

As God Changes Our Plans

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Bible Verse: Proverbs 16:9
Preached on: Tuesday, March 24, 2020

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We're doing a series of messages, the texts are not connected but the themes are over the course of this interruption to our normal ministry, and I have titled it loosely "Familiar Texts For Unfamiliar Times," and today I want to turn to a text in Proverbs maybe not quite as familiar as some of the ones that we've looked at in the past, but a vital text for Christian living in good times and in bad times, and particularly suited for the age in which we're living in this present-day. It's Proverbs 16:9. Proverbs 16:9 is the text for this evening and it says simply this,

9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. And you know, it was only a month ago, not even that long, you know, it was only three, four weeks ago where we were living in the midst of prosperity, our plans were working out according to everything that we could have hoped, really, in so many ways, and here we are only three or four weeks later and we find ourselves in a dramatically altered landscape to the world than what we knew even 30 days ago. Who was using terms like social distancing? Who was having trouble finding hand sanitizer 30 days ago, and yet here we are in the midst of a completely changed order to life that we don't know how long it's going to last. You know, we're all hopeful that it's a relatively brief time, but the fact of the matter is that we don't know that and this could go on much longer than what we expect or what we're hoping for, and so what I want to do tonight is to take us to a text that kind of functions as a hinge for our perspective on what we're going through right now, a hinge that as we glance back and see the changes that have taken place, it helps us process what we're seeing, and also looking forward to the future, a text that will prepare us in case things go on much longer and get much more difficult than they are right now.

And I'm mindful, my friends, as I preach this, is thinking especially of our Truth Community family here this evening and preaching kind of especially for you this evening, realizing that others are tuning in as well, but I'm mindful of the fact that the changes of the recent days have put many of you into a place of upheaval in your lives and when we realize that it may get worse, we're suddenly faced with a situation like the patriarch Job said in Job 17:11, he said, "My days are past, my plans are torn apart, Even the wishes of my heart." And that idea that my plans are torn apart is something that I want to focus on here this evening. Even in the midst of all of the changes that are going

on and may still yet unfold for us, we can come back to this text of Proverbs 16:9 realizing that Scripture says the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps, and what I want to do here this evening is kind of build up to a climax, kind of a long runway and a slow lumbering start before we really take off to what I want to say toward the end of the message, and what I want to do here this evening is to help you understand how our planning in life intersects with trusting God in his providence. We make our plans and we hope they come to pass, but sometimes they don't and what are we to make of that, and how do we trust God when our plans fall apart? You know, and this is endemic to life, this is woven into the fabric of life that, you know, the longer you live sooner or later you realize that the things that you had hoped for and the things that you had planned for are disappointed. You know, older parents come to the realization that the way that their children turned out and aren't walking with the Lord brings a great disappointment to them and they wonder, "What did I do wrong?" And they look back at the past with regret. Some have career plans that they pursue and pursue and they don't work out for them at all. Others like the rich man in the Gospels, he tore down his barn to build bigger barns only to find that his life was required of him that night by God. So we have this way of wanting life to turn out a particular way and yet we sooner or later, we realize that life doesn't bend itself to our wishes, rather we find ourselves bending to what life has given to us, and it is so vital and important for you as a believer in Jesus Christ to know how to understand that and how to respond to that, and how your understanding of God shapes everything about the way that you think about this.

I say without fear of biblical contradiction that the way that people view God is determining their entire response to the present calamity that we are facing, and a person with no view of God, someone who denies the existence of God at least outwardly, contrary to the testimony of the conscience in their heart, they have to look at this as a random occurrence that, you know, they hope that things work out but they have no, they can have no confidence that there is a greater purpose at work in the midst of it. For a Christian with a weak view of God, a Christian who thinks that God is constantly sparring with Satan for the upperhand, might think that Satan has the upperhand right now. You know, nothing could sorrow my heart more than to think of a professing Christian believing something like that at a time like this. And for others, you know, that have a sense of the providence of God, providence simply speaking being the idea that God orders circumstances according to his will, he orchestrates large things and small things down to the details of the hairs on our head and he knows these things, God orders the details of our lives to accomplish his purposes, that's vital to understanding how to respond to these things tonight and it's intimately related to an understanding of our text here this evening. But if your confidence in the doctrine of providence is weak, if your confidence in the goodness of God is weak at a time like this, you'll respond in one way that tends toward anxiety and that tends toward despair, even, but on the other hand, if you have a strong robust view of the sovereignty of God, of the goodness of God, of the providence of God at a time like this, then you're on stable footing that allows you to go through a time like this without panic, without fear, and simply responding to the circumstances as they unfold before you day by day. It's a wonderful way to live and not every Christian lives in that realm. I can say that because, you know, for 20 years or more I didn't really understand the doctrine of providence and, therefore, there was an inner

