

# ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute" ---- Volume XI Number 7

"A Troubling Passage and a Lesson on Pride"  
"...Knows to do good, but does it not...."

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Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 7th of 2012 -- and the 127th email sermon overall.

"Ministers' Minute" is a free service of encouragement to preachers, chaplains, donors, and Christian workers around the world. This sermon deals with a difficult passage and we pray that it will encourage you and those you teach. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, or use components of it!

May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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**ARM'S ABARC.ORG -- A FREE RESOURCE WEB SITE!**

Here's one of a myriad of resources at [www.abarc.org](http://www.abarc.org)!

**The Church in the Bible** by Don DeWelt

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## **ARM FAST FACT**

So far in 2012, 86 ABA Bible courses have been mailed from ARM every day-- and THIRTY-FIVE *new inmate/students* have been enrolled each day!

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**"Assuming too Much about the Future" -- James 4:13-18**

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene hampered him and he asked his home office to hire a plane. Arrangements were made and he was told to go at once to a nearby airport, where the plane would be waiting. When he arrived at the airport, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into the wind and they soon were in the air. "Fly over the north side of the fire," yelled the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes." "Why?" asked the pilot. "Because I'm going to take pictures," cried the photographer. "I'm a photographer and photographers take pictures!" After a pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?"

On one of his European tours, the master magician and locksmith Harry Houdini found himself locked in by his own thinking. After he had been searched and manacled in a Scottish town jail, the old turnkey shut him in a cell and walked away. Houdini quickly freed himself from his shackles and then tackled the cell lock. But despite all his efforts, the lock wouldn't open. Finally, ever more desperate but completely exhausted, he leaned against the door--and it swung open so unexpectedly that he nearly fell headlong into the corridor. The turnkey had not locked it.

**How easy it is to assume too much! How much trouble we can get into by assuming things are true without stopping to think, examine, and re-check our presuppositions.**

**James has something to say about the assumptions we make about the future. Let's look at James 4:13-17**

***13 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." 14 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. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (NIV)***

**Here is my outline of our text: The Assumption, the Actuality, the Attitude, and the Antidote. First,**

### **1. The Assumption vss 13 and 16**

**We have already illustrated the danger of assumptions ... the photographer ASSUMED THAT THE PILOT WAS HIS PILOT AND THE STUDENT FLYER ASSUMED THAT THE PASSENGER WAS HIS INSTRUCTOR! Dangerous!**

Equally dangerous is the assumption that we have tomorrow. The classic parable of Jesus illustrates:

**Luke 12:16-21 16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall**

those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (KJV)

**How often we have the attitude of the rich man! We think we have all the time in the world when actually, we are far closer to meeting our Maker than we think!**

## **2. The Actuality vs 14**

*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.*

The brevity of our lives! Have you recently had the experience of talking about a particular event in your life that seems fairly recent, only to suddenly discover it happened 15 or 20 years ago? HOW CAN IT BE? The younger we are, the longer our life seems to be, especially when that 16th or 21st birthday seems to be so far away. But the older we are the more we are amazed at how quickly our years pass by!

How would you like to spend 2 years making phone calls to people who aren't home? Sound absurd? According to one time management study, that's how much time the average person spends trying to return calls to people who never seem to be in. Not only that, we spend 6 months waiting for the traffic light to turn green, and another 8 months reading junk mail.

These unusual statistics should cause us to do time-use evaluation. Once we recognize that simple "life maintenance" can chip away at our time in such huge blocks, we will see how vital it is that we don't busy ourselves "in vain" (Ps 39:6). Psalm 39 gives us some perspective. In David's complaint to God, he said, "You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You" (v. 5). He meant that to an eternal God our time on earth is brief. And He doesn't want us to waste it. When we do, we throw away one of the most precious commodities He gives us. Each minute is an irretrievable gift--and unredeemable slice of eternity. Sure, we have to make the phone calls, and we must wait at the light. But what about the rest of our time? Are we using it to advance the cause of Christ and to enhance our relationship with Him? Is our time well spent?

