

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

MONTHLY DEVOTIONAL
January issue

WEB PAGE
Bedwellglobalministries.com

E MAIL
PKBedwell@hotmail.com

"WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?"

**A QUESTION TO PONDER AS
WE MOVE OUT INTO THE NEW
YEAR.**

**Scripture Reading – James
4:13-17**

Text - James 4:14.

Introduction

James asks a thought provoking question which in itself is an arresting challenge in the fourth chapter and the fourteenth verse of his letter. It is a simple question one which all of us can understand.

"What is your life?" It is not a question which sits well with the pop culture. We are not of the mind set which will easily set aside time to reflect on this issue. In a society which emphasizes feeling good, this challenge would probably make us feel uncomfortable and we would be counseled to **"lighten up."** But what is interesting about this question is the context in which it is placed. While it is a challenge to all, James is specifically talking to Christians. It is a serious call for all believers to take account of their lives. Sometime ago I talked to

friend of mine who is a dynamic dedicated Christian, a man of prayer and a powerful preacher of the word. He just had a medical test and I am sure that he suspected that the result might be cancer, for he said I have become more aware of the frailty of my mortality. I have observed in the news reports where people have had a close encounter with death; there is one of two responses from those individuals when they described what happened. They either say the crisis caused them to rethink and reevaluate what was important in life or in the moment when they hovered between life and death they asked God to forgive them of their sins. I have asked myself why it takes a near death accident, or a crisis to bring people face to face with what the true priorities of life are. James does not wait for a tragedy to confront each of us with these priorities. He asks the question **"What is your life?"** It is a question that calls for personal accountability and should be addressed immediately. What is your life? That should get the attention of each of us. The answer that James gives touches on how frail and uncertain our mortal life is. **"We are a mist which appears for awhile then vanishes."** These words are important because, no one is exempt from the frailty of human mortality. If anything is unpredictable it is life itself. The termination of life comes to all, some earlier than others. If we think that the end of life on earth is reserved only for the elderly, we are self-deceived. But this is a question upon which even Christians should seriously reflect.

In this contemporary period in history, when the pace of life struggles to keep in step with the supersonic age, very little attention or time is given to reflect on the importance of eternal values.

What is your life? What are we doing with it? Does it have a defined purpose? What are its guiding principles? Are they being molded by Biblical moral and spiritual principles? Is your life surrendered to the Lord who created it? Have we really sat down and thought about this and designated specific times which are set aside to do this? Have we set aside times when we refuse to allow anything to encroach upon or disrupt moments for serious reflection on these issues. How much quiet time do we give to God, or do we give Him the left-over's, if there are any? Even lives of Christians are so packed with the pre-occupation with the secular, that there appears to be very little time for spiritual and eternal values. It is true God is in the background of their thoughts. We would never think of denying Him, but if we would to take time to reflect on it, maybe we would discover that our priorities and energies are primarily focused and concerned with the material things and the secular activities of this world. The question is a personal one. Have we really thought about **the arrangements of our life's values?** Possibly there are those who are uncertain of their direction in life. **In one of Charles Schultz's "Peanut" cartoons,** Lucy is philosophizing and Charlie Brown was listening. **"Charlie Brown," she begins, "Life is a lot like a deck**

chair. Some place it to see where they have been, and some, so they can see where they are at **present."** Charlie Brown sighs, **"I can't even get mine unfolded."** There are some in life who have yet to unfold their deck chairs. They have not taken time to see where they have been, and they are not sure where they are at the present and their eternal future is not part of their thinking. They simply saunter through life without giving it a thought.

Then there are others who are really cynical about it. For instance Andre Maurios said **"the universe is indifferent.** Who created it? Why are we here upon this puny mud heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea. And I am convinced that no one else has the least idea." My response to this blatant cynicism is **"speak for yourself Andre Maurios."** God created the world and when He did, He gave it purpose and design. **It is not simply a "puny mud heap."** **When God saw His creation,** He said it was good. Furthermore, life does and can have meaning and purpose, if it is anchored in the source of life, God Himself. John Henry Newman wrote, "Fear not that your life shall come to an end, but rather that it shall never have **a beginning."** That is why it is important that we take time to reflect on the question that James asks, **"What is your life?"** Let me remind you that his message is specifically directed to believers. **One has rightly said "Life is a story in volumes three. The Present the past and the yet to be."** Yet to many, life is a never ending circle with no purpose to it. A country

woman at a fair was angry with her husband who somehow managed to get hold of a nickel and go on a merry go round. She guarded the family purse strings in miserly fashion and felt that this was a foolish waste of money. When the merry-go-round came to a stop she was waiting for him. **"What's the big idea? You got off where you got on! You spent a whole nickel and you ain't been no where."**