tossing in my heart from, you know, over the course of time during those things and I look back on that and I realize how much the doctrine of providence has changed the way that I respond to life, not that I respond to it perfectly, not by any means, I'm not saying that at all, it's just that there is always a refuge of truth to go back to when I start to stumble, when I start to fear and get anxious. We can always come back to this and find a refuge for our soul that truly brings abiding peace, and we all need that at a time like this. We all need to understand how the doctrine of providence intersects with our life and what it means to trust God since he is a God that is in providential control of everything that happens. That's what I want to lay out for you here this evening.

Now we're going to start with the idea of planning because this is where our text starts, Proverbs 16:9, start with the idea of planning, and when we talk about planning just to define it in a very simple way, you plan when you use your mind to develop a course of action to achieve a result that you value in the future. Planning is a mental activity, it is a rational activity that looks into the future and says, "I'm going to take these steps to achieve a result that I want in the future." There's no more that we need to say about it than that, but to plan is rational and I mean that in a good way. We are intended, God intends us to plan as we'll see, and planning simply considers the future as you act now. So in a very simple basic way, you make a task list for the day of the things that you want to get done. You're planning for the end of the day and what you want to show for the day at the end of the time, you know, 12 hours later. You make out your task list, you're planning for what that day you want to hold for it. Stated a different way, you have a car, you have a truck and you want that truck to, you know, to give you value over a long period of time, and so you follow the maintenance plan, you change the oil, you take care of all of those things that are related to car maintenance, and you follow a plan that guarantees, so to speak, it puts you in a better more likely position that that car will be serving you down the road in five or 10 years than if you neglected it and, you know, eventually it strands you on the road side someplace.

So that's the kind of thing that we have in mind. You're planning and that's in a simple way that we're thinking about it, but that doesn't really answer the question that we're facing in times like this. The question is for tonight is how do you plan for life in these uncertain days when things are changing day by day and week by week in such dramatic ways? You know, the government is telling us to stay home and mandating that we stay home with certain exceptions, of course, but how are we to plan when we don't really know what's going to come down the pike tomorrow or Friday or next week? Well, our text will help us think through things. What I want to do is just think through the concept of planning, biblically speaking, and then at the end we're going to come to what it means to trust God in such uncertain times when our plans are just kind of dissolving in our hands before our very eyes. That's what we want to look at here this evening.

Well, to understand the text, we'll look at it from three points here this evening and the first point that I just want to say quite briefly is that you should certainly plan. Point 1 for this evening: you should certainly plan. The Bible commends planning. It is not contrary to faith to plan for the future and God calls us to prudent planning in the book of Proverbs earlier in chapter 6, verse 6. It says this, it says, "Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her

ways and be wise, Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, Prepares her food in the summer And gathers her provision in the harvest." It tells, Solomon tells the lazy person to go to the ants that existed there in the Middle East times, in the Middle East geography there, he said, "Go and observe what they do, and as you observe these harvester ants," they're called, "they carry grain from long distances in order to get to their nest and to fill their nest with food that they will eat on incoming days and during the wintertime." The Bible commends the ant to us as something to be emulated. To look to the future, to realize that there is a future coming, that there is uncertainty, in one sense, to the future, but we know that we'll have need in the future, Scripture says we should be like the harvester ants in the Middle East that store away things for the future so that when hard times come, we are prepared to meet them and we have provision for ourselves in the times ahead. This is what Joseph did in the book of Genesis. During the seven years of prosperity, he commanded all of Egypt to store things away for the seven years of famine that would follow that God had revealed to him. There was planning. They didn't use up everything that was happening here by year, but they were setting aside, planning for, preparing for a time of want that they knew was going to come.

And in Proverbs 21:5 it says this, a very important text for those who would live wisely, a very important text for those who would live wisely. Proverbs 21:5 says this, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty." Planning leads to advantage. Hasty decisions lead to poverty. And you know, I'm pretty confident those of you that have any adult experience in life, if you were to step back and look across the spectrum of people that you've known over the years, you would find this to be true. Those who are hasty in making decisions when adversity comes, they leave quickly when things start to go against them, that becomes their pattern in life, life kind of fizzles out for them and it's sad to see, but those who are stable in their approach to life, who persevere through adversity, who are diligent in their approach to life and consistent, they come out in a different way.

