

# A Plan for Life

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It's wonderful to have so many of you with us as here today and I want to just set a little context for my message here this morning as I start. We are about to really accelerate our move in the building of our foundation of moving from being a fellowship to a church and that's going to start in 2 weeks when I start a series on the book of Titus and look at the building blocks of a godly church and that's what we're going to be starting on. I'm going to be gone next week and so I didn't want to start that series and then be gone and kind of break up the momentum so it kind of gave me a one time slot to share something very practical and useful for you here this morning. It's some content that a few of you have heard before but I want to bring it to the totality of the church because it's just so fundamental to living the Christian life.

You know, we sang earlier in the song "Wonderful, Merciful Savior," there is a line there about having hopelessly lost our way. I realize that there are times in the Christian life where we can feel like we've lost our way even though theologically we know that we haven't but as you're going through life and sorting through the different decisions that you've made in the past and that lie ahead in the future, there is a sense of, "What direction is this taking?" sometimes and you wonder if you've lost your way. And one of the most common things that you deal with in pastoral ministry is one of 2 things really: you can almost classify it and just chronologically you have people that are dealing with regret about the past over decisions that they have made or disappointments that they have about the way the past has gone that sets the context for now or it's anxiety and concern and fretting over the future. The present is really just an intersection of the past and the future and in the Christian life, we need to have a right understanding of that. What we have to talk about here this morning really hits us all right where we live whether you have regrets over past failed relationships, concerns about the future. I talk with people who are very concerned about taking care of their health and all of that and different aspects of planning for the future and all of that has around it, there is a common thread that is woven through all of those things that we're addressing that are common to each one of us, that each one of us feels the weight of. Unexpected events come.

The common thread through all of this is taking our understanding of what the Bible teaches about the sovereignty of God and placing it and applying that to the details of our lives both great and small. This goes to the very, very heart of living a productive, wise, fruitful Christian life is to be able to do this and to be able to understand these things and

to apply them properly to your life because look, if you're attracted to this church at all, I realize that you have a love, a respect, some sense for the sovereignty of God over all things. You know, the Bible says in Proverbs 21:1, for example that the heart of kings is in the hand of the Lord, he directs them wherever he wishes. The Bible teaches us that the very hairs on your head are numbered; that a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground or a deer alongside the interstate. Okay, the Bible doesn't talk about the deer along the interstate but it's the same exact principle that we're talking about here. That God's hand is in everything that happens. He's in every detail of life, both great and small. The numbers of hairs on your head, the intervention of life and death issues in your life, every aspect of it it is involved with the sovereignty of God. Nothing escapes his sight. Nothing escapes his direct care for us. And let me say this and I say this sympathetically. I have to say this over and over again so that you never lose sight of it: whenever we're talking about these kinds of life issues or whatever else comes from this pulpit, the pastor here at Truth Community Fellowship is always on your side. This is always designed to build you up and to encourage you and to help you. This is always to build you up and sometimes the word, as the word helps us, it rebukes us. It exposes defective thinking, a lack of faith perhaps in our thinking but even when the word rebukes us, it is done so to build us up, to edify us and to encourage us.

So what we're going to look at here this morning is designed for your blessing from beginning to end and to give you a sense of confidence about the future and the ability to be able to see the direction by which you can put the past to rest and not be tortured by the things that have tortured you in the past. All of this comes under the wise counsel of God that is shown to us in the book of Proverbs and I would invite you to turn to Proverbs 16 for our message this morning. It is always remarkable to come across a single verse of Scripture that unlocks a key to life. Not every verse of Scripture could be said to do that but this is a verse that properly understood points us in a direction that helps us understand the nature of the Christian life, that gives you the capacity to live with a sense of resolution with the past and confidence about the future and it takes all of the pressure off as you contemplate those things.

