

The Plan (Evening Service)

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Date: 29 October 2017

Preacher: Tad Inboden

[0 : 00] Give us ears to hear and eyes to see you tonight. In your precious name, amen. Hello, everyone. I'm Tad.

I'm the director of student ministries here at St. John's, along with my wife, Nicole. I'm so glad to be with you here tonight. So to begin, what I want us to do is this.

I want everyone to close their eyes. Will you all close your eyes with me? I'm not going to close my eyes, but you have to close your eyes. No peeking. We're not going to pray. You can't pray throughout my sermon, or you can't fall asleep.

Okay, so close your eyes. And I want you to ask yourself this question. What are some plans that I have for my life right now?

Maybe you're a grade 12, and you're trying to think through what university to go to. Maybe you're in university and trying to decide on a major. Maybe you're about to graduate university, and you're looking for a job, and you're trying to make a decision about where to work.

[1 : 06] Maybe you're in your career right now, and you're trying to plan out the next 5, 10, 15 years of your life. Maybe you're a mom or dad, and you're trying to make plans for your family.

Or maybe right now you're just lost, and you need God's guidance for your life. Take a few seconds and just think, what are some plans that I have for my life right now?

Okay, you can open your eyes. How many of you, you don't need to show me your hands, but how many of you could come up with some plans? How many of you had some plans?

Oh, okay, you will show hands. Let's see a show of hands. I want to show you. Do we? So we all have, oh, we all, okay, great. That's what I thought. I thought we all could make plans.

That was my bet. You see, here's the thing. No matter where we're at in life, no matter what stage, we simply make plans.

[2 : 08] It's what human beings do. Sometimes they're really, really big plans. Plans like, what am I going to do with my life? But sometimes they're just small plans.

Like, what am I going to do after church? I know for me, my small plan, what I'm going to do after church is I'm going to go out, get some takeout food, probably from McDonald's, because we live by McDonald's.

I'm going to get that McDonald's, and I'm going to go watch season two of Stranger Things. How many of you have seen Stranger Things season two? Let me see a show of hands. Woo, okay, good.

That's good stuff. If you don't, don't waste your life. It's good, okay. See, but here, we all make plans. We all have plans for our life.

Big ones, small ones, medium-sized ones. But here is the question, and here is the fundamental question that we as Christians have to ask ourselves when we are making plans because God is in the mix.

[3 : 11] Am I right? God is in the mix of our planning. So we have to ask ourselves these kind of questions. How do we know when we make plans for our life, no matter what they are, how do we know that these plans line up with God's plans for our life?

How can we know that the plans that we are making are being guided and directed by God? How do we know the things that we are doing are lined up with His will?

I, along with my wife, Nicole, we work with youth and young adults here at the church, and we counsel a lot of them, we meet with a lot of them, and we talk with a lot of them about life and about problems and all this other stuff you can think of.

It's crazy, but it's a lot of fun. And probably the number one question we get asked from students is how do I know what God wants me to do with my life?

I'm sure a lot of you have asked that question. What am I supposed to do? How do I know what I'm supposed to do? How do I know that my plans are aligned with God's plans for my life?

[4 : 24] What do I want? How do I know that what I'm doing are aligned with God's, what God wants me to do? How do I become the kind of person who actually does God's plans?

If you've ever asked those kinds of questions, which I'm sure most of you have at one point in your life, maybe you're asking those questions right now. If you've ever asked those questions, this sermon, this passage, which Proverbs 16 is for you.

Why? Because Proverbs 16 is all about plans. Well, most of it is about plans, not all of it. We have some other great Proverbs in there that aren't about plans, but we have most of it's about plans. And here's what it shows us. It shows us that there is one thing that we need to know and two things that we have to do when we're grappling with this topic of God's plans and our plans and how the two intersect and interlock.

And they all start with the letter F. We will call these things the killer Fs to knowing God, getting God, and doing God's plan for our life.

[5 : 44] Here they are. They are freedom, fear, and faithfulness. Can we all say that together? Here we go. Freedom, fear, and faithfulness.

