

“Make the Most of Your Mist” // James 4:13–5:6 // The Book of James #8¹

Before we get started, I have a very exciting announcement to make for all of you in your 20s or your 30s. We are launching a brand new gathering **for you** starting Friday night, September 15th, called **The Heights**. These gatherings will take place 4-ish times a semester at one of our campuses. For this first one, I get to be there--even though I'm not technically in my 20's or 30's--since I turned 40 last year I JUST missed it!--but as a part of the night we're hosting a live AMA. So, I get to come to this first one.

And, to be clear, this is not ONLY for singles. Single, married, engaged, if you're in your 20s-30s, this is for you.

These gatherings will not only help you capitalize on what God has for this chapter of your life, it will give you a place to meet other people in the same stage of life as you.

Summit, listen: God has placed us in a city with a young professional demographic that is exploding. And we have to reach them, and equip them to reach each other.

So, to those in your 20's and 30's--if you didn't have Friday night plans – now you do. And if you already had plans, cancel them. This will be better, I promise. Registration is not required, but it would help us if

¹ Sources: Tommy Nelson, James 4–5, Denton Bible Church; Tim Keller, A Community of Justice II (James 4:13-5:6); Joby Martin, Don't Waste Your Life, James 4:13-15; John Piper, If the Lord Wills, James 4:13-16; Sam Allberry, *James For You: Showing You How Real Faith Looks in Real Life*, “God's Word For You” series, The Good Book Company; Paige Benton Brown, study of James (Spring 2023)—notes no longer available online; Bryan Loritts, “When Play Time Is Over,” sermon preached at Fellowship

you do--and as always, you can do that at summitchurch.com. Bring your friends and your coworkers and we'll see you at 7PM at the BCC this Friday night.

Introduction

Alright, James 4, if you have your Bibles. We'll be beginning down in vs. 13. Bibles?

As we get into the subject matter for this weekend, I'm reminded of the story of the small plane that had 4 people on board--a mother, 2 grown men and a 14 year old boy--when both engines went out and the plane started to spiral toward the ground. To their dismay, they discovered that there were only 3 parachutes. So, they all 4 stared at the parachutes for a minute, and then the woman said, “Listen, I am a mother of 5 and my kids need me” & she grabbed a parachute and before anyone could say anything she jumped. Then, one of the 2 men said, “Well, I'm a brain surgeon, and I'm literally one of the smartest people in the world. My patients, my community--shoot--my whole country needs me.” So, he grabbed the second parachute and jumped. The third was an old, elderly Pastor, and he said to the 14-year old boy, “Son, I'm old and frail, and I've lived a full life; you take this last parachute,” to which the boy said, “Sir, that's alright. There are still two parachutes left, one for each of us. The smartest man in the world just jumped out with my backpack.”

Memphis, 2013; Brad Hambrick, “[Planning Like There's Not Infinite Tomorrows](#),” and “[An Imprecatory Epistle](#),” a Counseling Commentary on James, from BradHambrick.com. Bryan Loritts, “[So, What's Your THAT?](#)” James 4:13-5:6. And others as noted throughout.

At the end of chapter 4 and beginning of chapter 5, James aims to show the insanity of two groups whom society typically regards as wise and together: **“the competent”** and **“the wealthy.”**

James attempts to reason with both groups. He begins his address to each with the admonition, *“Come now”* (look at vs 13 of chapter 4 and verse 1 of chapter 5) and you’ll see both sections start that same way: *“Come now...”*: **13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit--”**

“Let’s go here and do this, I think we can make a profit there”--most of us would call this “planning,” and we would consider it a wise thing to do. And it would be. In fact, in many places in our Bibles, planning is commended! The **book of Proverbs** says, in fact, that not to plan is foolish and lazy.

The problem, James says, is not with the planning, it’s with the posture behind the planning. You see, **— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.**

The problem with the boastful posture behind your planning is that it takes on a God-like confidence, assuming that a) you are guaranteed tomorrow and b) you have the ability to create your own future.

But your life, he says, is as fleeting and as fragile and as insubstantial (vs 14) as the mist. Mist is the Gr. word “atmos,” from which we get our word “atmosphere.” Some translations say “vapor,” but don’t

think of the fog that hangs out for a couple hours in the morning. It’s more like the steam that forms on your mirror if you blow on it in the morning--seconds later it’s gone with no trace that it was ever there to begin with. That’s what your life is like.

