

The Vapor (Sacrificial Developer)

Phil EuBank · What Is A Follower Of the Way? · James 4:13-17; James 5:1-6

AT A GLANCE

James diagnoses a hidden posture: we edit our own stories into self-made triumphs and treat wealth as evidence of security, forgetting that life is a vapor under God's plan. Phil EuBank argues that once we accept how briefly we last, the goal shifts from accumulating an empire to developing others — sacrificially, before the mist evaporates.

- Because your life is a mist, plans made without praying 'if the Lord wills' are arrogance dressed as ambition.
- Wealth hoarded for yourself doesn't preserve you; it rots, corrodes, and testifies against you before God.
- A sacrificial developer stays open-minded, open-hearted, and open-handed, investing time and self in others rather than an empire.

“We are more spiritually educated than activated.”

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

James 4:13-17 — Some of you say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to some city. We will stay there a year, do business, and make money.” Listen, think about this: You don’t know what will happen tomorrow. Your life is like a fog. You can see it for a short time, but then it goes away. So you should say, “If the Lord wants, we will live and do this or that.” But now you are proud and boast about yourself. All such boasting is wrong. If you fail to do what you know is right, you are sinning. (ERV)

James 5:1-6 — You rich people, listen! Cry and be very sad because much trouble will come to you. Your riches will rot and be worth nothing. Your clothes will be eaten by moths. Your gold and silver will rust, and that rust will be a proof that you were wrong. That rust will eat your bodies like fire. You saved your treasure in the last days. People worked in your fields, but you did not pay them. They are crying out against you. They harvested your crops. Now the Lord All-Powerful has heard their cries. Your life on earth was full of rich living. You pleased yourselves with everything you wanted. You made yourselves fat, like an animal ready for the day of slaughter. You showed no mercy to good people. They were not against you, but you killed them. (ERV)

The argument

The Hero We Edit Ourselves Into — Why gratitude requires unlearning our own story

Phil EuBank opens by naming a nearly invisible habit: we tell our life story backward, and every accident or gift we received slowly becomes a decision we made. "None of these are conscious edits to our stories," he says, "they're just part of the way I think about and live my life." He cites Christopher Watkins: "the one thing we should never do with a gift is pretend we bought or made it ourselves." This is the posture James is diagnosing before the text even begins — the self-made entrepreneur who forgets that existence, meaning, and love are all received, not achieved.

Insight — Every accomplishment we claim as purely our own is, on inspection, a gift we've forgotten to thank someone for.

Plans Spoken as Assertions Instead of Prayers — James 4:13-17 and the vapor that makes eternity-long promises

James's businessman isn't condemned for planning, traveling, or profit — Phil EuBank notes Scripture praises prudence and "generosity requires capacity; you can't give what you've never built." What's indicted is a plan with no room for God: "if the Lord wills, that's the part he wants us to remember," not a spell to bless our agenda but, as Phil EuBank puts it, "framing our plans as questions rather than assertions." He ties this to Jesus in Gethsemane surrendering, "not my will, but yours be done," and to James's answer for "what is your life?" — "a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." Durability belongs only to what's joined to God's larger plan: "you think that your life... will last. It won't."

Insight — The measure of faith in our planning isn't whether we make plans, but whether we leave them open to being overruled.

Knowing Better Without Doing Better — The sin of omission as a diagnosis of spiritual consumption

James closes the passage with a line Phil EuBank calls easy to skip past: "whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him, for her, it's sin." He turns this on a specifically modern habit — treating sermons, books, and podcasts as if consuming the next one will produce the transformation the last one was meant to. "We are more spiritually educated than activated," he says, noting that James himself lived for decades near Jesus without following him. The standard isn't information; it's obedience to what we already know.

Insight — Spiritual growth is measured by what you've obeyed, not by what you've consumed.