You can think about this in a most simple way. I like to use simple illustrations especially here this evening, is just to think about it this way. One man orders his life and he saves \$200 a month, let's say, just to choose a figure out of thin air, so to speak. And he lives within his means but he lives modestly and he saves a little bit at a time looking forward to the future when, you know, he doesn't know what the future will hold. Another man wants to live in the moment. This man wants to live in prosperity that's beyond his means and so he goes into debt and charges up his credit card to the tune of \$1,000 a month, and at the early start he's living in an outward appearance of greater prosperity than the prudent saver at \$200 a month. You get the idea. And you know, and we've built a culture that really caters to the other man going into debt with his finances but, beloved, picture this 10 years from now, just assume that they both stayed to that plan and ask yourself in 10 years who's going to be in the better position? The answer to that question is obvious, the man who has planned prudently and ordered his life to live in a prudent manner, in a diligent manner, is going to be way ahead in life than the guy who is in bankruptcy at the end of his profligate spending.

Now sometimes people fall into debt through no fault of their own. We're not talking about that, we're simply talking about people who do not look to the future in their planning and in their approach to life. And so we see the benefit of planning, that planning leads to advantage, and impulsive behavior eventually leads to poverty. God has woven this into the moral order of the universe and sooner or later as time goes on, as life works itself out, these things catch up with us and we find that we're living in the midst of the consequences of decisions that we made some five, 10, 15, 20 years in the past. And for those of us that find ourselves toward, you know, the latter end of life, that can either be an encouragement or it can be a point of reflection to say, "You know what, I've reaped what I've sowed here."

So the only thing that we're saying here is that Scripture is teaching us that you should certainly plan in your approach to life, in that faith in God, trust in God is not contrary to planning at all, and in fact, having stated these in kind of carnal earthly terms, in fleshly terms this way, let me expand out into something of far greater significance. I'm just establishing the principle of planning right now, there are more important things that we have to say later in the message, but as you think about the nature of life and you think about the cosmic plan of God and you realize that God has revealed in his word that there is a coming day of judgment, that there is a time coming for every man who has ever lived, whoever will live, my friend, there is a time coming for you where you will stand before God in judgment and give an account of your life. That is far more important than saving finances or anything like that. It's far more important than any crisis of earth that we may be going through right now. Friend, I'm trying to pierce through the fog of the circumstances to say something and to plead with you to consider something very very important. That day of accountability before God is coming for you. It is certain. It is a fixed day known to God when you will be before him and give an account for your life. Don't you think that it would be the height of wisdom for a man, for a woman, to take that into account in the way that they think about life in the pursuits that they choose and the way that they live, and the way that they respond to the word of God, the way that they respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Because, you see, that day is certainly coming. You don't see it now, you don't feel it now, it's not necessarily a part of daily life to you but, my friend, it is certain to come. You will stand before a holy God and give an account of your life to him and my point for the moment here is this, is that the wise man not only plans his finances for earthly life, in a far transcendent way, the wise man takes into account what the future holds for him and prepares for it now. He knows the wise man does, the wise woman knows that there is a day coming where she will give an account to God for her life, and so she plans for that, she accounts for that in the way that she orders her life. And how do we account for that, how do we plan for that? Well, friends, that brings us right to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We're all sinners who fall short of the glory of God. Sin requires God's judgment upon it, and if you die with unforgiven sin in your life, there is a certainty of judgment going badly for you, of judgment coming and you being cast away from God because the guilt of your sin requires an eternal payment of judgment.

Don't you see, my friend, that this gives clarity to us in a moment like this? That the most urgent thing for all of us is still the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It is still in the terms of John

3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Believing in Christ, repenting of your sin and believing in Christ for your eternal salvation is the most urgent matter of spiritual planning that you could ever do; to take the claims of Christ seriously, to go to the word of God and read it and to beg God to give you understanding in your heart, and to work in your heart in order to save you because you know that you can't save yourself.

