

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 12, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES “The Peril of Playing God – Part 3” *James 4:11-17*

Approaching the end of the fourth chapter, James deals directly with a common problem among Christians...playing God. Having just exposed our tendency to be self-assertive and quarrelsome (vv.1-10), James goes a step further and shows a couple of the more familiar ways we assert an arrogant spirit. The first had to do with the way we often view others; the second with the way we frequently view ourselves.

→ **In verses 11-12, James deals with our tendency to take the place of God in others' lives as we judge and criticize them. In verses 13-16 he addresses our tendency to take the place of God in our own lives as we presume or boast on ourselves.** ←

Playing
God in the
lives of
others

Playing
God in
our own
life

The point of this study is to define the main objective of these two games, familiarize ourselves with each game's rules, and consider God's evaluation of both of them.

So far in our look at James 4:11-17, we have examined James' words concerning judging others or as we have been calling “playing God in the lives of others.” When we criticize, malign, or look down on others in any way we are essentially assuming the role that only God, Himself is capable and worthy to play. In verses 13-17 James takes the discussion a bit further and confront the “some-times” tendency we may have to play God in our own life. In other words, to set ourselves us as Lord of our own life, as god of our own destiny and desires. This study will focus on verse 13-17 specifically and the peril of playing God in our own life.

Several years ago Craig Gorschel, wrote a book entitled “Christian Atheist.” The sub-title of the book may be the giveaway for the where the book goes, “Believing in God but Living as if He Doesn't Exist.” Gorschel isn't saying in his book that Christians are “atheist,” but rather, we often live our lives as if there is not God or as if we are Him... God that is... we call the shots as if there were no God, or Lord, or that one we claim to believe in and to have surrendered too. So define it...

DEFINITION: A Christian Atheist is someone who believes in God, but lives like He doesn't exist.

Do we ever do this? How? Explain.

We believe in God, but worry all the time, or you believe in God, but trust money more. In *The Christian*

Atheist Craig Groeschel shares from his own journey of growing up in a "Christian" household, but the most that faith required was to attend church several times a year. When Groeschel discovered that the real key to faith is intimacy with God, everything changed. Discover a powerful, intimate relationship with God for yourself and you'll never be the same.

I. LAYING THE BIBLICAL GROUNDWORK FOR A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF JUDGING (Matthew 7:1-5)

"Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." – Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus' command not to judge others could be the most widely quoted of His sayings, even though it is almost invariably quoted in complete disregard of its context. Here is Jesus' statement: "*Judge not, that you be not judged.*" (Matthew 7:1). Many people use this verse in an attempt to silence their critics, interpreting Jesus' meaning as "You don't have the right to tell me I'm wrong." Taken in isolation, Jesus' command "Do not judge" does indeed seem to preclude all negative assessments. However, there is much more to the passage than those three words. Before delving into James' words on judging others let's lay some ground word from God's Word on what even Jesus' command is not saying. These are some important Biblical parameters that we lay down so that we fully understand James' teaching on judging.

What the Biblical Command (Jesus' command) to Not Judge Others Doesn't Mean:

1. **It doesn't mean we should not be DISCERNING** - The Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean we cannot show discernment. Immediately after Jesus says, "*Do not judge,*" He says, "*Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs*" (Matthew 7:6). A little later in the same sermon, He says, "*Watch out for false prophets. . . . By their fruit you will recognize them*" (verses 15–16). How are we to discern who are the "dogs" and "pigs" and "false prophets" unless we have the ability to make a judgment call on doctrines and deeds? Jesus is giving us permission to tell right from wrong.
2. **It doesn't mean that TRUTH if RELATIVE** - The Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean all actions are equally moral or that truth is relative. The Bible clearly teaches that truth is objective, eternal, and inseparable from God's character. Anything that contradicts the truth is a lie—but, of course, to call something a "lie" is to pass judgment. To call adultery or murder a sin is likewise to pass judgment—but it's also to agree with God. When Jesus said not to judge others, He did not mean that no one can identify sin for what it is, based on God's definition of *sin*.

