

Proverbs (Part 3) – Plans

Matt Younger – August 10, 2014

Hey, good morning. You look good. One of the reasons I love pastoring this church, this campus, so much is I feel like you get to pastor a bunch of people who are in bigger intersections in their lives. This is like Ground Zero for big questions and big answers (twenty- and thirty-somethings). Can I get an *amen*? Yeah. I love pastoring this church.

I think about the questions. It's, "Should I move to Uptown, or should I stay living with my parents where it's cheaper? Should I stay with this job that's kind of boring or go to grad school? Should I finally pay for a TollTag or just keep getting those ZipCash things in the mail?" We've all been there. You know what I'm talking about.

"Should I move to the 'burbs, raise a family where it's a little bit cheaper, or stay in Dallas?" The answer is obviously the latter! "Do I keep dating this guy who is kind of weirding me out a little bit?" The answer is *no*. "Well, how do I break up with him? How do I move on? Where do I find that person?" A lot of big questions. A lot of big answers.

I feel like, in a way, we're kind of like the Dallas road system right now here. You guys know what I'm talking about. We are under construction. We're waiting. We're confused. We're trying to figure out where the heck our exit is to get to what's next. I think we can resonate with that. When I think about your plans and the conversations we have, I see a lot of your plans coming into fruition. I see a lot of us confused by our plans. I hear a lot of crickets with our plans. I see a lot of our plans changing, and I see a lot of us waiting for what we hope the Lord does in our future.

Fortunately, there's a great book that would talk about this. It's Proverbs. Let's go there right now. Proverbs, chapter 16. It's a great book about plans. You know, the Bible is notoriously not a book about technique. You're not going to get a lot of self-help or 10-step kind of language in the Bible. It's a whole lot less about what you need to do and a whole lot more about the person you need to be.

The focus of the proverbs, the upshot, the takeaway of the proverbs is that you need wisdom. You absolutely need wisdom. It's more profitable than gold. It's more precious than a jewel. There is nothing you should want more than wisdom. This is a father pleading with his son, telling him, "Get wisdom. It's the most valuable thing on earth." Wisdom can be properly translated as *skill*. If we're looking for wisdom, we're looking for skill, namely skill in the art of godly living.

When you look at the Old Testament, you see the Law and the Prophets. A lot of times, those are kind of the large sweeps. This is what a restored humanity can look like. When you get into Proverbs, this book is wonderful. It gets really practical. It spotlights day-to-day behavior and personal character. It's kind of like a TED talk. I mean, it just gets really, really, really practical. I think the proverbs have a lot to say to us, because we all know we have plans. I hope we know we need wisdom.

Let's go to Proverbs 16 and see what the Lord would have us say. Proverbs 16, verses 1 through 3. **"The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit. Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established."**

Three questions I think are pertinent here that we need to answer. Here they are. Are you ready for them? You can write them down. *Who do your plans belong to? What does God see in your plans? What are we to do with our plans? Who do they belong to? What does God see in our plans? What in the world are we supposed to do with them?*

1. *Who do your plans belong to?* Okay, verse 1. Who do our plans belong to? Let's read it again. **"The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD."** Okay, so there are two answers to this question. It's not a trick question. There are your plans, and there are his plans. Okay? They are legitimately your plans.

These are plans. This word means *preparation*. This doesn't mean impulses. This isn't you driving down Forest Lane. You see the Whataburger. Before you know it, you're in front of the drive-thru order, going, "What am I doing here? Can I get a number five with a Dr. Pepper?" We're not talking impulses; we're talking plans. This is preparation. This word would be used in making an altar and bringing the wood around the altar, strategically, meticulously laying it.

It would be used of an army being prepared for battle in their battle array. These are plans. They're thought out. It doesn't get deeper than our hearts. It says this is the plan of your heart. Your *heart* constitutionally is a very basic identity word. It's what you're determined to have, what you're motivated to have more than anything else. These are your plans.

