

Kingdom Minded Planning

(1 Corinthians 16:1-11)

What kind of plans do you have for your future? Do you have plans? Benjamin Franklin, who among other things was an inventor, a scientist and one of the Founding Fathers of our country, once said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail! Often the plans we make have an underlying purpose we want to fulfill. When we make travel plans the purpose could be leisure or some important business. We may have a retirement plan because we want to be financially stable in the future. These kinds of plans can be good and very necessary. But how many of us have plans that are aligned with God’s purpose and God’s agenda for our lives?

Jesus said, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). When Jesus said, *all these things will be added to you*, He’s talking about things in the future that people worry about, like whether they will have enough resources to take care of their basic needs. Interestingly, there are Christians that wrongly equate worry with planning for the future. But Jesus didn’t say it’s wrong to make plans for the future. Rather He meant that we should not worry about our future. Moreover we should not neglect to fulfill God’s kingdom agenda for our lives, like supporting the spread of the gospel, because we are more preoccupied with achieving earthly security.

When we prioritize achieving our earthly plans over kingdom plans we may gain temporary security, but we will lose out on eternal rewards. But when we prioritize God’s purpose for our lives not only are we laying up treasure in heaven, we can count on God providing all that we need while we take care of His business on the earth.

Main idea: Accomplishing God’s purpose for our lives requires intentional planning to make the best use of our time, talents and treasure to serve the kingdom of God.

To unfold this theme, we are going to look at three ways that we must plan in order to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives.

1. Plan with Deliberate Intention

To fulfill God's purpose for our lives we must **plan with deliberate intention**. With God's power and purpose for the church clearly in view, Paul writes: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come"* (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Keep in mind that for the much of Paul's letter to the church of Corinth, he was dealing with factions in the church that were competing for prominence and prestige. Rather than coming together as one body to serve the cause of Christ, they were divided into various grievance groups promoting their own agendas. As a result, there was division, strife and jealousy in the church. And because the church was so preoccupied with internal conflict, they lost sight of their mission to the outside world.

Likewise, many churches today are divided over the political and social matters of our day. And as a result, factions in the church are not only at odds with one another, but are so narrow minded that they've become oblivious to where God is working in the world, much less joining Him in that work.

So, after admonishing the church of Corinth throughout his letter for their self-centeredness and calling them to pursue love, Paul turns their attention to the needs of the saints outside of their local church. As one Bible teacher explained, "When the members of a church begin looking up from their [narrow minded] problems to see the great needs in the world around them, they gain some perspective on their own pettiness. As the dire and urgent needs of those outside their church walls become the focus of attention rather than their own selfish concerns, they will begin to see that the church is bigger than their own congregation and that the mission transcends their own ministries" (Chuck Swindoll).

Remember, that Paul concluded his teaching in chapter fifteen on the hope of the resurrection by exhorting the church to “*be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain*” (v.58). Having exhorted them to abound in the work of the Lord, Paul now transitions into some practical ways they can plan to do so by reminding them of the physical needs in the church of Jerusalem.

No doubt the Corinthians were already giving to the needs of their own local church. But in addition to their regular giving, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to systematically set aside additional funds over a period of time for a specific cause outside of their own needs.

Notice that in verse 1-2 Paul gives thoughtful and careful instructions for how the Corinthians are to give, which by the way includes principles that we ought to apply today. Paul begins by instructing the Corinthians to give **systematically**. We see this in verse 2 when he gives direction for all the believers in the church to set aside funds every Sunday and store it up until his arrival.

Now the reason that Paul designates the first day of the week as the day to set aside funds for a special cause could be that he’s referring to the weekly gathering of the church for worship on Sunday as we see in Acts 20:7. But, as one commentator noted, “Paul’s instructions also indicate thoughtful planning—setting aside the “first -fruits” of one’s earnings at the beginning of the week. This was not supposed to be a “spare change,” last-minute offering when Paul arrived. He urges careful, conscious, and deliberate giving. This is why Paul tells them to systematically “put aside and save” (1 Corinthians 16:2).”