Now look, I get it. Life, except for people that are just really, you know, narcissistic and just really wrapped up in themselves and the pursuit of pleasure, if you're in this place this morning and you've come back 2 or 3 times, I understand that you take life seriously. Life matters to you. You want to live it well. You want to honor the Lord as a Christian with what you do. Well, here in this verse, it gives us the mindset by which we can do that. It's Proverbs 16:9. It won't take me long to read it. It's about 13 words in the English text. Proverbs 16:9 says,

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

What I want to look at here from this verse is to consider the whole nature of planning in the Christian life: how we approach life; how do we think about it; how do we prepare for the future. And also as we do that, to be able to cast a look back with you at your past experience in life and be able to give you a means of understanding that and interpreting it in a way that will give you as you meditate on these things as you leave this place, a

settled sense of resolution and confidence that God's hand has been involved in all of it. Even the sad things, even the sinful things that have happened in your life that have led you to this point, understand that God was working through all of it to bring you to where you're at right now. There has not been a mistake in the overall sovereign plan of God. That's not to excuse our sin but God over-rules even our sin to accomplish his purposes and so when we understand that as a believer in Christ, as we understand that Christ has come and reconciled us to a holy Father and that he intends to bring us to heaven with him, we realize that God's hand, his direction has been involved at every step of the process. And when you understand that, when you take that to heart and realize that this is more than an academic truth that we're discussing here, you look back and you say, "That particular regret, that thing that I still grieve over, somehow I must view this through the lens of the sovereignty of God, of his personal direction of my life and therefore that which caused me grief, which has still been a burden on my mind, I look at and say there is an unseen dimension to this. There is an unseen element to this that has to affect the way that I think about it. There is an unseen element that somehow the good, wise, sovereign hand of God was leading me even through that." And for those of you that are on the brink of life change, I know there are some of you in here today, this gives you the greatest confidence as you step forward as you make those changes in your life. This first provides for you the greatest confidence of the certainty of God's blessing as you move forward even if it comes out different than what you expect. This is wonderful truth. This takes the pressure off of your mind. This minimizes, this mitigates regret. This gives you confidence as you go forward. This is what we need to hear today.

So we're going to talk about planning and see where that takes us and I'm going to use the word "plan" today with the following sense, okay? I like to define terms when we're together just so that we're all on the same page. The word "plan," p-l-a-n. When you plan you're doing this: you're using your mind to develop a proposed course of action with the means that you have at your disposal to achieve a result that you value. You plan. I'll say it again: you plan when you use your mind to develop a proposed course of action with the means that you have at your disposal to achieve a result that you value. Now, in a very simple sense, just in a common sense, every day manner, we all plan to one degree or another. I understand that. You make a task list for the day ahead. "I'm going to plan out what I want to get done today. I've got a plan, 1, 2, 3 that I'm going to follow." Some people do that. You want your car to run well so you follow a maintenance plan and you maintain it at regular intervals because you value the fact of having a long-term vehicle that is reliable and so you take care of what you spent your money on so that it will serve you well into the future. The maintenance isn't necessarily necessary right today but you understand that there is a cumulative impact and so you plan and you take care of things because you're taking the future into account as you live life today.

Now, that's very simple and basic so far. There are elements of professing Christianity that believe that planning is inconsistent with trusting God. There are Christians who would tell you that you shouldn't have life insurance because you're not trusting God. I don't agree with that at all. I think that's foolish thinking to make a blanket statement like that. And I want you to see today that there is a role for planning in the Christian life and as you think about planning and what it means and what the Bible says about planning, it

opens up your mind to these whole other issues that we're talking about, about the way we view the past and the way that we view the future. To understand this is to understand the whole nature of Christian life and how we live it here today.

So I'm going to give you 3 points here to think about. First of all is this, the first point here today is this, as you're thinking about your life, whether it's thinking about today or thinking about the longer term future, according to the Scriptures: 1. You should certainly plan. You should certainly plan. You should have a course of action in mind and not simply be a passive responder to every circumstance in life. You should take the reins in your hands and start to direct the carriage in the direction that it's going. Now, I'm just really pleased that I used a horse and buggy analysis right after I had said an interstate as well. We're just covering every possible mode of transportation here today. Someplace I might just randomly throw in the word "bicycle" to just kind of help us out here and take all of this into consideration.

You should certainly plan. You should certainly plan. Look at Proverbs 6. I want you to see that the Bible commends diligent planning. The Bible commends diligent planning and promises blessing on those who do it. Proverbs 6:6, "Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise." So he's speaking to a lazy person and humbles him with his instruction, "Go look at this insect." This is a great day to be talking about insects in the Creation Museum with a new exhibit that's just been opened. I didn't plan it this way, it just happened this way. "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." Solomon says, "Look at what an insect does to care for life." When the provision is there in the summer, she gathers it up and preserves it so that it's available when food isn't as readily available in the fall. An insect does that and experiences blessing and preserves life for itself and for its colony by those simple planning actions and it's obvious that that's the right thing to do. Solomon goes to a human being made in the image of God, guilty of the sin of laziness and says, "That's what you need to be like." And so for all of the sophisticated things that we like to commend ourselves for, Solomon takes us back and humbles us and says, "Look at an ant and get a view of how you should approach life."