All of us are different in this room when it comes to our plans. We're like a bunch of different kind of snowflakes in here. I'm sorry. I could use a better analogy but snowflakes. You have over-planners, and you have under-planners. Right? You have your guy who is going, "Hey, by the time I'm 29, I'm going to be the executive vice president *here*. I'm going to live in *this* neighborhood. I'm going to have *this* many kids." Then you have 29 year olds here who are like, "Man, I should really start thinking about getting a job."

We do! We have over-planners. We have under-planners. We have folks who, when they envision what marriage would look like, it's five kids on a farm somewhere. Then you have guys who look well into their thirties and forties and go, "You know, I'm more than okay with being a bachelor for the rest of my life."

You have people who are just adventurous, free spirits (they're probably a little wild) who want to travel and maybe spend a little different time in *this* city and *that* city and maybe *this* place, maybe another country. Then you have the Tim Riggins types who are like, "Man, I'm here." *Friday Night Lights*. Tim Riggins. "Texas forever. This is home." You know? You have all different kinds of folks in here.

My dentist is here right now. I'm not going to give him an endorsement, but he knew in the eighth grade that he wanted to be a dentist. Eighth grade! Do you know what I was thinking about in the eighth grade? Do you know how many people are here...? This is legitimate. Post-college, you're still trying to figure out what you're doing with your life. All different kinds of plans in this room, all kinds of hopeful preparations underway here at The Village Church – Dallas Northway. They're wonderful plans. They're our plans. They're the plans God has given us.

There's a second part to this verse. The plans are ours. They're our heart plans, but the answer to our plans comes from...whom? Comes from the Lord. Maybe let me use this analogy. My daughter Caroline is almost 4 years old. Every time we eat dinner... She is a big planner like her mom. She'll say, "Okay, Daddy. We're going to do *this* for dinner. Then afterward, we're going to go get dessert."

It never fails, especially in the summer, we'll get dessert, to which obviously I oblige most of the time, and we go get dessert. She wants to get ice cream.

She is offering up that plan just about every day, but it's ultimately my call as Dad if I want to give her that or not. There's this kind of thing going on between the two that we have to see that our plans are uniquely ours, but he has final rights. This commentator says it's important for us to see the necessity and the limitations of planning, that the creature (I love that word) or the earthling gets the first word, but he gets the last.

Then you notice to whom the plans belong. They belong to the Lord. When you see *LORD*, when you see that word capital L-O-R-D, that's not just *a* lord. That's Yahweh. That's his personal name. That's the same word that's used in Genesis in the creation story. We're saying here that the God who hung Orion's Belt has intimately claimed a stake in the details of your life. He has very much involved himself into the minutia of your life.

In fact, I would go so far to say he is proud of that. What makes the Hebrew story of creation so distinct is that, unlike every other god, whoever allegedly formed the world, Yahweh Elohim is the God who takes pride in getting his hands dirty and being in the details. He has claimed an intimate stake in the details of your life because your plans, the answer ultimately comes from him.

You know, we have a lot of plans, Dallas. Right? We have a lot of plans. They started when we were young. Some of y'all heard, "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars." I went really big with that. I did honestly. I was like, "Okay, well I'm going to be the next Troy Aikman." Things were going really well for me for a long time. A lot of people agreed with that, except the coaches and the scouts. Anyway, I mean, I had my heart set on being Aikman.

Honestly, 30-plus years later, I have seen some of my plans fulfilled. I've seen some of them have died. They're not going to happen. I'm still waiting on some. I know that's your story too. You're waiting on your plans. You're living some. You're seeing old ones die. You're seeing new ones form. I think a really good question for us is...

