

God and Our Plans

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[0 : 00] 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. And in verse 9, the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Now, those of you who were here remember last Sunday evening we began a mini-series on some of the wisdom sayings found in the second half of the book of Proverbs.

These sayings that really encompass what we might call the whole of life wisdom. What it means to live under the sovereignty of God.

These sayings, these wise sayings that we find here in the book of Proverbs, these wise sayings that inform us. What it means to live wisely in the world where God has placed you.

[1 : 00] You know, how you apply God's Word in your daily, ongoing life. As you seek to live, to glorify God. As you seek to love Him.

As you seek to show your love for Him and your neighbour. And, you know, learning to live wisely. It's a priority that none of us can ignore.

Especially, you know, when we remember, as we noticed last Sunday, when we remember that, you know, we're to live under wisdom's great motivation.

The fear of the Lord. That reverence. That reverence. That reverence that's due to God. And that reverence that we apply, not just in what we believe, but what we practice.

What you practice. Because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. To fear the Lord is to honour Him. It's to honour God in every area of your life.

[1 : 59] In your work. In your relationships. In the way that you communicate one with another. In your decision making. Even the very plans that you make.

As we'll see here, of course, in these verses in a moment. But, you know, if you're to fear God, then you'll live for God. You'll honour Him.

You'll seek to honour Him in all your ways. You'll seek to be like the Lord Jesus. Of course, the Lord Jesus described elsewhere as the wisdom of God. He's the embodiment of wisdom.

And if you're to be like Christ, then you're going to seek to live as wise people. People who build their lives in the rock. Who build their lives in Jesus. As opposed to the fool who dishonours God.

Who won't build his or her life on the rock that's Christ. And, you know, when we look at these proverbs. We're going to look at a selection of them, of course. But when we look at these proverbs and the way that they're written.

[3 : 01] We see what wise living looks like to the glory of God. We see what wise living is in contrast to the foolishness of living outside of God.

The living that dishonours God. We see wise living in contrast to the foolishness of a life that has no desire, no connection.

No desire to serve God and to love Him and our neighbour as ourselves. And proverbs brings out that contrast. The person who's wise is the person who has that act of faith in living God.

The person who lives his life, her life to the glory of God. Wisdom of living, even the conduct of the person who seeks to direct others to the God of all grace.

And in contrast, the fool, the fool has no saving relationship with God. The fool, as we've been reminded often enough in our morning services, the fool is the one whose glory is in self and won't build his or her life on the Lord Jesus.

[4 : 11] So, as we move on in our thoughts here on wisdom, on this whole of life wisdom, well, we come to the whole matter of our plans.

And we're going to look at these verses 1, 2 and 3. And I think we'll add in verse 9 as well. That verse 1 to 9 is a sort of, if you like, a section in itself.

But anyway, we'll look at it, we'll see that in a moment. But let's look first of all at God's sovereign answer. Proverbs 16, verse 1. The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

It was on Friday morning, I was preparing the sermon and a letter came through the door. It was from the bank. And the heading in the letter, believe it or not, said, making plans.

And, you know, the words followed, plan your finances. And there were words of advice as to how better I could use my very flexible credit card.

[5 : 14] And it said to help me when I'm ready to put my plans into action. Of course, planning is something we all do in so many ways in relation to so many different aspects of our lives.

I know for some people here, perhaps retirement planning is to the fore. Financial planning, marriage planning, career planning. We can go on and on.

There are so many areas in our lives where planning is absolutely crucial. And, of course, it's part of a congregation's life. Part of a minister's life.

I'm obviously involved in sermon planning. And you go to office bearers, deacons, deacons, you know, there's so much planning involved in relation to the use of the resources of a congregation. Or the session itself involved in so much planning in relation to the church's life. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with planning. In fact, planning is integral to any person's life, any Christian's life.

[6 : 20] I mean, the very fact that, you know, mankind has the ability to use the mind that God has created, God has given. You know, we are given the gift to organise our thoughts, to organise our lives.

It stems from the very fact that we're made in God's image. And part of being made in God's image is the ability to think. It's the ability to reason. It's the ability to plan.