Now, turn over to Proverbs 21:5. You'll see it in a more didactic sense and these things that we see here in verse 5 really shape the whole nature of your character. It shapes the whole way that you think about life and it preserves you from making foolish decisions in an impulsive reaction to adverse circumstances. This is the most common mistake, I believe, that people make in the Christian life is they make hasty decisions when adverse circumstances come. Something happens that they don't like and they change the whole direction of their life on an impulse, on a whim, without due consideration simply because they find themselves suddenly in circumstances that they don't like. Well, we have to rise above that, beloved. It's not that we don't make plans and change our life. If that was the case, I'd still be in California rather than the pastor here.

But look at chapter 21:5, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty." Hasty decisions are the bane of

Christian living. Planning, the Bible says, leads to advantage. Impulsive behavior leads to poverty. And in one sense the wonderful thing about this, the thing that you have to do to really appreciate this, is you have to step back and look at it from a big perspective because the consequences of hasty behavior aren't immediately evident and people love, people love to baptize their hasty, impulsive behavior with statements like, "Well, I think the Lord is leading me to do this." Well, what makes you think that? What makes you think that the Lord would suddenly call you to the other side of the world when you've never given a thought to that and then you would be making plans to do that instantly in response to some disappointment in your life? That's not the Lord's leading. That's you being foolish. That's you being hasty and not really taking into account the biblical merit, the biblical mandate of planning.

God has woven this into the moral order of the universe as a principal to be honored and we can see this real simply. Consider a simple example, a hypothetical example. You've got 2 men with the same job, same family, same basic expenses. One man orders his life, plans his life, plans his finances and saves money at the rate of \$200 a month. That's not much money, I understand, but he orders it and he's disciplined in that direction. You've got another man who is hasty, impulsive with his decisions, does a lot of things that are beyond his means and he's spending at a debt rate of \$1,000 a month. Initially, the hasty man has the appearance of external prosperity; enjoying life more. But check back in 5 years. Check back in 10 years and see where the outcome of that approach to life leads. You see, you can't measure it by the instant things that happen. You have to evaluate what produces the best long term result. You have to think. And for all of the way that we take life seriously, we also have to approach life with wisdom and to realize that God has established a creation that is very ordered. Just look at the circulation of the planets in the galaxies around us and you'll see the precision of his order and realize that while we don't have complete control over what we do, that we approach life with an orderly sense in order to honor the one who made creation in an ordered fashion.

You see, beloved, the wise man not only plans his finances, the wise man thinks through life. He plans life. He thinks ahead and, you see, here's the ultimate way to plan your life, the wise man, the biblical thinker, is going to approach things with this in mind, the wise man is going to plan his life with this in mind: you look ahead and you realize that coming ahead for your life is the certainty that one day you're going to give an account to God. You're going to stand in his presence as a believer in Christ. You're going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and he's going to reward you based on how you've lived your life. For the unbeliever, it's going to be before the Great White Throne and the certainty of eternal judgment. You see, the wise person thinks ahead to that certain coming event that is more certain than what you will have for lunch today. He looks ahead to that event and says, "Oh, I need to order my life so that that day, that event, that time in the presence of God goes well, as well as it can be."

"How can I do that?" Well, let me start by saying what he says in his word: you devote your life to things of eternal significance now because you value the good result of a good outcome in the presence of God in the future and so you order life that way. You order life around godly priorities rather than the simple pursuit of your fleshly desires.