The killer Fs of knowing and getting and doing God's plan for our life. So first, first, what do we have to know? The first thing that we have to get straight, friends, is the idea that God has given us freedom to make our own plans.

God has given us freedom. Look at the first half of 16.1 and 16.9. 16.1 says this, The plans of the heart belong to man.

They're his. And 16.9 says, The heart of a man plans his ways. What these verses are showing us is that God has given us freedom to make our own plans, to make our own choices, and to bear the consequences of our choices.

We have freedom. No one, including God, is forcing us to go in this direction or that direction. You can choose what you want to do, how you want to do it, and when you want to do it.

[7 : 06] Your plans are yours. That's what these Proverbs are saying. You are free to choose, and God and other people will hold you accountable to your actions. God, in other words, does this.

He gives us the freedom to look within, to look at our heart, to look at our passion, to look at our skills, to look at our giftings, and to come up with a plan for our life.

We have the freedom to do that. So you can look within, and you say, I have a passion for caring for people. I want to be a nurse. I love arguing with people. I love writing papers.

I love reading. I want to be a lawyer. I love creating. I love creating. I want to be an artist. When I was young, I always babysat and hung out with kids.

I cannot wait to start a family of my own. I really, really, really like this guy. He's a good guy. He's a godly guy.

[8 : 05] I'm going to get married to him. Ooh, baby. Or this girl, you know, this girl isn't right for me. I'm just not feeling it. I think I'm going to break up with her. I've made enough money this year.

I think I'm going to buy in this city. I don't know how much money you're making, but if you can buy in this city, whoo, okay. See, we can look at these things in our life, our experiences, our history, our personality, our talents, our gifts.

We can look at all these things and then formulate a plan. And this plan can set a direction for our life. But here's the problem.

There's a problem. Have you ever talked to someone and they're like, you know, I think I'm one way. And then they're like, this is what I am made to do.

And you're like, okay, dude, I don't know who you think you are, but you would be terrible at that thing. Do we all know those people? Those kind of people who are like, I am made to be a singer, but you know they cannot sing on pitch to save their life.

[9 : 14] Are those people maybe who want to be a counselor, right? But you know them and they just don't listen to people. Or maybe they want to be a pastor, but they're just, you know, they're not good with people.

They don't really like spending time with people. We all know these kind of people. Maybe you are this kind of person. And no matter what you do, no matter what you do to try to convince them, convince them that this is a bad idea, that maybe this is a different, you should go in a different direction.

They are just determined to do it anyway. You see, this is the point I'm making. Proverbs constantly reminds us of how self-deceived we actually are.

In another book of the Bible, Jeremiah in 17.9, it says that our hearts are deceitful above all things and desperately sick. See, we can look at our lives, we can look within our hearts, and we can say to ourselves, I know what's best for me.

I know what course of action to take. I know what plans to make. And here's the thing. They can be the wrong plans. It can be the wrong course of action to take.

[10:28] This is what 16.25, I think, is on about. It says this, there is a way that seems right to man, but in the end leads to death.

You see, we are free to make our own plans. We are free to look within and choose what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. God is not forcing us to do anything. But in our freedom, we can think we know what is best for us.

We can think we know what is best to do. We can think we know better than God. Our freedom, in other words, runs the risk of making us prideful in our planning, of choosing to set up our own life, to set our own course, to do our own thing, make our own plans without consulting God or submitting to God.

This is why I think we have those passages in 16.5 and 16.18 warning us about the dangers of pride.

Pride in planning leads to self-deception and in the end, self-destruction and even death. Pride, these proverbs are telling us, poisons our plans.

[11:49] It poisons our plans. When we're prideful, we don't seek to consult others when we plan. We don't consult God. We look to ourselves and within ourselves only, and this can be lethal.

It can be deadly. So in thinking about this topic of freedom and pride in our planning, it's important to ask ourselves some really key questions.