3. It doesn't mean that there should not be a **WAY/PROCEDURE** for dealing with **SIN** - And the Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean there should be no mechanism for dealing with sin. The Bible has a whole book entitled Judges. The judges in the Old Testament were raised up by God Himself (Judges 2:18). The modern judicial system, including its judges, is a necessary part of society. In saying, "**Do not judge,**" Jesus was not saying, "Anything goes." Elsewhere, Jesus gives a direct command to judge in John 7:24, "*Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly*" or as the New King James puts it, "**Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.**" While Jesus forbade harsh, censorious judgment that self-righteous legalism promotes, He demanded the exercise of moral and theological discernment.

Interesting! What is Jesus saying in John 7:24 and is this in contradiction with what he said in Matthew 7 and what James is going to tell us in James 4? He is telling us how "not" to judge, but isn't he also telling us how to "judge." Here we have a clue as to the right type of judgment versus the wrong type. Taking this verse and some others, we can put together a description of the sinful type of judgment...

5 Sinful Types of Judgment that Are Condemned in Scripture: (*in other words, the kind of judgment that Jesus and God's Word condemns and that we ought not to be engaged in... EVER!*)

1. **SUPERFICIAL judgment** - *Superficial* judgment is wrong. Passing judgment on someone based solely on appearances is sinful. Again Jesus said it like this in John 7:24, "**Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.**" Proverbs 18:13 tell us that it is foolish to jump to conclusions before investigating the facts, "**He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.**"

Example: Simon the Pharisee (Read: Luke 7:36-50 *green)

- What was Simon the Pharisee's judgment of this woman?
- What was Simon the Pharisee's judgment of Jesus?
- What was Jesus judgment of this woman?
- What was Jesus judgment of Simon the Pharisee?
- Was Simon's judgment based on appearances or righteousness?
- Was Jesus' judgment based on appearances of righteousness?

Simon the Pharisee passed judgment on a woman based on her appearance and reputation, but he could not see that the woman had been forgiven; Simon thus drew Jesus' rebuke for his unrighteous judgment (Luke 7:36–50).

2. **HYPOCRITICAL judgment** – *Hypocritical* judgment is wrong. Jesus' command not to judge others in Matthew 7:1 that we looked at a moment ago is actually preceded by comparisons to hypocrites.

Example: Hypocrites (READ: Matthew 6:1-5, 16 [v.2, 5, 16], Matthew 7:3-5 *red)

- Why does Jesus say it is hypocritical to draw attention to our charitable deeds?

- What did Jesus say was hypocritical praying? Why?
- What did Jesus say was hypocritical fasting? Why?
- Why did Jesus choose these three to address what is hypocritical (charitable giving, praying, fasting)?
- What is “hypocritical judgement” according to these verses? How might you define?

In Matthew 6:2, 5, 16 we have Jesus identifying what is “hypocritical” and followed by a warning against hypocrisy in Matthew 7:3–5. When we point out the sin of others while we ourselves commit the same sin, we condemn ourselves (Romans 2:1).

3. **Harsh and UNFORGIVING judgment** - *Harsh, unforgiving judgment is wrong. We are “always to be gentle toward everyone”* (Titus 3:2). It is the merciful who will be shown mercy (Matthew 5:7), and, as Jesus warned, *“In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you”* (Matthew 7:2). A good example of this is Jesus’ story/parable of the unmerciful or unforgiving servant.

Example: The Unforgiving Servant: (READ: Matthew 18:21-35 *gold)

- Why does a harsh and unforgiving spirit toward others have to do with being judgmental?
- In the parable Jesus told, was the King’s “judgment” toward the servant correct? What was the King’s reaction toward the servant?
- In the parable was the servant’s judgement toward his fellow servant correct? Where did his judgement go off the tracks?
- Why is a harsh and unforgiving judgement always wrong?
- What is Jesus’ teaching/warning toward us concerning harsh and/or unforgiving judgment based on these verses?

4. **SELF-RIGHTEOUS judgement** - *Self-righteous judgment is wrong. We are called to humility, and “God opposes the proud”* (James 4:6).

Example: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: (READ: Luke 18:9-14 *blue)

- What was the Pharisee’s assessment/judgment of himself? Others?
- What was the Tax Collector’s assessment/judgment of himself?
- What might his assessment/judgment of others have been (though we are not told)? Why do you think this?
- What is “self-righteous judgment” and how does this parable help us define it?

The Pharisee in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was confident in his own righteousness and from that proud position judged the publican; however, God sees the heart and refused to forgive the Pharisee’s sin (Luke 18:9–14).