Moses spoke to this in Psalm 90:12. If you're taking notes, you can just jot that reference down and look it up later. Moses said, "Teach us to number our days so that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." "Lord," he says, "my life is brief and it's going to be over in a flash before I know it. Help me to take account of the brevity of life as I live it so that I would use these brief passing days in a productive way that reflects the wisdom that you've shown us in your word." Teach us to number our days. You see, beloved, this is what we have to do. This is how we have to think. We have to step back and say, "Oh, life is brief. Oh, life goes by quickly and God is going to hold me accountable for how I live my life therefore I want to live it in a way that is honoring to him," and that has the effect of excluding a whole lot of life options from your consideration. It leaves out, it pushes out all manner of sinful living and narrows you down to the path that is revealed in the Scriptures. Just being conscious of coming judgment has a sanctifying effect upon you and if you've never taken into account the reality of coming judgment in the way that you approach life, today is a great day to start.

Look, you know, that day of accountability that is all coming for us, we're not going to be able to stand before that together. There is going to be individual accountability. We're going to go through a turnstile, as it were, and collectively we're not going to be able to stand and support each other through it. We're going to be individually accountable to Christ for the way that we've lived our lives. And our time together to help each other through the life now, we take advantage of that but one day it's not going to be...you know, there's not going to be anyone there. It's going to be you in the presence of a holy Christ. So take that into account, beloved. If you've been clinging to sin in your life, if you're conscious of anger and bitterness that you've been holding onto because of past relationships or whatever, this is the time to deal with that and straighten it out. It's a good time to apply the principle of biblical forgiveness in relationships, for example, because all of that is laid open and bare before our holy God with whom we have to do. "Teach us to number our days so that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." Godly Christians plan their approach to life because God commands and commends planning in his word.

Now, secondly: you should plan confidently. You not only plan certainly but you should plan confidently and I love this point, this goes into the settled peace that is available to every true Christian. Let me remind you of a passage that we have looked at in passing over the past 2 or 3 weeks. Turn back to Proverbs 3. We're sort of keeping ourselves anchored in Proverbs although there are a lot of other places we could go for these things. Proverbs 3:5. We've been awakened to the need for planning through thinking through life, approaching it, taking it seriously, using our minds to plan both our days and our future and now we see that we do this with confidence. Chapter 3, verse 5, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." Watch this in verse 6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." As you are planning, as you are trusting, the Scriptures say that the Lord is going to direct your paths and make them straight. He's going to open up the future to you in a way that displays his blessing in your life. He will make your paths straight. That is the confidence that we have.

Now, this gets really personal really quickly. For those of you that are prone to anxiety, fear, uncertainty, "What if this? What if that? I need to do this so that that doesn't happen. I'm just trying to calculate all the permutations of what could happen." I used to live in that. I can remember just the weight of that and the precautions that you take to try to keep bad things from happening in your life. I understand what that's like and it's a burden to bear. Well look, what Proverbs and the whole tenor of Scripture teaches to us that know Christ is this: true Christians should plan their future with a serene confidence that the future will bring good to them even though that future is uncertain. Let me state that as a personal second person statement rather than in the third person: if you are a Christian here today, you should increasingly look to the future with a sense of serenity, with a sense of confidence that God is going to be good to you no matter what happens. No matter what happens. Romans 8:28, "For God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose."

Now look, I want to say this gently but I want to say it directly: do you believe that or not? Do you believe that or not? Do you believe that God is good to his people or not? If you belong to him, then make a personal application to your own life and to your own life circumstances right now that says, "Oh, God is always good to his people in every aspect of life and though the future is uncertain, whatever comes to me in the future is going to be a dispensation of the goodness and sovereign control of God directing my circumstances in order to bring me blessing in the end." That is the way every Christian should think about the future. That is the way, beloved, that you should think about the future and if you are one that is prone to anxiety and wracked by the doubts about what's going to happen in the future, you need to bring your mind here and anchor it there and keep it there until you start to see a turning of your heart in this matter.

Look, let's tie this back in with planning and the whole point of this is what I'm about to say: when we talk about planning, it's easy to plan with a sense from a defensive posture, a sense of fear that says, "I've got to plan things out so that bad things don't come. I've got to plan and account for all of the contingencies and exclude them so that the bad things don't happen to me." Look, that's not why we plan at all. That is not Christian thinking at all. It's okay to account for things and protect yourself but what I'm saying is, what I'm talking about is the fundamental way that you think about the future and the way that you think about the uncertain nature of what will happen to you in the days to come. We plan not from a perspective of fear that, "If I don't, bad things are going to happen to me." Look: we plan because we understand the word of God. We plan because we understand that God has promised blessing on those who take an intelligent approach to life. We plan because God has called for planning in his moral order and so out of obedience to that, out of a response of trust to that, we say, "Okay, I'm going to plan my life, I'm going to plan this day the best way that I can not because I'm afraid of what will happen if I don't but because this is what God has called for. As I look to the future, there is something other – oh, this is so very important - there is something other than my plans that I am resting in that produces confidence in me. I'm not confident about what the future brings at all because of my plans, I'm confident because my great and holy and good God controls the future down to the hairs on my head and he has promised to do good to me and that's why I'm confident. That's why I trust. That's why I am unafraid. It's because I