What a commentary of so many who are spending their lives going in circles never finding peace or fulfillment. They have never discovered the abundant life that Jesus promised to those who come to Him. They simply exist without reason or fulfillment. Someone wrote,

**"There was a very cautious man,
Who never laughed or played,
He never risked, he never tried,
He never sang or prayed!
And when one day he passed away,
His insurance was denied,
For since he never lived,
They claimed he never died."**

James asks **"What is your Life?"** If what you possess and what are doing in life were suddenly snatched from you, what would you have left of eternal value? What would your account look like before a Holy God? Would you be ashamed before Him? It seems to me that William James insightfully **commented that "the great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it."** Are we spending our lives for eternity? Are we storing up treasures in heaven, or hoarding them on earth. James is concerned that we

get a balanced perspective of life. Do we see it for what it is? It is clear that James does, and his words are instructive and helpful. Notice what he says about life. He tells us that there is,

1. A DISTURBING BREVITY ABOUT LIFE. James 4:14.

Note what he asks; **"What is your life?"** And then in the next breathe, he answers his own **question. "You are mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."** What is important about these words is that it is,

a. A Personal Question. James 4:14. What is YOUR life? **"YOU** are a mist."

This is the issue to which we must continually address ourselves. It is a question which should be answered with honesty and integrity, if we are concerned about our eternal future.

Katherine Logan wrote that **"there is always hope for the individual who stops to do some serious thinking about life."** Life is a fact of our planet. Life happens, **AND IT HAPPENS TO THE INDIVIDUAL.** It was God who gave man life. God breathed the breathe of life into man, and man became a living **being." Genesis 2:7 God gave to man life.** That is a certainty and it is part of His design and purpose for man. He wants man to live, to really live. His deepest desire is that man does more than exist. But life only has meaning if it is centered in a vital relationship to the one who created it. When the soul of man has found life in a relationship with God, he has found

life indeed. This abundant spiritual life must be our priority, because the life of our mortal bodies is brief. Our bodies are wasting away each day says Paul. This personal question demands a personal response. Life appears for a while and then disappears like a mist. That puts the pressure on, for if life is brief then should we not make the most of it? The challenge that faces us is to define what we mean by life, and what we mean by making the most of it. Our society tends to define life as gratifying the self to the exclusion of God and others. While it may not be written on paper, it is certainly evident in the life style of our age. What self wants becomes the essence of living. We are the "me society" and because of this we are a hedonistic or sensual society. We live to please and gratify self. The **philosophy seems to be "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die."** Let us pleasure the self before we move into eternity. And it is pleasure and entertainment that have become the obsession of the contemporary scene. What is sad is that it has infiltrated into some of the church. But this pleasure seeking society excuses itself by maintaining, that if it feels good, then do it as long as it does not hurt anyone. Again, this is a philosophy which is blind to the realities of life, because everything we do touches and influences someone. Furthermore this philosophy does not promote a very high level of living. Donald Gee said that, **"the measure of your life is the measure of your cravings."** The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your desires. Paul has something

to say about this in Ephesians 4 v.19. **"Having lost all sensitivity,** they have given themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for **more."** **What is the measure of your life?** What are the qualities of your desires, ambitions and priorities? These are the drives and the forces which determine what we put into life and what direction we move and what quality of life we possess. They are pillars upon which we build our lives. Our desires and drives should link us to "Someone" bigger than ourselves - "Someone" who is not only the source of life but the essence of it. We know who that is!! It is the Triune God who is the creator of all things and the sustainer of all life. It is the doing of His will that is the heart of authentic living. What James is saying is that the will of God should determine how we live. The decisions and the direction we take should be determined by the will of God. **In verse 15"....you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."** Jesus told us that on the final judgment day it will not be what we have done, or what miracles we have performed that will open the door into heaven, but he who has obeyed the will of God. What is your life? This is a personal question. There is also in these words,

b. A Pertinent Observation
James 4:14. "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while, and then vanishes."

A stockbroker urged Claude Pepper (Chairman, House committee on aging) to buy stock that would

triple in value in a year. Pepper told him, "At my age, I don't even buy green bananas." Life is disturbingly brief. Henry Kissinger became a household name during the Nixon administration. His brilliance was tapped by world leaders who readily recognized his genius. But possibly, his wisest pearl did not come from politics. In a moment of contemplation he said, "What has most surprised me about life is how quickly it passes." Moses prayed, Teach us to number our days aright." The greatest blunder that men and women can make is to live as though life on this planet is eternal. In verse 14 James writes "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.....you are a mist and you appear for a short while and then vanish." There is disturbing brevity about time.

