

“God’s Plans”

Proverbs 16: 1-9

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What is our only comfort in life and in death? New years are great – a clean slate, a new beginning, new opportunities before us. It is an exciting time to make new plans, and developing some healthy holy habits. The excitement of a new year is thrilling for many.

Well into the first week of the New Year many of us are quite busy with planning the year. That is good. If things change along the way, it is great to have a plan from which to be flexible from. There are many unknowns in the year ahead. We can plan in a detailed way, but as they say, *‘life gets in the way.’* In our western society, most often these life issues are minor, like a flat tire or forgetting about your dentist appointment - and we are late for work. Thankfully, less frequently, it may mean something more serious as a life and death situation. Loved people of God: Certainly, we do not know what is ahead, but we do know who we belong to.

The Heidelberg catechism of the Reformed church states clearly in question and answer 1: *What is your only comfort in life and in death?*

That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful saviour Jesus Christ.

‘The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord (Verse 1).’ This verse states that we are free to plan many things, but God still has the last word (also the starting word for that matter).

Our bodies are a gift. We have to stop and remind ourselves that our bodies are a temporary tent for our souls. It also is important for us to know our vulnerability and be in touch with our mortality. Being aware of your vulnerability is vital to living a full life. We then realize life is short but so exciting and precious at the same time. Life is a gift from the giver of all things – God. We actually belong to our faithful and loving saviour Jesus Christ and nothing not even death itself can separate us from him! The awareness of belonging to God diminishes fear and we are free to be who we are called to be. Thanks be to God!

‘By loyalty and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for and by the fear of the Lord, one avoids evil (verse 6).’ The question is how can we avoid evil as we make plans for our life? This verse states that the loyalty and faithfulness quoted here comes from God and God forgives our sins. Of course one needs to be aware of their sin to ask for forgiveness. Are we aware of our sin?

The scripture states in Proverbs 9: 10 that *the fear of Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.* Fear in this sense does not mean to be afraid, but to be in awe of the almighty God and dwell on God’s wisdom not your own. This ‘fear’ of the Lord also comes through prayer and listening to God.

It is interesting to note that theologian Richard Rohr spoke about how Jesus did not focus on individual sin to condemn or to punish in order to change it. Jesus took evil seriously and he showed in his life and teachings how to overcome and heal it. Sin (evil) for Jesus was when people were accusing others. Satan’s name actually means, ‘the accuser.’ In other words, whenever we judge and condemn others and do not consider our own sin, we end up ‘sinning’ (being the accuser). For us to follow God’s plans and not choose evil, it is vital that we look at how we are part of the evil in the world. It is too easy to point the finger at others.

Choose your path this year and walk God's way of love (as described in 1 Corinthians 13). When we move in the way of God's love, we will not be accusing but building bridges of unity. The nature of God is love – nothing is greater than love (1 Corinthians 13)!

'When the ways of people please the Lord, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them (verse 7).'

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor^[a] and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5: 43-48 NIV

God's plan for our lives is to create unity.

'Better is a little with righteousness than large income with injustice (verse 8).'

Too often in our consumer culture, money will dictate whether we do the righteous thing or not. It is important to ask oneself how my income is causing pain and suffering on others who are also made in the image of God and loved by God. As Christians, how are we changing our patterns to alleviating injustice through our spending and giving habits. Justice, peace and unity are to be the priority as we make our plans. How have we stood by while others are suffering? As followers of Christ, we all are called to live in line with God's plans. We do miss the mark (in other words we sin) but with God's Grace, we encourage and help one another to get out of the ditch and back on to the path.

'The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps (verse 9).' The mind is a huge gift given by God to human beings! The question then is how can we use our brains to the glory of God? We can choose to listen to the Spirit directing our steps or we can choose not to listen.

God's plans for your life are not to accuse – no! Just the opposite - God's plans are always based in his Grace. Therefore, in line with God, we are to be gracious to others.

There is a story about Christian parents who had a daughter who showed great promise in academics. She was encouraged by her dad who was a successful businessman to get into law. Shelly had an interest in law, applied for the program and got in. While in the program she became friends with another young woman at university who invited her to her Christian group on campus. While meeting with the group, Shelly became aware of inner city people across the country who did not have access to adequate legal services and were treated unjustly. Shelly prayed about it and realized God had given her a gift not merely to use for her own means, but to share it for the glory of God.

Shelly was so excited to tell her parents who would be so pleased with the plan she wanted to follow as a career. However, when she mentioned it to her parents, her father became angry and said that the people she is going to help had made bad choices and that is why they are in this situation. He accused them of living off the system while those who work hard have to pay for it. Deflated, Shelly left her parent's home deeply disappointed in their perspective, yet continued on the journey God had planned for her.

Let our stories and our plans line up with God's story and God's plans. Others will then see more clearly that we are Christians by our love. Amen.