You know, I would appeal to you, my friend, I would appeal to you to be wise and if you do not know Christ, to understand that that day of judgment is the most central thing that you have to settle while God gives you breath, and to come to him with a sense of urgency that says, "I need this day to be made right and You're the only One who can do that for me. Lord Jesus, have mercy on me the sinner." And then to search for him dependently on the Holy Spirit, searching Scripture until he makes himself known to you. And I just encourage you in that direction because the wise person will account for Judgment Day in the way that he approaches all of his life and this is in keeping with what Psalm 90 says, another familiar text for the people at Truth Community Church anyway, Scripture tells us, shows us a prayer of Moses in which he says, "Teach us to number our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Lord, help us to know the vanity and the transience of our lives that we might be able to account for the brevity of life and what comes after while You give us time to do so." My friend, you should certainly plan. You should plan for eternity in coming to grips with the Gospel, coming to grips with Jesus Christ, and in a lesser included way, you should plan for the way that you approach life. You should certainly plan, that's the point of the Scriptures that we have looked at.

Now moving on to point 2 here, is that now speaking more specifically to believers in Christ who are the only ones who are able to respond in this particular way, point 2 here this evening is that you should plan confidently. You should plan confidently. Let me remind you of another important passage in Proverbs, Proverbs 3:5 and 6, which say this, Proverbs 3:5 and 6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." This is a promise to the people of God that those who trust in him will find that he directs their steps, and he helps them, and what we find in this is that the people of God have a unique privilege in life. We are confident in the future, even if it is unclear to us right now, we are confident in the future because we understand something vital, we understand something that is in the language of today, a game changer, we understand that our heavenly Father holds the future. The one who saved us in Christ, the one who loves us in his Son is the one who determines the course of our future and that changes everything and it gives us a perspective on why we plan, and this is so vital, my friends. We do not plan for life because we are afraid of what may happen. That is not why a Christian plans at all. We plan because God tells us to in his word and he tells us that he will bless our plans. So we're planning not out of fear like those who hoard away goods for fear of what might happen in the future, we don't plan like that, we plan with a sense of confidence that our lives are under the hand of a good and loving heavenly Father. He's promised to bless our planning and he has commanded us to do so. So we are

planning in response to the commands of God and the promises of God, and exercising obedience in our walk with him in response to what he has revealed in his word. And so the whole context of our planning is different as believers. We are not hedging against a future that might bring harm to us, we are planning in response to a future that is coming to us according to the plan of God, and we do so with texts like Romans 8:28 in our minds, you know, that says in Romans 8:28 that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

So my friend, my Christian friend, my fellow member of Truth Community Church, in these days of uncertainty as we look and as we plan and try to respond to what's happening around us, understand what we are doing here. We are planning not to react to unforeseen circumstances from God's perspective, we plan not because we are afraid that life might collapse around us if we don't, no, we plan from – watch this – we plan from a sense of serenity, from a sense of confidence that understands that the totality of life is under the hands and in the hands of a God who loves us and saved us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is working out plans that he has for us and that those plans will always turn out to be ultimately for our good even if, even if we don't understand what's happening right now and even if it seems like the margin for our survival is suddenly very very thin. We do not look at the circumstances in the language of Proverbs 3, we do not lean on our own understanding of what's happening in life, we plan for it, we respond to it but our sense of direction, our sense of confidence comes from the revealed word of God that tells us what God is like in relationship to his people. God is a covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God who always does good for his people in the end and that is true regardless of the shifting nature of the circumstances that we encounter in life, and if you really believe this, then it changes your perspective on everything and when you have a different perspective, you respond to uncertainty circumstances like we have right now completely differently than someone who does not have that same trust and security in the heart.

So friend, it's time for us, this is a spiritual gut check time for us. This is in language of basketball, this is a heat check time for us. This is exposing to us what we really believe about God and where we really are in our trust and in our walk and in our sanctification with him. And let me say by way of encouragement that if you find yourself a believer but trembling and anxious, that God has mercy on that. One of the things that God is doing is he is showing you where you are short in your understanding of him, short in your trust of him so that you might grow spiritually through this. These changes in our times have become for you a spiritual opportunity for you to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There is no shame in saying, "Wow, I realize in this time that I'm not the Christian that I thought that I was. I'm overwhelmed by anxiety. More than certainty about my financial future, what I need to do is I need to draw near to God in this time because I believe the promise of James 4, that if I draw near to God, He will draw near to me." So we don't want to lose sight of the critical importance and the obedience of trusting God even in a time like this.