know who God is. I believe what the Scripture says about his sovereign control over all things. I believe and I trust that he intends good for me no matter what and so I rest and so I'm confident and so I'm unafraid," you say to yourself. You see, that changes everything.

Going back to hasty, impulsive responses, think with me here because it's really important for us to understand this: hasty, impulsive decisions are made because people fear the future in large part. They want to escape the present and hopefully find a better way for the future but they're trying to overly manipulate their present circumstances in order to account for what they want to happen. Look, we don't live life that way, not in a hasty, impulsive way. We don't have to be hasty, beloved. We don't have to be impulsive because we truly believe the sovereignty of God applies even to the individual circumstances of our life and we rest in that. You see, if you believe it then it changes life. It lets you calmly put one foot in front of the other as you go forward. This changes everything. This changes the way that you make decisions about life and so as we look to the future we're confident. We're confident and we're unafraid and therefore we live life from a position of courage and strength, not from fear and weakness. That's why Christians can be men. That's why Christians can look over the course of history, can look martyrdom in the face and be unafraid and be unflinching in the midst of it. Confident. And it's better to live in confidence than in fear, right? I mean, just given a choice, wouldn't you rather live confidently rather than fearfully? Well, why don't we just do that together and individually? Let's just do that. Let's just live this way and enjoy life together. I'd like that.

Now, we said that we should certainly plan because God has woven planning into the moral order of the universe. This is what he calls us to do. We're not indifferent. We're not careless about the future. We plan. We plan confidently because we know that God is going to direct everything to accomplish good for his people. We're not afraid and so we plan with confidence but point 3 is just as important. As you're thinking through biblical principles in life, when you get to these real foundational things, when you start to see, "Oh, there is a balancing consideration here," and you start to see there is a balance, when you start to see the principles of balance, you know you're on the right track and here's the balance in what we've said that brings us to point 3 and it's this: that you should plan dependently. You should plan dependently. Some of you look back on unfulfilled plans and disappointed dreams. Some of you look to the future and your plans are on track. You're young and things are going right and it's good. No matter where you'll at on that spectrum, late in life things can't be changed, young and aspirations just on the horizon, no matter where you're at on that spectrum, you need to heed this passage carefully. You need to take it to heart and I'll try my best to help you do that.

Look at Proverbs 16:9 again. I want you to have the actual text in front of you as we talk through these things. Proverbs 16:9, "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." Proverbs 16:9 teaches us this: your plans for life are not the last word on what happens. You can plan it out to the greatest detail but you can't guarantee the results. You don't know what's going to happen. Mark these words here: all of your plans, every last one of them are subject to change as the Lord takes them in a different

direction. This is just an outworking of the overall principle of the sovereignty of God. You're not sovereign over the direction of your life. You can't dictate with certainty the outcome. All of our plans are subject to change as the Lord takes them in a different direction. We plan on the front end, we look back on the back end and say, "Oh, the Lord directed my steps this way. That wasn't what I planned at all but do you know what? It was good anyway."

Look at Proverbs 19:21. "Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand." We plan a lot of different things but it's God working out his purposes that is going to be established. It's God working out his purposes that will stand the test of time. The most instructive biblical passage on this point is James 4:13. Turn in the New Testament to James 4, just after the book of Hebrews. James 4:13 and 15. This is the balance in planning. This is the added thing that we take into account. We plan dependently. Verse 13, "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.'" "Okay, we're going to go to such a city tomorrow. I'm going to spend a year there. We're going to engage in business and we're going to make a profit." He's got it all planned out.

