

DEO VOLENTE

JAMES 4 v 14-15

You don't even know what your life tomorrow will be! You are like a puff of smoke, which appears for a moment and then disappears. What you should say is this:

In my home church in Northern Ireland there was no printed weekly bulletin. During a service, just before the offering was taken up the announcements were made. The minister made the announcements which sometimes took up a lot of time; it didn't shorten the sermon. I can remember the minister always ending his announcements with the sentence, "These are the announcements in the will of the Lord". Sometimes the minister after announcing a meeting or service added the short phrase, "Lord willing". It is quite normal for Christians in their vocabulary to say 'God willing' or 'If the Lord wills' to make it clear that in their plans for the future they are taking great care not to usurp God's sovereignty. Sometimes the phrase 'Lord willing' is shortened to the Latin abbreviation 'DV' which stands for Deo volente which means 'God willing' or 'Lord willing'. Sometimes the words can become a slogan which people trot out without thinking and perhaps without meaning it.

The origin of 'Deo volente' or 'Lord willing' is found in the book of James; 4 v 15b. James is warning against the temptation that people have to put themselves in the place of God. James highlights this danger in relation to peoples' future plans. He has in mind Christians who are running businesses. A businessman thinks to himself, and then says to a colleague or employee, that he should go off to some distant town or city to ply his trade there and make plenty of money. He or she (there were successful businesswomen in the ancient world as we know from the book of Acts) thinks that the future can be planned out well in advance.

James has some stern words to say to these business people. He drives his message home with a simple but devastating question; v 14b. He answers with a vivid illustration; v 14c. Each morning I drive from my home in the suburb of Jerrabomberra to my office at St Andrew's House next to St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Canberra. During the winter season as I drive down Lanyon Drive into the valley towards the Monaro Highway, I see a heavy mist. Usually, it is a frosty morning. I have to drive carefully through the mist. By 10.00am, on a typical Canberra winter's morning, the mist has completely lifted, the sun is shining brightly and there is a blue sky above. That is what our lives are like. They are only, as 'The Message' paraphrase puts it 'a wisp of fog, catching a brief bit of sun before disappearing'. We have no idea what today will bring or what tomorrow will bring, let alone what the longer term will bring; v 14a. The psalmist describes life; Psalm 39 v 5c "*Indeed every living being is no more than a puff of wind*"; Psalm 102 v 3a "*For my days vanish like smoke*".

The business people James is addressing were not taking God into their reckoning when they were drawing up strategies and plans to develop and expand their business enterprise. James makes it

absolutely clear to them that they couldn't even live for one day, let alone do their business planning without reference to God. James is not suggesting that they should sit back and do nothing. He is not criticising their business prowess and experience, but he is criticising their arrogance and boasting. James is telling them in no uncertain terms that the right attitude to life is to recognize that God is in sovereign control of it and that it should be yielded in humble submission to God's divine will. DV – Deo volente.

It is necessary for us to plan for the future, but we must always do so prayerfully. It is not enough to make our plans first and then expect God to bless them. We should seek God's will before we make our plans and act when we have an assurance that we are doing so according to his will.

I hear many people talking about their future plans; what they hope to do or where they hope to be in five or ten years from now. People plan for their retirement. They want to travel overseas or drive round Australia, or the country they live in, in a campervan, go on cruises, spend more time with the grandchildren, pursue a hobby or do something else. But in their plans, there is no reference to God. There is no DV. Alec Motyer wrote; **“James would have us empty our lives of proud planning which does not fear and bow to the will of God and submit all things to his ordering hand”**. If we do this our lives will be marked by the conviction and confidence which is expressed in the words of William Freeman Lloyd's hymn; **“My times are in Your hand; my God, I wish them there! My life, my friends, my soul, I leave entirely to Your care”**.

Remember what your life is. In your planning always say; “DV - Deo volente”.