God has made us in His image. Now, yes, that image has been tarnished. Sin has tarnished that image. But we still bear that image.

Because we think, reason, plan. We organise. We make decisions. This is all part of being made in God's image. And of course, remember, we worship a God who, the one true God who makes plans.

God has planned salvation from all eternity. And God's plan, God planned the means of our salvation through the finished work of God the Son, the Son of God.

[7 : 28] That's what Peter reminded the crowd there in Jerusalem when he spoke of Jesus. You read in Acts 2.23 that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

God's purposes for His people have been planned from all eternity. We're going to be singing Psalm 40 at the end of the service.

Your plans for us are far beyond our power to number or declare. And even when we were singing there in Psalm 20, may He fulfil the desire of your heart, success to each one of your plans to impart.

God has given His people, given us, all us, the ability to make plans. We are made in His image. God Himself makes plans and has made plans, wonderful plans for His people.

But when we come to the aspect of my making plans, your making plans, there's one thing to make plans. It's quite another to involve God in these plans.

[8 : 33] It's quite another to make God our priority and our planning. We commit to God. We must commit to God our plans. You know, it's more than just good practice.

It's essential for the Christian to put God first in our plans. But you know, do we actually put that into practice? Do we follow even the biblical principles?

Do you follow the principles about your planning and the reason for your planning? Are your plans, the plans that you make for your life, are they God glorifying? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God in your plans?

I mean, this is the kind of question that King Solomon who wrote so much of the Proverbs here, he was reckoning with this. He wrote of, and he was given God-given wisdom, you know, about this whole aspect of our plans in relation to the God who gives us the ability to make these plans.

And, you know, to bring it all down to one question, is God in your life or is he outside of your life? Are you committing your hopes, your aspirations, all your expectations?

[9 : 48] Are you bringing them before God? Or are you just content to use your own wisdom outside of God, outside of giving God the glory? And this is something we really must address both as individuals and as a church.

So, let's look at this in a little more detail. I think we do need to look at even the very word plan here. There's no, you know, haphazard use of a particular word here.

This word plan has the idea of arrangement. You know, arranging something in an orderly fashion. You've got the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament, for example, setting up the tabernacle.

Again, the word plan was used in the organized way that the tabernacle was set up. Priests who organized the wood and the animal sacrifice, again, the word plan is used there.

In other words, the word plan has a very positive connotation, a very positive way. It involves skill, it involves precision, and it's carried out for God's glory.

[10 : 58] Other times, the word plan was used to organizing an army for battle, organizing a legal case, organizing arguments, organizing people.

You know, God has said to organize in an orderly manner. So, there's a very deliberate use of this particular word here in verse 1, verse 3, and verse 9. Planning is essential.

There's nothing at all wrong with planning. Planning is God-honoring, but we must have God central to our plans. He's given us, as we said, our ability to make plans in an orderly fashion.

God has given us these minds so to exercise. exercise. Now, if God's placed you in any position of responsibility, now that can be in the family, it can be in a place of work, it can be in the church itself, it can even be in your leisure time.

Well, God expects you to use your mind, to think things through in that orderly fashion, but in conformity to God, the God of all order. You know, think of the different places that, you know, of work.

[12 : 14] You plan, you make preparation, you know, we could go on and on even in the whole human aspect of planning. Running a home involves planning, running your life.

There's so much preparation, so much planning, so much forward planning, how you live to the glory of God. But, but, and this is the central aspect here, all your plans, all your preparations must, absolutely must, come under the sovereignty of God and the scrutiny of God.

It must, and you must remember that they are conditional. Every plan you make for your life, your home, your work, must be conditional on God's approval, on God's enabling, on God's overruling control.

You know, if I preach a sermon, for example, and I simply am using, yes, words, fine sounding words, without the, committing that, that, that sermon, that address to God, without giving Him the glory in what I say, then I'm going to be utterly ineffective.

I'm not going to bring glory to God. Try and bring glory to God, but that's not the right thing, isn't it? If we disregard God's involvement, that's, things are going to be useless.

