

Small Group Guide



Icebreaker Question

Share about a time when your carefully laid plans didn't work out the way you expected. Looking back, can you see God's hand in how things unfolded differently?

Key Scripture

James 4:13-17

Key Takeaways

1. **The Illusion of Control:** While we often believe we can control outcomes through wise planning and hard work, this is ultimately an illusion that leads to stress and anxiety.
2. **Planning vs. Presumption:** James isn't against planning—he's against arrogance, pride, and presumption that leaves God out of our plans.
3. **Our Part vs. God's Part:** Our responsibility is to seek God's kingdom and righteousness; God's part is handling the outcomes and the future.
4. **A Better Way:** Living with the phrase "if it is the Lord's will" isn't passive—it's actively trusting God while faithfully doing what He's called us to do.

Discussion Questions

1. **Read James 4:13-14.** What specific elements of the planner's approach does James criticize? What's missing from their plan?
2. James uses the metaphor of life being "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." What does this image communicate about our human limitations?

3. Jeff mentioned several cultural messages that tell us we're in control (invest wisely = financial security, work hard = career success, etc.). What are some other examples you've heard or believed?
4. In which area of your life do you most struggle with trying to maintain control?
 - Finances
 - Career/work
 - Relationships
 - Children/family
 - Health
 - Other: _____
5. Think about a time when your plans didn't work out. How did you respond? Did you ask "Why?" in a way that was seeking to regain control rather than seeking to understand God's purposes?
6. Jeff shared personal examples of how God's plan was better than his own (his brother Tommy, meeting his wife, coming to Grace Church). Can you identify moments in your life where God's "detours" led to unexpected blessings?
7. **Read Matthew 6:33.** What does it practically look like to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" in your daily life? What would change if you truly made this your priority?
8. The sermon distinguished between planning (good) and presumption (arrogant). How can we tell the difference in our own lives? What does humble planning look like?
9. **Read Proverbs 19:21.** How does this verse help you understand the relationship between our plans and God's purposes? How should this affect the way we plan?
10. When we try to control outcomes, Jeff said we're telling God, "I don't trust you." What fears or beliefs make it hard for you to trust God with specific areas of your life?
11. Jeff described the peace that comes from "doing all that I could do as faithfully as I could do it at the time, then saying, God, all I know is very little... I trust your goodness." What would it look like for you to adopt this approach in a current situation you're facing?
12. How can incorporating "if it is the Lord's will" into our thinking and speaking change the way we approach our daily lives? Is this just a phrase, or does it represent a deeper heart posture?