We tend to make comparisons in relation to time. Deadlines are measured in weeks and months. But God makes His comparisons in relation to eternity. Life as compared with eternity is a mist, seen for a moment and gone forever. All through the scriptures the writers are haunted by the brevity of life, which deeply disturbs them, and at times brings them to the point of despair. Ezra wrote, "Our days on earth are like a shadow without hope." Job maintained "my days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle." And the Psalmist put it another way, "You sweep men away in the sleep of death. They are like the new grass of the morning. Though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered." When compared with the limitless

expanses of eternity, which has no beginning and has no ending, life is a speeding shuttle, a vanishing vapor, a fleeting shadow and withering grass. There is disturbing brevity about life. Tillotsen said that since this is so then, "he who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity, is wise for a moment but a fool forever." "What is your life? You are mist that appears for a little while then disappears." Thomas Carlyle wrote that "Life is a little gleam in time between two eternities." But there is not only disturbing brevity about life, there is also,

2. A DISCONCERTING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT LIFE. James 4:14.

James makes us aware of this when he writes, "why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow." James highlights two approaches that we can take to life. We can approach it with,

a. An Arrogant Self-Dependence. James 4:13.

James wrote in verse 13, "Now listen, you who say. 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.'" The question here is, "how can you be so sure that you will be able to implement those plans, for you do not know what will happen to tomorrow? Life is a vanishing mist. And what James is urging us to do and what we ought to say in v.15, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." He goes on

and says instead "you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil" There are two tensions here;

i. The tension is what we plan to do and whether or not life will allow us to do it.

Everything could end in an unexpected moment. The second is,

ii. The tension is between what we will do and what God wants us to do.

It is not that God is condemning any kind of planning for the future. What He is saying is that planning for the future should be done in His will. The reason is clear. Life is uncertain. Our plans are really not our own. They are always tentative. Time is not our own. Our lives are not our own, for they are a puff or steam, a wisp of mist - here today and gone tomorrow. This is a fact of our existence. This is the truth about life. Which ever way you look at it there is a disturbing uncertainty about it. Jesus told a story about a rich farmer whom God had blest with a bountiful harvest. As he reflected on his wealth, he thought to himself what shall I do? I have no place to store up my crops. Then He said "this is what I will do! I will tear down my barns and build bigger barns and there I will store all my grain and **all my goods. And I'll say to myself, you have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat drink and be merry. But God said to him you fool, this night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for your self. Then Jesus said, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores things for himself, BUT is**

not rich towards God." Life does not consist in the things you possess. This is a story of a man who was totally obsessed with himself, sold on himself, immersed in himself, so much so that he conversed with himself. No less than 13 times does this man refer to himself and the gratification of that self. He was arrogantly self-satisfied. His every purpose and effort and energies were for himself. God never came into the picture of his life. He felt that his success was acquired independently of God. Then he made a fundamental mistake. It was a misconception of what life was all about, and ultimately who was in control of it? He said to **himself, "you have plenty of goods laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat drink and be merry."** God stepped into his self-centered **arrogance and said "you fool this night your soul will be required of you"** (K.J.V.) In the eyes of God this man was a fool. A boss was invited to the home of one his employees for dinner. He controlled the conversation and boasted about his wealth and achievements and ended by saying I am a self made man. The little boy of the family had been listening to the braggadocios man open mouthed and as he looked at the man he **asked "why on earth did you make yourself that way?" James said "What is your life?"** What are you making if it. Is it characterized by arrogant self-dependence? Is it lived independently of God and His will? James reminds us that **"you do not even know what will happen tomorrow."** James is not trying to intimidate anyone. He is instructing

us on what the vital issues of life are, and is guiding each of us in what the priorities of life should be. Since there is disconcerting brevity about life, he is showing us what we have to do in order to prepare for the future. To do this he says that we should approach God and life with,

a. Humble God-dependence. James 4:6, 10, 13 and 15.

In this 4th chapter James mentions the importance of humility in life. In verse 6 of James informs us that **"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."** And in verse 10 he exhorts us to **"humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."** It is very clear that James is telling us that life must be lived in a humble dependence on God. Humility is the pre-cursor to abundant living. In verse 13 he is concerned about how some of the people are conducting themselves. They plan their activities and make money without reference to God. And James insists that what we ought to say, as we go about our plans and activities in life, **"if it is the Lord's will we will do this or that."** This attitude indicates a recognition and dependence on God. If we do this, it does not matter how uncertain life is, and whatever happens to us, we know that in **God's will there is hope and certainty.** Paul had the Christian attitude of life when He testified **"To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.** He had the best of both worlds. This is the Christian way and it is the only way to live because there is this disconcerting uncertainty in life. Then there is

3. A DEFINATE FINALITY ABOUT LIFE. James 4:14.

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." The word **"vanishes"** indicates that there a finality in life. James Dobson said that **"life itself is a fatal disease. None of us is going to get out of it alive. And it happens so quickly too."** To study this finality in life we should give ourselves to two commitments. There should be,

a. A Commitment to the Preparation of our lives for the future. James 4:7-8.

