

# Growth Points

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## Biblical Planning

Somewhere deep inside many church leaders is a fear that planning is not biblical, that those who really trust the Lord will accomplish things in a more spiritual way.

They believe that planning for the future leaves God out of the picture and rests entirely on human strength and insight. Others assert that strategic planning is a corporate concept that churches have borrowed from the business world.

These conclusions are born out of a poor understanding of what planning really is.

“Planning is no more than an attempt to understand the will of God for our church and respond to it by our actions.”

Planning is no more than an attempt to understand the will of God for our church and respond to it by our actions. It is not an independent, humanistic activity that thwarts God's ability to work. It is a spiritual activity that is an expression of our faith in God. Sensing where the Lord is leading and making a unified effort to move in that direction actually honors God and displays our trust in Him. Planning is not a faithless activity or a trendy technique stolen from corporate America. It is what believers do as faithful stewards of God's resources.

Thinking of planning in this light, we see it emerge as a key theme throughout scripture. Planning and giving forethought to decisions is described as wise behavior throughout the book of Proverbs. Those who plan, seek guidance, and give forethought to their future are considered wise and contrasted with those who do not. Proverbs 13:16 says, "A wise man thinks ahead: a fool doesn't and even brags about it!" (NLB). Proverbs 14:15 adds, "The simple believes anything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps."

Those who do not think about their future are

considered foolish, while those who plan and spend time seeking the Lord's direction are wise and prudent.

Additionally, Proverbs suggests that those who make hasty decisions make poor, uninformed decisions (19:2), while those who seek the Lord together and commit their plans to him experience success (15:22, 16:3)!

Even Paul, in 1 Corinthians, explains his behavior in light of these principles. His ministry plans changed, but he wanted the Corinthians to know that it was not on account of carelessness or a lack of planning. He had significant spiritual reasons for postponing his visit to them and he felt the need, as a minister of the gospel committed to their spiritual growth, to explain his rationale for the change in plans.

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# God sometimes alters our plans.

## Man plans his way, but God directs his steps.

Not only is planning a wise activity with great benefit, it is good stewardship of the resources that God has entrusted to us. As church leaders we are responsible to handle the resources of the church in a way that furthers God's Kingdom, and this is only possible when we take time to plan. Good stewardship is more than simply spending a budget wisely; good stewardship is using the resources God has given us to minister to others in an intentional way. We want our churches to move forward in a way that honors God, honors the resources He has given to us, and honors the opportunities he places before us. When we operate on a short-term basis or fail to recognize the significance of our decisions in the present, we miss opportunities to be faithful and fruitful for the future.

Acts 6 begins by describing a picture of a growing and disorganized church that was missing opportunities to minister. The Holy Spirit was at work transforming lives and the church was bursting at the seams with new believers, but there was a problem. A growing number of widows in Jerusalem were going without food and being overlooked in the distribution of resources to help them. The issue was finally brought to the attention of the leaders, and they put a plan in place to solve the problem.

Even though this new church had the people and material resources needed to care for the widows, they were unable to respond to their needs because *they did not have a plan*. They had not taken the time to set priorities, delegate responsibilities, and coordinate jobs. Like the church of Acts 6, when we fail to plan, we fail to be good stewards of the opportunities God gives us to meet needs and minister to those around us.

Scripture is clear that God is the one who brings fruit through our plans, and in this way our planning is an expression of our faith in Him. We do our best to listen and discern His voice as we plan, but biblical planning recognizes the role of God to empower the

plans. Proverbs 16:9 says that, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." Although we make plans and work hard to accomplish them, ultimately we trust in the Lord to accomplish anything and make any spiritual progress.

God may sometimes alter our plans to accomplish His purposes, but this does not diminish the significance or value of seeking Him and developing a plan. This point is well illustrated in Acts 16, where Paul and his companions planned to preach and minister in Asia. They attempted to go to Asia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to enter Bithynia and minister there. Instead, they were directed to Macedonia in a vision, and decided to change their travel plans so they could minister in a different part of the world.

It is interesting to note that Paul and his companions were not in the wrong for having a plan, nor were they reprimanded for attempting to accomplish a plan different than what God wanted. However, they were open to a change in their plan and willingly responded to it after concluding that the Lord wanted them to minister in Macedonia instead of Asia. There are times when God's plans will trump our plans, but that does not diminish the value of planning.



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