2. *What does God see in your plans?* What does he see in our plans? Well, I'd say two things. He sees *underneath* your plans, and then he sees *beyond* your plans. Let's read verse 2. It says, "**All the ways of a man are pure [clear] in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.**"

If you looked at me in the face when I was 21 years old (10 years ago), I would have told you legitimately, "Ten years from now, when I'm 31, I'm going to be a bachelor. I'm going to be stepping into hopefully a promising legal career. I'm going to have some sick studio apartment somewhere. I'm going to be Executive Platinum on American Airlines." That's what I thought. Okay?

Legitimately now 10 years later, I've been married for coming up on seven years. I just bought a sick minivan. I have a mortgage. I just signed my daughter up for ballet and soccer. I get really excited about those 20 percent off Bed, Bath, and Beyond coupons that come in the mail. I'm telling you guys, I really, really, really 10 years ago thought I knew. I thought I knew! You think you know! The Bible says you think you know!

The proverbs say we have this natural tendency, right? There's so much written about millennials. I'm a millennial. I just made the cut. I'm like Grandpa Millennial. There's so much written about millennials. I don't think all of it's true, but I think some of it is. Here's what it says. I mean, here's the summation.

It says we're the most affirmed generation in history. We expect rapid advancement. We're not looking for the job that just pays the bills but an expression of our identity. It's not that we're confident. We're over-confident. We're cocky. However much of this is true (some of it is), this is what I know. Our "millennialness" exacerbates, it emphasizes, the fact that we think we can have what we want to have.

We're so optimistic. For whatever reason, that's a marker of our generation. We're so optimistic. We saw some hard things, guys. We saw what happened in Columbine. One of the defining moments of our generation was September 11 and then experiencing that. Yet there's this optimism that's brooding from our millennialness, and it's helping us. There are some really good qualities that come from that, but it also makes us think that everything we have in our hearts is within arm's length.

Again, one of the most exciting, favorite things about leading this campus is that I get to pastor a lot of people like me. That's not just a millennial conversation. There are some old people in here. By *old*, of course I mean like north of 32. You guys have plans. I mean, seriously! What's your family going to look like? What's retirement going to look like? You have these wonderful ideas about how it's all going to look.

The Bible says God is actually looking underneath our plans. He gives us these desires, and he gives us this kind of creative energy to shape the way we want things to look. Yet he is weighing our spirit. That word *spirit* means frame of mind. You know, God is thinking about the things we think about. He is weighing our spirits. He is asking these questions. He is saying, "Why do you want that? Why do you need that? Why is that important for you?"

This is a personal conversation. He is a Father. That's what he does. He asks really good, heart-level questions. He is asking the questions underneath the questions. He is thinking about the things we think about. When you think about me, especially if I just kind of offer myself out here, I see giving God my plans is one thing.

Usually that works really well when I'm praying my plans into existence. I have two hands up in the air. I'm like, "God, give me this. Let me see this." I'll tell you. I'm in the danger zone as soon as one hand is down and one hand is up. It's a different story when I'm going, "I have to have this. This has to happen." If I could give you a microcosm of this, it's me in traffic. I keep going back to these traffic analogies, but just bear with me.

I will do anything in Dallas traffic except wait. Right? I will veer off onto the shoulder I shouldn't be driving on to exit to find some back alley, to find some road, to get me from Webb Chapel to Midway, because I'm not going to sit in that traffic. Wisdom says, "Wait," but I'm convinced. I'm like, "I'm going to power through this. That's for them; it's not for me." I'm telling my wife (who always tells me, "Don't do that"), "Babe, I'm going to figure this out. I'm a local. Don't worry about it. I get this. I'm going to wing it. Leave me alone."

We all know. Christians know there are legitimately... God has ordained for us legitimate seasons where we *will* wait, where we *will* be confused, where we *will* be annoyed. Yet instead of dealing with the traffic, I have to manufacture something into existence. I have to manipulate my circumstances to make something happen.