Now in addition to a careful and systematic way of giving, Paul instructs the Corinthians to give in accordance with each one’s individual capacity to do so (v.2). It’s important to note here that although Paul is encouraging everyone to give, he doesn’t designate a specific amount that each person should give. Rather Paul explains that each believer is to give *as he may prosper* (v.2). That is to say,

although each individuals giving capacity varied, everyone was to give with a generous and cheerful heart of gratitude from the blessings that God has bestowed on each one (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

With the understanding that we are to give in accordance with how each one of us prospers, the question that arises is how much do we give from what the Lord has given to us? Although the New Testament does not require that believers tithe, which means giving 10% of your earnings as we see in the Old Testament, many Christians apply the principle of tithing to how they give to the local church. They do so because they don't want to give to the Lord the left overs of their earnings after taking care of their own personal expenses. Rather they decide ahead of time to give a proportionate amount to their local church using the tithing principles of ten percent. And then any other giving outside their local church is above and beyond their tithe.

Now although I believe that this is a practical and God honoring way to give, the New Testament does not require that Christians give 10% of their earnings. Rather the New Testament instructs believers to give in a way that reflects the loving and gracious heart of Christ who *though he was rich, yet for our sake He became poor so that we through His poverty might become rich* (2 Corinthians 8:9). In others words, New Testament "grace giving" reflects the sacrificial love of Christ. But although grace giving is sacrificial, it's not done out of obligation. Instead grace giving is practiced with joyful gratitude and to the glory of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Notice also that in verses 3-4, not only did Paul instruct the church to collect the funds for the needy saints before he arrived, he also advised them that he would send others whom the church sanctioned to deliver the funds. Furthermore he adds that if advisable he was also ready to deliver the funds along with the faithful brethren sanctioned by the church. Unlike the prosperity preachers today who manipulate their followers to give, Paul was above reproach as he exercised great discretion and accountability with the giving of others.

Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? To seek first the kingdom of God, which applies to every area of our lives, we must plan to give with deliberate and Christ honoring intentions.

Now Paul not only gives instructions to the church about how to be thoughtful and deliberate in their giving, he also lays out his intended travels plans. He writes: *“I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, ⁶ and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go”* (1 Corinthians 16:6).

Unlike many today, who post wherever they’ve been and wherever they are going on social media for amusement or recognition, Paul shares his travel plans with kingdom minded purpose. He shares his travel plans because he needs their help when he travels to Corinth and beyond on his missionary journey. But in addition to needing their help, Paul expresses, as he shares his travel plans, his desire to spend meaningful time in-person with the church of Corinth. Paul continues, *“For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you...”* (1 Corinthians 16:7).

You know, my wife purchased Face Book portals for both my grandchildren. And she uses them almost daily to call and virtually interact with our grandchildren. But can I tell you, she didn’t buy these portals to be a substitute for spending in-person time with our grandchildren. They’re just a supplemental means for communicating with our grandchildren.

How many of you know, there is no substitute for being physically present with those we love and care for.

Because of the pandemic many churches went through a season of having to use the internet to offer some sort of a virtual worship service. It served a purpose for a time. And because churches discovered some of the benefits of streaming their services online, many churches, like ours, are continuing to stream their services. But although we believe that streaming services online offer certain

benefits, they cannot and should not take the place of in-person church gatherings.

The bible clearly affirms the absolute priority and value of the physical presence of people gathered together to worship, serve and build one another up in the love of Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25). God ordained that believers grow into spiritual maturity best by sharing life together in a mutually caring and compassionate covenant community of faith. Moreover, the value of physical presence is not only important for the church, but for life in general. There is no substitute for a real person walking beside you in a park, sitting across from you at a dinner table, or standing next to your hospital bed. As Christian blogger, Greg Petrie noted, “There is just something about sharing space together that fills a need that cannot fully be met in other ways” (Greg Petrie).

It’s important to note also that the value of physical presence did not originate with man. As Greg Petrie also explained, “Most significantly, [the value of physical presence] is a model and practice that reflects the very character of God (John 1:14). God became physically present with us. God did not just send a message; he embodied his message to us and for us.”

Likewise, just as Jesus in His incarnation was sent by the Father into this world, we as His followers have been sent not only to take the saving message of the gospel to those without Christ, but also to embody the message of Jesus (John 20:21). We are to incarnate the selfless love of Christ in a world that desperately needs to see what real love looks like.

