



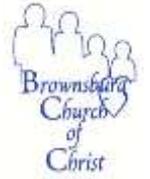
# My Life as a Vanishing Vapor

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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## Introduction:

If you were getting to write your dream autobiography, what would the title be? “My Life as a Multi-Millionaire” or “My Life as a Pro Quarterback” or “My Life as President.” No doubt, many of us will accomplish things that we could name our autobiography, but based on **James 4:13-17** every one of us could have an autobiography entitled “My Life as a Vanishing Vapor.” That is what our lives are—vanishing vapors or fleeting mists. We are here today and gone tomorrow. As **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12** says, time and chance overtake us all. We are like birds caught in a snare or fish in a net. We’re just swimming or flying along and...WHAM!...dead. This is going to happen to us all. Most of us won’t be expecting it. Most of us won’t see it coming. It may even seem unfair. I think of my high school friend who died in a car wreck at age 15. I think of my Mom who died at 35 because a doctor did not properly care for her when my brother was born. I think of my father who at age 49 thought he just had gall stones, then being suddenly diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and dying four months later. I think of my father-in-law who came in contact with asbestos for two summers as a teenager and 40 years later at age 59 was diagnosed with asbestos-induced mesothelioma. He died within six months. I think of my good friend Jimmy Hickman, faithful Christian, deacon, song-leader, barbershop quartet singer. In his sixties, he developed a cough he just couldn’t shake. Found out it was inoperable cancer and he died within just a few months. We are indeed vanishing vapors and fleeting mists. No matter how young or old you are, your life is a wisp that you simply can’t take for granted. James highlights that for us in **James 4:13-17**. But he does more than just make the statement. He demonstrates that understanding this should change our lives. It should change in a very practical way how we live today. What can we learn as we understand that our lives are merely a mist, a vanishing vapor?

## Discussion:

### I. Today, I will remember who is really in control.

- A. Based on the parallel introductory statements with **James 5:1-6**, most believe James is speaking to the wealthy in **James 4:13-17**. He is certainly speaking to those who are confident in their business dealings. They had the idea that they made their plans and nothing could get in the way. They were going to make their money. They were going to get the job done. After all, they were in control. But James explained it differently. They needed to say, “If the Lord wills...” That is, they needed to recognize that the success of their plans depended on God. God is the One who is really in control. We are coming up on a new year. 2012 has all kinds of potential in it. We may have all kinds of plans. But we must remember that our planning doesn’t make it so. God is the one who is in control.
- B. **Proverbs 16:9** explains it this way: “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (ESV). We may make the plans, but the Lord decides what will really happen. He is in control and we are not. James’s statement calls to mind some of Jesus’s teaching. In **Luke 12:16-21**, Jesus told of a rich fool who had a great year and thought he was now in control of his own future. But no, that night the Lord required his life from him.
- C. There are two sides to living this way. First, there is the recognition that we are not in control. Certainly we plan and we do our best to live by those plans. But we can’t make things happen, and we can’t make others get in line with our plans. We aren’t in control. Second, we recognize that God is, and that is good. The one who is in control really has the power and the maturity to wield it. We can trust the one who is in control to do what is right and what is best in the long run. We can trust Him to take care of us. Even if things aren’t going our way in the short run, we know that He is going to take care of us. **James** in many places parallels Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount. This passage reminds us of **Matthew 6:25-34**. When I remember that God is in control, I don’t have to live in anxiety. I can know that God will take care of me. All I need to focus on is seeking His kingdom and righteousness. So, today, I will remember who is really in control and live like it.

### II. Today, I will acknowledge the Lord.

- A. Because these arrogant businessmen did not recognize who is really in control, the only people they knew to acknowledge were themselves. James explains that they needed to acknowledge God’s involvement. “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that” (**James 4:15**, ESV). Not only do we need to remember who is really in control, we need to openly acknowledge His control and involvement.
- B. **Proverbs 3:6** also says this. “In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (ESV). God will establish our way and straighten our paths, blessing us, if we confess Him before others. When we are making plans we need to submit those plans to the Lord’s willingness. When we have had success, we need to

give God the glory. When we have had failure, we need to examine the Lord's discipline, learn, and grow. But in all cases, we need to openly profess the Lord's involvement in our lives. We must not arrogantly boast and put ourselves forward. Rather, we must point the praise and glory to God.

