

Where do we go from here? Psalm 127 James 4:13-15

Do you remember the TV program called "Early Edition" that ran from 1996-2000?

The basic storyline centered on a young man who somehow was able to receive a copy of tomorrow's newspaper today. How would you use that knowledge?

- Would you use it to enrich yourself? If you knew that the stock market was going to go up, would you buy low & sell high?
- Would you use it to help those in need? If you knew that someone was going to be in trouble?
- Would you become a hero? If you knew someone was in danger & would die, would you be there to prevent that from happening?

What would you do if you knew what was going to happen tomorrow? Well that is what we are going to talk about today, but more specifically, **how will you prepare for tomorrow when you have no idea of what tomorrow will bring.**

Humanity has always demonstrated an almost insatiable desire to know the future. Psychics in this country rake in millions of dollars annually because people want to know what the future holds. Probably every major newspaper in this country runs a daily horoscope for its readers.

Even Christians, contrary to the Bible's advice, seem overly curious to know what the future holds. I remember a particular Church that over the course of several summers – when I filled the pulpit so their pastor could take a vacation – each time I was with them, their adult Sunday School Class would still be studying in the Book of Revelation.

Dwight Pentecost, a premier scholar on biblical prophecy, noticed the same phenomena. He stated that whenever he spoke on some subject other than prophecy, the size of his audience was greatly diminished. Apparently people were more interested in what he could tell them about the future. But he also related that every reference to the second coming of Christ in the New Testament was followed by an exhortation to godliness and holy living right now.

While we can't know the future we can prepare for it by the way we live today.

[Charles Swindoll. The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart and 1,501 Other Stories.(Nashville: Word, 1998) p. 227]

Which is exactly the point that James is making, **knowing the future is not nearly as important as being prepared for the future. And we Christians have been given clear Biblical instruction in how to best prepare for the future by living our present lives aware of and dependent upon God's daily while making future plans accordingly**

Perhaps all of us know at least one person who claims to be an atheist. Atheists do not believe in the existence of any god. They say that we are only answerable to ourselves in this world. Scripture refers to those people in this way,

"the fool has said in his heart
there is no God."

Psalm 14:1

True avowed atheists are not that common even in our modern world – most people still express some level of belief in God. **Yet perhaps one of the most prevalent sins among modern day believers is that while claiming otherwise, we actually live like atheists by leaving God out of our daily plans.**

When a person makes plans and then implements those plans with a total disregard for the will of God, regardless of what they may say they believe, that person is in practice an atheist. **The test of what one believes is not found in what they say, but in how they live.** Many people today profess to believe in God, but nevertheless continue to live as if God has no control over their lives.

We can't have it both ways, if we say that we believe in a God who cares for our daily lives and controls our future and then we had better start living that way.

As a believer, how DO we plan and prepare for the future?

In our James scripture we can see both right and wrong ways of dealing with the future. **Here are three things that God says "don't do."**

Do not boast about tomorrow,
for you do not know what a day may bring.

Proverbs 27:1

1. We are not to make plans for the future without acknowledging God's control over that future. James writes

You who say, 'Today or tomorrow
we will go to such and such a town
and spend a year there, doing business
and making money, Yet you do not even
know what tomorrow will bring'...

all such boasting is evil.

James 4:13-16

A man was walking past the field of a farmer with a cow on a rope. The farmer asked,
"Hey mister, where ya goin with that there cow?"

The man said, *"I'm takin it to town to sell it."*

The farmer replied, " *You mean if it's the Lords will you are.*"

The man shot back , " *Well it's my cow and I recon I can do anything I want with it and it ain't any of the Lord's business.*"

A short time later the farmer looked up to see the man coming back the other way very bloody and beaten up.

" *What happened to you?*" the farmer asked.

" *Oh just down the road three guys jumped out of the bushes, stole my cow, beat me up and left me for dead.*"

The famer says, " *Oh no! What are you gonna do now?*"

" *I'm going home to clean up.*" the man replied - " *If it's the Lords will.*"

It's not that we should not make plans or set goals but we are to do so while acknowledging our dependence upon God for whatever tomorrow brings.

2. we are not to fear the future.

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus tells us....

'do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ...

Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Matthew 6:25-34)

Erma Bombeck wrote: " *Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere*" Instead of worrying about what you cannot control, shift your energy to what you can control, and then trust God for the rest.

3. We are not supposed to procrastinate until tomorrow.

Proverbs teaches ... *Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow"- when you now have it with you (3:27-28).* James puts this more succinctly

Anyone who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

James 4:17

So we are not to fear the future, or make future plans without acknowledging God's control over that future. But we are to live Godly lives today, daily seeking to bring to pass His kingdom in our world by never putting off the good that it is in our power to do for another.

