

A New Year's Plea – Plan

Jeremiah 29: 11-14

Suppose the thought enters your mind that you want to build a house. You sit down and make a list of all the materials you think you'll need. Then you order them to be delivered to the lot where you will build. Everything is piled in the center of the lot, and the next day the bulldozer comes to excavate the basement, but everything is in the way. It's all laying right where the bulldozer has to dig!

Why?

A failure to plan.

Without some rudimentary planning you probably won't have anything to eat when you get up in the morning. And without some detailed planning no one can build a house, let alone a skyscraper or shopping mall or city.

If producing shelter, food and clothing is valuable, then planning is valuable. Nothing but the simplest impulses gets accomplished without some forethought which we call a plan.

All of us know this and practice it in relation to the basic physical necessities of life. We take steps to see that we have enough to eat and enough clothing to keep us warm.

But do we take our spiritual needs that seriously?

Do we apply the same earnestness in planning to maximize our spiritual life and ministry as we do in planning to make a living?

What I would like to do is to try to persuade you to set aside time to plan.

It may be once a week or once a month or quarterly - which seems more realistic if you're anything like me – specifically to plan your devotional life and ministry, because the bulldozer of God's Spirit often arrives at the scene of our hearts ready to begin some great work of building only to find that due to our lack of planning there are piles of disordered things in his way demonstrating that we're not ready for him.

The way I hope to motivate you to do this is to give four examples of planning in the Bible:

First, some illustrations from the Proverbs

Second, the apostle Paul's plan

Third, the planning of the Father

Fourth, the planning of His Son

First, let's look at the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 6:6-7 , "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest."

The ant is an example not only because it works so hard, but also because it plans ahead. Even in summer, the ant instinctively knows that there will be harder and leaner times ahead, a time called winter. So, in the summer, it stores food when food is readily available and easier to collect. It is this forethought that allows the ant colony to survive the winter. If the tiny and lowly ant does this, shouldn't we humans be able to do likewise?

Proverbs 14:15 , "A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thoughts to his steps."

The difference between planning and not planning is whether we see the path out ahead of us that leads to our future or whether all our focus and attention is placed on what's immediately in front of us with no thought toward the future.

Simply put, if you are not a planner, then you will be at the mercy of others who try to give you counsel about how to act in the here and now so as to be happy in the here and now without consideration for the future.

I think I was somewhat guilty of not being much of a planner in college. When someone asked me if I had any plans for the weekend, I'd often say no, and they'd say great, then you're coming with me! I'm sure my overall GPA would've risen at least a half a grade point if I'd only stuck to a plan that emphasized more study and less socializing.

But as Proverbs say, *"the simple believes anything, but a prudent man looks where he is going."* He considers the days to come and what they are bringing and thinks about how best to prepare for them and use them to accomplish his purposes.

Proverbs 15:22 , *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."*

Here, the wisdom of planning is taken for granted, and the writer simply gives us advice on how to make plans that succeed.

He says, Don't be so independent that you think yourself above counsel.

Read the wisdom of others who have gone before you.

Talk to experienced and wise people.

Watch the way others do things and learn from their mistakes and successes.

I remember a few Christmases ago, I brought home a gecko for Lily – I felt like we shorted her on Christmas presents – anyway, I knew very little about these little lizards, but I was amazed at all the information I acquired just by asking someone who worked at the pet-shop.

In that one conversation with the pet store worker, I learned more about geckos than I ever wanted to know, but I wouldn't have if I hadn't asked. It's always wise to ask someone who has already walked ahead of you.

Proverbs 16:3, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

Again, planning is taken for granted and the issue here is: How can we plan in such a way that what we produce will have abiding value and not just pass away overnight?

Answer: Commit it to the Lord.

That is, **always seek the Lord's guidance and strength in your planning.** Trust his wisdom and not your own. Then your plans will bear fruit that stays.

Proverbs 24:27, "Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house."

This probably means that it's extremely important to be able to support yourself by the productivity of the field before you establish your own household. Perhaps in modern day lingo, we'd say to a young person today: Get a job before you get married. Or at least plan how you are going to support the new household you are establishing.

Proverbs 31: 15 – 16, "She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard."

Here the model homemaker is a model planner in two ways:

First, she gets up early and assigns tasks to her maids. (Wouldn't it be nice if we could all have maids?)

But the point is ...you cannot assign tasks to your maids if you have no plan about what you would like accomplished that day.

Second, she has an eye toward the future. She buys a field, not on whim, but envisions a vineyard that will benefit her household in the future. Growing a vineyard takes a lot of hard work and patience and will scare most people away. She knows she will not taste the fruits of her labor and investment for a number of years, but makes the transaction anyway, trusting God that her investment will pay dividends.

Conclusion from Proverbs:

Careful planning is part of what makes a person wise and productive.