And here's the way that we need to think about it, beloved, and I say things like this a lot for those of you that are joining us maybe newly on our live stream just because it

popped up on your Facebook live feed or something, but we need to get beyond our suspicious view of God and the sense of wondering whether he's really going to take care of us or not. We have to move beyond that as believers in Christ and a crisis like the present time is the perfect opportunity for us to do so. There is spiritual opportunity for the people of God, for the church of Jesus Christ in this time, and my prayer as I stand here before you is that we would rise to the occasion and embrace it and prove ourselves worthy of the one called us because we need to think rightly about the character of God. Who is God but he who made himself known in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus Christ except the one who came to seek and to save that which was lost, sinners like you and me? Why did he do that? He came because he was a servant. He came in love. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. In this is love that not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

So your theology of the cross, your understanding of what atonement is goes to the very heart of what you understand the character of God to be like toward you, and my Christian friend, I want to say this with compassion but I want to say it firmly to you here this evening: if you believe that God in love sent Christ to save your soul, then that determines the way that you view everything else because if God in Christ lovingly provided a means of reconciliation to you, understand the significance of this and we're summarizing biblical teaching without alluding to a specific text here, God in Christ, in love, did the greater thing that you needed. He provided eternal salvation for you. He provided redemption for you in Christ. He had his Spirit work in your heart and draw you to Christ in love even though you were rejecting him, even though you were a rebel at heart, in love he looked past your sin in order to bring you to salvation to himself, and that's what God is like and that's what Christ is like, so gracious, so merciful, so loving to show that kind of mercy to you while you were a sinner in order to bless you and to do good to you in the end. Well, my friend, if you believe the Gospel as it's revealed in Scripture, you have to believe those things. The love of God is stamped all over the pages of the New Testament in this way. The Old Testament too but we're in New Testament times here. And Ian Murray, the famous Christian author, said the cross is the pulpit of God's love. You look at the cross and you see God's love being proclaimed for unworthy sinners like you.

Now having established that once again in our thinking, we ask this question as it relates to our text for tonight, Proverbs 16:9, the mind of man plans his way but the Lord directs his steps, how does that affect the way that we understand and we respond to a text like that? Well, we understand it this way, the one who is directing our steps, orchestrating the outcome of life for us, is the same God that loved us in Christ. Don't you think, my friend, that if God did the greater thing in love for the sake of your soul, that included in that is all of the lesser things that are necessary for life and godliness to you? If he loved your eternal soul, don't you think that he will also care for your earthly life? Read Matthew 6:25-34 and follow up on that if you struggle with that. No. No. No. No. If God loved us in Christ for our eternal salvation, then God will love us in Christ for the needs of earthly life. The one who made us will not abandon us. The one who saved us will not leave us on the roadside to squander our life in unmet need. That is not the way God is.

He is a good God. He is a gracious God. He is a loving God and that doesn't change when the circumstances, as it were, blow up in our face. We have to step back, turn away from the news reports, turn away from our present circumstances and look up and remember who God is. "God, I remember who You are. I remember that You saved me though I was unworthy of that. Though I was dead in sin, You imparted new life to me. Though I was the one who deserved eternal judgment, Christ stood in my place at the cross, loved me and forgave me of all of my sins right there and guaranteed the outcome of my salvation even though I would not be born for 2,000 years after the fact." Friend, if God loved you like that, don't you think that he will love you in this circumstance as well? If God took care of your eternal need, don't you think that he will take care of your temporal need as well? If he loved your eternal soul, won't he love you in this temporal life as well? You see, times like this bring to the surface in our inner response, times like this bring to the surface what we really believe inside about God, what we believe about our Lord Jesus Christ.

So what we find in texts like these is that trusting God is the most important thing for us to do right now because we are responding ultimately to him, and as it were, you can think about it as a little bit of a life exam here. We just had a pop exam fall into our laps over the past 30 days, pop exam that's asking the supreme question not what the outcome of these, you know, these next weeks are going to be but the pop exam, the pop quiz for us is are we going to trust God in this time. You know, by the grace of God and realizing in a very imperfect way, the desire of my heart, the commitment of my heart even though it's mixed with a lot of failure, the fundamental commitment of my heart is, "Yes, I want to trust God through here. I want to prove faith in God through this time." And do you know what I believe about you at Truth Community Church? I believe that that's what you want to do also, and it just helps us to have God's word show us what the issues are so that we can respond, so that we can ask the Holy Spirit to do that work in our heart to produce the faith in us that would honor God at this time; that we would look to Scripture and we would look to the revealed character of God and let that shape our response far more than the circumstances that press on us day by day. What does Scripture say to us except that we walk by faith, not by sight. We walk by what is revealed. Our perspective on life, in other words, is determined by the things that God has given to us in Scripture, not by the shifting circumstances that are all around us.