THREE words, James says, describe our lives: FLEETING: The mist is just there for a moment, and then it is gone.

- Life feels so long when you’re in it, especially when you’re young.
- But as you get older (at least this is what I’ve heard), one of the disturbing things is how fast it all seems to have gone, and how much quicker it goes every year. Older people, can I get a witness on that? I’ve heard it said that when you’re a child, time crawls. When you’re in college, time walks. When you’re a new parent, time runs. When you’re older, time flies. And when you hit retirement, it vanishes.
- Life is like a roll of toilet paper, every revolution gets faster. So, all you college students and young professionals--enjoy your flexibility and your vision--it won’t last long.

2nd word: FORGETTABLE: The mist vanishes with no trace it was ever there.

- We are forgettable. We don’t remember much of what came before. James’ other analogy for this in chapter 1 was the grasses of the field. Look out over a grassy field--how many cycles of grass have there been? Every season a new batch comes in. Some of the blades of grass grew tall; some stayed short; some were pretty with flowers; some of it was stubby and ugly. But all of it is now gone with no memory and a new crop comes in every season. (Kind of like when you walk into your old high school. I used to rule here. Now, nobody has any idea who I am and kids are like, “Who is the creepy old guy?”)

- Your lives are like that. Can I prove it to you? Answer this question; be totally honest: Raise your hands if you could right now say the names of all of your great-grandfathers. That's merely four generations, and this is your very own blood. And you don't even know their names! We are, humanly speaking, forgettable.
- I heard this point made by none other than that **great philosopher Kevin Durant**. If you don't know, KD is one of the greatest NBA players of all time. He's a four-time NBA scoring champion, a two-time finals MVP, and an 11-time All-Star. He's one of those players whose decisions about where to play made some franchises wealthy and almost bankrupted whoever he left. But in this interview he said, "The world is bigger than my little box, I'm not going to be playing this game forever..." Then he said, 'This is the K.D. box.' Who gives a [expletive]? There have been billions of people on this earth, (and my little box doesn't really amount to much of anything, from a universe perspective.)"²

And that brings me to the 3rd word: **FRAGILE**. You can take vapor and just wave it away with your hand. Our lives are fragile.

- The prophet Isaiah makes this point in a rather colorful way: "**Of what account is man, whose life is in his nose?" (Isa. 2:22)**. I love that. You can kill anybody--even the toughest Navy Seal--just by clogging up his airways. James says, "All your confident planning about tomorrow is arrogant because the smallest thing--one bacteria entering your body--could change everything."
- Or, imagine this: It's a bright, cloudless morning as a man looks out the window of his skyscraper office over one the best views of NYC. He's an investor for Cantor Fitzgerald, one of New York City's

most prestigious investment firms, and in his hand he holds a paper. His returns for the quarter have just come back 3x bigger than what he'd hoped. His two twin sons have just started their freshman year at different Ivy League schools, both on full scholarships, one academic and one athletic. He's in great health--he just finished in the top 10 of the NYC triathlon over 40 division. He is happily married. The cloudless horizon he looks out over seems almost a metaphor for his future. 'Tomorrow,' he thinks, 'I will invest in a new market and spend a year making a profit. Nothing but blue skies.' The only problem is the date is September 11, 2001; it's 8:00 am and his 105th story office is in 1 World Trade Center.

- Life is fragile, and there's a whole host of things that can bring it down. Listen, your whole life could change with one unexpected phone call this afternoon.
 - *"This is the Highway Patrol. You need to come down to the hospital immediately. Your wife was in an accident."*
 - *Or: "This is the doctor's office. You need to come in immediately because some unexpected things showed up on your scans."*

And I know that's hard for some of you even to hear that, because you've received a call exactly like one of those before. But James just wants to remind you that life is fragile.

So what is James' counsel? In light of lives that are fleeting, forgettable and fragile, James says our lives should be characterized by these 3 things:

² I paraphrased this last sentence slightly for greater readability. "Like: 'This is the K.D. box.' Who gives a [expletive]? It's been billions of people on this

earth. We really are small, if you look at it from a universe perspective." Source: Sam Anderson, "Kevin Durant and (Possibly) the Greatest Basketball Team of All Time," The New York Time Magazine (6-2-21)

HUMILITY: We should live with the awareness of how much your life owes to God.

Only the fool looks at his past and fails to see God's hand of grace in his successes.