### III. Today, I will live in the present.

- A. Obviously, there is a proper place for planning. If each of us truly lived every day like it was our last, we'd all run into some real trouble. But some folks live so much in the future they lose sight of today. James explains that "you do not know what tomorrow will bring" (**James 4:14**, ESV). Tomorrow may bring raging success. It may bring utter failure. It may bring more of the same as today. Then again, it may bring your death or even the return of the Lord. We don't know what tomorrow holds so we must not spend too much time living there.
- B. Some people live too much in tomorrow by fantasizing about how wonderful everything will be. They live in this dream world as if the success of tomorrow has nothing to do with today. They are always dreaming of better days but not ever living in the present so that tomorrow can be different. As **Proverbs 27:1** says we must not spend all our time boasting about what will happen tomorrow because we just don't know.
- C. At the same time, some live in the future by experiencing nightmares of how awful things might be. They awfulize the future, as a friend of mine says, and end up ruining today. There is a glitch in the finances and they are certain they will be living under the bridge. Their spouse gets mad at them and they are sure the marriage is heading for destruction and divorce. The sad thing is when they live in this future, it often causes them to act in ways today that produce the very future they feared. We call this a self-fulfilling prophecy. As **Matthew 6:34** says, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (ESV). We don't even know if we'll be here tomorrow. So don't let tomorrow mess up today.
- D. Sure, make your plans, but don't forget to live in the present. Live in the only moment you can really do anything about. The past is gone and you can't change it. The future is out of our reach. The present moment is the only one we can truly impact. Live there.

### IV. Today, I will do what the Lord wills.

- A. In **James 4:15**, James introduces a phrase that he says should modify all our plans: If the Lord wills. Certainly, James is using this to speak of whether or not the Lord is willing to let something happen. However, at the same time, we see the need for submission to the Lord. He is in control. We must want His will. We need to let this phrase define our expectation not simply as a means of resigning to the sovereignty of God, but as a means of declaring that we only want what God wants. We want the Lord's will done.
- B. Instead of boasting in all of my plans, wants, and desires, I need to discover the Lord's plans, wants, and desires. We need to surrender our lives to the Lord. As **Luke 6:46** says, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (ESV). Like the parallel in **Matthew 6:33** teaches, I need to seek God's kingdom and righteousness today. He is the ruler, I need to seek His rule, not my own will.

### V. Today, I will do what is right without procrastinating.

- A. In **James 4:17**, James said, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (ESV). But keeping this in the context of today and tomorrow, we recognize that James is not just talking about getting around to doing the right things sometime. His point is that we don't know what tomorrow may bring therefore if we know the right thing to do, we need to do it right now. Don't procrastinate.
- B. This same sentiment is taught in **Proverbs 3:27-28**. When it is in your power to do good right now, do it. Don't withhold it. Don't tell someone to come back tomorrow to do the good. Do it right now. Don't procrastinate. You don't know what tomorrow will bring. You may not be here to do that good thing tomorrow. Do it now. Never put off until tomorrow what you can go ahead and do today. But it is too easy to justify backing off right now and thinking we'll make up for it later. Or we'll start in the new year. Or we'll have time tomorrow. If we get to tomorrow, what is going to make it different from today? What will keep us from procrastinating again? Then again, we may not even get to tomorrow. So, do what is right right now, without procrastinating.

### Conclusion:

As **Psalm 39:5, 11** say, we are but a breath. As **Psalm 144:4** says, we are a breath and our days are like a shadow. Our lives are spent as a vanishing vapor, a fleeting mist. With that in mind, we need to make the most of our time (cf. **Ephesians 5:15-16**). The days are evil and we don't know what tomorrow will bring. Therefore, let's acknowledge God and His control, surrender to Him, and do it right away without procrastinating. This is what a life lived as a vanishing vapor should look like.