Verse 14, here's the caution, here's the biblical counter to that mindset. "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." He says, "How can you speak," watch this, "how can you speak with such certainty about the future when you don't know what your life is going to be like tomorrow?" We see it on the news every day, we just think it will never happen to us. Sudden intervention of catastrophe, of crisis, of death. It intervenes when you least expect it. So he's rebuking this false sense of confidence that says, "Here's what the outcome will be," and says, "You can't speak that way. You don't know, you little vapor, you little puff of steam, you little puff of smoke. Phht and you're gone. Who are you?" he says, "Who are you to speak with such certainty about the future?"

Verse 15, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'" Now, James is talking about something a lot more fundamental, a lot more important than simply mouthing the words "if the Lord wills." He's talking about your whole attitude toward your approach to the future. When you've made your plans, you step back and say, "I can't guarantee the outcome. I don't know for certain how all of this is going to come out. If the Lord wills," there's the dependence, "if the Lord blesses what we're talking about then it will come out this way." But there's always this room in your mind, there's always this margin in your thinking that, "God may direct it in a different direction and if he does, I'm okay with that." You see, beloved, through the force of his unseen Providence, God determines the results of your plans in a realm that you cannot control

When we lived in California we used to go to the beach a lot. We had to be careful because sometimes there were rip tides under the surface that would pull people out to sea even though on the surface you couldn't see what was happening and so you had to be careful. You had to watch. You had to be careful lest the ocean would take you in a different direction. On the surface, things looked fine but there were unseen forces at

work. That's kind of a negative example of unseen forces but you get the point, that as we live out life and as we go through seeing what we see, making our plans and living our life, understand this, beloved: that there is a divine current in world history, there is a divine current in your personal history that is directing things where God wants it to go. And that current is strong. It is powerful. It is good. It is certain. And that current is going to take you where God intends it to go and sometimes that current will take your plans as you're going this way and will come along and move them someplace else. God is so sovereign that he even rules our plans. He over-rules our plans. He directs our plans to accomplish his purposes. Your planning is simply an instrument of divine Providence.

Now, let's work out what this means for us. That means that you plan with confidence because God promises to bless prudent planning. You also plan with dependence, knowing that God has the final say. Here's what this means, I wish I could put this on the screen behind me and imprint it on your mind. What it means is that as Christians, as those who believe in the sovereign goodness of God, it means that we, you and I, are open to change as life unfolds. Unpleasant change and pleasant change. Sad change and happy change. We're open to change because God is the one who is directing our path. He is the one who is making our paths straight. And that changes the way that you receive a bad report from the doctor. It changes the way that you receive a bad phone call at night. It deepens your gladness and joy when unexpected blessing falls into your lap. You look at it all and step back and say, "This is the direction of God in my life."

Christians know that they are supposed to say, "I trust God." You know that if you've been around at all. The mere environment of being in a church week by week would make it unthinkable for someone to openly say, "I don't trust God here," and so it's verbalized in different ways. But I want to help you on this very specific point here: when we say we trust God, so very often people are saying that, and they've made plans and you know, "I'm trusting God that my plan will come out the way that I want it to do. I'm trusting God that my child will come to Christ," or, "I'm trusting God that there will be financial blessing here," or whatever the case may be. Beloved, that's okay as far as it goes but that's really not what it means to trust God at all. That's no different than somebody saying, "I want life to go my way. I want it to come out like I do and I'm sure God will work that out." But that's not really trusting God. That's just an expression of saying, "I want life to go like I want it to."

Here's what trusting God means, here's what it means to be dependent on the Lord as you plan: you trust God not that your specific plans will come out the way that you want them to. That may or may not happen. That's the whole point of James. It may not come out the way that you plan it to be. And those of you that have some gray hairs on your head like I do understand and you've got a track record of experience like that. And so life teaches you not to talk that way sooner or later if you think about it. No, you're not trusting God that your specific goals will come to pass, here's what you're trusting God for: you're trusting God that whatever comes to pass will be coming to you filtered through his good hand and intended for your blessing. Whatever comes to pass will be from his good hand and even if it differs dramatically from what you've had planned or wanted. You see, that's really trusting God. That's saying, "I'll let go of the future. I won't grasp and cling to

what I want so much that when God brings something differently, I turn into a defiant, sullen, depressed individual." In contrast, change comes and you say, "Wow. This is what the Bible told me to expect. I made my plans, the Lord took them in a different direction and," you go one step further and say, "I'm okay with that because I know that God is directing my steps. I know, even though I can't see it, even though I don't understand it, even though I wouldn't have chosen this, even though right now I don't really like this, I know that a wise, sovereign, good Father brings into my life exactly what is good for me at exactly the right time and I trust him for that and therefore I submit to that. In the midst of this change," you say to yourself, you say to your loved ones, "I trust him. I'm confident. I don't understand. I didn't see this coming but I trust him." And these spiritual realities have far reaching consequences for how you react to life.

