

“The Best Laid Plans...”
James 4:13 to 5:6
November 13, 2022

We're now in the middle of November, halfway through the final quarter of the year. Thousands of businesses are scrambling to pull together numbers to create their 2023 Financial Budgets. They will look at 2022 numbers and try to project how their revenues will increase, and where they can cut costs. It's not just a guessing game. There need to be reasons and examples provided to justify the changes expected. Many of you out there will also follow the same process in order to manage your household budgets. Next year the actual results will be compared to those forecasted numbers. There will likely be variances. Hopefully there will be more positive than negative differences.

The problem is we do not know what will happen tomorrow. We can use our experiences and look at changes we intend to make, but we can't account for unforeseen events. Why? Because they are unforeseen. James spoke about this.

¹³ Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. James 4:13-14.

It is true. We don't know what the next day will bring, yet we make plans for the next year, the next decade, and the rest of our lives. Not too long ago I went into business for myself. At the end of year one, I worked on my next year's budget. When that new year started, I was surprised to find I was hitting my projected numbers, until March 13th arrived. Suddenly the world shut down and everything became an unknown.

So, does that mean we shouldn't spend time planning? Should we just react to the situations that come before us? The bible doesn't say that. Jesus said, ²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.’” – Luke 14:28-30

James isn't contradicting Jesus. He explains in more detail.

¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them. James 4:15-17

The real message here is simple. In planning, as with anything we do in life, we include God in the process. ³ Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. – Proverbs 16:3. Talking with God as you make plans will help give you a clearer vision and focus on what needs to be done. There can be a multitude of benefits in having God as a part of your planning process.

- Clarity – When we make plans it is important to talk with other people whose lives might be affected by those plans. Let's say you are working up your budget and decide a good way to cut costs is to budget for quantity discounts. Great idea. But if you don't discuss that with the supplier, how do you know the discount is an option? If I think Michelle should walk Sheldon on Tuesday mornings rather than Wednesdays, I'd better bring that up with her

before I make that decision. Speaking with God and asking for his guidance allows you to see things you might otherwise miss.

- Conviction – Speaking with others helps us determine the plans we are making are correct. I once saw an interview with Gene Wilder where he shared about the one argument, he ever had with director Mel Brooks. Do you remember in the movie Young Frankenstein, sorry – Frankenstein, where Wilder’s and Peter Boyle’s characters sing “Putting on the Ritz? That scene was Wilder’s idea. Brooks didn’t like it and said he was going to cut the scene. Wilder and Brooks got into a big argument until Brooks said “ok, it’s in.” Wilder asked why he changed his mind. Brooks said he just wanted to see how committed Wilder was to the idea. We can have that same kind of argument, or conversation with God.
- Compassion – What is our motive for what we are doing? Are we thinking of others, or just looking at how we benefit? We shouldn’t want our blessings to come at the expense of other people’s suffering. Back in 2005 our home was partially flooded – one of the trio of Delaware River flooding that occurred in our community in 2004, 2005 and 2006. At one point I considered building some sort of berm in my back yard. Building up the land so water wouldn’t have as easy of access to our house. I found out I wasn’t allowed to do that without an engineering study. What I hadn’t considered was the effect such a structure would have on my neighbors. I would be directing the water away from our home to their homes.
- Comfort – Sometimes, no matter the planning, we end up with unexpected results. Having God with you during the process gives you comfort. He is always there to lend you strength. His shoulders are big enough for all of us – individually or all at once. As Covid went on and on, my business like many others suffered. There were times when I wondered if it would be possible to stay open. While I had many concerns, I never gave up hope. And more importantly, I never gave up faith. I knew God was there with me. I knew he was providing me with what I needed to keep my spirits high. And I also knew that even if I was forced to close my business, God wouldn’t desert me. As Woodside friend Dave Pettigrew sings in the song, “Even If Not” - I know my God will rescue me, I know my God will come and save the day, even if not, I will worship you tonight.
- Change – You’ve come up with your great idea. It seems like everything just makes sense. But in your prayer time, you just aren’t getting that confirmation from God. Somewhere in the back of your mind you just seem to think somethings wrong. What do you do? It’s easy to accept God’s guidance when he is agreeing with us. We need to have the faith in him when he isn’t agreeing, or when we’re not sure.

That was the easy half of today’s sermon. Time to strap on your seat belts and get ready.