So I want you guys to ask yourselves these questions as I kind of rattle them off. Ask this, when I make plans, any plans, big or small, do I consult the Lord in prayer?

When I make plans, do I see them as fixed plans, as my plans? They're not going to be moved.

These are mine. They're set. Do I take advice from other people wiser than me, or do I just make plans on my own?

Is that a pattern or a habit in my life? Do I seek guidance from God's Word and people in my small group, or do I just look within and say, I got this? Are there plans that you have right now that you can't let go of?

[13:02] Plans that you just can't give to God? So here we go. Freedom leads to pride. There's a danger in it. So how do we avoid that?

How do we avoid becoming prideful in our planning? How do we avoid the mentality that we know what is best for us? How do we use our freedom to honor God and submit to God's plans for our lives?

Now we're moving into the section of the things that we have to do. So the first thing that we have to do is to fear the Lord. This is the second F word.

Fear the Lord. Can you all say that with me? I need to fear the Lord. Fearing the Lord is a major theme in the book of Proverbs.

You guys remember this. Aaron has talked about this multiple times. It even shows up in 16.6. To fear the Lord literally means just to respect and stand in awe of the Lord.

[14:05] It means to stand in a subservient position to Him and seek to obey whatever it is He says. In other words, it's the opposite of pride.

It is humility before the Lord. So imagine with me this. Imagine that I wanted to be a basketball player. Okay? You guys are looking at my 5'7 frame and you're like, this is never going to happen. Okay. But let's just imagine for the sake of this example that I want to be a basketball player. And I don't know where to start.

And let's say that I have any resource available to me to help me become a good basketball player. What would I do? Well, naturally, I would probably call the best basketball player in the NBA right now LeBron James.

Maybe that's contestable, but I think it's LeBron James. And here's what I would do. I would call him and I'd be like, LeBron, yo, bro, you need to teach me how to play some b-ball.

[15:07] And he'll be like, okay, man, whatever. He's like, okay, Ted, that's cool. Okay. And then, and so what, he'll be like, okay, Ted, you're from Ohio. I'm from Ohio.

Let's meet in Cleveland. We'll get some Wendy's. We'll play ball on the court and I'll show you everything I know. What would be the first thing I do when I get there, when I stand on the court before this man?

I would simply stand in awe of LeBron James. I would respect everything he had to say about the game of basketball. I would literally do everything he told me to do.

I would listen so intently. I would just stand before him and let him teach me everything he knows about the game and then I would try to do everything he told me to.

Why? Because I know that he is far better than I will ever be at the game of basketball. You see, fearing the Lord when we set out to make plans looks a little bit like that.

[16:09] It is coming to God and saying, God, you are the creator and sustainer of all of life. You are far better at all of this than I am.

You are all powerful. You are all knowing. You are the king of kings and the lord of lords. And God, I don't know what is best for my life. I don't know what I'm supposed to do.

I don't know what the best course of action to take is on this point. But you do. Give me your wisdom. Give me your guidance. I need your help.

Fear is about humility and respect for the Lord and saying to him that you are God and I am not. But it's more than that.

You see these verses in 16.1, the flip side of these verses. 16.1, 4, 9, and 33. What these verses show us is that it's also about acknowledging that God is sovereign.

[17:14] Sovereign over the world and sovereign over our lives. And that nothing is outside of his sovereign will. Not a single word as verse 1 shows us and not a single deed as verse 9 shows us.

It's about recognizing that while we have the freedom to devise our own plans, God is the one who has the ultimate say. It is coming to see that his sovereignty works together all things.

This is incredible. It works together all things for his purposes. Even the wicked and evil things as verse 4 shows us. And when we see that, when we catch a glimpse of that, when we humbly come before God and say to him, Lord, you are the sovereign king and ruler of this world and of my life.

You have a plan that is higher than my plan. You have ways that are higher than my ways. We can relax in his presence. We can submit our plans to his sovereign plan and we can begin to grasp what his plan is for our lives.

