

# Life Is Like a Vapour

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## Key Scripture

James 4:14 (ESV) 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.

## Sermon in One Sentence

Life's fleeting nature, though sobering, serves as a divine invitation to live with an eternal perspective, intentional stewardship, and humble dependence on God.

## Introduction

Have you ever tried to catch smoke? Perhaps from a campfire, a candle, or even a puff of breath on a cold morning? You reach out, your fingers close, yet there's nothing substantial to grasp. It dissipates, vanishes, as if it were never truly there. This elusive, ephemeral nature of smoke, or mist, or vapor, is precisely the image the Bible uses to describe our lives. In a world obsessed with longevity, permanence, and building legacies that will seemingly last forever, the sober truth of our brevity can feel unsettling, even alarming.

We plan for decades, save for retirement, and invest in futures that, while good and responsible, can sometimes lull us into an illusion of control and an overlooking of our inherent fragility. The problem is not in planning, but in how such planning might eclipse the profound reality that our time here is astonishingly, wonderfully, and terrifyingly brief. We struggle with the tension between diligently building for tomorrow and simultaneously acknowledging that tomorrow is not guaranteed for any of us.

This morning, we are invited by the Word of God to confront this uncomfortable truth head-on. James, the half-brother of Jesus, brings an unvarnished clarity to our human existence that, far from being depressing, is ultimately liberating and calls us to a deeper, more authentic walk with God. As we open to James 4:14, let us allow the Holy Spirit to transform our perspective, moving us from a worldly understanding of time to a kingdom-centric and eternity-focused way of living.

## Historical & Biblical Context

The Epistle of James is a powerful, practical letter penned by James, the brother of Jesus, likely to Jewish Christians scattered among the nations. It's a book of wisdom and action, often likened to the Old Testament's Proverbs, emphasizing that authentic faith is demonstrated through works and a transformed life. James addresses a community grappling with various issues: trials, temptations, favoritism, unbridled tongues, worldly wisdom, and the very pride and self-sufficiency that our key verse directly confronts. In chapter 4, James is particularly sharp, rebuking their worldly desires, their spiritual adultery, and their arrogant presumption about the future. He challenges their self-sufficient planning, calling them to recognize their complete dependence on God. His words about life being a "mist" are not a philosophical musing, but a

pointed theological statement aimed at shattering their self-centered arrogance and redirecting their hearts back to God's sovereign control and their own humble, temporary existence. The context is not one of abstract theology, but of real-life spiritual lethargy and pride within the Christian community.

## **Main Point I — Embrace Life's Fleeting Reality**

**Scripture:** James 4:14a yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life?

James opens this profound declaration with a double punch: "you do not know what tomorrow will bring" and the rhetorical question, "What is your life?" This immediately dismantles any illusion of control or foresight we might possess. We meticulously plan, we schedule, we project, but ultimately, the future remains a veiled mystery. The uncertainty of "tomorrow" is not a call to anarchy or irresponsibility, but a stark reminder that our plans, however well-intentioned, are always subject to a higher authority – the sovereign will of God. This acknowledgment of our limited knowledge and finite existence is foundational to true spiritual maturity.

The follow-up question, "What is your life?" isn't seeking a biological definition, but a theological and existential one. It forces us to ponder the very essence and duration of our existence in honest reflection. This reality, though humbling, prepares our hearts to receive the subsequent description of life with appropriate reverence. If we refuse to acknowledge our lack of control over time and our own finite nature, we will live in a state of self-deception, prone to pride and vulnerable to the deceptions of the world that promise endless possibilities and extensions of life apart from divine sovereignty. Our path to wisdom begins with accepting this fundamental limitation.

## **Main Point II — Understand Life's Ephemeral Nature**

**Scripture:** James 4:14b For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Here is the central metaphor: "you are a mist." The Greek word *atmis* refers to a vapor, steam, or smoke – something translucent, insubstantial, and highly temporary. Think of the morning fog that blankets a valley, only to be burned off and entirely gone by the mid-morning sun. Or the breath you exhale on a cold day, visible for a brief moment and then utterly disappeared. This is James's chosen image for our existence – not a mighty oak, not an enduring mountain, but a fleeting wisp. The phrase "appears for a little time" underscores the extreme brevity; it's not just temporary, but *briefly* temporary.

And then, the sobering conclusion: "and then vanishes." The implication is clear – there's no lingering, no gradual fading, just disappearance. This isn't meant to breed despair, but to ignite spiritual urgency. If our lives are that brief, if our time on earth is so incredibly short in the scope of eternity, then how are we to live? It demands a re-evaluation of priorities, a re-assessment of values, and a re-alignment with eternal purposes. This picture of human life, so fragile and fleeting, urges us to consider what truly endures beyond the mist, directing us away from worldly attachments to that which is eternal – God Himself and His kingdom.