So I ask you tonight, my friend, my fellow member of Truth Community Church, those of you that associate and identify with the church, maybe you're not members yet, but I ask you how will you respond in light of these things in Scripture? Yes, we should certainly plan but along with our planning, we plan with confidence, we respond in trust because we reject suspicious ideas of God, we reject doubting ideas about whether he cares for us in these times, we reject all of that and we say in accordance with the Scripture writers our God is good, our God is great, and he cares for us. We can base our entire life upon that reality and smile at the face of an uncertain future because we realize the hand of God is in what comes to us.

So you trust God as you plan, to summarize very briefly what I just said for who knows how long, I don't have my watch with me, but when we say you trust God and you plan

confidently, what we're saying is this, is that you appropriate the goodness and faithfulness of God into your entire worldview. You believe and you account for the faithfulness of God in your response to life and it governs your perspective to everything else. The character of God is primary. Your circumstances are secondary. I know that's hard to hear for some of you that have been greatly affected in recent days by what has happened. I know that is hard to hear but it is especially at times like this where it is the duty of a Christian preacher to emphasize that to people as they hear his teaching. The character of God is primary to you, the circumstances of life are secondary in this time, and if you embrace that and if you embrace it according to the love and faithfulness of God, then it will govern the way that you respond to everything else about the circumstances. If somehow you try to bypass the character of God and lean on your own understanding and depend on your own abilities to get you through this time, that doesn't come out well, my friend. Come back to Christ, come back to the God who loved you and trust him even in, especially in a time like this and be, as it were, the disciple, be the student that was met with a pop quiz and passed it with flying colors because you made the determination in your heart that you were going to believe God for the sake of what he said in his word.

So that, summarizing this second point, our life disposition is this: Jesus Christ will prove his love to me. Jesus Christ will manifest his faithfulness to me even if I don't see how that can work out from where I stand. I do not determine my view, my approach, my sense about the future based on what I can understand, it's governed entirely by who Christ is, governed entirely by what God has revealed in his word, and everything in his word tells me that he is a God of abundant goodness and I'm going to rest in that, so much so that I'll put my head on my pillow tonight, you say to yourself, and I'll sleep soundly in peace knowing that when I awake, the Lord will still be in charge. You see, faith believes the word of God and acts upon it. At the core of faith is this from Hebrews 11:6, "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." That's Hebrews 11:6. Faith believes that God rewards those who seek him. I believe that. You believe that. That means that we're in good hands as we look to the future.

Now that leaves us with a final question from our text this evening and we could frame it like this: how do we respond, then, to disappointed plans? How do we respond to disappointed plans or how do we plan in such uncertain times as these where, you know, we don't know what's coming tomorrow? We experientially know what Scripture says, we don't know what happens tomorrow, well, that brings us to our third point here this evening, our third and final point and it's this, it's that you should plan dependently. You should plan dependently. One writer put it simply like this with a brevity that I could only aspire to, he said man proposes but God disposes. Man proposes his way, but God disposes the outcome of those plans.

Let's go back to Proverbs 16:9 and just keep the text in front of us as we explore this final point here this evening. "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." And beloved, what we have all found, and when I say we all, I mean the 7 billion people in the world, the 350 million people in the United States, the X number of people

that are involved at Truth Community Church within our own family, me personally, we are getting an experiential verification of the word of God that says this: our plans cannot guarantee the outcome. We plan things but we always have to understand that our plans are subject to change. They are subject to the intervention of God in small ways or in dramatic ways and, you see, one of the aspects of faith is that it is a submissive, trusting dependence on God. Submissive in the sense that we understand that God directs our lives and that he sometimes, maybe often, does it in ways that are different than what we originally planned for the outcome to be, and because of that we plan dependently. We plan this way, if you want a physical illustration here, we plan with an open hand that realizes that God may come and take our plans out of our hands and do something different with them rather than planning with a closed fist that grips it so tightly and says, "I won't let go no matter what. I have my plans and they must come to pass." Christians don't plan that way. We plan with a submissive, dependent, open hand that says, "God, here are my plans but not my will but thine be done." That's the spirit of it all. God reserves the prerogative to say yes or no. To use a word that I like, to put it in a different way looking to say the same thing in a half dozen different ways, trusting the Spirit of God to have some of them stick in our collective minds, in other words, our plans are always provisional. Our plans are always provisional. They are not determinative. They are subject to change always.