5 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. **2** Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. **3** Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. **4** Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. **5** You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.^[a] **6** You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you. James 5:1-6

Maybe you're thinking, this isn't me. I'm not a rich person. That's the guy next to me. The woman behind me. Let's look at this on a broader scale. According to an October 31, 2022 article in Sportofmoney.com

- 39% of the world's millionaires are Americans. That's staggering percentage to me. But hey, I get it. There probably aren't a lot of millionaires in this room.
- The median household income of \$71,000 places a family in the top 4% of richest people in the world
- As an individual, you are in the top 1% of worldwide earners if you make more than \$60,000 per year.
- The median worldwide income is \$2,800 per year according to "Giving What We Can."
 - Want to put that in perspective? If you are making \$11/hour and work 10 hours per week, you are making \$5,720 a year – or more than two times the median worldwide annual income.

So now that we understand James **IS** speaking to us here, what is he telling us? He is once again coming down hard on us. ² Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. James 5:2

This happens because they aren't being used. When we hoard our wealth what good does it do for us, or others? This reminds me of the Parable of the Rich Fool

¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

²⁰ "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

²¹ "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." - Luke 12:18-21

It's not the planning, or even the saving, Jesus and later James, speaks of. It is our motives. If we hoard our wealth how can the wealth be used to advance God's kingdom?

³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. James 5:3

Your gold and silver are corroded. That's an interesting statement. It is interesting when you realize that pure gold and silver don't usually corrode because they don't react to oxygen. They tend to show corrosion and/or discoloration when they are mixed with lesser metals. In other words they are diluted. Our real wealth, or worth, comes from our relationship with Jesus. If we dilute that faith with things of the world, our faith corrodes and rusts away.

James then shifts from hoarding and not using your wealth faithfully, to actively hurting others in acquiring, and keeping, our wealth.

⁴ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you.

⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of

slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you. James 5:4-6

Are we cheating people in our business dealings? And if you're thinking, no I'm fair. Dig a little deeper. Do you make payment within the terms agreed, or do you withhold payment. Ever receive more change than you deserve, and not return it? Do you take advantage of others because you have resources to do so?

I mentioned earlier how lucky we are to be living in the USA. Compared to most of the world, we do live in luxury and self-indulgence. It may not feel that way to you, but consider those in countries like Haiti, or Zambia. The Dominican Republic, or Yemen. And there are many people in our own country who are struggling. There are the homeless, seniors struggling on a fixed income, even people who have had their homes destroyed by storms. How are you using your wealth, talents, and time to bring God's love to them?

- Your Financial Commitment – Have you completed your annual pledge to Woodside yet? Sure, the money you commit is used to pay the church expenses. But it goes to so much more. We use it to feed the hungry with the Dinner Ministry. We house the homeless during Code Blue. We bring hope to those incarcerated or struggling with addiction. And any number of other ministries.
- Your Talents – How are you using the spiritual gifts God has given you to spread his love? If you haven't found the service that fits your strengths, have you completed your GPS Assessment to help you? God has a plan for you, but that doesn't mean you don't have a part to play. As it is said, "God is in control, but he doesn't expect you to lean on a shovel and pray for a hole."
- Your Time – Sometimes there are opportunities where finances and talents aren't really required. It's just giving some time.
 - Later this morning, at 11 am, we will be meeting in the Vineyard. We will spend an hour and a half packing fruit and vegetable seeds to send to countries who don't have the resources to feed their people. Anybody is welcome to participate.

In 2009 Woodside first hosted Code Blue. There was a requirement to spend about an hour at an orientation meeting so you could be registered to be a volunteer. I decided I was already doing enough ministry work and didn't have time to spare. A week or so later I was getting ready to go out to dinner with Michelle and I realized if I had 2 or more hours to go to dinner, didn't I have an hour to spare for Code Blue. I didn't have to make a substantial commitment to this ministry. I was serving in other ways. Two things stood out to me:

1. What if there was a night when they couldn't open because they didn't have enough volunteers, and what if I found out that I was available and could have helped, if I taken that one hour out of my life?
2. But most importantly, I realized I had not taken the time to have a discussion with God prior to making that decision. I had done it on my own. The next week I signed up for orientation. I haven't served there often over the years, but every so often I've seen an open shift at a time that works for me, and I've given my time.

Don't regret the things you've done, or haven't done, because of a failure to talk, and listen, to God.