- It's interesting, even a growing number of secular thinkers seem to recognize this now. They don't attribute it to God, but they recognize the idea of the truly self-made man or woman is a myth.
- Some of you have read Malcom Gladwell's great little book called *Outliers*. Gladwell is a secular intellectual, but in that book he points out how much of our successes were ultimately outside our control. Yes, your hard work contributed, but for you to be successful, you had to be in the right circumstances; timing was huge; your upbringing and social networks also played a huge role, as have many other things you were not in control of.
- Don't boast about your past successes, failing to realize God's hand of grace in it. James says it is EVIL. That's what God struck down Nebuchadnezzar for in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar walked out one day and looked over his kingdom and thought, "Look at all I have built!"--and it was impressive--but he failed to acknowledge God's role in it and give God glory. He saw his accomplishments as a testament to his greatness. And God said, "We'll see about that," and with the flick of his finger made Nebuchadnezzar go insane and eat grass like a cow for 7 years.

Only the fool looks at his past and fails to see God's hand of grace in it. Even worse, only a fool looks at the future and thinks it is under his control. God enables; God raises up; God empowers. And so,

James says, rather than boastfully saying, "Tomorrow I will do this or that," **15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."**

- Reject, even in your speech, the arrogant assumption that you really are in control of your lives. Don't make God do something to prove that to you.
- Honestly, this is so unnatural for us Americans. We love this sense that we are the masters of our fates and the captains of our souls.
- At the end of the **Back to the Future series, Doc Brown says to Marty McFly**, who after all of his flying DeLorean adventures is trying to figure out what to do with the rest of his life, "The future is whatever you make it, so make it a good one."
- And, as Americans, we're all like, YEAH!" We love that. The future is mine to create!
- Don't provoke God. The 3 most dangerous words in the English language might be, "I got this." No, you don't. Not necessarily. God determines that.

By the way, I think we should take James literally here. We ought to say often, when talking about our future, 'If the Lord wills.' I don't think James is trying to impose some legalistic rule, but he's saying we should acknowledge to ourselves and to others that ultimately we aren't in charge of our lives, God is.

This is how the Apostle Paul talked: In Acts 18:21, he told the Ephesians, "I will return to you again if God wills." In 1 Corinthians 4:19 he writes to the Corinthians, "I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills." If you know anything about Paul's life, you know that when he went to a new town he didn't know if it would end in revival or his execution. Maybe both. You are equally uncertain about your future

and you should often acknowledge that. I've found, by the way, that just saying that cultivates humility in me.

Here's the 2nd word that should define a fleeting, forgettable,

fragile, life: ETERNITY: If your life is a mist, you need to think about what actually matters.

- Do you ever think about how short your life is, compared to eternity?
- Several years ago, I saw a guy do an illustration that really gripped me. Let this **ROPE** represent your life. This tiny red part represents what you've lived until now. (Birth, high school, college...) And maybe by doing all the right things--eating kale or using a standing desk and avoiding wheat or preservatives and rubbing yourself down each night with unicorn oil or whatever else the trendy magazines tell us we should do now could add another couple of millimeters to this red, but, bottom line, you are headed for eternity.
- How foolish is it to live for just this. People love to say, YOLO: you only live once. Pack everything into this that you can. That's dumb. **YALF:** you actually live forever. If you want a bracelet or a tattoo, put that on it.
- One of my favorite verses: **Ps 90:12, "Teach us to number our days, that we might apply our hearts to learn wisdom."**
 - Martin Luther translated this verse as, "Teach us to think about death, that we may learn how to live." Only by pondering the inevitability of death, and its relative immanence, will you begin to live wisely.
 - If you've ever heard me tell my story about what brought me to Christ as a teenager, instrumental in that was the death of a friend in a car wreck. It was gruesome. And as I stood there

beside his closed casket the illusion of my immortality was shattered. Death comes for us all. Are you going to be ready for it?

- **Do you know that you know that you know that you're saved?** If you died this afternoon and stood before God, would you be ready? How is this not the most important question in your life?
- You are so so busy working toward this and trying to accomplish this and build that and earn that over there and get your kid into this school. Do you ever stop and ask, "What difference is any of this going to make in eternity?" Parents, you are so focused on getting your kids all the advantages, doing what it takes to get them into the right schools. Do you know that you know that your kids know and love Jesus? Are you more focused on where they go to school than you are where they spend eternity?
- Jesus said, **"What does it profit a man...?" I always illustrate that to high school students by asking them (pinky).**
- Are you prepared for eternity and are you living for things that matter?
- James' whole point is "Make the most of your mist!" **Amy Carmichael**, the single missionary to India, "We will have eternity to celebrate the victories, but only a few hours before sunset to win them."
- Or what my dad always told me: "Only one life to live, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." He would always say, "Son, only 2 things in life last forever--the Word of God and the souls of people. So build your life on both of those." And, by the way, he's living that out even now. Many of you know my dad is an active member, an elder at the Capital Hills Campus now.

