



7. REMINDED

Sensing life's fragility

James 4:13-17

Living with uncertainty

Most of us live life by a series of well laid schedules, routines and plans. We get up at the same time, set off on the school run or daily commute, have our regular slot at the gym, or 'every second Tuesday' catch up with friends. Our electronic devices ping with reminders of what we should be doing in fifteen minutes. Our lives have come to run almost like clockwork. We spend our money booking holidays, buying concert tickets, pre-ordering books that haven't been published yet months in advance. We expect life to go as planned. Our plan.

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic shattered that illusion that we are in control. Things that we took for granted were sure, certain and guaranteed to happen, were suddenly derailed. So many aspects of our lives became filled with uncertainty, had to be hastily rearranged or put on hold.

- TO TALK ABOUT -

Q. What carefully crafted routines and plans have you found interrupted by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic?

We don't often live with a sense of how fragile our lives are. We just assume one day will follow another in an unending pattern of activity. The coronavirus pandemic gave us a rude awakening. The whole world seemed not to know what would happen next. People became unexpectedly ill. Rising numbers died. At first it was all numbers and figures, but quickly they took on the names and familiar faces of people we knew. There was a rising sense of fear as life suddenly felt very fragile. It was all very uncomfortable.

Let's have a look at some verses from James 4:13-17 that remind us that our lives are uncertain and fragile and see how God intends us to live wisely in light of that reality.

PARALLELS AND

PATTERNS

Read James 4:13-17.

Do so slowly. Listen carefully. Pay attention to the details. Reflect on how things feel at different parts of the passage. Let the passage sink into your soul.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

PARALLELS

Line up the passage alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some parallels.

James reminds us that we are much less sure of today or tomorrow than we usually think. We tend to assume that we are in control of our movements, minutes and money (v13). In reality everything we plan can only be written in pencil.

Q. How did the effects of the coronavirus pandemic cause you to realise how little control you have over everyday things?

James goes on to say, ‘you do not even know what will happen tomorrow’ (v14). During the coronavirus pandemic, despite every attempt to plan, this was literally the case, even for experts in health care, government officials and medical staff.

Q. How does having to approach life with a feeling of less certainty make you feel? What are the positives and negatives?

Talk about other parallels you can see between the passage and our situation today.

PATTERNS

Line up the passage alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some patterns for living as followers of Jesus.

James pictures our lives as ‘a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes’ (v13). There are few things more fleeting than that. Picture the steam rising from a kettle and how quickly it evaporates into the air.

Q. How might it change what we value and how we live if we gained a new realisation of how fleeting and fragile our lives are through experiencing the pandemic? What has it taught us about the value of life generally and the lives of our loved ones in particular? Which stories particularly touched us?

Instead of being arrogant and boastful about our plans, James tells us that we ought to understand that they are dependent on God. We should say, ‘if it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that’ (vv15-16). We need to have plans. Life cannot function forever on the hoof. The challenge is really to our sense of who is in charge of what happens. Our lives are not our own. They are a gift from God, given that he might determine how they best display his glory. Sometimes that means our preferred story gives way to his purposes and glory.



Q. How can we balance the necessary plans we need to make with an overall surrender to God's will for our lives? How might we see deviations from our plans as moments in which God especially wants to teach us something important? How might we become more pliable to his will? What happens if we continue to resist it?

Talk about other patterns of who God is and how he acts, or lessons that we can learn in living as his followers and his church, that emerge from this passage.

POSSIBILITIES AND

PERSPECTIVES

– TO TALK ABOUT –

POSSIBILITIES

Take a moment to think about the initial impression this passage made upon you as you read it and the discussion that you have just had. What sticks in your mind? What do you particularly sense God prompting you to think more deeply about?

Pause and take a moment on you own, or share with the person next to you, your sense of what God is saying to you from your reflections on this passage?

PERSPECTIVES

Prepare to share with others what impression God has made upon your heart. Do your best to put this into words. Maybe it will be the same as others, maybe it will be different. Pay attention to the conversation that is about to start so that God can deepen and widen the impact of his Word.

Share with the whole group the lessons you think God might be teaching you through his Word, by his Spirit.

PATHWAYS

TO PURSUE

– TO TALK AND PRAY ABOUT –

Thinking

What has reading this passage against the background of your experience of the period of coronavirus pandemic caused you to think again about?

Living

In what specific ways will that make you change the way you live as a follower of Jesus?

Praying

Pray together for strength to follow through on what God has taught each person.

PROMISE AND

PRAYER

PROMISE

*All the days ordained for me were written
in your book before one of them came to be.
How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand –
when I awake, I am still with you.*

Psalm 139:16-18

PRAYER

Lord of every small detail of our lives,
you have planned our every moment,
you oversee the way that we take,
going before us to make our story a mirror for your glory.
Thank you for the gift of our life;
help us to hold it lightly,
to value it as a fragile treasure,
to offer it back to you.
Teach us to plan in pencil,
to walk more by faith and less by sight,
to find you in the twists and turns,
to trust when you redirect our ways,
mixing your glory with our good.
In Jesus' name.
Amen