So in Proverbs 19:21, if you want to turn over there for just a moment, Proverbs 19:21, it says, "Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand." You see, there's a contrast between the plans of our hearts and the intentions and the directions that we establish for our day or for our life. There's a contrast between that and the purpose of God, and it is the purpose of God that stands. Now sometimes God blesses our plans and allows them to come to pass but it's not through the ingenuity of our planning but rather in the fact that our plans met with a consistency with the predetermined counsel of God. Here's the thing for us, when our plans fail, when life changes even dramatically upon us, we have to understand that God is working out his purposes even though our plans are disappointed, and even though sometimes, you know, we say goodbye to people who move away, we say goodbye to people whose lives the Lord takes away from us in a seemingly premature fashion, in all manner of change like that, there is this submissive dependent sense in our minds that says, "My life is subject to the outworking of the plan of God and it may be different than what I want," and here's the bridge, here's the key to it, "and I embrace that. I accept that. I am willing for it to be that way with a satisfied contented heart because I understand that God is on His throne, I am under His authority, as a Christian He loved me, I trust His love, I trust His purposes to be good even though it's different than what I had hoped and expected in times gone by." Beloved, that's a graduate class in spiritual maturity. We have an opportunity here to respond in that way in the times in which we live.

Let me remind you of a key, another key passage, a New Testament passage in James 4 that speaks to this ever so clearly. It's like James 4:13 through 16 were written precisely for the world in 2020 as we know it today. God looks on this and Scripture speaks to us and we see in our experience the truth of what was always there in the Bible. James 4:13 says this, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a

city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.'" We have our plans and I know, the speaker in the verse says, the projected speaker, the hypothetical speaker, and I know the outcome of my plans. I'll go to the city, I'll be there a year and at the end of that year things are going to be profitable for me. Is that the way it works out? Well, those are his plans but verse 14 acts kind of as a commentary on Proverbs 16:9 here, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." You're planning for next year but you don't know what your life will be like tomorrow. "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." You see, James does not condemn planning. He says you can make your plans but you do so with a conscious dependence upon the outworking of the will of God. It's not that you have to annoy everybody by every time you use the future tense also saying, "If the Lord wills, you know, I'm gonna go brush my teeth now and go to bed." We don't need to take it to that kind of silly extreme. He's talking about a mindset which is what we've been talking about all along tonight, a mindset to the way that you live life and what your disposition toward life is. Yes, you should certainly plan. Yes, you should plan confidently but you should plan dependently, understanding that you're simply a vapor subject to death at any time, subject to a world changing dramatically at any time without warning, and so that you live your life from a perspective of dependent trust rather than arrogant presumption about what the future will hold. So you must be conscious of divine providence as you plan.

So how can we summarize this? God blesses prudent planning but our plans do not determine the outcome. This is the climax that I promised you earlier that I really wanted to get to. This would turn the thinking of countless numbers of true Christians on its head if they were only to think through these things in a proper way. Everything that we've said tonight affects how you trust God. Stated differently, it affects what you trust God for. This is so vital. This is everything in terms of what we're talking about here tonight. You do not trust God that your specific goals will happen. Trusting God does not mean that you have an advance presumption that what you have planned in life will come to pass, and you just insist upon that and you just know that what you planned is what's going to happen. That is exactly the opposite of what Scripture is teaching us to do. We do not trust God that our specific goals will come to pass because what we've seen tonight is they may not, in fact, they probably will not in many cases. So we're not trusting God that what we planned originally will eventually come to pass in our lives. That's not what we're trusting God for. Have I said that enough to make it clear? We're not trusting God that we will get what we hope for. Biblical trust is not a promise that we will get what we planned for. That's not it, beloved, and to understand this is to change the whole manner in which you think about life. No, what you trust God for is something different. What you trust God for is something greater, it is something loftier, it is something more noble than that. We trust God for this, we trust God that he will ultimately bless us whatever happens. No matter what happens, no matter if none of my future plans come to pass, I am trusting God, this loving gracious God of whom we have been speaking, I am trusting him to be good to me no matter what, and that places trust at a completely different level. Now we're trusting God for his character to be proven true and to be made manifest to us as one of his children in Jesus Christ. That is much

different, much loftier, that is an eternal dynamic to trust that goes far beyond trusting him for the earthly things that we want. A temporal approach to trusting God is so unworthy of what Scripture actually calls us to do.

