

Pursuing God—A Seeker’s Guide

Chapter Five

Sooner Than You Think

1. Please read the chapter aloud.
2. *Tempus fugit* is the Latin equivalent for our phrase, “time flies.” It might be stated this way: “time is a fugitive.” This chapter deals with this truth. The minutes and days you live are gone forever and each moment you are coming closer to the time of your death. The chapter is based on James 4:13-17. Please read that passage aloud.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

3. The passage puts you into the mind of businessmen who are planning a way to make a profit by going to another city and staying a year there, buying and selling. Surely you make plans sometimes. Is there anything wrong with that?
4. There are two absolutes that must be remembered whenever plans are made. The first is this: *You don’t know what will happen tomorrow*. I had a friend in school when I was much younger who went swimming in the river after school one day. The next day he wasn’t at school. When he jumped from the boat to swim ashore, he didn’t make it. My other friend was unable to save him. In another case, a friend was driving while drunk one night and hit a telephone pole. He was instantly paralyzed. Has anyone in the group experienced a major change with no real forewarning, or do you know of such a situation? If so, tell your experience to the group. These experiences are important for us to consider so that we won’t forget the first absolute.
5. The second absolute is this: *Life at its best is very short*. James puts it this way: Your life is but “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” That’s a clear picture. However, it seems less a reality when you are young. Although some people never think of it, it remains an inescapable reality. For instance, when a girl starts 8th grade, she will have only 60 months until she will graduate from high school. If you are 50 years old, you will only have 180 months until you could retire at 65. If you are entering college, you will only have 48 short months until you graduate and on your on. Think how quickly a month goes by! Everyone feels differently about the relentless advance of time. Do you think of time as moving slowly or quickly? What were you doing 48 months ago? What do you project will be happening in your life five years from now?

6. OK, we've said that you have a short time to live and you really don't know what will happen tomorrow—you may in fact die. James tells us not only what we should not say (that is, "I will do this or that"), but rather, what we should say. He puts it this way: "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'" (vs. 15). Here is a fact that trumps the other facts: Everything we do, and even the duration of our life, is entirely dependent upon God's will! This includes whether we live or die and what we do or don't do in the future. Remember that the time of your death will come right in the middle of your plans. Another verse that speaks of this is found in Psalm 139:16.

And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me,
when as yet there were none of them.

Also, note what Jesus said in Matthew 10:29.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls
to the ground apart from your Father's will.

Do you believe that it a good thing or a bad thing that God is in control of the moment you die? Explain your answer.

7. My friend who drowned was not a Christian. Suppose he had known then what he knows now. Describe in some detail what you believe would have been his attitude and interest in the issues relating to Christ during the year before he died?

8. I mentioned that we have one way to be secure in the face of the facts I've listed, and that is through correctly aligning ourselves with the one who controls the future. From the list below, which is the right way to become a true Christian, and which is insufficient or even wrong, in your opinion? Explain why or why not. Only one answer is right according to the Bible. *[Leader, you may want to ask the group to turn to a person next to them and explain their answer(s) first; then you can discuss the various views in the whole group.]*

- a. by believing that Christ is the Son of God, that He died for sinful people like me, and that He arose from the dead
- b. by deciding to obey God with all of my strength, asking him to forgive me when I fail
- c. by going to church and spending more time with Christians
- d. by trusting Christ on the basis of what He has done, and resting everything in Him for forgiveness and a future life in heaven
- e. by doing the best I can and then trusting that Christ will decide correctly when I stand before Him at the judgment

9. Any more questions?

For next week: Please read chapter six.