5. **UNTRUE judgment** - *Untrue judgment is wrong. The Bible clearly forbids bearing false witness (Proverbs 19:5). “Slander no one”* (Titus 3:2).

Example: Jesus on Trial: (READ: Matthew 26:57-68 *violet)

- This one speaks for itself, but what is “untrue” judgment?
- How does it feel to have “untrue” judgment made of us and what should this teach us about making them of others?
- Jesus was the recipient of “untrue” judgment, and it ultimately cost Him his life. What does this teach us about making “untrue” judgments of other?

Christians are often accused of “judging” or intolerance when they speak out against sin. But opposing sin is not wrong. Holding aloft the standard of righteousness naturally defines unrighteousness and draws the slings and arrows of those who choose sin over godliness. John the Baptist incurred the ire of Herodias when he spoke out against her adultery with Herod (Mark 6:18–19). She eventually silenced John, but she could not silence the truth (Isaiah 40:8).

Believers are warned against judging others unfairly or unrighteously, but Jesus commends “right judgment” (John 7:24, ESV). We are to be discerning (Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). We are to preach the whole counsel of God, including the Bible’s teaching on sin (Acts 20:27; 2 Timothy 4:2). We are to gently confront erring brothers or sisters in Christ (Galatians 6:1). We are to practice church discipline (Matthew 18:15–17). We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

II. PLAYING GOD IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS (James 4:11-12)

Again, we have titled this study “The Peril of Play God” and while the title may be a bit off-putting, it is no less a reality that we often take on this role whether consciously or sub-consciously. James addresses this issue in verses 11-17 of the fourth chapter of his letter to believers. Just to set the tone let’s consider a couple of questions: (1) What do we mean by “playing God”? and (2) How exactly are we doing this?

2 Questions Concerning Playing God:

1. **What does it mean to “PLAY GOD”?** – To act as if we are **SOVEREIGN** above others, our own life or life circumstances.

2 Parts to the Phrase:

- (1) **Playing = TOYING with or PRETENDING/ACTING a part** - The term “play” certainly conjures up a couple of images in our minds. Children play at things, toy with things, engage in fantasy, pretending to be someone or something they are not... they “play” at it. They may play dress-up and put on costumes to pretend to be someone, but in reality they are not really a princess, or a fireman, or police officer. They are just playing. The other image the term may bring to mind is the idea of a “play” in a theater, in which actors act out a part... they “pretend” to play a part, but in reality they are not actually that part they are playing. They are simply acting. Both of these images may help us understand what we are saying when we speak of “playing God.”

- (2) **God = SOVEREIGN (Supreme, Absolute, Superior, Matchless, Ruler, Monarch, King)**
Diety, DIVINE, IMMORTAL, ONE and ONLY – In other words, God is

“matchless.” There is no other. None can compare. No one else has His attributes, His power, His authority, His place. He alone is GOD. He is “Holy Other.”

Observation: Even to play or pretend to be God is to take on an “unfathomable” role... one which is really incomprehensible and unknowable to us. It is a paradoxical role... absurd, inconsistent, contradictory role. We are taking on a role we cannot play! God is God, we are not!

Are we ever guilty of doing this? How? Cite an example?

2. **How do we “play God”? – When we ASSUME the ROLE of God in our lives rather than LETTING Him be GOD.**

Ways We Sometimes Play God: (*this is not an exhaustive life, and there are many others areas where we may play the role of God in our own lives. As believers a good prayer for us would be for God to reveal to us those areas where we are not fully surrendered and letting Him be God)*