You can read Habakkuk 3:16 through 19 to see another illustration of this. There are no cattle in the stall, there's no food in the field. I'm summarizing, paraphrasing. Yet, Habakkuk says in chapter 3:18, I will exalt in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Everything earthly that I ever wanted can go away, I am still unmoved in my basic disposition toward life because I am exalting in, I am trusting in, I am rejoicing in who God is and that is much different than simply wanting God to work out circumstances in accordance with what I originally planned.

Now think about it from one other perspective. I'm going on a little bit of a tangent here but, friends, think about it this way: why would we want life to work out according to the plans that we made in the days of our youth, in the days of our greatest immaturity, why would we not want plans to develop as God himself works sanctification in our lives? As we grow in Christ and our perspective on life changes, the last thing that we would want, if we're thinking rightly, if we're thinking biblically is to have our life determined by the course of the things that we sought in the earliest days of our conversion, or perhaps even carry over plans from our pre-conversion days. No, our perspective, our heart grows as God works in our heart, as God changes us more and more to the image of Christ, our perspective of what is important in life changes and grows in such a way that it grows beyond those original plans that we made in germ form, you know, in the early days of our youth, in the early days of our conversion. No, my friend, God changes you and adapts your life to the purposes that he is working out in you. God orders the circumstances to change in ways that are consistent with the greater work that he is doing of conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ. So that's another perspective on why we would hold our plans loosely. "God, if You want to change the circumstances in order to do something in my spiritual life to make me more like Christ, then, God, do that. Not my will but thine be done," is our prayer.

So what does that do for us and how does it help in a time like what we're living through right now? Well, it means this stated very simply, it means that we are open to change as we go through life. We are open to change in our daily plans. We get an unexpected phone call, we have an unexpected need. We understand Proverbs 16:9 and say, "Okay, my plans for today aren't working out but God has providentially intervened and I have to do something different today than what I had planned. I accept that and I rejoice in it." So we are open to change as our life unfolds in little things in day to day life. What we have here before us in this season of the world, in this season in our country, is this and, my friend, it means this, it means that we're open even to dramatic change that changes the entire course of the rest of our lives. We are open to that. As difficult as it may be to process changes in the immediate presence, as soon as we get the news it's hard to process all of the implications of it, but at the core what we've studied here tonight gives us a disposition that says, "Lord, okay. This is a dramatic change. Not my will but thine be done. My plans have fallen apart, Lord, Your plans still stand and I trust You for that." And sometimes God will give to us beyond what we could ask or think and if he does,

we'll give him thanks for that, but that's the easy part. When events intervene and change everything, what do we do when God changes our plans? We do this: we receive that unpleasant providence with an equal trust. You trust him even when you don't understand because the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

My friends, I know that these days have brought some really dramatic changes for many of you and the difficult days of transition lie just ahead for you. Our elders are praying for you. The Spirit of God is with you to help you, and Christ himself has said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So as you look at these changes, as you contemplate a dwindling bank account perhaps, as you are facing other changes that were unthinkable even a week ago, I encourage you to step back from all of that, to look up and to say, "Lord, I believe that Your hand is somehow in this in a way that I don't understand. I'm going to trust You through this. Help me not only with the circumstances that I need to respond to but, Lord, do a work in my heart that You would conform me to the image of Christ, and that the outcome of this trial down the road, whatever timeframe that is, that, Lord, my prayer is that I will have been found to have been a faithful trusting disciple through these changes that You've brought into my life." God will do that work. God will be pleased to answer that prayer and we'll be here as a church to pray for you and to encourage you along the way as we go through these things in these uncertain days together.

Our Father, we trust You for Your grace and we pray for all of those who are responding to life in a different way. Lord, we love You and we love You more than our plans and we love You more than life itself, and so by the Spirit of God we ask You to work an abiding and a supernatural contentment in our heart that trusts You before we know the outcome and then, Lord, as we trust You like that, we ask You to be gracious, merciful and abundant to our many friends who find themselves in times of need, times of sickness, times of sorrow like this. Father, be abundantly gracious to them in this time, that they might see the outworking of Your faithfulness and that You would show to them that those who trust the Lord do not do so in vain. Lord, You know what You are doing. You direct our steps. This evening in a humble trust, we rest in Christ and in the hope of the future glory that You have planned for all who know you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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