**We must face the actuality ...that our lives are so brief... and we must act accordingly. That demands the right attitude and that is our third "A".**

## **3. The Attitude Vs 15**

"I want God to a willing partner of how I spend my time." The verse reads thusly:  
*Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

**The key attitude is this: Whatever I do, I want to check it out with God's Word and pray that it can be done with God as my partner. If this is truly our attitude, we'll be able to approach all we do with an assurance we have His aid and blessing!**

A boy and his father were hiking a familiar path and enjoying their time together. As they negotiated a sharp turn in one of the narrower sections of their route, they came across a big rock that had turned loose, tumbled down the hillside, and come to rest dead center of their trail. Either it would have to be moved or they were blocked and would have to turn around and go home. "Do you think I can move it?" asked the child.

"If you use all the strength you have," replied the father, "I'm sure you can."

So the little boy looked at the big stone, chose an angle of attack, and began pushing with all his might. He strained and grunted. Because it was a warm day, it wasn't long until he broke a sweat. Summoning all the strength he had, he pushed and pushed. But the heavy rock refused to yield.

With frustration obvious both on his face and in his voice, he turned to his dad and said, "You were wrong. I just can't do it."

Squatting beside him so he could look his son square in the face, the boy's father smiled and said, "No, son. You just haven't used all your strength yet. I'm right here with you, and you haven't asked me to help!" Soon the path was clear. The two of them proceeded on what had appeared to the child to be a closed path.

**Sometimes we can help each other with obstacles and heavy loads. Pride keeps some of us from asking another's aid. Then, when the barrier is still too great, we frequently forget that we haven't used all our strength until we have asked for the help of a loving Father who is standing nearby. "Give all your worries to him, because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7, New Century Version)**

**The great advantage of having an attitude of "Lord Willing", the attitude of "God is my partner in all I do" is this: We have his power and blessing in every endeavor because we approach all we do by FIRST inviting the Creator to be our leader and our energy!**

**This leads us to the fourth "A":**

#### **4. The Antidote to Assumptive living vs 17 .**

*17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (NIV)*

**This is one of the toughest verses in the Bible. If we take it to mean that each of us sins as soon as we KNOW more GOOD than we do, we are all sinners everyday. Of course, that is true. But the verse wasn't written to heap guilt upon us.**

Taken in the context of the meaning of the passage, it applies to the proper use of our brief time on earth. In other words, "IF YOU KNOW YOUR LIFE IS SHORT AND YOU SHOULD ALWAYS ACT WITH GOD'S WILL IN MIND, AND FAIL TO DO THAT, YOU ARE SINNING!"

The solution to assuming the future and wasting our lives (like the Rich Man in Lk 12) is to live each day, each moment, with a consciousness of God's will for our lives and a willingness to live for Him and His purpose moment by moment. This involves making Matthew 6:33 our approach to living. It will thus involve prioritizing our lives according to the spiritual and the eternal, not the physical and the temporal.

*One day this expert was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration I'm sure those students will never forget. After I share it with you, you'll never forget it either. As this man stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, "Okay, time for a quiz." Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on a table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.*

*When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?"*

*Everyone in the class said, "Yes."*

*Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks.*

*Then he smiled and asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was onto him. "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied. And he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"*

*"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"*

*One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!"*

*"No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."*

What are the big rocks in your life? A project that YOU want to accomplish? Time with your loved ones? Your faith, your education, your finances? A cause? Teaching or mentoring others? Remember to put these BIG ROCKS in first or you'll never get them in at all.

**So please reflect on this short story sometime later today and ask yourself this question: What are God's "big rocks" in my life or business? Then, put those in your jar. This, then is the key to the passage. Realizing we don't have an unlimited amount of time, we listen to God and His Word to help us determine WHAT THE BIG ROCKS ARE AND WHICH ONES ARE SO IMPORTANT THEY MUST GO IN FIRST.**

*13 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." 14 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. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.*

**17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do—WHO KNOWS HOW SHORT LIFE IS AND HOW MUCH WE NEED TO APPLY GOD'S PRIORITIES--and doesn't do it, --OR FAILS TO PUT ETERNAL THINGS FIRST – TO THAT ONE, it is sin..**

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"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B  
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