

Plan with God in mind

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. O Lord our God, you planned the creation of the universe in which we live.

You planned our redemption even before the creation of the world by sending your son Jesus to die so that we might be forgiven.

You are a God who plans. And as we come into this new year, help us to think your thoughts, particularly about how we plan our days, our months, and even our years in a way that glorifies you as individuals and corporately as a church.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. I hate competing agendas. Well, that's a very strong way to start a sermon, isn't it?

But honestly, I do hate competing agendas. Although I wouldn't consider myself as a very good planner myself, nor do I always stick to whatever that I've planned earlier, I still constantly find myself being frustrated whenever I have to attend to something that is not part of my original agenda for the day.

[1 : 27] I know that it's not a very good thing. That is a very odd thing for a pastor to say because a large part of a pastor's job is to attend to or to minister to something unexpected, something that is not originally part of our plan or agenda for the day.

Occasions like death, for example, bereavement, depression, divorce, sickness. Tell me, who planned for all these things in advance?

I hope none of you here planned for all those things either for yourself or for others, right? But that's my weakness, and I need to grow in that area.

Well, God does have his agenda for humanity and for the world. He has revealed his ultimate will and his ultimate agenda in his word, in the Bible.

But so often we find ourselves competing with God's agenda, with our own agenda. Either because we are ignorant of his agenda, or we want our agenda to triumph over God's agenda.

[2 : 53] And even for many Christians, sadly, when we plan and set our agenda, we often do so in a way that makes God as an addition.

He's just there to bless our agenda, our plans. He's just an afterthought. Now, of course, as Christians, we still pray to him to bless us.

Of course, we still say that we do all this for his glory. That's a super spiritual way to say it, isn't it? But ultimately, they are still our agenda, not God's agenda.

And if we do that, can we honestly say that it's a God-glorifying plan or agenda?

Now, friends, what I want to do today is to get us thinking about what it means to plan our days, our months, our years with God in mind.

[4 : 02] And to do that, I will use James 4, verses 13 to 17, as our anchor passage for today, although I will not be strictly tied to it.

Along the way, in my message for today, I will refer to different passages in the Bible. So we are going to do a little bit of flipping today. So please bear with me.

So what does it mean to plan with God in mind? Three things. Number one, plan with God's will in mind.

Plan with God's will in mind. Plan with God.

Plan with God. Plan with God. And in context, James was probably addressing Christian businessmen of his day who make plans for their businesses, to grow their businesses.

[5 : 30] That sounds like a good business strategy, isn't it? I mean, if I were to be a businessman, I'd probably do something similar. I'd make plans for my business to grow.

Who doesn't want to do that? But then, if you look in verse 14 of our passage, James pointed out the temporary nature of the plans that these businessmen were making.

He says in verse 14, Why do you not even know what will happen tomorrow? What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Why did he do that? I mean, don't making plans for businesses sound like a legitimate thing to do, even for us as Christians, isn't it?

But friends, you have to understand here. What James is addressing here is not making plans per se. That is not the issue here.

[6 : 38] The issue here is self-confidence. The issue here is boasting. This is the kind of planning that sets God aside and thinking their business security depends solely on their careful planning.

They don't realize that God, in his sovereignty, can thwart their plans in just a matter of seconds.

This is the kind of planning that relies on self rather than rely on God.

And no wonder James makes a very strong rebuke here in verse 16. He says, As it is your boast in your arrogant schemes.

All such boasting is evil. I wonder have you seen people who, on the surface level, look busy and productive.

Meetings after meetings, plannings after plannings, almost always on the phone talking about business matters, have accumulated significant wealth for themselves.

[7 : 57] Yet, they seem to miss something very significant in their life.

Yes, they may have lots of wealth, lots of material possessions, but they don't seem to have joy in life. They may have a lot of security guards around them, yet they are always insecure.

That's because they find their identity in the things that they do and the things that they possess.

And they are never enough. They are chasing one after another and it's never enough.

And the remedy of this self-confident and arrogant planning is, in verse 15, is to do it according to the will of God.

Verse 15 says, Instead, you ought to say, If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

[9 : 05] Now, to some people, this might sound as if like James is saying, that we don't need to plan at all, and instead just wait passively for God's will to happen.

But that's not what James is saying at all. Like I said, the problem here is not planning per se, but the real problem here is planning without God's will in mind.

The kind of planning that glorifies God is a planning that considers God's will and God's agenda. A kind of planning that wants to see God's agenda gets done first and foremost.

A kind of planning that fits into God's overall purpose for humanity. A kind of planning that is not self-centered, not self-reliant, and not self-confident.

Now, although the context here is talking about business planning, I think the same principle applies to any kind of planning as well. As Christians, we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and we are no longer our own.

[10 : 26] We belong to Him, and we live for Him. And we seek to live our lives in light of that fact, including in all of our plannings, whether planning as individuals, or as a church.