Guys, y'all are doing this too. Things aren't working out the way you want them to work out, and so you're trying to make things happen. Because what you want your relationship, what your relationship prospects were hopefully going to look like by this age haven't happened yet, you're finding yourself out at bars at stupid times at night with the wrong people.

Or your career plan hasn't happened the way you want it to, so you find yourself just kissing up to your boss. You're just working stupid hours because you want your boss to give you that promotion. Or financially you're not where you want to be, where you thought you'd be 10 years ago, so you're just getting into stupid debt because your plans told you that you should have more. We struggle with this. This is legitimately a struggle in our culture.

Sometimes I think the most encouraging thing we could hear is, first, God is not going to let us know in this and then, secondly, he is actually looking underneath our plans. What do I mean by that? I mean this. If you look into your future and you see that thing you think you need, what you're likely going to do is you're going to identify some shame in your life now.

If you're looking for that relationship into the future that hasn't happened yet, what that will actually do is that will be a signpost backwards to say, "I have shame in my life that the Lord hasn't given me the things I've been asking him to give me." If you want to know what those things are, those things you're looking way out into the future to try to figure out...

I'm sorry. Let me say that differently. You're looking way out into the future to try to figure out what those things are that will bring you some kind of affirmation, that will give some kind of meaning to your life. You're actually identifying idols you need to put to death.

Jimmy Needham is a local guy. I just love this song. I think he gives us a helpful way for us to think about what those things are. He says, "Anything that I put before my God, anything that I want with all my heart, anything that I can't stop thinking about, anything that I give all of my love..." These are the things you're looking way out into the future, and you're going, "God, I have to have this! I told you I wanted this, and you haven't given it to me yet. I'm going to make it happen."

You're manufacturing your plans, and God is not condemning you. He is not judging you. He is taking a scalpel to your heart. He is going, "Look at how unbalanced and unhealthy that is that you need those things now when I, the sovereign God who takes pride in the very details of your life, just haven't given you those things yet."

That's the showdown for me. Traffic is just a microcosm. I have all kinds of stuff like that happening. God help you if you don't have community. God help you if you don't have people in your life, and you're not seeking people in your life to have these difficult conversations with you. God help you. There is such thing as an unregenerate Christian who does not go to church. There is absolutely no

such thing as an obedient Christian who chooses not to go to church. If you don't have these kinds of people in your life, if you're not tethered to a church, God help you.

Here's what's crazy. Some of you are, and some of your friends are telling you these things, and you're still not listening. God help you because either way, it's quite possible you're searing your conscience. That's a biblical reality. You could become so hard-hearted that you can't even hear anymore because the ice has formed that much around your heart.

You need people to speak into these things, but you need to take encouragement in the fact that God is looking underneath your plans anyway. He is underneath, but he is also way out ahead. This is really good news. He is underneath, and he is way out ahead.

I read *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time last year as a 30-year-old man. I decided to read it. A bunch of my nerdy pastor friends had read it when they were 8 or 9 years old. About the same time I was watching *Cops* and *The Simpsons*, they were reading *The Lord of the Rings*. I read it, was fascinated by it.

I was thinking the whole time, "Okay, so who is the type of Christ?" You know, the kind of literary thing going on. Who is the actual hero here? I figured out about halfway into the story there are actually a lot of heroes. Tolkien did it to point out the kinds of qualities in Jesus in the heroes of the story.

It's like if you look at Aragorn, you'll see his leadership. If you look at Sam, you'll see his humility. If you look at Frodo, you'll see his courage. Then I got to thinking about Gandalf. I think Tolkien was trying to pull out the fact that Gandalf the wizard is wise. He knows things other people don't have. At the very beginning of the book (it's in the movie too; you'll remember this), Gandalf shows up, and Frodo runs in there and rebukes him. He says, "Hey, you're late."

What's Gandalf's response? Y'all know this. Gandalf's response is, "A wizard is never late, nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to." Some of y'all legitimately have no clue that when the psalms talk about God being your strength and your shield... Everybody wants him to be their strength. Everybody wants him to be the kind of power and strength and confidence they need to step into today, but I don't think we've scratched the surface of understanding what it means that he is our shield.