Not planning is considered foolish and dangerous.

This is true even though Proverbs teach us that we do not know what the future may bring: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." (*Proverbs 16:9*).

The fact that the Lord is ultimately in control of the future does not mean we shouldn't plan. It means we should commit our work to the Lord and trust him to establish our plans according to his loving purposes.

Now let's move on to the New Testament.

We will take just one example of Paul's planning from the many that we could take from the book of Acts and from his letters.

Romans 15:20-28 says,

"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation

... But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for awhile. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there ... So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. "

Here is a typical example of how the apostle Paul carried out his mission.

And I think we should learn from him that planning is essential to a productive ministry. And I mean your personal ministry as well as the more complex organism of church ministries. Paul was the greatest church planter who ever lived. He accomplished more in his life for the spread of the reign of Christ than any other person. So, I think we would do well to seriously consider his method, and part of his method was his planning.

He had a general guideline:

He wanted to preach where no one had preached before.

Then he developed a specific plan from this guideline:

He would take a gift to Jerusalem; then he would go to Rome to establish a western base, from which he would then go to Spain.

What makes this especially significant is that as far as we know his plan fell through.

He was arrested in Jerusalem.

He went to Rome as a prisoner and probably never got to Spain.

It's just like we saw in the Proverbs:

God is the one who finally makes the future. But we plan nevertheless.
God uses our planning even if we are unable to fulfill it.

For example, if Paul had not planned to use Rome as a base of operations for a trip to Spain, he probably never would have written the greatest letter the world has ever known—the epistle to the Romans.
Planning is crucial in Christian living and Christian ministry—even when God overrules our planning.

I'm sure that about a year ago, we all had some specific plans for 2025.

How many of them came to fruition?

I bet not nearly as many compared to those plans that had to be changed or completely cancelled.

What are your plans for 2026? Are you prepared to have them cancelled?

Julie and I hoping to take a trip to Australia in the next couple of years. We want our sons to see where their grandfather grew up. (My three daughters have already been there.)

Will it happen? I don't know, but we're planning on it.

Maybe you are planning a wedding, and all the invitations are ready to be sent out.

Maybe you have surgery scheduled for 2026. We'll pray that all goes well.

Maybe you're planning to enroll in college or tech school or seminary.

But what if the wedding gets delayed or cancelled? What if something happens in the world and all our plans are put on hold? Remember 2020? It's not that far in our rearview - mirror.

When things get cancelled, we get frustrated and we often forget about God's greater plan.

The ultimate reason for planning is that God is a God who plans and we are created in his image to exercise dominion in the earth under his lordship and to bring Him glory.

I don't think it's even possible to conceive of a God who does not act according to his own eternal planning—that is, a God who has knee jerk responses to stimuli rather than deliberate actions that fit into his wise purpose.

Isaiah 46:9-10: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

Ephesians 1:9-10: "God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth."

Acts 2:23: "This Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."

Since God is a God who does all things according to plan it befits us to approach the most important things of life with forethought and plan, not haphazardly.

Finally, Jesus had a mission to accomplish, and he finished it with forethought and planning.

When his mother urged him to do a miracle at the wedding in Cana, he said, "My hour is not yet come" (John 2:4). There was a planned and appointed hour for the revelation of his power. He would stay with the plan.

Luke 9:51 says, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." He knew that the plan meant death in Jerusalem and he didn't shrink back from the plan.

But he wasn't driven against his will. The Father's plan was his plan. He said this about his life in *John 10:18*, "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Conclusion:

Very specifically, my hope for all of us this new year is that we take time to plan out the most important things in our lives.

Plan how you are going to spend time with your spouse to deepen and strengthen this marriage relationship ordained by God.

Plan how you are going to spend time playing with and teaching your children.

Plan how you are going to get the amount of exercise you need to stay healthy.

Plan how you are going to get enough sleep.

Plan how much you should eat and how you are not going to overindulge.

Plan your vacation so that it really gives rest and spiritual renewal.

And by God's grace, your plans will succeed!

But most important, plan how prayer is going to be a real thing in your life and the reading God's Word and how you're going to reach your neighbor for Christ.

And if we fail today, we'll try again tomorrow by leaning on God's love and grace and power.

But without a plan these most important things always get pushed aside by the tyranny of the urgent.

So, my plea to you is that you set aside a regular time to plan, especially to plan your life of prayer and the study of God's word.

Perhaps give some thought how God might want to use you in the immediate future in a special way.

Plan the communications you've been putting off.

The Bible verses you want to teach your children,

the visit you want to make,

the book you want to read,

the neighbor you want to talk to.

The Book of Proverbs teaches us to plan.

The greatest missionary who ever lived was a planner.

God is a God who does all things according to His good and perfect plan.

And Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem because of the most loving plan ever devised.

He planned for our joy. Let us plan for his glory. Amen.