

James’ letter contains the hope of the second coming of Christ. Meanwhile, Christians are to continue in prayer and praise, and in Christian living. So what do we do when people and plans disappoint us? What do we do when life doesn’t turn out the way we expected? Take a look at James 4: “*Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that’*” (James 4:13-15). Literally, all such boasting is worthless. It is not only morally bankrupt; it is materially useless.

So let’s not boast about our plans for tomorrow, because we could be very disappointed. “*You do not even know what will happen tomorrow,*” verse 14 says. It could be very different than what we expect. A special report on *This American Life* follows the lives of several people currently living what they call “Plan B” for their lives. The host, Ira Glass, took an informal poll, which reflects the human experience. He asked a room of a hundred people to think back to the beginning of adulthood when they were first formulating a plan for their lives. He called it Plan A, “the fate you were sure fate had in store.” He then asked those who were still following this plan to raise their hands. Only one person confessed she was still living Plan A. She was 23 years old. (Jill Carattini, “Redirection,” *A Slice of Infinity*, 7-5-17, [rzm.org/a-slice-of-infinity/redirection](http://rzm.org/a-slice-of-infinity/redirection))

Life almost never turns out the way we plan, so don’t boast. Ricardo Lockette rose up the ranks of pro football and eventually helped the Seattle Seahawks win the Super Bowl in 2014. But on November 1, 2015, the wide receiver and special teams player, was blindsided with a vicious hit and was left sprawled on the ground in front of 90,000 fans. A year after the hit that nearly broke his neck and took his life, this is what Lockette had to say:

“It’s crazy what matters to you when you’re in that situation. Cars, jewelry, big houses, Super Bowls? It all seems so meaningless. I came up from nothing. Undrafted, practice squad, released a bunch of times, then I made it to three Super Bowls in a row. I have a saying, kind of like a mantra. “A hundred dollars and a dream.” I used to want a black Lamborghini and a seven-room house. That’s what I dreamed about. Now, all of a sudden, I can’t move. And the only thing that mattered to me in the entire world was being able to see my family again, to hold my kids in my arms.”

After surgery to repair his damaged vertebrae and a few weeks of serious rehabilitation, he was walking around just fine and playing basketball again. However, a few months later, in early May 2016, he made the decision to retire from football at age 29. Lockette’s head coach, Pete Carroll, used to preach to his players all the time: “You live in a temporary fairy tale. Your fans are temporary. Your coaches are temporary. Your teammates, as much as they love you, are temporary. The big houses you live in are temporary. You can enjoy all that stuff, but it’s not what will bring you happiness.”

Lockette says, “When I was laying motionless on that turf in Dallas, I was completely dependent upon the help of others. It was the exact opposite of the mindset I had from the moment I got to Seahawks camp as a rookie: You’re a rock star. You’re a leader. You’re the alpha. This is all yours for the taking. Then, in

one second, you're helpless." (Ricardo Lockette, "Am I About to Die?" *The Player's Tribune*, 7-5-16; [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

Three and half years ago, a woman I know through a friend was enjoying her career as a museum curator. Then on a Friday morning in May, one second changed her life. A workplace accident left her with a Traumatic Brain Injury that has left her permanently disabled. We don't know what tomorrow will bring, so we should not boast about our plans for tomorrow, because we could be very disappointed. More than that, we could be very dead. Verse 14 asks the pointed and sobering question, "*What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*" Our lives are very brief in the grand scheme of things. We're here today and gone tomorrow.

When I conduct a funeral or memorial service I often think, this person wasn't planning to get sick and die when they did. But since life is like a mist, a vapor that appears for a little while and then passes away, it apparently was their time. Friends, our lives are very fragile. **Life is unpredictable.** We don't even know what will happen today, much less next week or next year. The truth is that no one can predict the future. **Life is brief.** Our lives are like a "mist" that appears for a little while and then vanishes. The Greek word here is the word *atmos*, from which we get the word "atmosphere." Our lives are nothing more than a misty fog in the grand scheme of things. Our lives are like a vapor: here one minute and gone the next.

You see, if all we had to do was to live and then die—that wouldn't be so hard. But when confronted with the brevity of life, we usually have no choice but to think about more serious questions: What do I believe about life and death? What are the most important things in life? What happens when life comes to an end? What lasting good can I do with my life? What is God's plan for my life? We need hope for our souls and... We need the assurance of faith.