We need to plan with God's will in mind. But the question now is, how do we know God's will?

How do we know what God's will is? Now, here is where I want to take us a little bit of an excursion here, a little bit of a detour, in order for us to consider how to know God's will for us.

In analyzing the biblical data, theologians have come up with two categories of God's will. God's secret or hidden will, and God's revealed will.

Firstly, God's secret will. So God's secret will involves what God Himself has sovereignly ordained in all things. For example, in the passage from Isaiah that we read earlier in our service, Isaiah 46, verses 9 to 10, God says, You see, all of history, including all of humanity, is moving towards a destination that God intends here.

[12 : 23] And nothing can hinder or thwart God's purpose and plan. We don't know what that plan is. It's called hidden or secret will of God because we will only know it after it comes to pass.

And in this sense, although we don't know what God's will for us, because only God knows it, but we can always trust that God, being a loving and a gracious God, He never meant harm for us.

It doesn't mean that it will always be a pleasant and comfortable life for us, but despite all those, He meant everything for our good and ultimately for His own glory.

That's God's hidden or secret will. And then we have God's revealed will. So as the title suggests, this is the will of God has been revealed to us.

It has been revealed to us in His Word, in the Bible. For example, Jesus Himself revealed to us in Matthew 22, verses 37 to 40, that the will of the Father is for us to love God as well as to love our neighbor.

[13:51] And all throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, if you read it, we find a lot of commands directed to Christians, directed to us, directed to me, directed to you. The commands that, for example, we not murder, not cheat, steal, slander, gossip, so on and so forth.

Those are what we call as the negative commands. On the flip side, we have positive commands, the commands to love, to pursue peace, kindness, humility, gentleness, self-control, so on and so forth.

All these are God's will for us. God's will is not only for us to avoid or reject bad and ungodly things, but also to pursue and to seek good and godly things.

And also still, under the heading of God's revealed will, God has not only revealed His will for us, individual believers, but He has also revealed His will for the entire universe.

Now I want you to flip your Bible with me to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1, and I am going to read from verses 3 to 10.

[15:27] Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 to 10. Verse 3.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with His pleasure and will, to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the one He loves.

In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us.

With all wisdom and understanding, He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the time reached their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[16:48] Friends, do you see that? God's will for the entire universe, as verse 10 here of Ephesians 1 tells us, is to bring unity of all things, everything, in heaven and on earth under the lordship of Jesus.

That is God's ultimate will for the universe. And God does that by blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

He chose us before the creation of the world, verse 4. He predestined us for adoption, in verse 5. We received redemption and forgiveness of sins, verse 7.

He revealed to us the mystery of the gospel, verse 9. All of these things is for the purpose of gathering us under the lordship of Christ.

So what we see here, there's God's will for individual Christians, but there's also God's ultimate purpose for the entire universe that revolves around Christ.

[18:05] That is to say, the entire universe has a center, has a focus. And all of history is moving around and moving toward that center.

That is Christ, Jesus. In Philippians 2, verses 10-11, Paul says that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So, all of God's revealed will for individuals serve God's revealed will for the entire universe.

That is to gather everything under the lordship of Jesus. So what does that mean as we plan for 2024?

What does that mean for us? Well, in light of God's ultimate revealed will for the universe, first and foremost, we must recognize that we are not living for ourselves.

[19:20] and the world does not revolve around us. We are not at the center of the universe, despite what the world wants us to believe today.

We are not at the center of the universe. Before the 16th century, most people in history believe that the universe revolves around the earth, where we live.

It was an accepted fact in those days. However, in the 16th century, there was an astronomer by the name of Nicholas Copernicus who came out with a theory and a model of the universe that revolves around the sun instead.

Although that idea was not original to him. To the people in those days, that idea was so radical, so controversial, that not only it received a lot of opposition from the masses, from the population, but also from the church, the Roman Catholic Church, that is.

Because they were very politically strong in those days. They thought that this idea of Copernicus was a heresy.

[20 : 46] But this theory was so radical, was so revolutionary in science and astronomy because it shifted the center of the universe from revolving around the earth now to revolving around the sun.

So friends, we too, we need this Copernican revolution. Instead of having us at the center of the universe, the Bible says that Jesus is the center of it.

And our lives revolve around him. And that should affect the way we plan our days, the way we plan our months, the way we plan our years ahead.

We can plan, yes, indeed, we must plan. But we plan with God's ultimate purpose in mind.

For example, if you plan to marry, so instead of just considering about the happiness of you and your partner, think, think, first and foremost, how this potential marriage can and will contribute to God's purpose of gathering everything under the lordship of Christ.

[22 : 10] if I marry this so and so, will it promote God's plan or will it hinder it? Ask questions such as, how can this potential marriage be a reflection of the church as the bride and Jesus as the groom?

