

JAMES

MARK IT UP

James 4:11-17 **LEADER** Discussion Guide

Week of 5/8/22

Icebreaker: What kind of plans are you making for this summer?

Getting Started: Read James 4:11-17 as a group.

Select 2-3 questions that you think will be most helpful for your discussion.

1. According to verses 11-12, what is the problem with speaking evil against another believer? It may be helpful to read Leviticus 19:16-18 and James 2:8. The idea here is one of slander of another brother or sister in Christ. Slander of anyone is wrong, but slander of a fellow believer divides the church. This kind of speech is fueled by self-righteous judgment, both toward another person and toward the law of God that prohibits this kind of speech. Ultimately, it's a failure of the "royal law" to love one's neighbor as oneself. As a side note, it's important to point out that judging other believers is not always wrong (see 1 Cor 5:1-12). The form of judgment in these verses from James, though, is to be avoided.

Application: What are some practical consequences you've observed when brothers and sisters in Christ speak evil against each other?

We might include here that the community of believers is divided, unity is harmed, and the witness of the church is hindered.

2. Why do you think James is emphasizing that, "There is only one lawgiver and judge..." in v. 12?

When people slander and speak evil against each other, we are acting as judges against each other. In other words, we are attempting to take on a role that is only God's, and we end up maligning or distorting it in the process. James, then, is essentially saying, "There is a judge—and you're not Him!"

Application: When do you feel most tempted or justified to judge others?

This could have a wide range of answers, but one possible scenario is when we have some kind of personal conflict or history with another person. It could also happen when we see someone struggle with a sin that we don't struggle with (because our struggle is in another area). Perhaps we also have some kind of "pet peeve" that we see in another person that simply encourages us to react against them in a self-righteous way.

3. According to James, what's wrong with the perspective of those speaking the words of verse 13?

This is planning without consideration for God's sovereignty over and purposes in our lives. This mindset is one of self-determination without accounting for God's will. This outlook presumes the future will go a certain way without giving thought to the way God can and does use difficulties, struggles, and even failures to bring about His desired outcomes.

Application: Think of some of the major decisions or plans you've made. How did your mindset compare with what's stated in verse 13?

This is an opportunity to think through how we've made plans in the past and examine how we may have adopted this same outlook that James is addressing.

Application: What example can you think of where your best plans didn't go as you wanted, but that you're thankful for now?

Most of us can look back with gratitude about how things haven't always gone according to (our) plan!

4. How would you describe the kind of mindset James calls us to adopt in verses 14-15?

We could summarize it as one of humility and constant dependence upon God. Our lives on this side of eternity are brief and we should live with the awareness of how quickly our circumstances can change. (As an illustration, consider using a spray bottle with the nozzle on "mist" to depict the "mist" that appears for a little time and then vanishes.)

Application: We might feel depressed by verses 14-15, but is it possible that this mindset could actually cause us to live with greater peace and confidence?

There is a real blessing in being able to embrace how out-of-our-control the outcomes of our plans are. This is a perspective that relies on God to do what is best and put our confidence and hope in His plan and work rather than in ourselves.

5. What differences do you think James is calling us to see between the two statements expressed in verses 13 and 15?

Verse 16 helps us see that everything hinges on the attitude of, "If the Lord wills..." Boasting and arrogance define the first statement's autonomous mindset. The second humbly recognizes that God ultimately determines the outcome of our plans.

Application: What do you think it would look like for you to apply the perspective of verse 15 to a decision or plan you're facing right now?

This could be a good question for you to think through ahead of time and consider answering first while people have time to think of their own answer.