Now, let's apply it. If you're in a position of life where substantially what you have planned has come to pass and you're happy about that, humble yourself under the hand of God and realize that it was not your wisdom that made that happen. It was the blessing of God. He took your planning and he blessed it and you are enjoying the fruit of his blessing and your plans were just an instrument in the hand of God to bless you. And you humble yourself. You bow before him and you say, "Dear God, you've given me what I asked for. Dear God, I thank you for that. Not everybody gets to experience a blessing like this, Lord. Not everybody gets to have life go the way they want it to do, but you've given that to me even though I'm no better than the man sitting next to me. You've given that to me. God, I just thank you for that. I'm so grateful because this has been an expression of your will and your goodness in my life. Success has not come from my strength, O God. Our family hasn't come out well or my career hasn't come out well because of me, it's because you've been good and I thank you for that and I disclaim any credit for that."

So this leads you to humility in the midst of blessing. For a lot of us, we regret the way of life has turned out. Events have intervened and denied your dreams. Wicked people have harmed you, made life sad and difficult or even worse, in some ways this mental torture is even worse, you think, "You know, life might have turned out better if I had just tried harder or if I had just gone left instead of right at that decision in my life 10 years ago, 20 years ago, everything would have been different. What if? What if? What if I had done this? Why not that?" That's the symptoms of this mindset. You regret life and you say, "If only I had done something different the outcome could have been better and I'd be happier now than what I am."

Beloved, you listen to me carefully. Proverbs 16:9, let's look at it again as we start to move into this. Proverbs 16:9. Before we bring this direct application to bear on our hearts, let's take a look at this. Proverbs 16:9, "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." If I just described you, may the Holy Spirit give wings to these words to help you. Proverbs 16:9 gives you the freedom and the responsibility to put those past regrets to rest, to bury them and to leave them behind and to not let them continue to dominate your thinking about life. You were never in control to begin with and if you find yourself in that circumstance, understand this: that being godly, pleasing the Lord, is not measured by how closely your life approximates what you originally

wanted it to be. That's not it at all. That has nothing to do with godliness at all. Lots of sinful people make plans and it comes out great and sometimes the wicked prosper. That's not a mark of godliness. It has nothing to do with it. Godliness isn't measured by how closely your life approximates your loftiest dreams of the past. Godliness is measured by how you trust the God who directs your circumstances. You may not understand why things turned out the way they did but as Proverbs 3 says, you don't lean on your own understanding. You trust the Lord's goodness and you rest in him.

Now mark this: changed circumstances are not an indication that God's grace has failed you. Changed circumstances do not necessarily mean that you've done anything wrong. Understand this: when God changes your circumstances – oh mark this, write this down and inscribe it in the tablet of your heart – changed circumstances are the means of God's grace to you, not that he has withdrawn his grace from you. That is the only way that it could ever be because God is good to his people all the time no matter what. So, mindful of these things, we make room in our thinking for tragedy to occur. We make room in our thinking for profound sadness to occur. We're living in a fallen world. This is not the life that we're living for and we understand that although these things can happen in general and they could happen to me and the life disappointment that you feel is a test to prove whether you will trust him or not. The changed circumstances aren't a means to go back and recalculate everything and wonder, "What if? What if? What if?" Paul said, "Forgetting what lies behind, I reach forward to what lies ahead."

Look, I understand that your sin and mine has produced results that are negative and some of us bear the consequences of sin in our lives to this day. I understand that. What you need to understand about that is this, is that whatever your past is, whatever you've done wrong, whatever has been done wrong to you, whatever has just not worked out, you've got to look at it this way: "Here I am today. Through all of the complexities of the past, this is where God has directed me today. I can't figure all of that out. I can't untangle the past but here I am today and I can say with certainty that this is where God has directed me today because God is always directing everything to accomplish his purposes and he most certainly directs the lives of his children in order to bless them." If you are here feeling the weight of the consequences of your past sin, take heart. Take courage and say, "Even in this, God intends to bless me." Welcome to the point of Christian salvation, that God brings blessing and salvation to those who don't deserve it.

