

“Blessed Are the Flexible”

James 4:13-16

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Burger King was in trouble. McDonald's was eating their lunch, selling a lot more hamburgers than they were. That's when the executives at Burger King made two decisions they hoped would increase their sales.

First of all, they decided to let the consumer tell them how to prepare their sandwich. Their motto became, "Have it your way!"

Secondly, they made the decision to build a Burger King within two blocks of every new McDonald's. Someone convinced them of the importance of "location, location, location." "Let McDonald's do the research and discover where people are moving and shopping and then move in beside them," they were told.

These changes worked. It wasn't long before families were going to Burger King in record numbers. So, McDonald's responded by introducing the Happy Meal, a child's item including a hamburger, french fries and toy all in a decorative box.

The part of this business story that fascinates me was the decision by the Burger King executives to build franchises next to new McDonald's. That was a brilliant idea that paid big dividends. There is no substitute for the right location when starting and growing a business.

The ancient Jews knew this important lesson, too. This was why merchants studied maps to discover emerging communities or busy crossroads and moved there to open new businesses.

James did not discourage this practice, but offered his readers some sound advice. He told them not to leave God out of the planning process. Instead, they needed to seek and follow His will. Their decisions needed His blessing.

Ours do, too, especially as we begin a New Year, setting goals and mapping out the strategy to achieve them. We need to listen to and heed James' advice to the ancient Jewish traders.

Why? Of what value is it to include God in our plans for 2005? **To begin, He will help us make wise decisions.**

Do you remember the 1950's television show starring Robert Young and Jane Wyatt, "Father Knows Best?" It was a show about a family who lived in a dream world where children's problems were always solved in thirty minutes because their parents were so wise and capable. To be sure, this world existed only on television. Most problems take longer than thirty minutes to solve and no parent has all the right answers.

However, James had all the confidence in the world that his Heavenly Father really did know best and would guide his people to make wise decisions. He would help them to see the consequences, good and bad, of every choice and give them the desire and ability to make wise ones.

I did not live in Atlanta long before I learned the value of the traffic copiers. These are the people that fly helicopters over the city during rush hour and use local radio stations to tell people where the traffic jams are and how to avoid them. Anyone trying to get somewhere during the morning and evening rush hours would be making a big

mistake to ignore them or their advice. On many occasions, I have saved a lot of time and lowered frustration by following their advice.

God looks at life from a different vantage point than we do. Like a traffic cop, He has a much broader view of the landscape. Ignoring Him or His advice when making decisions would not be wise. James knew this and strongly encouraged his readers to seek God's guidance when making decisions. I am encouraging you to do this, too.

Secondly, God will help us remain flexible when our plans don't go as expected. In this passage, James alluded to the fact that life is unpredictable and the best plans can go awry.

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow” James 4:13-14a.

Remember the words of Forrest Gump, “Life is like a box of chocolates and you never know what you are going to get.” He was stating the truth, wasn't he? And so was James.

He did not want his readers to be caught by surprise with surprises. This was why he said, “You do not even know what will happen tomorrow.” He was not trying to scare them or discourage them from making plans and setting goals. He was trying to prepare them for life in a changing world and reminding them to anchor their faith in a God that would help them adjust to these changes.

He is trying to do the same for us, too. He is encouraging us to be faithful to God and flexible so unfriendly winds will bend but not break us.

I grinned when one of our members returned from the Vienna trip with the choir and Prime Time and told me about the trip's motto. She talked about what a wonderful time everyone had and said one reason was because every person understood the value of flexibility. She told me that they drafted a new beatitude while on the trip. “Blessed are the flexible, for they will bend but not break.”

James would encourage us to live by this motto everyday. Plan for the unplanned by staying close to the God that can make all things work for our good.

Finally, God will help us keep our priorities in order. “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” James 4:14b.

What was James' concern when he penned these words? I think he felt that his readers would misplace their priorities if they failed to realize the brevity of life. He knew human nature. Many would put off important tasks if they felt no urgency to do them.

“So live your life that when it comes time to die, that's all you have to do.” I can't tell you the times I've thought of that quote when tempted to rearrange priorities.

How can we keep our priorities in order in a world filled with opportunities and distractions? James believed the secret was found in staying close to God and including Him in setting goals and making plans.

I do, too, and this is why my challenge to you this morning is to heed James' advice to the early Jewish traders. Include God in your plans for 2005. Seek His will and follow it. Honor Him with your decisions and He will help you each step of your journey.