- (1) **We play God with our HEALTH** – When we put things into our body that are bad for them thinking that there will be not consequences. This can include such things as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc. But it may also include over eating or eating an unhealthy diet. It could also be a failure to take care of our health, but exercising, eating right and getting rest. We also play God with our health when we get sick, have health problems or receive a bad diagnosis from a doctor or medical professional and get angry at God for allowing this to happen to us. We are essentially saying that we know better than God and that we should be calling the shots rather than God. These are just a few examples.
- (2) **We play God with our FINANCES** – This is a big one and one that is often overlooked in our personal lives, but when we make financial decisions based on our personal appetites, desires, and whims, without ever consulting God or considering Him in the matter. He desires to be Lord of our finances as well as every other area of our lives. I believe that we also play God with our finances when we treat our finances as if they are ours to do with as we will, and fail to recognize that everything we have comes from Him and is really His to begin with. Poor stewardship on the part of believers (a failure to tithes, and give back to the Lord and His works) may also be a sign that we are playing God with our finances, rather than following Him.
- (3) **We play God with our RELIGIOUS LIFE** – That is we perform religious duties, are involved in religious things, we go to church, do “church” things because, tithes, serve all because it will get me to heaven, God will like me better, God will have to accept me. That is playing God... or you setting the rules for God and how God must conduct His affairs. If your “religious” life and duty saves you, you are your own God and in control of whether or not you earn salvation and go to heaven. That is you playing God with your religious life. Another way we play God with our religious life, is when we set the standard of how much we will do for God... how much time we will give to the church, how

much of our resources we will give! I'll give this much and no more. I'll give this much time and not more. I've already done my part!

- (4) **We play God with our OWN MORTALITY** – When we fail to recognize our own mortality and that we are “dust,” but rather live and approach life as if we will live forever, we are playing God. This could include playing God with all of the previous mentioned... really playing God with our health, our finances, our family life, our lives all include failing to take into account our own humanity and the frail nature of the flesh. The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21 is an example of one who plays God with his own mortality
- (5) **We play God with the LIVES of OTHERS** – James is out to address this one in James 4. We play God with the lives of others when we set ourselves up as being superior to others in anyway, as judge of others, and controlling of the lives of others.

Beginning this portion of his letter, James says, ^{*¹¹*}*Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.* ^{*¹²*}*There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?* Let's take a look at exactly what James is saying in these two very potent verses. I think we may find this helpful in our own lives, but also in the church. Let begin by looking at a few other translations of these verses to see how they are reading this passage. Pay close attention especially to the way certain words are translated:

Translation – “A translation is a rendering of the Bible in a language different than the one in which it was written.” A translation is intended to be as literal as possible and still be easily read. There are basically two types of translations.

2 Types of Translations:

- (1) **Versions** – Versions are the various translations of the Bible within one modern language.

Example: English Versions = King James Version, American Standard Version, New International Version, English Standard Version, etc.

Version Revisions – Some modern versions could also be called “revisions” because they are largely based on a previous version which has been updated. The following chart will help you to understand how version revisions work. **Example: Today's New International Version (TNIV & NIV), New American Standard Version, New King James Version, etc.**

VERSION	REVISION OF VERSION
New International Version (1973, 1978, 1984)	Today's New International Version (TNIV) and New International Version (2005, 2011)
American Standard Version (1901)	Revised Standard Version (1946/1952 revision)
King James Version (1611)	New American Standard Version (1960) New King James Version (1982 revision)
(1612)	

Paraphrase – “A paraphrase is a less literal rendering of the Bible, restating the text to give the original sense but not attempting to literally translate each term in the original language.” A paraphrase attempts to translate the ideas from the original text without being constrained by the original words or language. The end result is something that is very readable, but certainly not exact or true to the original texts as far as translation goes. Examples: Living Bible, Phillips, Today’s English Version (formerly called Good News for Modern Man), The Amplified Bible (verses are greatly expanded to explain each phrase), The Message

NIV – “¹¹ Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”

NLT – “¹¹ Don’t speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God’s law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. ¹² God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?”

NASB – “¹¹ Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?”

KJV – “¹¹ Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. ¹² There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”

MSG (paraphrase) – “¹¹⁻¹² Don’t bad-mouth each other, friends. It’s God’s Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You’re supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?”

PHILLIPS (paraphrase) – “¹¹⁻¹² Never pull each other to pieces, my brothers. If you do you are judging your brother and setting yourself up in the place of God’s Law; you have become in fact a critic of the Law. Yet if you start to criticise the Law instead of obeying it you are setting yourself up as judge, and there is only one judge, the one who gave the Law, to whom belongs absolute power of life and death. How can you then be so silly as to imagine that you are your neighbour’s judge?”

LIVING BIBLE (paraphrase) – “¹¹ Don’t criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God’s law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong. But your job is not to decide whether this law is right or wrong, but

to obey it.¹² Only he who made the law can rightly judge among us. He alone decides to save us or destroy. So what right do you have to judge or criticize others?"