[13 : 37] And that's why we see in the second part of verse 1 here, the plans of the heart long to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. And, you know, what do we see again and again as King Solomon writes this little section that concerns our responsibilities?

What do you notice? In fact, just, you know, glance your eye down to verse 1, 2, 3, and even into 4, 5, 6, and so on, pretty much every verse there. You notice the name of the Lord.

The Lord is there right at the heart of the whole teaching about making our plans. Because there is no blessing, there's no increase, there's no God glorifying success unless the Lord builds the house, unless the Lord is with us.

And that surely teaches me, it teaches you, that you must involve God in every one of our plans. In fact, we may even say this, as verse 1 tells us, yes, God gives us the freedom to exercise our minds, but that freedom is conditioned by the response of God to every one of our plans.

You know, you might plan your life, you might take into account various factors when you come to a decision, but that decision is dependent on the Lord's will.

[15 : 04] That's why we read in James 4, verse 13 to 15, come now you say, today or tomorrow we'll go into such and such a time, we'll spend a year there and trade and make a profit, yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

What is your life? For you're a mist that appears for a little time then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, if the Lord wills, you will live and do this or that.

you know, I think both as individuals and really as a church, you know, even a denomination, we've largely lost that sense of the sheer importance of attaching all our plans, attaching all our plans with the reality of their coming to be and coming to pass, if the Lord wills, if the Lord wills.

You know, it used to be almost, you almost say, a regular occurrence should see something written down with the two little letters after the statement, DV, Deo Valente, God willing.

It just seemed to be so standard at one time even in the conversation of Christians. You know, announcements that were made from the pulpit. You know, when believers were thinking even what lay ahead even later that day or that week or that year, and DV was said that we will do this God willing.

[16:34] DV. And surely, you know, we must bring this back, bring this back into even the very way that we think, even the way that we practice. Because surely that has to be the response of every believer when we're making decisions about the future, whether it's your own life, whether it's the life of this church, it's God willing.

God willing, or we might say if the Lord wills. So before each one of your plans, each one of your decisions that you've made, it has to be, it has to be, DV, if the Lord wills.

And that's a conviction, a conviction of heart, you know, that all the decisions that you'll make in so many areas of your life, will you trust that, yes, God leading you in the right way, in the right course, that what you've planned in your heart, what you've brought before God, if it's His will, it will be done.

But, you know, there has to be that absolute commitment to God in seeking your will. I sometimes think we've just lost that perspective of bringing our plans, bringing our thoughts before God and saying, Lord, if it's your will, this be done.

And, you see, that's what I think we read here in verse 3. I'm slightly changing the order of looking at this passage. I'm going to 1, 3 and 2, 9 thrown in as well.

[18:02] But, let's look at verse 3. Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed. Your plans will be established. Your plans will be set firm.

Your plans will be set sure. I suppose is another way of putting it. You've made your plans. You've committed them to God. And, if these plans are within the will of God, as God's Word tells us, they will be established.

They'll be sure and certain to succeed. I mean, if you look at the verse carefully, commit your work to the Lord. The word literally is roll. Roll the plans that you've made unto God.

It's a sense of casting your care in the Lord. You know, entrusting to God what you've planned. And doing so in prayer. You know, coming before God in prayer.

Entrusting to God what you've planned. Seeking his guidance. Seeking his approval. Seeking his leading. Seeking his involvement in the plans of your mind. And we're told of the effect of that rolling these plans into God.

[19:10] Your plans will be set firm. Set sure. Established. In other words, when you entrust your plans before God and with God, when you commit them to him, you do that with that full assurance that his will is above all else.

His will is above everything, everything of what you've worked out. So, yes, each one of us has to acknowledge that the plans that you make, the plans that we make, that we devise in our mind, our hearts, will only succeed if they're in line, if they're in harmony, complete harmony with God's perfect plan for your life.

If that's the case, as the verse tells us here, these plans will be established by God. They'll be fixed, enduring, lasting value. What you've committed to the God of all grace won't have been in vain.

The outcome of what you plan won't be, won't be, it won't be in vain. They'll be established with lasting spiritual benefit for you and for all who will be in the focus of these plans when God's will is done in working out these plans.