The Rotting Wealth of the Sole Beneficiary — James 5:1-6 and the stagnant heart

James pivots from the planner to the hoarder, warning that riches "rotted," garments "moth-eaten," gold and silver "corroded" — images Phil EuBank notes are deliberately unnatural, since gold doesn't corrode, painted to show "just how distorted the use of these riches are." The wealth was built partly on wages withheld from laborers whose cries "reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts" even though the rich man never heard them. Phil EuBank compares the resulting heart to the Dead Sea — "flow in without flow out... stationary, stagnant, and diseased" — and warns the same can happen collectively, to a church or organization that quietly becomes "the primary beneficiary of its own generosity."

Insight — Wealth or resources that only flow inward, never outward, don't accumulate safety — they decay into stagnation.

The Sacrificial Developer: Open-Minded, Open-Hearted, Open-Handed

Against the self-made entrepreneur, Phil EuBank offers three postures. Open-minded means holding the decision open, not just the outcome: "we hold the outcome loosely and the decision tightly, and we call it surrender." Open-hearted means noticing the harvesters we walk past every day — "don't just be nicer, be attentive" — even though attentiveness costs us empathy in a culture built to remove friction. Open-handed means acting on the nudge before calculating the cost: "never resist a generous impulse... I just assume if I feel this pull from God to be generous, I'm gonna assume that did not come from me." He adds a caution for the already-depleted: this isn't a longer to-do list but an invitation to give "from an overflow rather than from depletion."

Insight — Sacrifice becomes sustainable only when it flows from an already-tended soul, not from an empty one straining to perform.

Cross-references

- [Matthew 26:39](#) — Jesus's surrender in Gethsemane modeled as the pattern behind praying 'if the Lord wills.'
- [James 1:5](#) — recalled as the earlier appeal for wisdom that should shape how we hold our plans open to God.
- [James 5:7-11](#) — pointed ahead to the farmer's patient waiting as the fitting posture for a mist-length life.
- [Genesis 41](#) — cited as an example of God-honoring provision and planning, unlike the entrepreneur who leaves God out.

DEVOTIONAL

Consider how briefly a morning mist holds its shape over a field before the sun takes it apart. James says that is what we are — not diminished by the comparison, just told the truth of it. We build our lives instead as though we were granite: naming buildings, storing gold, narrating our

own rise as though nothing had ever been given, only earned. And under the right light, for a while, it even works. The mist looks solid. But nothing we clutch was ever ours to keep, only ours to steward for a moment before it moves on, or we do. This is not bad news, only unfamiliar news to ears trained by a culture that measures a life by what it accumulates rather than what it releases. The rich man in James's warning did not fail by having wealth; he failed by becoming its only outlet, a heart with no current, receiving and receiving until it turned stagnant and dark like a sea with no mouth to the ocean. The alternative on offer isn't less blessing — it's blessing set moving again, a hand held open rather than clenched, a plan whispered as a question instead of declared as a fact. If the Lord wills. Four words that turn a life from a monument into a gift, passed on before it evaporates. This is what it costs to be a follower of the Way: not the loss of what we love, but the surrender of the illusion that any of it was ever secured by us in the first place. The mist rises, and while it lasts, it can still fall as rain on someone else's field.

Reflection

- What decision have you already made in your heart that you're only asking God to bless rather than truly opening to him?
- Whose daily labor makes your life work that you have stopped noticing — and what would attentiveness to them cost you?
- Where in your life have you mistaken accumulation for security, forgetting that none of it was ever yours to keep?

Closing prayer

God, thank you for the gift of pursuing you, and for the hope found only in you. Remind us of the legacy we can leave when our lives become a sacrifice for you — it's the better way. In Jesus' name, amen.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Your life is a vapor held in God's plan; sacrifice for others, not accumulation for yourself, is what survives it.

This week

This week, name one person God keeps bringing to mind — a coworker, barista, or neighbor — and take one concrete step toward them: a note, a meal, or real attention. Before deciding, pray 'if the Lord wills' over your own plans.

Return to [James 4:15](#)