He is legitimately protecting us from thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of scenarios that would kill us if we stepped into those things. He is way underneath our plans, but he is also way ahead. Because he is God, he has the privilege and the pleasure of looking into the future and being able to read those things into your life now. He knows!

Part of the reason why our plans aren't coming through is he is protecting us. He is shielding us from things he doesn't want to happen to us. He is underneath, and he is way out ahead. He is looking deep into your heart and way into your future.

3. *What are we to do with our plans?* I think probably the biggest question we should answer now at this point is what we are to do with our plans. I think verse 3 will help us there, so let's read that. What do we do with our plans? Are you ready for this? It says, "**Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.**" That's kind of a trick question. What are we supposed to do with our plans? That's flip-flopped, right?

The Bible doesn't say, "Commit your *plans* to the Lord, and your *works* will be established." He says, "**Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.**" It's the best possible outcome for us that he would flip-flop that. The word *commit* means literally to roll over, to lay on top of, to put your full weight onto something. God is saying if you lay all of yourself, if you commit the full weight of your life to the trust and to the service of Yahweh, your plans will be established.

That's the answer to your plans. Okay, so let's think about that. I think some of your responses are really healthy. I can see it on your face. You're like, "Okay, lay everything? That's costly." Yeah, exactly. God is asking you to abandon yourself, to lay all of yourself, all of your works, over to him through committing your life to him. Then your plans will be established. Well, that means unconditional trust.

I mean, that means you would say even today, "Whatever you ask of me, whatever you send to me, whatever you're calling me to do, even if I don't understand that thing, the answer is *yes*." You're abandoning yourself over to him. Some of you may go, "Well, that sounds really fatalistic, like I'm just lying down, and he is deciding everything." No, they're still your plans. I think Jeremiah can help us with this.

Jeremiah is this Old Testament prophet. He is asked to minister to people who don't want to listen. He is told, "You're going to have to wait a long time, and you're going to see very little fruit." His

conversations with God are just epic. I mean, he is emotional. He cries. He complains. He is like, "Help me! God, what are you doing? I don't understand. I don't have the chops for this. Help me figure out what you're doing!"

I'm telling you, one of my favorite things in the Bible here is God's response. He just gives him this wonderful range of what he allows and what he desires Jeremiah to say to him. Jeremiah says these things, and then God responds, "I know! I know, Jeremiah. It's hard, and it's going to get harder. Don't lose hope. Depend on me." He and Jeremiah had this great back-and-forth. It's like two or three conversations.

Then Jeremiah goes too far. He says, "You have become like an unreliable stream to me. You deceived me." God says, "No, you're not going to say that." He tells him to repent. There's such a healthy lesson in this, and that lesson is... Paul tees it up for us in Romans 14. He says, "**For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.**"

There's this world of difference in our conversations with God. If you're coming to him and you're saying, "Listen, I trust you, but I don't understand. You don't seem to be in this. I don't have a clue what you're calling me to, but I trust you," that is a world away from telling him, "You've deceived me," from not caring, from being apathetic and walking away. Altogether different, honestly.

There is unbelievable range in the Scriptures for you to wrestle through the bigger questions of your life. Huge questions! Huge! Huge range! Huge opportunity for you to do that. He cares so much about the intimate details of your life. Some of you guys are just on fire. Your life is out of whack, and you're not even talking to him. Then here's this opportunity. He is perched in heaven waiting for the conversation of your life, and you're not even talking to him.

Talk to him! Have a good, healthy back-and-forth dialogue with him. Talk to him. Bring the desires of your heart to the Lord. You're saying, "This isn't happening. Let me see this." He is a good Father. Watch him shape those desires while it's happening. Commit your life to him while you're doing it. This is the great invitation. You're saying, "I don't understand you, but I trust you." You get to bring your plans before the Lord, and you get to talk.