And that establishing by God, you know, the establishing by God of our works, of our ways, of our plans, you see that again in verse 9, the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

[20:47] The way you take, in other words, the course of your life, you know it's already mapped out by God. He knows, well Job said, he knows the way that I take. And so, you know, to seek, to seek in your plans to conform with God's will, that is so utterly essential.

And it's a great blessing, it's a great comfort to every believer, that yes, we plan as we must, but ultimately, ultimately it's God who directs the course of your life, it's God who establishes in his will, yes, where you'll go in his service, what you'll do in his service.

So it's for you and for me to rest in the Lord, that he will guide, he will direct, he will direct you in his ways, so that we can have that assurance that his ways are the important ways, and that his ways may be our ways as well.

That doesn't take away the responsibility of seeking his will for all your ways. It doesn't take from you the preparation of actually doing the planning of your life, but you must do it under God's guidance.

And as we said before, we'll say it again, to realize that unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain. All your preparation, all your work, all my work is going to be in vain, unless you give these preparations, unless you give the work that you've been given to do, unless you give that to the Lord.

[22 : 29] So let's truly seek to bring our plans before God and to glorify God in everything that we devise in our heart.

Surely, you know, because this whole aspect of motive comes into the picture. All that you, all that your motive is, surely, is to glorify God our Lord.

Paul told the church in Corinth, whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. And that surely has to be the outcome of all our plans.

Because you see, plans become actions. And we pray that the actions that stem from our plans are there for the glory of God. And, you know, in the honesty of your heart, the honesty of my heart, we have to ask indeed of, you know, the plans that we make, are they intended to glorify God.

And remember this, God knows your heart, he knows my heart, and he probes our motives. It's what we see there in verse 2, God sovereign, sovereign examining. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

[23 : 48] So the plans of the heart have become actions, have become our ways. And, you know, we think we're innocent. We think that our plans are pure in our motive.

But are they? Think of, you know, the work that we've been given in relation to this congregation, this church. Or else think of, you know, your conduct at your place of work if you're working. Think of your interaction with others. Think of your connection with your neighbours, your friends. What are your true motives? You know, think of the plans even you have in relation to those whom you meet.

What are your true motives? I have to ask myself this all the time. Each one of us has to ask ourselves, what are my motives in the work that I'm doing in the church, in my family, in the community where I live, in the work that I've been given to do?

Are they truly to give glory to God? Are they truly to make God known by words and actions? Are what you do, are they to show forth the Lord Jesus Christ by your words and by your witness, by your actions?

[25 : 03] Are they to show that truly the change that God has made in your life is that true change, that true life-transforming change? And you want to point others to the Lord Jesus?

Is that the motive in what you do and what you say in the life that God has given you? Or is it the opposite? Is it the opposite? Is it that he might decrease and I might increase?

Are your motives or my motives, are they pure in your ways, in your work, in your actions? You know, it's very, very easy to fool others when our motives aren't pure, when our motives aren't to glorify God.

And you know, there are even times we can deceive ourselves. I think that's what this proverb here in verse 2 suggests. We might fool others, but we can't fool God. God knows our hearts.

He knows the motives behind what you do, behind what I do. As we're told here, they're weighed. They're weighed by the Lord. You see that in verse 2, the Lord weighs the Spirit.

[26 : 11] You see that word picture here of God testing our hearts. God, as it were, weighing, God weighing our hearts, whether our hearts have pure, God glorifying motives in everything we think and everything we do and say, or whether they come short of His glory.

I think the word picture here is of weighing scales. Our hearts motives weighed in these scales. And the measurement that's showing the motives of our spirits, the motives of our hearts, do they have that required weight of glory?

Or do they fall short of the glory of God? God will test your thoughts. God will test your hearts. He's going to test your ways as He tests my ways. Because there's no hiding place from God.

And so, you know, each one of us has to ask ourselves, you know, in what spirit do I perform my actions? Is it the spirit of God first? Is it the spirit of giving God glory?

You know, in what I plan, when I make my decisions? Are these plans out of love for God and for my neighbor's good? Do I do what I do in service for the one who gave himself for me in his pure motive of love, even though I deserve nothing of his love?