Now, here are three things God says we ARE to do.

1. **Forget the past.** Don't let past victories or failures keep you from preparing for the future.

Listen to the instructions God gave to Joshua just before he led the people of Israel into the promised land,

*"**Moses my servant is dead.** Now then, you & all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them - to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." (Joshua 1:2-3)*

Here's the scene. God freed the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery. But because of their disobedience, they have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years until the older disobedient generation has gone and the younger generation is ready to do what God tells them to do.

Joshua knows that once they enter the Promised Land they will be facing at least 7 enemy nations. These are strong nations with trained armies & fortified cities. And they're far better equipped with weapons of war than Joshua's young army. Is it any wonder that Joshua is uneasy about it all?

So God appears to him & says, "Joshua, let me tell you 3 things to do. And if you will do these 3 things, I guarantee you success."

How would you like to have followed after Moses' ministry? That is what Joshua now has to do. So first God, reminds him that **Moses is dead**. Moses was a powerful leader, a charismatic leader, a worker of miracles, but Moses is now gone, and the people of Israel won't get to the future by dwelling on what has past. So God tells them to stop looking back and to start looking forward, "**to get ready**" for what God has next in store for them.

Proverbs reminds us...

In his heart a man plans his course,
but the Lord determines his steps."
Proverbs 16:9

So we should make our plans, counting on God to direct us

2. Stay in the Word.

God further told Joshua,

*"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your **mouth; meditate** on it day & night, so that you may be careful to **do** everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous & successful."* (Joshua 1:8)

A. First we should **Talk about it**. *"Don't let the Word of God depart from your mouth."* It is not enough just to read the Word. We need to talk about it. This is why our small groups and mid-week bible studies are important. God's word was always meant to be shared with others for encouragement and guidance (believers as well as non-believers).

B. And next we should **Think about it** *"meditate on it day & night."* This is what we should be doing in our daily devotions; mulling over God's word and what it is calling for you to do.

C. And then we are to **Do it!** *"...Be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous & successful."* We need to take the teachings & principles that we have learned from our Bible out into the world, & live them every day.

Which brings us back to the **3rd "Do"** God has given us... **DO Step out in faith.**

God concluded his instructions to Joshua saying, *"Have I not commanded you? Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9

So the people moved forward as God directed. When they crossed the Jordan river, they would be entering the promised land. So, as instructed, they sent the priests ahead of them into the Jordan river. *"Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan & their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away."* (Joshua 3:15) And so People of Israel entered the promised land as God directed them.

Like the People of Israel,

This is how WE enter the Future

- By forgetting the past
- By preparing with God's provision in mind
- By Staying in God's word for encouragement
- And by stepping out in faith.

This is how we are to prepare for the future that we cannot know but are trusting God to guide us. And what is true for individual believers is also true for the whole church. We have no idea what is ahead for Bedford Presbyterian Church, but God knows, and we can trust Him to safely bring us through wherever He leads us, be it green pastures or the valley of the shadow of death.

When Bedford Presbyterian was first founded in 1844 it had over 300 members. Twenty years later at the conclusion of the Civil war it had 39 members.

It then took thirty years to grow back to over 100 members (1894 recorded 121 members), and over 100 years to surpass its original number (1945 recorded 305 members).

Bedford Church reached its peak membership in 1955 with 413 members. Then, for the next 50 years it stayed somewhere close but just below its peak numbers.

After 2004, membership numbers began a steep drop to where we are today with some 150 members and friends in attendance.

This is not a very accurate report of real church involvement, because for many years churches were very hesitant to clean "inactive members" from the rolls. "Inactives" are those people who still had their name on the Church rolls long after they had stopped attending or supporting the congregation. The steep drop indicated after 2004 was the result of finally beginning to clean up these records. But the point I am trying to make is that while our numbers are diminished from where we were, we still have more and more active members than we did for the first fifty years of our existence.

We are still a viable, even large congregation by today's standards. And we still have a future, God's future to look forward to. We have well celebrated our past and honored those who have gone before us. Now it's time to turn our attention to the future, trusting the Lord to continue leading us as He has in the past.

And we do that by:

- Letting go of the past,
- By planning for the future aware of God's promised provision for that future.
- By staying in God's word – both individually and corporately
- And by stepping out in faith trusting God to lead us.

So let's now ask God to lead us into tomorrow and then get ready to go.