We do not like to think of this finality in life. But ignoring it does not eliminate its reality. One has **said that "we may take tomorrow for granted, thinking of it as a mark on the wheel of time, coming on as the encircling years proceed."** But in the Bible the years do not circle. They go on in a straight line from eternity to eternity, and on that line we are given another day. Not because we deserve it, or have a right to it. **But only by the mercies of God."** so said Dr Motyer. P.162. The promise of tomorrow is as much part of our dependence on God as is our life itself and our ability. The security of our future lies in our commitment to God. Since this is so, then it is wise to ensure that we are prepared for the finality of death. James indicates that we do it by a humble walk with God. It is this attitude that dispels the presumptuous approach to life, which assumes that we have plenty

of time to continue our lives independent of God. James makes clear that there are at least five steps which are vital in our preparation for the finality in life. **Motyer outlines them for us.**

a. There must be a commitment of ourselves completely and decisively to God's side. James 4:7. Again the command is unmistakably clear. "Submit yourselves to God." This is where we begin and this issue has to be settled before we move on. Having done this we are then urged,

b. Live in close fellowship with Him. James 4:8a. It is a command but also a promise, "Come near to God and He will come near to you."

This command reveals the glorious possibility of having a living relationship with a Holy God. As we draw near to him, He draws near to us. We are then exhorted to,

c. To purge our lives and hearts. James 4:8b. The words are strong and uncompromising. "Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded."

This purity is based on the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the unshakable foundation upon which fellowship with God is based. The Psalmist assumes this truth when he wrote in Psalm 24: 3-4. "Who may ascend to the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and

a pure heart...." **What is your life? Is it marked by holy living? James then moves on to stress the urgency of coming;**

d. To the place of wholesale repentance. James 4:9.

His words are radical and strong, "Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom." Sin is so serious that there should be grief and deep sorrow over it. Sin is not a reason to express joy or laughter. Paul wrote that "Godly sorrow leads to repentance." Joy and laughter, however, are some of the fruits of repentance. Repentance is at the heart of a humble spirit, therefore we are expected to give evidence of,

e. A genuine spirit of humility. James 4:10. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Self exaltation and self realization is the enemy of God. In verse 6 James declares "That God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." **It is these qualities** which are necessary to being prepared to enter into eternal life. There has to be a commitment to preparing ourselves in this way if we are going to inherit our eternal reward. Then James places his finger on another vital truth for he says that there must be,

b. A commitment to a priority. James 4:15-17.

The Biblical and fundamental approach to life is to establish a

priority for our lives. It is priority which is compatible with the will of God. James tells us that we ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live, and do this and do that." One has said that which helps us not to take our lives for granted or being presumptuous about the future, is the recognition of three facts about life outlined in verses 14-15.

i. Our ignorance of the future. James 4:13-14.

A person may lay down his plans for the next two to three years, but James observes quietly "You do not know about tomorrow." This fact alone should keep us humble before God who created and controls time. (Motyer. Comm. James. P.160.) "We take the reigns of life into our own hands, we forget our ignorance, frailty and dependence and plan our day, our week and next year as if we were the lords of earth and time, and there was no God in heaven." (Motyer. P.161) The second fact is

ii. The frailty of man. James 4:14. "You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." "We are insubstantial (A mist) transient (a little time) and gone without trace. (It vanishes.) The third fact is,

iii. Dependence. James 4:15. "You ought to say 'if it is the Lord's will, we will live, and do this and that."

Dependence on God is the heartbeat of true humility.

This is a priority to which we should surrender ourselves. The tragedy is, that so many, commit themselves totally to worldly values that they neglect God, and surrender to Him is placed on back burner. So what life is all about is forgotten.

Some years ago it was reported in the Chicago Tribune that a man died tragically while trying to retrieve his hat on an eight lane freeway. He chased the wind born hat into the oncoming traffic and was struck by a car. A reporter with great insight commented on the tragedy. "Isn't it amazing that we are often willing to risk everything chasing nothing." Are we risking eternity at the expense of chasing the trivial in life? What is it that controls our purposes and priorities? Is that activity to which you are giving most of your time going to count for eternity? Is it building treasures in heaven for you? "What is your life?" Is it based on Divine priorities? Think on this issue!!!