it out. I was like, no, we won't, no, we won't, no, we won't, no, we won't. She's snoring, I'm stressing, that's our whole marriage. She's irresponsible. And she would say I have unbelief. So, you know, whichever one you prefer. So I remember taking a couple of days and just fasting and praying, and I took a whole silence and solitude day with the Lord. And I had a list of things in my journal, like, Lord, I need help. What do You want me to do with this? And I'm asking God for His plan. And God did speak to me on some very specific things, and there's other things He said, "Son, I'll let you know later." Okay, Dad. And one of the things He said was that Ashley gets to graduate with her friends from her high school. It was October when we transitioned and everything went upside down and we quit. And she was a senior and she wasn't supposed to graduate till June. I was like, Lord, just hang out from October to June? He's like, "Yeah. Heal up, love Grace, spend time with the kids, make memories, get healthy, that's your assignment." Okay. So I go home and I grab Ashley, our oldest daughter, it's her senior year, and she's the planner, driver, firstborn, she's my daughter. And I said, "Honey, the Lord spoke to me and said that you get to graduate with your friends from your school, that's His plan." She just starts bawling. She's like, "Tank you, daddy, that's what I wanted, but I didn't wanna say anything 'cause I didn't wanna burden you." So I kissed her on the head and pray over her. And she ended up graduating and winning the president's award, top schooler, top scholar. And I mean, she's so smart. She's scholar and I can't say it. And I went to public school, she went to private school. And she was top athlete, Christian scholar, leader in her class. And that was God's plan. And so it was interesting because I would have moved the whole family, I would have said, okay, that's it. If this door is closed, we're gonna go kick another door down. And God was like, no, you're gonna wait, son, till I open a door. And so it was in the fall or winter, they had a school dance and she went with a friend group, and we would've moved had I had my plan, and this friend group included a young man that we had never met. Just came as a plus one for a friend and didn't even go to the school. So she met him and today that's her husband. And her plan was then to graduate and go to college. So she's in this Christian school where it comes that pressure at the end of your senior year, everybody has to publicly disclose their plan. So all the kids are either wearing their college sweatshirt that they're going into school at, or their branch of military service that they're going to serve in. And my daughter is in my office and she's weeping, and she's like, "Dad, I don't know where to go to college 'cause I don't even know where our family's gonna live. I don't know what country or state you and mom are gonna move to. I don't know if I'm gonna be with the family or not." And so we prayed, and God said she could take a gap semester or a year. So she got a Gap sweatshirt. I kid you not. So all the kids get together for their photo. It's like Yale, Harvard, Gap. And she said, "Dad, I wanna go to Costa Rica and work on my Spanish and go to Bible college and get time with the Lord." I was like, oh, my daughter gonna a foreign country. That's a terrible idea. And so the Lord said, "Send her," so she went.

And she came back and then we moved to Arizona, God moved us to Arizona. And I didn't know we were gonna plant a church, but the kids, they called a family meeting and asked us to plant this church. And so then Ashley went to ASU and went to the Barrett Honors College on a scholarship. I think she was like 4.0 and she got her degree in Spanish. And then her plan was to go to Argentina and to be single for the rest of her life and to be a missionary, and God shut the door, and she married the boy that she met in our house that we shouldn't have been there. It was an accident. It's weird how all these accidents happen in our life. I mean, if I didn't know better, I'd think there was a sovereign over the circumstances. And so then God slams the door for her to go to Argentina, she gets married. This last season hits, the whole world shuts down, she comes to me, she says, "Dad, I feel like I can help you get Bible teaching out." So she's the executive director of Real Faith. And all of a sudden the world shuts down and we're using technology to get my Bible teaching out. And I would have been in a city where it was closed. I wouldn't have been able to preach the gospel freely or for the church to be open. I wouldn't be doing ministry with my family. My five kids couldn't serve alongside of my wife and I. And my daughter, instead of being single in Argentina, is married, and I'm happy to report that every week, the executive meeting for Real Faith Ministries with the executive director of Real Faith is me having lunch with my daughter. And I still kiss her on the head. I don't care if she's the executive director, I'm still gonna kiss her on the head. And she's getting Bible teaching out, including in Spanish, which is her heart's desire. And this year, instead of us following our plan, God has revealed His plan and we'll get Bible teaching out to 110 million people on planet earth from Trinity Church. Here's what I wanna tell you, friends. I'll close in our time together. God's plan's better than your plan. God's plan's harder than your plan. God's plan's scarier than your plan. God's plan is more complicated than your plan. God's plan is slower than your plan. God's plan is better than your plan. And I love you with all my heart and it's an honor to be here with you. It's a miracle to be here. It's a testimony to God's goodness. What is God's plan for you? What is your next step? Life has uncertainty and it has brevity. Thankfully God has sovereignty. I want you to have humility and urgency. Father God, as we go into a time of worship and prayer together, Holy Spirit, would You come and just speak to Your dear people? For those who are not Christians, would this be the day of the biggest pivot of their entire life and eternity? Would they give their sin to the Lord Jesus and receive Him as their Savior and sovereign Lord? God, for those of us who need to take some things off our plate, would You tell us what those are? For those of us who need to put some things on our plate, would You tell us what those are? God, for those of us who don't know what to do, would You tell us what to do? God, there are dear people in the room and online, they're trying to figure out where do we live, where do our kids go to school, where do we work? Do we lose our job or not? What do we do, Lord? Father, You know, and so I'm asking that You would send the Holy Spirit down to speak and to reveal and to lead and to guide. And God, I just wanna publicly thank You for the best season of my life. I wake up every day with my dream girl, I get to teach the Bible, which is my favorite thing, and I get to serve the Lord Jesus with five kids who love You with their whole heart. And God, I had a plan, and You have a better plan. And your plan, Lord, it's not easy, but it's better. It's not fast, but it's better. It's not clear, but it's better. And I pray this faith in these dear people so that they can move forward courageously in Jesus' good name, amen.