

A Different Way to Live

James 4:11-17

August 16, 2026



DAY 1: STEPPING DOWN FROM THE JUDGES SEAT

READING: JAMES 4:11-12

It is remarkably easy to slide into the role of judge without realizing it. A passing comment about someone's choices, a quiet assumption about their motives, a conversation that chips away at their reputation -- and suddenly we have placed ourselves above the very law we are called to live by. James reminds us that there is only one Lawgiver and Judge. That position is not vacant, and it was never ours to fill. Our calling is simpler and harder at the same time: to be doers of the law, not arbiters of it. Today, notice the moments when your words begin to diminish rather than dignify someone made in the image of God.

Reflection Questions:

- When was the last time your words about someone were intended to damage rather than simply express disagreement?
- What would it look like today to be a doer of the law rather than a judge of it?

DAY 2: THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE

READING: LEVITICUS 19:18, ROMANS 13:8-10, JAMES 2:8

James calls the command to love your neighbour as yourself the Royal Law -- and that word "royal" carries weight. It is not a suggestion tucked into the margins of faith. It is the governing standard by which all other conduct is measured. When we speak evil against someone, we are not simply being unkind -- we are actively stepping outside of love's boundaries and rewriting rules that were never ours to write. Romans 13 describes love as the fulfillment of the whole law. That means love is not one item on a long checklist. It is the entire checklist. Ask yourself today whether love is the filter through which your words about others are passing.

Reflection Questions:

- Who in your life is it most difficult to extend genuine love to, and why?
- How might treating someone as an image-bearer of God change the way you speak about them when they are not in the room?

DAY 3: THE MIST AND THE MOMENT

READING: JAMES 4:13-14, PSALM 90:10-12

James asks a disarming question: what is your life? He answers it with a striking image -- a mist, appearing briefly and then gone. This is not meant to make you feel insignificant. It is meant to make you feel awake. Psalm 90 echoes this by asking God to teach us to number our days so that we might gain a heart of wisdom. We tend to number our years, our accomplishments, our goals. But God invites us to number our days -- to feel the weight of each one and use it with intention. The brevity of life is not a reason for despair. It is a reason for surrender.

Reflection Questions:

- If you genuinely believed today could be your last, what would you do differently?
- In what area of your life have you been assuming tomorrow belongs to you rather than holding it with an open hand?

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DAY 4: IF THE LORD WILLS

READING: PROVERBS 16:1-3, 9, JAMES 4:15-16

There is a difference between saying "if the Lord wills" and actually meaning it. James is not calling us to attach a spiritual phrase to plans we have already made and closed our hands around. He is calling us toward an ongoing posture of surrender -- one where plans are formed in prayer, held loosely, and submitted to a God who sees what we cannot. Proverbs 16 reminds us that we may make our plans, but God directs our steps. Boasting in our plans as though the outcome is guaranteed is not confidence -- it is arrogance dressed in productivity. True steadfast faith plans with open hands.

Reflection Questions:

- Are there areas of your life where you have made plans and simply assumed God would bless them, without genuinely seeking His direction first?
- What would it look like practically to hold your plans with an open hand this week?

DAY 5: THE GAP BETWEEN KNOWING AND DOING

READING: JAMES 4:17, LUKE 12:47-48, ROMANS 2:13

James closes this passage with one of the most convicting statements in the entire letter. To know the right thing and fail to do it is sin. The problem James is addressing is not ignorance -- it is the gap between knowledge and obedience. Many of us have sat with God's Word long enough to know what He is asking. The question is not whether we understand it. The question is whether we are willing to surrender to it. Knowledge brings responsibility. Every time we encounter truth and choose comfort over obedience, we are quietly claiming the final say for ourselves. Steadfast faith closes the gap -- not perfectly, but persistently.

Reflection Questions:

- What is one thing you know God is asking of you that you have not yet surrendered to?
- What would re-surrendering that area look like in a concrete, practical way today?