We begin to catch a glimpse of his will. And when that happens, sometimes when that happens, I know it's happened to me when I come and stand before God and throw myself at him in humility and I pray, Lord, I need your help on this thing.

[18:42] Here is what I'm planning. Is this right? Is this what I'm supposed to do? What he'll say is no. I want another course of action. I want you to trust me in this area.

I want you to do this. And what we will have to do is amend our plans, change our plans, and sometimes even just get rid of our plans and trust him entirely.

How many of you right now sense that God's plan for your life looks a little different than what you're planning right now? Maybe it just looks a little different.

Maybe God is calling you to do something that doesn't quite fit your plan. Maybe he's asking you to downsize in your home. Maybe he's asking you to give more to the church or charity or ministries. Maybe he's asking you to reach out to your neighbors or quit school and do something crazy like go spread the gospel in India or Africa or China or somewhere.

[19:45] Maybe he's asking you to stop your practice right now and use your skills to help the needy. Friends, do you fear the Lord?

Are you seeking God's plan for your life? Are you submitting your plans to him? So we must fear the Lord. We must humbly come to him, submit our plans to him, and seek his guidance for our life. That's the first do. The second F. But secondly, we must be faithful when we plan. Everyone say that with me.

I must be faithful when I plan. Ooh, that sounds good. This is the third F word. Look at 16 verse 3. It says this, commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.

Another translation puts it this way, commit to the Lord whatever you do and he will establish your plans. At first glance, what do we think this verse is saying?

[20 : 55] We think it's saying this, commit your plans to the Lord and what will end up happening, what you end up doing will succeed. Isn't that what we think it's saying?

But that is not what the verse is saying. What it's saying is commit your deeds to the Lord and you will become more and more the kind of person who makes smart plans.

It is exactly the opposite of what we might think. And this is what it's saying. The word for commit in this passage, it literally means to roll over onto, to put all of your weight on.

And what this is saying, practically, is to unconditionally trust God for all things that happen in your life and you will slowly become the kind of person who makes wise plans, plans that are aligned with God's plans for your life.

You see, once we fear the Lord, once we come to Him and stand in awe and deference to Him, we begin to see God's will and plan for our life. And what needs to happen is once that, once we get that, once we grasp that, we need to begin to radically trust God with our entire lives.

[22 : 20] We must come to a place where we can say to God, Lord, not my will be done, but Your will be done. God wants us to trust Him completely.

Wants each and every one of you to trust Him completely when you're making decisions about who to date, when you're making decisions about who to marry, where to move, when to quit that job or when to start a new job, when to have a baby and start a family, how to raise your family.

He wants us to trust Him with our careers, our finances, our families, our friends, everything in our life. He wants us to trust Him through the good times and the bad times.

And you see, and the more and more we entrust our lives in, the more and more we trust Him with every aspect of our lives, the more and more we will make plans that look more and more like His plans for our lives.

It's an amazing thing. So to sum up everything I'm saying, you have freedom when you make your plans. But are you looking only to yourself when you plan or are you looking to God, His Word, and other Christians?

[23 : 47] Do you fear, the second F, do you fear the Lord when you make plans? Do you recognize His sovereignty and are you willing to submit your plans to His?

And lastly, the third F, are you being faithful when you plan? Are there areas in your life that you need to give over to God? Are there things that you need to trust God with completely?

So let me close with this. You know, in our passage in verses 10 through 15, we have that section that talks about the King. The King was someone who was supposed to submit His own plans to God's plans, to God's sovereign rule so that His rule would be brought to bear on His people.

Jesus Christ, friends, was that perfect King. He submitted His own plans to the ultimate plan for salvation, administering God's rule on earth and rescuing us from the bondage of sin.

We see Him trusting the Father with every fiber of His being and doing His Father's will, even though it cost Him His life.

[25 : 07] And because of that, because He accomplished the Father's plan, we can stand before Him in fear and reverence without shame or without guilt and discover His plan for our lives.

Because He was faithful to the end, we can trust Him with our plans. We can trust Him with our lives. Amen.