I learned something in the crucifixion story in Matthew that I had never seen before. I say this in closing. You have Jesus hanging on a cross. He has been crucified. You have Israel's elite. You have the chief priests. You have the scribes. You have the elders. They're sitting there, and they're

mocking Jesus while he is dying. They're telling him, "You saved others. You can't save yourself. You say you trust God. Let God deliver you. You're the king. Come down off the cross, and we'll believe."

Their understanding of what a messiah would be was completely different from what the Messiah actually was. They were the ruling class. They had the most to gain. What they're saying is, "You need to go back there. You need to sack Rome. You need to run Rome out. You need to restore Israel to her glory days, the days when the proverbs were written." Basically they're saying, "Give us our plans. Give us better circumstances. Give us the life we wanted."

They had so much to gain in that prayer. Jesus listens to that appeal. In the most loving act in human history, he stays. He stays for them. The most loving act of human history. He sees it through. He purchases for them the best possible thing he could give them, and he doesn't answer their prayers. But he gives them the best possible gift he could give them. That is his life, forgiveness of sin, and nearness and reconciliation back to God.

In the most loving act of human history, Jesus sees they didn't need new circumstances. They needed to become new creations. That's why he stays. Sometimes he doesn't listen to our prayers because he has better things for us. As we grow in our Christian life, over time what that does is it allows us to just build up this bank of trust to say, "I don't understand, but I trust you because you stayed."

When they were trying to pull him off the cross to get the things they thought they had to have, he stayed up there. He is listening to them tell him what they think they need. He is giving them what they have to have: his life. His life! What does this mean for us? It means God cares so much about the details of our lives that he will give everything and withhold everything that is necessary to conform us into the life of Jesus.

Yet the gospel says we are free to ask anything we want, assuming you want God to decide if it's good for you or not. It means the offer for him to take control is available for anyone who is coming to realize even this morning how hollow their plans really are. It gives us really good perspective. It gives us really good perspective!

To be a Christian is to say, "You gave yourself totally for me to make me pure, to forgive me of my sins, and for us to be together. Do not let anything come in my way. I couldn't even possibly be

satisfied in getting every little dream of my heart if you're not in it. Don't give me something I think I want that's going to kill me. Don't do that!"

To be a Christian is to pray those prayers often. You know, Keller says it so well. God doesn't promise us better circumstances. He promises us a better life, he promises a new heart, that will transform even the most difficult of circumstances into good, even the most difficult seasons of waiting into good. There's no chance that you're going to avoid suffering, so stop trying to step away from it. You're going to step into suffering. I'm not saying to look for it, but when it comes, you're going to have to step into it.

The promise of a newly created heart is that God is going to transform that suffering into a grace and conform you into the life of his Son all the while. What do we do with our plans? Well, we trust this. We trust the gospel, and we get to keep asking and asking and asking because he is a good Father who loves to give good gifts. He loves to give good gifts. Commit your life to Jesus today. Put your full trust in his trustworthiness. The Bible says as a result of that (and this is really cool), your plans, everything he intends for your life, will be established. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for just the grace and the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ and the way he has taken control and taken over. I thank you that even in these prayers right now, you hear what is right and what is good. You hear everything. You respond only according to your will. You only give us that which is good and which comes from your hands and which is pleasing to you and which is good for us.

I pray we would be men and women who just abandon our lives over to the service and the trust and the care of Yahweh. I pray we would see even today that you take pride in the little stuff, in the details. You are so big and so vast and so glorious, and yet you have come so low in the sending of your Son Jesus Christ because you care about the day-to-day.

You care about the things we need. You care about the desires of our hearts. Help us to be people who pray. Help us to be people who talk, who ask, who consider, who bring our appeals before you, Lord. We love you. We pray that in Christ's name, amen.