[27 : 37] Or am I way simply to draw attention to myself? Praise of others rather than praise of God. You know, I speak for myself as much as I direct yourself to consider these things.

You know, when I think of even my own work, in every sermon I preach, in every pastoral visit I make, in every piece of writing that I do, even that's occasionally published, I think there's something in next month's record that I've got in the record, every email that's written, every conversation that I have, are these done for the glory of God?

Or as we're thinking this morning, for the glory of self? You know, ask yourself these things, and all that you do, in your ways, all your conversations, whether it's spoken or written, and every decision that you make, and every plan that you have, are these for the glory of God, or the glorious self, and forbid that any of my ways, or any of your ways, are found in the balance, and found wanting.

Let's lay our plans before God, your plans before God, you roll them unto him, ask God to test your heart in these plans, we have to, even as a church, ask God to test our motives, ask God to, yes, to examine our ways, and pray that he'll reveal if there's even the dross of any kind of self-centered pride, or any motive that's contrary to the will of God, yes, to follow the command that Paul gave to the church in Colossians, he read in Colossians 3, 17, whatever you do, I think we've said this already, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him, and a few verses later, whatever you do, work heartily us for the Lord and not for me.

And when you do what you do in the name of the Lord Jesus, when you do what you do in thankfulness to God, and I give you this challenge and I give you this conviction, you'll see change in your life, and you'll see change in the life of others, because when we take away the ugliness of self-centered actions, and give way to actions that show the love of God, and your love for God and your neighbor, your heart will change, because actions that stem from the heart to give glory to God, will see that you are truly living for the Lord Jesus.

[30 : 24] us. We said right at the start of our thoughts in this passage, that we make plans as we're made in the image of God, because of course God himself makes plans and has made plans for his people that are pure and eternal.

And you know, this is the wonderful truth, and with this we'll finish, God has plans for you, God has plans for you. One of the very first sermon I ever preached here in this building was in Jeremiah 29, verse 11 to 13.

And there are verses that I often return to for reassurance and comfort and that resting in God whenever there are particular doubts in my life at times, and I pray that you'll look at these same verses to give you that assurance of God's love for you.

Jeremiah 29, 11 to 13. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I pray that you will take these words to heart, that you'll know the plans that God has for you, and that you'll trust in the Lord our God, because his plans for you are pure and perfect and glorifying to him.

[31 : 53] And that you'll remember this, that the Lord is in that throne in heaven. He is sovereign. It's for you, for me, to seek to honour him with your plans, with my plans, to seek to honour him with your ways, and pray that your ways, your plans, will conform to his plans for the glory of his name.

Lord, you have given us minds to think, you've given us the abilities to reason, you've given us that skill to make plans, but we pray, Lord, that all our plans in our life, all the plans that are made for this congregation's life, that these plans we know will be if the Lord wills.

And so, Lord, even in the quiet of this time, may your people commit to you their ways, may they commit to you their plans, may they roll them unto you, may they seek your leading, your guidance, may they seek to honour you in all their ways, that they may glorify you and live for you in all the days that you have given to them.

We thank you, Lord, for your word. We thank you, Lord, that you give us these directions. For us, your word gives us these directions that show us how we might live for you, how we might truly fulfill the purpose that you have given to your people to glorify God and to enjoy you forever.

So help us, Lord, we pray, in all our ways. Forgive, Lord, for the many times when our ways have not been your ways, when our ways have been according simply to self-glorification.

[33 : 48] But we thank you, Lord, that you cleanse us, you restore us, you bring us back to yourself. We thank you, Lord, that you give us that motive to fear you, to honour you.

So may your people truly do so, as from the heart, for your glory and for your praise. Pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's sing now in Psalm 40.

Sing Psalms on page 50, from verse 1 down to verse 5. We read from verse 1, I waited long upon the Lord.

He heard my cry and turned to me. He raised me from the slimy pit and from the mire. He pulled me free. And there's verse 5, the wonders you have done, O Lord. How many and how great they are.

Your plans for us are far beyond our prayers to number or declare. 1 to 5, stand 40, to God's praise. Amen.