After my mom passed away last year... I mean, he misses her terribly, but he's not sitting around playing golf all the time or traveling the world. His schedule is filled up with people he's meeting with. Some of them are investigating faith; some are exploring a call to ministry. Listen: he's busier than I am. That's not a joke. I have a harder time getting on his schedule than he does on mine. And that's because he believes only 2 things in life last forever--it's not golf clubs or sports cars or Tahiti vacations. Only 2 things in life last forever, the Word of God and the souls of people, so build EVERY CHAPTER of your life on them.

- Which, if you'll give me a minute: always makes me think about the people around the world who have never heard the gospel. Whole people groups with no access. In light of eternity, is there anything more urgent for us to focus on? Anything more important for us to do with our money and our time? 10 seconds into eternity, will we have thought ANYTHING else was more important? Some of you need to consider doing this with your life: I realize you may not have grown up thinking this is what you'd do: but if our lives are mist and eternity is forever, getting the gospel around the world is what should characterize this brief mist of a moment we call life.
- Let your life be characterized by eternity. Live for the things that last forever. Make the most of your mist. "We will have eternity to celebrate the victories, but only a few hours before sunset to win them."

One more word, and then I'm going to briefly hit those words in chapter 5 written specifically to the wealthy: IMMEDIACY: (Humility; Eternity; Immediacy). James ends this section by saying: **17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**

Because life is fleeting, fragile and forgettable, don't put off until tomorrow anything you know you should do today. If you were to die today, what would be undone? I love the words of another missionary, Jim Elliot: "Make it such, Lord, that when it comes time in my life to die, all I have left to do is die!"

- Don't wait to **get saved**.
- Don't wait to **tell that person about Jesus**. If you unexpectedly die tomorrow morning, when you're standing in eternity, who are you going to wish you'd told about Jesus?
- Don't wait to **reconcile that relationship**; to say **you're sorry**.
- "Make it such, Lord, that when it comes time in my life to die, all I have left to do is die!"
- **Don't wait to be generous**. Don't be one of those people who save up all your money so you can live richly on it now, telling yourself that you'll instruct other people to be generous on your behalf when you die.
- **James is saying, "Be generous NOW."** If you see something good in front of you to do and you fail to do it, it is SIN.
- There are needs around you now. There are missionaries who need your support now. This church needs to do things to reach this community now. Don't wait to be generous. Be generous today.
- There's a wealthy man at our church, he's retired now--who told me, "My goal is to give all my money now, so that my last check bounces." I said, "So, in other words, how you see this going down is the doctor tells you that you have 30 min left to live, and you call me and a few of your family to your bedside and then you hand me a check for the church that's no good." He said, "Yeah,

that's right." I said, "Could you write us your second to last check?"

- Here's the question: Is there anything God has put on your heart that you haven't done yet? **It's like Veronica and I tell our kids: Delayed obedience is disobedience.**
- "Make it such, Lord, that when it comes time in my life to die, all I have left to do is die!"
- **17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**

For lives that are fleeting, fragile and forgettable, we should focus on humility, eternity and immediacy. And now, with that at the forefront of your mind, you are ready for the first few verses of chapter 5: **Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.** Ha, don't you love it? Positive, encouraging... Brother James!

These two sections really tie together, because when you have a proud outlook on life, the place that will most often manifest is in how you spend your money.