Pastor Mike Fleischmann, in one of his recent blogs, wrote about Colman Mockler, the former CEO of Gillette who is still celebrated in the business world as one of the most effective CEO's of all time. When he graduated from Harvard Business School with an MBA, he went to work for the Gillette Corporation and steadily worked his way up the ladder to CEO.

Gillette was a 75 year old company, yet Colman took the company to new heights of success. Under his management they came to dominate the market. After 16 years as CEO, Colman was at the top of the world. *Forbes* magazine had just put him on the cover of their next issue celebrating his leadership and success. The magazine wouldn't hit the newsstands for another week, but on the morning of January 25th, 1991 they sent him an advance copy to review. The rest of the executives literally applauded him as he carried the magazine back to his office. In so many ways it was a fantastically good day for Colman. Decades of hard work had brought him to this point. He had beaten back three hostile takeover bids and revolutionized the company. He had increased the value of the stock 50-fold. He was, literally, celebrated by the entire business world. And with millions in the bank, he had just announced that he would be retiring within a few months.

But there was one thing that made it an unexpectedly tragic day. With the staff applauding, Colman walked down the hall, stepped into his office, shut the door, and crumpled to the floor. Within moments he was dead of a massive heart attack, still clutching the *Forbes* magazine that featured him on the cover.

(“Your Most Precious Resource,” Mike Fleischmann blog, 10-3-16; [www.mikefleischmann.net/?p=2594](http://www.mikefleischmann.net/?p=2594); [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

All of us will die someday (if the Lord doesn’t come first). All of us will come to the end of our days, and it will come much quicker than expected. Life goes by so unbelievably fast, so don’t boast about your plans for tomorrow, for you could be disappointed—or dead.

Instead, submit to God’s will. Let God have his way in your life. Verse 15 advises, “*Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’*” There is nothing wrong with making plans. What’s wrong is making plans *without* God. You see, we are not in control; God is. We are not in charge; the Lord is. My great aunt would say, “*The Lord willing...*” whenever she spoke of a planned meeting or event. When our plans disappoint, when life doesn’t turn out the way we expected, let’s stop demanding our own way and defer to the Lord of all creation, and say, “*The Lord willing...*”

That’s the attitude Steve Hayner had before he died on January 31, 2015, at 66 years of age. Steve was the president of Columbia Theological Seminary (near Atlanta, Georgia) when he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. After tests had revealed the chemotherapy wasn’t working, Hayner wrote, “The cancer continues to have the upper hand. What now seems clear from a purely physical perspective is that in all probability the remainder of my life on this earth is now to be counted in weeks and months.” Then, in a blog post, Hayner addressed the many people who had been praying for a miracle of healing. He wrote:

Many are praying for one of God’s “big” miracles. We are as well. But it is not how God answers prayer that determines our response to God. God is committed to my ultimate healing. But being cured of my cancer may or may not be a part of that healing work... One person told me how disturbing it is to her to watch so many thousands of prayers on my behalf and yet to see a minimal of physical evidence of healing. Does God really heal? ... Does the amount of prayer have any special impact? Honestly, while I understand the importance and logic of questions like this... most of these questions are not ones that are important to me.

I truly don’t know what God has planned... I could receive “healing” through whatever means, or I could continue to deteriorate. But life is about a lot more than physical health. It is measured by a lot more than medical tests and vital signs. More important than the particular aspects of God’s work with us... is God’s overall presence with us, nourishing, equipping, transforming, empowering, and sustaining us for whatever might be God’s call to my life today. TODAY, my call might be to learn something new about rest. TODAY, my call might be to encourage another person in some very tangible way. TODAY, my call might be to learn something new about patience, endurance, and the identification with those who suffer. TODAY, my call might be to mull through a new insight about God’s truth or character.

Then Steve Hayner closed his blog post by quoting the poet E. E. Cummings: “I thank you God for this most amazing day...” (Leslie Scanlon, “Columbia president affirms faith despite spreading cancer,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 7-29-14; [www.PreachingToday.com](http://www.PreachingToday.com))

He was a man who has surrendered to God’s will. And that’s exactly what we must do when life doesn’t go the way we planned. When people disappoint, let God be Judge. When plans disappoint, let God be King.

James has wisely reminded us that, “faith that follows” is “*patient and stands firm, because the Lord’s coming is near*” (5:8).

Amen.