

- If there was one word that could summarise the mood of this cultural moment, I suppose it would be the word “Uncertainty”

**Stuart Jeffries** “Every choice feels like a gamble; every decision relies on making a prediction about an unpredictable future. To make a plan for a life in such circumstances feels like a fool’s wager.”

- Which is interesting because we get a completely different message from advertising! “You control your destiny, nothing can stop you!”
- I can’t help but to see a contradiction between headlines in the news and ads ADS “You can do anything!” NEWS “We are all going to die!”
- But the Bible’s perspective on the future is completely different. For the person who trust in Jesus, follows Jesus, everything changes.

**You are neither captain of your destiny nor a captive to circumstance. You are on a course with God.**

- Some of you feel as if you are the captain... you are not.
- Others, you feel as if you are captive! ... you are not.
- How should this reality shape the way that I view and plan for my future?
- The birth of the church was a movement of the Holy Spirit. Luke records for us a travelogue of all these men and women following the Spirit. At times it is absolutely extraordinary! We read of setbacks and successes, conflicts and conversions, riots and revivals.
- But there are other times, when this early church travelogue is surprisingly ordinary... Like the passage before us in Acts 18.
  - when I was emailed from the Carp staff about which text I was to be speaking on, it included an apology “Sorry, you get the boring text.”
  - WELL... I would like to declare boldly and gladly: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- And sometimes, this instructing does not come in the spectacular, but in the ordinary.
  - Here, we are given a simple picture of how Paul’s team made plans

### **1. When making your plans, always consider people**

- a. Paul’s time in Corinth had come to end, he sets sail for Syria, no doubt to bring a report back to the church which sent him out!
  - i. Some interesting details are added, he had cut his hair, verse 18, for he was under a vow.
  - ii. No doubt this a Nazarite vow, a vow described in the OT which involved abstaining from wine and the cutting of one’s hair. It was a symbol of offering oneself to God. Paul may very well

- have done it also as a matter of strategy, to show his own kinsmen, the Jewish people, that he was not anti-Jewish.
- iii. This certainly would have helped for he went to the local synagogue in Ephesus, v 19, where he reasoned with the Jews.
- b. And what I want you to see, to notice, is this very simple but vital pattern in his plan-making that serves as a model for us: Make your plans with people in mind!
- c. And when Paul arrived at his destination, he sought out people, who, though did not belong yet to the church, he longed that they might.
- d. And when he travelled there, verse 18, he did not go alone. Priscilla and Aquilla were *with* him.
- e. Not only are these two people married, but their names RHYME.
- f. Priscilla and her husband Aquilla met Paul when he came to the city of Corinth and the three would prove to become steadfast friends, companion and fellow workers.
- g. Here, we are reminded that though Paul, an Apostle, senior leader in the church, pioneer church planter needed what we all need; encouragement, fellowship and support from friends.
- h. It would be very easy to think that the more mature you become, the better trained you are, the more experience you have, that you would shed your need for community.
  - i. Nothing could be farther from the truth!
  - ii. Listen: spiritual maturity does not result in needing people less, but loving people more!

**Romans 1:11-12** For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

- iii. It is a beautiful picture that though we have a diversity of experience, we can stand side-by-side and be encouraged
- i. See, I love these little facts in Acts because they reveal people like Paul to have real relationships!
  - i. Are you in healthy relationships? Or are you isolating yourself?
- j. Though not like the authority of Scripture, the counsel and confirmation of other Christians is key nonetheless!
  - i. Scripture makes it clear that the fool thinks he is right in his own eyes. But the wise person is aware that our sin can blind us! Do you invite other people to help you see what you can't?

## **2. When making your plans, always practice prayer**

- a. You know what is interesting, is that Paul wanted to come to Ephesus two years earlier! But, we are told, the Holy Spirit, prevented him!
- b. And yet now, we see that the door had been opened!