3 Parts to Playing God in the Lives of Others:

1. **The way we view OURSELVES** – How we view ourselves may be the first indicator of a life that is playing God in the lives of others. When we perceive ourselves as superior or better than others, put them down in various ways, treat them as unimportant... small... insignificant, belittling to others we are actually giving indication that our life is superior, above and more important than there's. A proper view of oneself in light of who God is, is in order for the life of a believers. Paul tell us in Romans 12:3-5, *"³ For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."* When we fail to view ourselves properly, with God perspective rather than ours, we will likely find ourselves playing God in the lives of others. Remember that we are each one "sinners" in need of God's grace. We are all made of "dust" and are frail creatures of "dust." There is none better, none of higher value or worth, none who are more or less deserving of God favor than another. The truth of the matter is every one of us are deserving of "death and hell" and it only by God's grace that we don't get what we deserve.
2. **The way we view OTHERS** – Scripture is very clear about how we as Christians... believes are to treat others. The following are just a few verses to remind us of what the Bible says our attitude and behavior toward others should be as believers:

Ephesians 4:29-32, *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."* *ESV*

Romans 15:1-2, *"We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."* *ESV*

Romans 12:10, *"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."* *ESV*

1 Peter 3:8-12, *"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."* *ESV*

Colossians 3:12-14, “Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” *ESV*

Philippians 2:4, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” *ESV*

James Points our Two Signs We Are Playing God with Others:

- (1) **SPEAK AGAINST** your brother or sister – The Greek word translated here as “speak evil of” come from a combination of two words meaning “to talk down.” We observe this rule when we talk about one person to another, lowering that person’s estimate of the other’s worth. We speak without hard facts and, of course, creatively disguise our motives with such statements as “Now stop me if I’m wrong, but...” or “Perhaps I should not say this about him (or her), but...” The God-player’s power play is to take a juicy bit of information and link it with some honored or respected person in order to hold his listener’s attention and fascination.
- (2) **JUDGING** your brother or sister – The word “judge” means “to pronounce condemnation of someone.” In doing so, we allow a critical, petty spirit to run free where it can wreak havoc in others’ lives. This is not to say that we are to be non-discerning and gullible. There are times when the child of God must exercise careful judgment and discernment. But our problem is that by nature we are selfish and negative, so our judgment fades into condemnation. The only way anyone can rightly judge another is to know all the facts about that person. However, as humans we’re incapable of judging others. Only God can look upon the total man. Jesus addressed this in his sermon on the mount when he said in Matthew 7:1-5, “¹Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Timely Words

We learn from James that when we judge others, in reality we engage in judging the law (i.e. the law of love, of acceptance, of grace, and of Christian kindness). Our major goal as Christians is to build up one another in love, not tear one another down with criticism. James also informs us “judges” that “there is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy” (v.12a). The moment we engage in the judgment of others, we’ve overstepped our boundaries before God and encroached on His territory. In other words we’ve played God in the lives of others.

3. **The way GOD, HIMSELF, view it** – Through James' comments, we see the reasons why our playing God is so wrong from God's point of view.

3 Reasons Playing God with Others Is Wrong: (God's Point of View)

- (1) It places us in the POSITION of GOD –
- (2) It ignores our own FAILURES and tends to EXCUSE them –
- (3) It assaults LOVE, rendering it INOPERATIVE -

III.PLAYING GOD IN OUR OWN LIFE (James 4:13-16, Luke 12:16-21)

Listen to James' words in verses 13-16, “¹³Come 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’; ¹⁴whereas 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. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’” ¹⁶But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” Perhaps this is the most self-deluding of all our ways. James seems to be reflecting the teaching of Jesus in Luke 12:16-21 and “THE Parable of the Rich Fool.”

“¹⁶ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ ²¹“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” – Luke 12:16-21 NKJV

How does this parable indicate “playing God”?

Where did this begin in the man’s life?

Where did his blessing come from?

Where did he go “off the track”?

What similarities do you see between Jesus parable and the word of James in James 4:13-16?