Questions like, how can we as married couple mentor younger couples in our church who may look to us as their spiritual mentors? You see, a marriage that is not perfect, yet still gospel-centered and Jesus-focused, and when people see that, it will not only be inspired to live like you to imitate your faith, but ultimately to see the beauty of Jesus.

and this principle of Jesus-focused planning applies to just about anything else that you plan, not only in marriage, that investment that you are thinking of making, that university that you are thinking of applying to, the property that you are thinking of purchasing, and as a church, corporately, that program or event that you are thinking of doing.

In all of these plannings, will there be gospel-centered and Jesus-focused? Will there be aligned with God's ultimate purpose for the universe, or will it hinder it?

So, knowing God's will, God's ultimate will for the universe, which is to gather everything under the lordship of Jesus Christ, that takes away the focus from us back to God.

[24 : 06] The plannings that we make may still involve us, yes, but it is not ultimately about us. It's about God and his purpose.

So, plan with God's will in mind. plan with prayer. Plan with prayer.

Now, prayer is dependence on God. By praying, we acknowledge our helplessness and our hopelessness without God. Prayer, in our planning, acknowledges that ultimately God is sovereign and not us, not even our planning.

Yes, we acknowledge that God is sovereign over all things. He can do and determine whatever he pleases, and that's entirely within his right to do so.

Ultimately, it's God's plan and purpose that is going to come to pass. So, then you may ask, why do we pray then, if ultimately it's God's plan that is going to come to pass?

[25 : 27] Well, the answer is, it is precisely because God is sovereign that we need to pray. So often in the Bible, God's sovereignty is an incentive for God's people to pray.

We may not know God's hidden will or his hidden plan for us, but God also uses means to achieve his purpose and plan. And ordinarily, that means is our prayer.

If you see towards the end of Romans 15, Romans 15, the Apostle Paul expresses his desire to the Roman church to visit Spain, of course, with Rome as his pit stop.

And in verse 30 of Romans 15, he urged the Christians in Rome to pray for him, to pray for his plan to come and visit Spain, among other things.

But in history, we know that Paul, the Apostle Paul, he never set foot in Spain. Somehow, God, in his sovereign plan and purpose, prevented Paul from going to Spain.

[26 : 49] We don't have an answer as to why God did that. All we know is that it achieved his own purpose. Yet, yet, knowing that God may not grant him his prayer to visit Spain, that doesn't stop Paul from asking for prayer for his plan.

Do you see that? Friends, as you plan for this year, plan with prayer. Acknowledging that God's sovereignty over all things does not negate our responsibility to pray.

More than that, God's plans and purposes are achieved in and through our prayer. Lastly, and thirdly, plan with flexibility.

Plan with flexibility. Now, when I say plan with flexibility, I do not mean flexibility in terms of your scheduling. For example, like, oh, I planned this event on Monday.

If I can't make it on Monday, that's fine. I can move it to Wednesday or Thursday. That's not what I meant here. flexibility that I'm referring to here has to do with our mentality and thinking than our scheduling.

[28 : 21] That is, in your planning, do not hold to it so tightly that you get utterly frustrated when it's not going according to your plan.

Again, this is tied to the fact that God is sovereign and he can do whatever he pleases, including either prospering or frustrating our plans.

I think it is easy for us to keep praising God when things are going our way and according to our plans, isn't it? But will we still be praising God even when he frustrates our plans?

Holding our own plans so tightly in our palms of our hands, coupled with the view that the world revolves around us.

Friends, that is such a recipe for spiritual disaster. So, friends, can I encourage you, as you plan, plan with flexibility.

[29 : 38] Plan with the mindset that God may frustrate our plans. And even when God frustrates our plan, we can trust him that he is doing it for our good, for the good of those who love him.

We trust his wisdom on that. So, friends, again, if you notice here, what I'm telling you is not so much about what to plan for 2024, but rather a few principles that you can apply as you plan.

And I think that's how God works too. He's not so much interested in telling you what choice you should make as you plan, but rather he's giving you the principles in his word, in the Bible, for you to make the choices as you plan.

So, in this business of planning, God is more interested in how it formed us into the likeness of his son. He's more interested in how it builds our character than simply about choosing right or wrong. And even if we made the wrong choices, and I think we have all met that, me too, including, even if we made wrong choice in our planning, we can trust that God is making everything for the good of those who love him.

[31 : 17] And knowing that is so freeing, so liberating, isn't it? It frees us to plan, and to plan big, and to take risks in our planning, take godly risks in our planning.

So, friends, as you plan for 2024, be it for yourselves, for your family, and even for your church. Plan with God's will in mind, plan with prayer, and plan with flexibility.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, as we enter the new year, help us to glorify you, particularly in our planning.

We acknowledge your sovereignty, and you can do whatever that please you. And it's your plan and purpose that will come to pass. Yet, you also use means to achieve your purpose, and that means include our planning, and our prayer.

So, in all of that, help us to be gospel centered, and Jesus focused in our planning. All for your glory, and for your honor. We pray this in your Son's name.

[32 : 44] Amen.