

Discussion Starter

If you knew that you were going to die tomorrow, in what ways would it change what you say and do today?

Worship Together

Let's spend some time thinking about what it means that we have *hope* as Christians – and thanking God for it. You might want to have a quiet worship tape playing in the background. Ask volunteers to read the following verses one at a time, allowing time for quiet reflection in between each. At the end take a few minutes to respond to God in prayer.

1 Peter 1:3; Colossians 1:27; Romans 15:13; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 6:17-20; Romans 8:16-18; Ephesians 1:18-21

Bible Study

"We live at one of the great turning points in history. The present division of the world's resources dare not continue. And it will not. Either courageous pioneers will persuade reluctant nations to share the good earth's bounty, or we will enter an era of catastrophic conflict...

If at this moment in history a few million Christians in affluent nations dare to join hands with the poor around the world, we will decisively influence the course of world history... We must pray for the courage to bear any cross, suffer any loss, and joyfully embrace any sacrifice that biblical faith requires in an age of hunger."

Ronald Sider, from Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger

Read James 4:13-5:6 and discuss the following questions...

- In Christian circles we often hear the phrase "God willing" appended to sentences (or occasionally we read "D.V.", which is from the Latin *Deo Volente*, which means exactly the same thing). Do you think that this fully captures the spirit of what James is saying about submitting our plans to God? Is he saying that it is wrong to plan for the future?
- Notice that the example that James uses in verses 13-15 is taken from the world of commerce, rather than from the realm of someone's private life. What implications do these verses have for the way we approach our work or business decisions?
- Is James issuing a blanket condemnation of all rich people? What does this passage tell us about a godly attitude towards money and possessions? Is hoarding just a sin of the rich?
- In the days when James wrote, poorer workers had few rights and injustices frequently occurred. Here he rebukes employers who left their debts unpaid without a thought given to the effects on the workers. Can you think of parallel situations in today's society? How should we be involved as Christians?
- How do you respond to the quote from Ronald Sider above? Does it capture the spirit of what James is saying in this passage?

Pray Together

Some of these verses can easily be applied at an international level. How might you re-write James 5:1-6 beginning "Now listen, you rich nations..."? Allow these thoughts to lead you into prayer / confession / intercession...

Meditations

A few things to consider before your group discussion.

Read James 4:13 and James 5:1

Our passage this week falls into two sections, both of which begin with the phrase “Now listen...” reminding us that the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. What attitude do you come to read the Bible with? Do you take the time to listen? Do you *expect* to hear God’s voice as you read and pray? Take the time to thank Him that He is always willing to communicate with His children.

Read James 4:13-16

James initially addresses those traders who would boast of their business plans and then broadens out his comments to “all such boasting”. Are there areas of your life, your achievements or your affairs that you are tempted to boast about? Reflect on these things before God and ask him how He views them. If you do allow yourself to boast, what effect does that have on those around you?

Read Proverbs 16:9 and James 4:15

Ask God to speak to you about your thoughts and plans for the future. Do you have ambitions or desires that are not fully submitted to Him? Are you able to offer God your future and ask Him to take charge of it? If this idea seems frightening why not make the time to pray through your feelings with a trusted friend or another member of your small group.

Read James 4:14

We ought to note that the second half of this verse is a comment on the brevity and fragility of life, not its

importance. Reflect for a minute on the thought that your life is in God’s hands. Not just your circumstances, your career or the choices you make, but your life itself, the beating of your heart. *All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be* (Psalm 139:16). Doesn’t that give you a deep sense of security?

Read James 4:17

It used to be common to talk about sins of *omission* as well as sins of *commission*. In other words, we are just as guilty in God’s sight for the good we fail to do as for the evil that we actually do. Of course, there are always more good things we *could* be doing and we could read a verse like this and be driven into unwarranted feelings of guilt or condemnation. What we need to ask God to speak to us about is whether there are areas in our lives where He has told us we *should* be doing something and we have not. Anyone who *knows* the good he ought to do...

Read James 5:1-3

The focus of James’s comments is widened from those in business to anyone who is well off. Is emphasis is not so much on comparative wealth as attitude towards money and possessions. Are you ever tempted to hoard for yourself what could better be used for the good of others? If you are not well off in financial terms, ask the same question about your attitude towards your time or your talents.