3 Signs from “The Parable of the Rich Fool” that may indicate we are playing God in our personal lives: (these call from for some deep soul searching and heart checking, being genuinely honest with ourselves about our own lives)

1. **A failure to acknowledge God in our life (v.16)** – Notice some key words in verse 16 and what is not stated or understood by the man in the parable. Verse 16 says, “... the ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.” Key words there are “ground,” “yielded,” “plentifully.” Who created the ground, and who causes it to yield? And if it is “plentiful” in yield who caused that? Well of course God created the ground and every living thing that grows in the ground. If the ground yields it is God who waters it, and provides all that it needs to grow. And if the ground is “plentiful” in its yield and produce, it is God who gives the increase. Strangely missing from verse 16 is

any mention or acknowledgment of God as the source of this blessing, let alone even as the Creator of the very ground that this man survives off of. This is the first indicator (sign) of a life that is perhaps subtlety, yet certainly living as if he or she were God. Simply failing to acknowledge God, indicates a failure to understand that there is One. To acknowledge no God is to assume the role yourself in some way. The wise write of Proverbs tell us in Proverbs 3:5-6, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.*” These verses tells us how to avoid the sometimes subtle and often times overlooked tendency to fail to acknowledge God in our lives. It also give us the direct reward of a life that does (acknowledge God).

How to avoid failing ot acknowledge God:

(1) **Trust in the Lord** – “*Trust in the Lord...*” In understanding a passage it is sometimes helpful to read the verse or passage repeatedly each time emphasizing a different word. For example listen to just the first four words of Proverbs 3:5 when rehearsed this way... think about what truths emerge when the passage is read this way:

“**Trust in the Lord...**” = Don’t just believe, but actually “trust,” lean on, depend on, rely on, put your full confidence in, expect. (Chair illus.)

“**Trust in the Lord...**” = That is put the full weight of your confidence and trust in Him and only Him.

“**Trust in the Lord...**” = There is only One... none other

“**Trust in the Lord...**” = He is Lord, and if he is Lord... really Lord, then he is God. That is he must be fully “trusted” and relied upon. To acknowledge him as Lord is to state that you are not.

(2) **Offer full commitment** – “*... with all your heart...*”

(3) **Practice dependence** – “*... lean not on your own understanding...*” I believe that we must purposefully become less and less dependent on ourselves and more and more dependent on God. This is not an acquired taste. As a matter of fact, most of us have a distaste for ever being dependent on anyone or anything. We desire to be self-made men and women, who can set out and accomplish anything we set our minds to. We are so “self-made” at times that we have no need for God. There truly is no “self-made” man in the truest sense of the word or idea, and those who think they are will one day be humbled by the blow that knocks them off of their “self-made” high-horse. The Bible tells us in Philippians 2:9-11 that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (God).... “⁹*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,*”¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,*”¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

(4) **Acquiesce to God** – “*... in all your ways acknowledge him...*” “Acquiesce” means agree, comply, accept, consent, assent, submit, yield, concede, concur, acknowledge. Give acknowledgement to God in “all.” We fail to acknowledge

God in all. Oh we may acknowledge him in lip service, particular to the “biggies” in our life... our health, our family life, our church life. But here the idea is to acknowledge him even in the smaller, trivialities of our lives.

2. A over-reliance on personal pronouns (v.17) – ^{*"¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'"*} Five times in verse 17 and no less than 15 times in verses 17-21 does the man in the story use self-absorbed language referring to himself. He uses the word “I” at least 6 times successively, and the word “my” 5 times., plus others words that refer exclusively to himself. I, I, I, me, me, me, my, my, my, mine, mine, mine. A bit... or a lot self-absorbed language. This indicates one who is strongly assuming on himself, or herself a “god-like” quality, as if they are totally in control of their life and surroundings. It is delusional thinking, as we see in the parable. When our conversation and thinking become overly dotted with personal pronouns (I, me, mine, myself, etc.) Check yourself out! Sometimes others notice it before we do ourselves. It is a tell-tale sign within a church when you hear those who have assumed a self-imposed “leader” spot using an over-reliance and inflated use of personal pronouns to talks about what “they” do.

Suggested Practice Sessions: Replace all of the reference that the man makes to himself in the first part of the parable with “God” or a reference to God. How does this change readily apply to us!

