

HOMILY – “Planning in God’s Will”

INTRODUCTION:

How often do we plan things that just don’t end up the way we expect it? I did not expect to be here in an empty sanctuary this Sunday morning. In fact, it is rare that anything goes exactly like we expect it to be completed.

One time when I was young, my parents planned a special camping trip to Cape Cod. There were four of us kids and there may have been a cousin with us too. We were tent campers so favorable weather for setting up camp was highly preferred.

After getting off work, my father comes home to find everything packed up and we were ready to go. We had an old green station wagon, and we were pulling an old second-hand utility trailer. Not long after we started, you guessed it, it started to rain. Traffic started to build, and everything started to slow down except the rain.

From the back seat, I could see my dad tensing up. He started muttering with an occasional mild curse directed at other drivers or the situation. With my quick wit at the ready, though not always appreciated, I said, “Hey Dad, why don’t you let a smile be your umbrella?” A brief flash of anger

crossed his face, but smiling the corners of his mouth curled into a smile.

This section of proverbs addresses the plans and motivations that guide us and living into God's purposes for our lives.

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 16:1–9 (NIV84)

To man belong the plans of the heart,
but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue.

² All a man's ways seem innocent to him,
but motives are weighed by the Lord.

³ Commit to the Lord whatever you do,
and your plans will succeed.

⁴ The Lord works out everything for his own ends—

even the wicked for a day of disaster.

⁵ The Lord detests all the proud of heart.

Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

⁶ Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.

⁷ When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord,

he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

⁸ Better a little with righteousness
than much gain with injustice.

⁹ In his heart a man plans his course,
but the Lord determines his steps.

BODY:

Here is an excerpt from the second chapter of *Here Today, There Tomorrow: Unleashing Your Church's Potential* by Gary L. McIntosh. He starts with some common reservations people in churches might have with planning the direction of the church:

"I don't know about all this planning. As long as we are teaching the Word, why do we need to be so concerned about where our church is going in the future? Can't we just have faith in the Holy Spirit to lead us?"

Long-term planning in the church today is just like corporate planning—church leaders may have good intentions, but their strategic planning has strategized the Holy Spirit right out of church ministry.

Somewhere deep inside many churches there is a sense that planning is not biblical—that those who

really trust the Lord will accomplish things in a more spiritual way. They believe that too much planning for the future leaves God out of the picture and rests entirely on human strength and insight. Others assert that strategic planning is a corporate concept that churches have thoughtlessly borrowed from the business world. These conclusions are born out of a poor understanding of what planning really is.

A Biblical Perspective on Planning

Planning is no more than an attempt to understand the will of God for our church and respond to it by our actions. It is not an independent humanistic activity that thwarts God's ability to work. It can be a spiritual activity that is an expression of our faith in God. Sensing where the Lord is leading and making a unified effort to move in that direction actually honors God and displays our trust in him. Planning is not a faithless activity or a trendy technique stolen from corporate America—it is what believers do as faithful stewards of God's resources. Thinking of planning in this light, we see it emerge as a key theme throughout Scripture.

Planning as Wisdom

Planning and giving forethought to decisions is described as wise behavior throughout the book of Proverbs. Those who plan seek guidance and give

forethought to their future are considered wise and held in contrast with those who do not. Proverbs 13:16 says, "A wise man thinks ahead; a fool doesn't, and even brags about it!" (tlb). Proverbs 14:15 adds, "A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps" (niv). Those who do not think about their future are considered foolish, while those who plan and spend time seeking the Lord's direction are wise and prudent. Additionally, Proverbs suggests that those who make hasty decisions make poor, uninformed decisions (19:2), while those who seek the Lord together and commit their plans to him will experience success (15:22; 16:3).

Paul, in 1 Corinthians, explains his behavior in light of these principles. Even though his ministry plans changed, he wanted the Corinthians to know that it was not on account of carelessness or a lack of planning. He had significant spiritual reasons for postponing his visit to them. He felt the need, as a minister of the gospel committed to their spiritual growth, to explain his rationale for the change in plans.