Pursue the life that God has actually given you rather than the one you envisioned years ago that never came to pass. Here you are. You say, "Oh, but I sinned greatly in the past and I've got a lot of broken relationships. I'm a Christian now. I'm trusting the Lord for it but there is so much in my past." Well, do you know what? Do us all a favor: show us how a godly Christian lives with that kind of past. Embrace even the failures of your past and say, "Okay, I'm going to show before God and before men how a godly man responds to that. I'm not going to live with any more regret. God has something for me to do here. I need to live out godliness here even as I'm feeling the consequences of my past sin." That's the only way it could be. We don't have time machines. We can't undo it. And somehow God directed you through all of that blackness in your life, Christian, to bring you to the point where you'd say, "Now I'm going to look forward with confidence. I'm

going to leave my past behind me and I'm going to look forward to the future with confidence because this God is sovereign and he is good." And if your life has disintegrated because of your own sin, hear me carefully, Christian: take responsibility for it. No more excuses. No more blaming somebody else for what you did that was wrong and broke up a lot of relationships. No more of that. Take responsibility for it but understand that the grace of God is operative at that point. God's work in your life is not yet done. Do you know how I know that? Do you know how I know that God's work in your earthly life is not done? It's because you're here and you're breathing. God is not done. God is not done. Praise God. There's a whole lot of hope in that and so what you do is you submit yourself to the consequences of your past, the debt, the shame, the broken relationships with a glad heart in the Lord's forgiveness. With a glad heart and confidence that he will still bless you.

Welcome to the purpose of Christian salvation. This is a great aspect of our hope. We're not ruled by the past. We look forward to the future with confidence. We'll plan for it. Some of you are on the front end of your plans. Plan big. Plan great things and pursue them. Who knows what the Lord might do. And as you make those plans, trust the Lord to direct your paths. You will honor him not with a specific outcome but with prudent planning and transcendent trust. You see, through all of this, what we're saying is that God is worthy of our trust and that God actually directs the steps of your Christian life in order to accomplish his purposes and even in the midst of lonely disappointment, you rest in Christ. You lay hold of him and say, "I will trust you no matter what as I move forward." And all of a sudden you have a whole different set of glasses through which to view life.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Beloved, as you think through these issues, as you apply them to your heart, as you settle issues from the past, you're seeking him and as you seek him in this realm, Scripture says he will bless you and a central aspect of your trusting him is to believe that. "God, I believe that. I don't understand it but I rest. I believe that the accumulation of things in the past has now become the stage, the foundation upon which I will stand and you will display your goodness and blessing in my life." We're never without hope. We never have legitimate grounds for fear.

Great God. Great plan. Certain fulfillment.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we do honor you and we do trust you. Father, to talk about these things in principle is not to deny that there is a lot of sadness, a lot of heartache that goes with these things, mindful even of families that have lost loved ones in shocking ways and even in the past week. Father, we can't sort all of that out on the front end, it doesn't insulate us from the hard realities of grief and what have you but, Father, frame our thinking, each one of us and collectively as a body of believers, frame our thinking by the certainties of your goodness, your control and your intention to bless us and when we don't understand, give us the patience to wait until you make it more clear to us.*

*Father, I do pray for those that are here whose lives have been wrecked by their past sinfulness and there doesn't seem to be a clear way forward. May the clear word of Scripture give them confidence even if the next step still seems uncertain. Just confidence and a sense of praise and gratitude's and trust to you that you've got it under control. That you brought them to this point and that you intend to bless in the future.*

*Father, for those that have experienced your hand of goodness and life has just been a blessing after a blessing, we thank you. We give you the credit and the praise for that and pray that we be good stewards of what you have entrusted to us.*

*Father, for those that are here that don't know Christ, please pierce their heart. Please convict them of sin. Please open their heart and bring them to repentance and faith, Father, because the reality of their life is simply that your purposes are arrayed against them right now. The way of the transgressor is hard and there is no blessing in this life for the sinner and there is eternal judgment at the end. O God, for those that just are so indifferent and uncaring about scriptural truth, shake them up. Wake them up and lead them to eternal life. We honor you and we thank you for these things from your word and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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