And doing so takes more than conveniently watching services online or even sitting in a comfortable church and thinking that by doing so we’ve done our duty. Rather, like Paul, we must plan with deliberate intent to connect with people to share the saving love of Christ with our words and actions. We must look away from our problems and focus on the great needs in the world around us so that we might realize how petty and self-centered we really are.

Many American Christians struggle to simply attend an in-person church service on a regular basis. Meanwhile Christians today in Romania are traveling hundreds of miles in a time of war to take food to fellow believers in local churches in Ukraine—churches that are not only still gathering for worship but are also sacrificially caring for and taking the gospel to the lost in their communities.

How are we, as a follower of Jesus, reflecting His selfless love in the world?

Because we are a local church in America, maybe we can't all personally travel to Poland or Romania to help the churches there that are caring for refugees and traveling to Ukraine to care for those in desperate need. But we can, like Paul exhorted the Corinthians, set aside funds to support our brothers and sisters in Christ beyond our borders who are abounding in the work of the Lord.

But now as much as we should be ready to graciously give to the cause of Christ, let's not allow our financial giving to become a substitute for giving our time and talents to physically serve others in our own circle of influence and in our own church body who need to experience the love of Jesus.

There's nothing necessarily wrong with making travel plans or having a retirement plan. But are you willing to alter your plans so that you might seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? How many of you know, when you're seeking first the kingdom of God you can trust that a difficult set back to your plans, can be a divine set up to bring you into a season of greater spiritual fruitfulness for the kingdom of God.

This brings us to a second way that we must plan to fulfill God's purpose of our lives.

2. Prepare for Divine Interruptions

In addition to **planning with deliberate intention**, we must **prepare for divine interruptions**. After sharing his travel plans with the Corinthians, along with his intentions to spend meaningful

time ministering to them, Paul adds at the end of verse seven, “*if the Lord permits*” (1 Corinthians 16:7). Paul was called by God to take the gospel to unreached people groups and plant churches. And knowing his explicit purpose, he made plans accordingly.

But do you know that although there were times when Paul received divine revelation, the plans that he made to fulfill God’s purpose were not always the result of direct revelation from God. No doubt Paul prayed about his travel plans. And he set out to go where he believed there were people with needs that he could minister to by the power of the Holy Spirit. But no matter how good he thought his own plans were Paul’s confidence was not in his planning but in the sovereignty of God. In other words, he trusted that if his plans didn’t work out the way he hoped they would, that God had a better plan. Paul’s ultimate hope and security was not found in his plans or in fulfilling his expectations, but in the Lord His God.

Because Paul’s hope and security was in the Lord His God and not in his own plans, while in prison in Rome, he wrote: “*I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear*” (Philippians 1:12-14).

O brothers and sisters, because Paul’s ultimate hope and expectations was from the Lord, who rules over the affairs of man, he did not lose heart when things didn’t go as planned. Because he knew that God was in control, he viewed interruptions to his plans as divine opportunities to grow in dependence upon God and as divine appointments to advance the kingdom of God.

While I was preparing this message, I got a text from our brother Mario who spent almost two decades in prison. Along with a picture of himself and his wife embracing after his release last year, he wrote: “17 years of waiting. I understand now that God’s will had to be done, not mine. I walked out of prison and my wife jumped into my arms and if

you look close; the Bible is in my right hand. I have a peace that makes no sense and I had joy in my heart in that chaos of prison. I'm alive because of Jesus!"

How do you respond when things in your life do not go as planned? The way you respond can reveal where your ultimate hope, identity and security is found. If God is just a means to fulfill your own plans, you will miss the greater blessings that God can bring through divine interruptions. But if your hope, identity and security is found in who you are in Christ and His Lordship, you will see divine interruptions as opportunities to realign your heart to the will of God and look for open doors to serve Him.

Notice that after acknowledging the sovereign will of God over his plans, Paul continues: *"But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ for a wide door for effective work has opened to me"* (1 Corinthians 16:8-9). Although Paul has a strong resolve to minister to his spiritual children in Corinth, he could clearly see that God had opened a wide door for ministry in Ephesus. When we keep our eyes on the Lordship of Christ, and stay close to His heart we will be sensitive to how He is working around us. When we continuously look to Christ and lean not on our own understanding, we won't jump ship even when the work gets hard or there's opposition. As long as the Lord keeps the door open for ministry and there's work to be done we will abound in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord our labor will not be in vain.