## **Main Point III — Live with Eternal Intentionality**

**Scripture:** James 4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

Knowing life is a vapor should not lead to recklessness or paralysis, but to living with profound intentionality and humble submission to God. James doesn't suggest we abandon plans, but that we qualify them with "If the Lord wills." This isn't a magical incantation or a superstitious phrase; it's an attitude, a heart posture of complete deference to God's sovereignty. It acknowledges that our very breath, our every moment, is a gift from Him and depends entirely upon His divine permission. It's an antidote to the "boasting in your arrogance" that James condemns in verse 16.

To live with "eternal intentionality" means stewarding our vapor-like lives for purposes that transcend our brief earthly span. It means investing in relationships, in the spread of the Gospel, in acts of justice and mercy, in spiritual growth – all things that hold eternal significance. It shifts our focus from accumulating temporal treasures that will vanish like mist, to laying up heavenly treasures that endure. When we live with the constant awareness of God's sovereignty over our fleeting lives, every decision, every conversation, every act of service takes on deeper meaning and greater urgency, calling us to make our brief existence count for Christ.

## Illustration

Consider the story of a young, highly skilled photographer specializing in capturing ephemeral beauty. He spent years honing his craft, traveling the globe to photograph fleeting moments: the perfect wave cresting just before breaking, the delicate ice crystal forming on a windowpane, the fleeting blush of a sunset across a vast landscape. One day, he felt compelled to capture the dance of a monarch butterfly, a creature known for its vibrant but short life. He waited for hours, adjusting his lens, anticipating the perfect shot. Finally, a single monarch landed on a flower, its wings fluttering with breathtaking grace. He pressed the shutter, capturing the image. Just then, a sudden gust of wind swept through, and the butterfly was gone, carried away into the unseen. He had it, just as it was, and then it vanished. His life's work was dedicated to freezing these moments, to giving fleeting beauty a form of permanence. Our lives, too, are like that butterfly – beautiful, intricate, active, but for a "little time." The question is, what image are we leaving behind for eternity? What is captured of our lives for the Master Photographer?

## Practical Application

- 1. Cultivate Daily Dependence:** Consciously begin and end each day by acknowledging God's sovereignty over your life and future. Make "If the Lord wills" not just a spoken phrase, but a guiding principle for all your plans and decisions, recognizing He orchestrates your "vapor" existence.
- 2. Evaluate Your Investments:** Take inventory of how you spend your time, energy, and resources. Are you investing primarily in things that will vanish with the mist, or in things that have eternal significance (e.g., relationships, spiritual growth, spreading the Gospel, serving others)? Realign one significant investment this week towards eternity.
- 3. Practice Presence and Gratitude:** Since time is fleeting, savor the present moment as a gift from God. Be fully engaged in your conversations, work, and worship. Express gratitude for the small, momentary joys and blessings, recognizing them as precious drops in your vapor of life.

**4. Embrace Humility Over Arrogance:** Identify one area in your life where you tend to boast or act with self-sufficiency regarding future plans. Confess this before God and intentionally practice humble submission to His will, speaking of your future plans with open-handedness before Him.

**5. Share the Eternal Hope:** Recognize that life is a vapor for everyone. Be intentional this week about sharing the eternal hope found in Jesus Christ with someone who is living as if this vapor is all there is, pointing them to the One who is eternal.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the metaphor of life as a "mist" or "vapor" make you feel initially? Does it bring a sense of urgency, anxiety, or peace, and why?
2. In what specific ways might presuming upon tomorrow, rather than saying "If the Lord wills," demonstrate pride or a lack of deference to God?
3. What are some "worldly attachments" that we might prioritize, knowing they will vanish like the mist, instead of focusing on eternal treasures?
4. If your life were truly a visible mist right now, what actions would you prioritize to make your "vapor" count for God's glory?

## Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we humble ourselves before You, acknowledging the profound truth that our lives are but a vapor. Forgive us for our pride, our presumptions, and our tendency to live as if tomorrow is guaranteed. Grant us the wisdom to number our days, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Help us to steward each fleeting moment for Your glory, investing in that which is eternal and living in humble dependence on Your sovereign will. May our brief existence point all to the enduring reality of Christ. Amen.

## Benediction

Now, may the God of enduring hope, who holds our brief breath in His eternal hands, empower you to live with intentionality, humility, and an ever-present awareness of His sovereign grace, until that day when the vapor gives way to everlasting light. Go in His peace.