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall God do, since God has no room to store God’s crops?’ ¹⁸ So he said, ‘God will do this: God will pull down God’s barns and build greater, and there God will store all God’s crops and God’s goods. – Luke 12:16-18 NKJV

It changes to parable from a reliance on man to a reliance on God

It acknowledges that it all belongs to God

It changes the focus.

What would be the effects in our lives if we approached our lives this way?

3. A charting of course independent of God (vv.18-19) – ^{*"¹⁸ So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."*}
- There is a quote that says, “Man proposes, God disposes.” I had a preacher when I was in Seminary that used this quote all the time, Bro. Miles Seaborn. The quote comes from Thomas A Kempis in his celebrated work, “Of the Imitation of Christ.” This work is the second most widely read Christian text after the Bible itself. It contains many sensitively and wisely expressed insights into spirituality and morals. In chapter 19 of book 1 of “Of the Imitation of Christ,” Kempis writes... listen close, ***“For the resolutions of the just depend rather on the grace of God than on their own wisdom; and in Him they always put their trust, whatever they take in hand. For man proposes, but God disposes; neither is the way of man in his own hands”***. What do you think Kempis is

saying? What does the statement, “*For the resolutions of the just depend rather on the grace of God than on their own wisdom...*”? What does the quote/phrase, “*man proposes, but God disposes*” mean? What is that talking about? People may make plans, but they cannot control the outcome of their plans. Proverbs 16:9 says, “*A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.*” And in Proverbs 19:21, “*There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the Lord’s counsel- that will stand.*” And Jeremiah 10:23, “*O Lord, I know the way of a man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.*”

All of this sounds very similar to James’ own words, which truly may be reflecting what he learned from his older half-brother, Jesus, in the very parable we just reviewed. Notice our passage in James 4:13-14:

¹³ 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”; ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

3 Parts to Playing God in Our Own Lives:

1. **The way we view ourselves** – When we imagine ourselves as the final authority over our lives and then live as if this were true we are trekking in the area of playing God in our lives. Do we ever do this? How (cite an example of how we live as if we have the final authority/say over our lives).
2. **The way we view life** – By reading James’ text carefully, we can pinpoint the ways this kind of life is viewed by one who is playing God in her or her own life. There are five that emerge:

Indicators We Are Playing God in Our Own Life:

- (1) **When we act as if we are in control of our time and schedule** – James says in verse 13, “¹³ 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.” James does not condemn wise business planning, but rather planning that leaves out God. Dr. John MacArthur calls Christians who live like this, “practical atheists, living their lives and making their plans as if God did not exist.” That’s pretty powerful language. Such conduct is inconsistent with genuine saving faith, which submits to God.
- (2) **When we act as if we can control outcomes** – Again, James’ words in verse 13 reflect such thinking when he writes, “¹³ 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.” James reminds us in verse 14 that we have not control on such outcomes, for we don’t even know what a day may hold, “¹⁴ 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.”

(3) When we fail to submit our will to His will - James states it this way in verse 15, “¹⁵Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”” The true Christian submits his plans to the lordship of Christ. When we assume the position of “lord” in our own lives, rather than allowing Him to be Lord, we are playing God in our own lives.

Yes, we are to plan ahead, but God wants our planning to be done with His will in mind. We are to allow space for Him to step in and interrupt or alter the plan... should it be His wish to do so. But woven into our heart’s fabric is the desire to have full charge... to call the shots.

3. **The way God, Himself, views it –** Again, James lay before us God’s reasons why this is unacceptable... that is, our playing God in our own lives

3 Reasons Playing God with Ourselves Is Wrong: (God’s Point of View)

- (1) **We have no knowledge of tomorrow –**
- (2) **We have no assurance of a long life –**
- (3) **We have no right to ignore God’s will -**

IV. WHEN WE DECIDE TO STOP PLAYING GOD (James 4:17)

Pulling out of God-playing games requires implementation of new patterns and adoption of new rules. These rules spring from the words, “*Therefore, to him who know to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin*” (v.17). Here are the rules:

Rules:

1. **Rule one: We must know the right thing to do –** This means you and I must evaluate our various life patterns to see if they conform to God’s Word rather than human habits and traditions.
2. **Rule two: We must start doing the right thing –** The God-player is as seriously entrenched in sin as the person living in adultery, or some other form of compromise. The counsel of Scripture could not be simpler... if you’re trying to occupy God’s spot, stop! You’re living in sin.