Money is not wrong, and being wealthy is definitely not a sin, but **3 things characterize proud, world-centered wealth:**

- **1. Hoarding: Vs. 3. James says, "You have laid up treasures for the last days."** Saving is not wrong, of course. Proverbs commends certain kinds of saving. Saving up money so that you're not a burden on others when you're older, or because you want to provide for others--the book of Proverbs calls that wise.
 - But just piling up wealth on earth, especially at the expense of generosity or in a way that ignores the needs of others, that's evil, James says.
 - I know you say, "Well, how much can you save up before it's considered hoarding?" Well, there's no magic number I can give you. You just need to take passages like this seriously. At TSC, we say we should save sufficiently and give extravagantly, rather than give sufficiently and save extravagantly. I would say most of you in here give (some) and save (some). Which one do you do sufficiently, and which one do you do extravagantly?
- Which leads me to the second thing James says characterizes worldly wealth: **2. Self-Indulgence. Vs. 5: "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence."** We're not talking about simply enjoying a few nice things; driving a reliable car, being able to bless your family with a college education or the occasional nice vacation. James is saying you live in a way totally disconnected from the people around you and their needs, and particularly when you do things to flaunt your wealth; when the clothes you wear or the bags you carry or the cars you drive and neighborhood you live in are supposed to make a statement about you.

- You say, “Well, how much is too much?” Here again, the question is one of proportion. I’d say most of you in here have some nice stuff and you give. Again: Which one do you do sufficiently and which one do you do extravagantly? **I challenge you, as a family, to write out these 3 words: spending, saving, giving and then ask which ones do we do sufficiently and which ones do we do extravagantly?**
- Characteristic #3: **3. Injustice: James says in vs. 4** that the way you got this money was by exploiting and defrauding others. James is probably not talking about outright theft here; he’s talking about those ways that the wealthy can manipulate the legal system to keep people from their due.
 - For example, employers who pay low wages or delayed wages just because they can. Or, who use their wealth to manipulate the court system to benefit themselves even if it’s not entirely fair to others.
 - I want to be really careful here in how I say this: There are a lot of people in our tradition who oppose the ACA and we hate discussions about raising the minimum wage. And I know many of you think that because you think those kinds of government impositions onto the market do more harm than good. Free enterprise, you say, is the only thing that prospers everyone in the society. And I’m not here to debate that one way or the other. That’s not my calling to tell you what to think about that. I understand that line of reasoning, and in many ways I am very sympathetic to it.

- What I’m saying is that Christians shouldn’t need government mandated programs to treat their workers justly and fairly and generously.
- James is not talking about government programs here. He’s saying that regardless of your politics or whatever political solutions you think help society, the poor around you are YOUR responsibility.

So, if you run a business, your question shouldn’t only be, “What am I legally required to do?” It should be, “How can I take care of my employees in ways that are just, even generous?”

- It means that those in our small groups, our neighborhoods, our kids’ friends at school--we shouldn’t need the government to tell us to take care of them; we should.
- In the early days of the church, the church was the soup kitchen. It was orphan care and foster care and welfare. **Historian Eberhard Arnold** notes about those first few centuries of Christianity: **“Most astounding to the outside observer was the extent to which poverty was overcome in the vicinity of the communities, through voluntary works of love... Christians spent more money in the streets than the followers of other religions spent in their temples.”** The Roman Emperor Julian, one of the early Christians’ primary persecutors, said in disgust, **“It is a scandal that there is not a single Christian who is a beggar... these godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”**³

³ From *The Early Christians: In Their Own Words*, Eberhard Arnold, p. 14, 16.

I don't think it's possible to overstate how seriously God takes this.

Just read the words in this chapter! 5:1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you... 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. James says to rich people: You think you are living it up now, your lives are fat with money, but in God's eyes you are just fattening yourself up for the day of slaughter.

- A couple of years ago Veronica and I went on a mission trip to visit some of our missionaries in Germany and Eastern Europe. Two of the ones we went to see were Rich and Julia Rudolph who were, at the time, living in a small, rural village out in the German countryside. We got to their house late at night, so we couldn't really take in our surroundings when we first arrived, but when we got up the next morning, right out of our window was the most idyllic German hillside I'd ever laid my eyes on. Six or seven sheep grazing on a vast, green hillside, flanked by the mountains... with a windmill you could see off in the distance. At any moment I was expecting the little Swiss Miss girl with blond pigtails to come dancing, or Captain Von Trappe to come out singing Edelweiss. It was perfect. These sheep looked like they were living the dream. But only one word popped in my mind when I saw those sheep: mutton. Or lamb shanks (I guess that's two words). You see, right over the hillside you could see the slaughterhouse. These sheep were being prepared for the day of slaughter. Their idyllic lives were an illusion.
- James says this is what the lives of the rich are like. This hoarding, self-indulgent, luxurious life is fattening you up for when God executes justice on behalf of the poor.