Planning as Good Stewardship

Not only is planning a wise activity with great benefit, it makes possible good stewardship of the resources God entrusts to us. As church leaders,

we are responsible to handle the resources of the church in a way that furthers God's kingdom; this is only possible when we take time to plan. Good stewardship is more than spending a budget wisely; it includes using the resources God gives us to minister to others in an intentional way. We want our churches to move forward in a way that honors God, honors the resources he has given us, and honors the opportunities he places before us. When we are short sighted or fail to recognize the long-term significance of the decisions we are making, we miss opportunities to be faithful and fruitful for the future.

In Acts 6, Luke describes a growing church that was missing opportunities to minister because it was disorganized. The Holy Spirit was transforming lives, and the church was bursting at the seams with new believers. But there was a problem. A growing number of widows in Jerusalem were going without food and being overlooked in the distribution of resources to help them. The issue was finally brought to the attention of the leaders, and they put a plan in place to solve the problem.

Even though this new church had the people and material resources needed to care for the widows, they were ineffective in responding to the needs, because they did not have a plan. They had not taken time to set priorities, delegate

responsibilities, and coordinate tasks. Like the church of Acts 6, when we fail to plan, we fail to be good stewards of the opportunities God gives us to meet needs and minister to those around us.

Planning as Faith

Scripture is clear that God is the one who develops plans and brings fruit through our plans; in this way our planning is an expression of our faith in him. We try to listen and discern his voice as we plan, but biblical planning also recognizes the role of God to empower the plans. Proverbs 16:9 says that, “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (esv). Although we make plans and work hard to accomplish them, ultimately we trust in the Lord to bring success and spiritual progress.

Planning is an expression of our faith in God.

Paul recognized the unique role God plays in advancing or prospering ministry: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6 nrsv). True spiritual change and growth comes from the Lord, and our long-term planning honors the vital role that the Lord plays in the realization of any goals.

Planning is also an expression of our faith—we are putting our confidence in the Lord, expecting him to work. We can plan confidently because God is faithful and we know his purposes will be accomplished. Proverbs 19:21 says that, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand” (esv). We may not know exactly how our needs or goals will be met—especially in the initial stages of planning—but we move forward, trusting in his guidance and provision. Even if our plans do not entirely align with God’s purposes, planning is not futile. We can plan confidently because we know his purposes will ultimately prevail.

God may sometimes alter our plans to accomplish his purposes, but this does not diminish the significance or value of seeking him and developing a plan. This point is illustrated in Acts 16, where Paul and his companions plan to preach and minister in Asia. When they attempted to go to Asia, the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to enter Bithynia and minister there. Instead, they were directed in a vision to go to Macedonia. Wisely, they decided to change course so they could minister where God wanted them, despite their previous plans.

It is interesting to note that Paul and his companions were not in the wrong for having a

plan, nor were they reprimanded for attempting to accomplish a plan different than what God wanted. However, they were open to a change in their plan and willingly responded to it after concluding that the Lord wanted them to minister in Macedonia instead of Asia. There are times when God's plans will trump our plans, but that does not diminish the value of planning.

Planning allows us to be good stewards of the opportunities God brings to our church.

Planning is not, then, something reserved for corporations or something that is unspiritual. It is a wise activity that allows us to be good stewards of the opportunities for ministry that God brings our way. And when we plan, we are expressing our faith and confidence in the Lord."

CONCLUSION:

C. Reuben Anderson tells this story: An engineer was confined to his bed because his lower limbs were paralyzed from a serious accident. Because of his reputation for great skill he was asked to design and prepare the blueprints for a great suspension bridge.

After many months his plans were completed and placed in the hands of those who were to be in

charge of the construction of the bridge. After many more months the bridge construction was completed. The engineer was brought on his bed to the scene of the beautiful bridge spanning the wide river.

As he watched for the first time, the cars sped over the bridge, and as he looked at the blueprints which he held in his hands, the tears began to fill his eyes, and he cried out, "It's just like the plan; it's just like the plan."

AMEN & amen. Let us Pray.