3. Expect some Demonic Opposition

Lastly, to fulfill God's purpose we must plan with deliberate intentions, prepare for divine interruptions, and finally we must **expect demonic opposition**. Although Paul was resolved to travel to Corinth, he did not have the green light to leave Ephesus yet. Why? He writes in verse 9: *"for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."* Notice that Paul did not use the many adversaries he encountered in Ephesus as an excuse to leave the ministry. He stayed in Ephesus.

Do you know that because of the fallout of the pandemic, many churches today have closed and others are struggling to recruit volunteers to serve in the ministries of the church? How does a Christian decide what ministry to serve in or when it's time to leave a church or ministry? There are often good reasons to move on, but sadly many Christians today jump from one church to another because of petty disagreements or because another ministry or church offers more programs that will serve them or their families. Very few Christians decide to join a ministry or church because they see a door of opportunity to use their time, talents and treasure to serve the cause of Christ and build others up in the Lord. What's your rationale for staying or leaving a ministry or church? One commentator noted:

“Paul’s twofold rationale for staying in Corinth in verse 9 provides a powerful model for Christians in many times and places trying to decide where to perform ministry or exercise their spiritual gifts. An open door and much opposition often go hand in hand, and they may jointly signify that God’s Spirit is mightily at work. To be sure, at times God brings blessing and prosperity for short intervals without significant antagonism. On other occasions, he allows seemingly unmitigated hostility, perhaps even for somewhat longer periods of time. But a prolonged lack of results in ministry more often than not suggests that it is time to move on, while prolonged prosperity without any difficulty should make one question if the full-orbed gospel with all its demands is clearly being preached” (Craig L. Blomberg).

Remember that the church of Corinth had many problems, but Paul didn't give up on the church? He didn't give up on the church even though there were some in the church that were questioning his leadership. He longed to return to Corinth and spend meaningful time with his fellow believers even though he knew he would encounter opposition.

But because he was not yet able to return to Corinth, Paul sends Timothy. He writes: *“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. ¹¹ So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return*

to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers” (1 Corinthians 16:10-11).

Paul didn't send Timothy to Corinth and Timothy didn't agree to go because it was the hottest church in town or because it offered him the best opportunities to make a name for himself. He went there to serve. Because he knew that there were factions in the church that opposed his apostolic authority, Paul had reason to be concerned that Timothy would also face challenges that might discourage him.

But Paul did not write the church off. Rather he vouches for Timothy in his letter and urges the church not only to put Timothy at ease, which means to welcome him warmly, but to help him on his way in peace. In other words, he's urging the church not only to provide for his physical needs while he ministered to the church, but to also provide assistance for Timothy to return to Paul in Ephesus to join him in the work of the Lord.

What's your rationale for being part of the church of Jesus Christ? To serve or be served? Yes, we also need to receive from one another to grow in our faith. But what should characterize our lives as Christians who are growing in faith and love is that we have found what Jesus modeled and declared: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:25).

What compelled Paul and Timothy to serve others so selflessly, even in times of adversity? Paul exhorted the Corinthians, who earnestly desired spiritual gifts, to make the pursuit of love their first priority (1 Corinthian 14:1). Paul's first pursuit was not ministry but to know Christ and His great love (2 Corinthian 5:14-15). As one Pastor explained, “I use to think that I was called to ministry. But now I realize I am called to intimacy. Ministry is the overflow of intimacy” (Vance Pitman).

Have you discovered that it is more blessed to give than to receive? When we know the love of Christ, who gave His all on the cross to save us from our sin, we will know the greater joy of giving.

Conclusion

O brothers and sisters, pursue love by abiding in Christ and allowing His word to abide in you. And from the overflow of intimacy with Christ plan with deliberate intention to give of your time, talents and treasure to serve others. And although we can expect demonic opposition when we are serving the Lord, we can trust that where man and demons rule, God overrules.

When we are seeking first the kingdom of God we can trust that a difficult disruption to our plans can be a divine opportunity to bring us into a season of greater spiritual fruitfulness for the kingdom of God.