Here's the question James wants those of us who have money to consider. WHY did God give it to you? After all, what we saw in James 4 was at the end of the day, it was God who made us rich, right? You have to ask, What was his purpose in making you rich? At The Summit we use the word "steward" to describe our relationships with our finances--a steward understands that none of what they have truly belongs TO THEM. Everything--our time, treasure and talents are given to us by God for a purpose, and our responsibility as stewards is to figure out what that purpose is and fulfill it.

So, if you are blessed with a lot, you have to ask, "Why did God give me this?" And the answer is, "He gave it to you so you could channel it to the needs around you." He didn't give it to you to hoard or live in self-indulgence.

You parents--say that you learn there is a really poor kid at your kids' school who never has anything to eat at lunch. So, as you are preparing your son's lunch for the day, you pack him two of everything. Two lunchables; two juice boxes; two packs of Goldfish. But, you get busy and forget to tell him why you did that. All he knows is that when he opens up his lunchbox at lunch, he's got two of everything. And right beside him is this kid with nothing.

What would you hope that he does, instinctively? Would you hope that he eats two of everything--sit back and say, "Mom and Dad love me so much, and I've been such an awesome son lately that I've been rewarded with two packs of Oreos!" And then gobble it all down, saying that "I am glorifying the generosity of my parents by eating two of everything?" That's what the prosperity gospel people will tell you to do.

Or, do you hope that he takes the second lunchable and stealthily finds a place he can hide it in case you forget about him tomorrow-- that way if you forget, now he's got a spare lunch saved up, and ready for a rainy day?

Or, are you most pleased if, instinctively, he hands the extra lunch stuff to the kid who has none? If he did that, would you say, "Well, my kid will never be rich because he doesn't know how to save! There goes the whole free market system right there, up in smoke!"

No, my guess is that you'd be supremely pleased that his instinct was to share, not to hoard, because you know that you're going to pack another lunch for him tomorrow and he's got nothing to worry about.

So, why would you think God is pleased when we pile up all our money in extravagance in case GOD doesn't take care of us tomorrow?

God made you wealthy, James says to the rich, to give. So you can meet needs. He prospers you not so you can increase your standard of living only, but also so you can increase your standard of giving.

At the Summit Church, we teach that 3 words ought to characterize your giving:

- **Priority:** Giving should come out first, not last. It's the first thing Veronica and I do every month. Firstfruits. You say, "But if I do that, I won't be able to make ends meet!" Listen, I have done it for 40 years now, and God has always been faithful, and I've heard countless testimonies in this church of people who

experienced the same thing. He promises multiple places in our Bibles that if you put him first, he will make sure you are sufficient in all the rest of your needs. In Malachi God says to test him by giving to him first and see if he won't be faithful in coming through.

- **Percentage:** One of the ways you can bring discipline to your giving is by setting a percentage each month. We're not talking about just throwing your lunch money in the plate when the pastor talks about it. "Tithe" means literally 10%, and that's a great starting point for us. But that leads to the 3rd word:
- **Progressive.** As God prospers us, we are to increase that percentage year by year. Veronica and I were giving 10% when we were bootstrapping it as new college graduates. But now that we have more means, we have year by year tried to progress our percentage. I'd encourage you to consider the same.

Conclusion: VAMP

Let's return to our central thread: **our lives are fleeting, forgettable and fragile**, so we should live lives characterized by humility, eternity, and immediacy, with money and in all areas.

Only the fool lives as if this mist is all there is. Live for eternity! And we have an incredible model in doing so--Jesus who used his brief stint on earth not to pile up treasure and power, but to pour his life out as a sacrifice. For joy, the writer of Hebrews tells us, Jesus endured the cross, he embraced the sacrifice, despising its shame, because he knew the sacrifice was temporary but the people he was saving were eternal. That's how you should live. Only 2 things in life last forever--the word of God and the souls of people. Build your life on them.

Bow your heads...

I've asked some weighty questions today. Your life is brief. It could be over today. If it were, what would remain undone?

Have you received Christ? Are you sure that you're sure that you have? Here's how

Does everyone in your life know about Jesus? Who do you need to tell?

What about global missions? Some of you right now the Spirit of God is tugging at you. Will you pray about it?

What act of obedience have you delayed?

What ministry do you need to start? Maybe you need to make changes to your generosity.

I don't know, but I want to leave you here with the Holy Spirit for a few minutes and let him do whatever work in your heart, and then our worship teams will come.