- c. And the attitude Paul has regarding his plans is captured in this wonderful phrase of verse 20 and 21. (READ)
- d. So, what is the right perspective when it comes to our plans? What does his posture teach us?
- e. First, Accept your limitation
  - i. The Bible does NOT keep us from making plans, it keeps us from becoming presumptuous
  - ii. This truth humbles us, this truth helps us!
    - 1. Have you ever thought that it is a good thing that we do not know the future? If you did, then
    - 2. Future success would make you arrogant
      - a. You would be unbearable! You would be tempted to walk around, smug and arrogant!
      - b. You would be tempted to be disgruntled about the present!
      - c. Or, perhaps even lawless! (University students...)
    - 3. Future suffering would make you despondent
      - a. We would just give up! Some of you might be there... and I want to comfort you... but it is with strong words that I do so! YOU DO NOT KNOW what will happen!!
  - iii. Paul longed to see the men and women in Ephesus again! We read that here. But he says “If by the Lord’s will!”
  - iv. This phrase governs the way he makes plans. It is used on many occasions!
  - v. Consider his letter to the Roman church, a community he had not yet had the chance to visit, but strongly desired to on his way to Spain!

**Romans 1:10, 15:24** “In my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you... I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and that you will assist me on my journey there.”

- vi. But here is the twist... we know what took place with Paul!
- vii. He never made it to Spain! And while he did make it to Rome, it was as a prisoner!
- viii. And yet, he faced these setbacks and changes with joy and courage!
- ix. How? Paul’s confidence was not in his plan, but in his God!
- x. He knew and trusted that Jesus would work even the bad for good!
- xi. He modelled the teaching that James is giving us here! Accept your limitation, receive God’s invitation, and therefore!

- f. If our lives are contingent upon God, then so should our plans.
- g. See, here is the test! In what manner do you relate to God and your future! Do we give our plans to him in pen? See, Paul exemplifies what James instructs.

**James 3:13-15** “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

- h. Notice, James is NOT saying that we shouldn't make plans, but he is condemning self-importance and self-determination!
  - i. We must acknowledge God in our plans. This is absolutely clear, we are without excuse. To fail to do this is sin!
  - ii. Pretentiousness will lead to prayerlessness!
- i. Instead of dependence *on* God we profess independence *from* God!
  - i. This is not just wrong it is evil. To know that God is sovereign, but not to acknowledge him in our plans, this is sin.
- j. God has perfect timing... the answer could be yes, no or wait.
- k. Am I living in such a way that I recognise God's authority? Seek his will? This should be the posture of our hearts.

### 3. **When making your plans, always remember your purpose**

- a. Another departure and Paul arrives to his home church in the city of Antioch and begins a string of visits to different communities, and Luke's language in 23 reveals his sense of purpose: to strengthen all the disciples.
- b. The purpose revealed in this passage is of course to see people saved!
- c. But it does not stop there! People who have come to faith absolutely need to be strengthened in their faith.
- d. And what is said of Paul is actually modeled in the final section through Apollos and Priscilla and Aquila. When you make your plans, when you think about the future, are thinking along these lines? You should!
  - i. Your purpose is to grow and help others do the same! We can do this by practicing what v 24-25 pictures:
  - ii. How can we do that? Well, this passage embodies our purpose
- e. **Invest in the ministry of the word**
  - i. In verse 24-25 We read about an up and coming key player in the unfolding story of the early church, also with a great name APOLOS.

- ii. He was eloquent, he had a natural speaking ability, but more than that, he was competent in the scriptures! (mighty!)
- iii. And what is he doing? What is he invested in? He spoke and taught accurately about Jesus!
- iv. Wherever you go, whatever your plans, remember your purpose is to give yourself to the ministry of the Word!
- v. God's word guides us!
  - 1. Our desire for every one of you! Take the courses!
  - 2. One of the things I have always appreciated about Reality Carpinteria is the passion and practice of equipping people for the ministry!
  - 3. I want to say to you... KEEP ON DOING IT!

**f. Invest in the ministers of the word**

- i. Now, as gifted and as educated as Apollos was, he still needed some guidance! What he DID know, he taught accurately, but still needed more.
  - 1. We are told in verse 25 that he only knew the baptism of John. This most likely means that he knew of and preached the need for repentance, which John the Baptist clearly preached. He most likely proclaimed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the promised one of God to rescue humanity.
  - 2. But it could be that perhaps he did not have full knowledge of the power of the cross and perhaps the meaning of the resurrection. We are simply not told other than that he needed further instruction...
- ii. Who will do this? Our power couple Priscilla and Aquilla!
  - 1. The Spirit can work without us but desires to work through us!
- iii. Our plans must include this purpose, this conviction that investing in people must be a part of our plans!
  - 1. So many people took time to invest in me!
  - 2. I know it can be discouraging at times... results may vary!
  - 3. But never underestimate what can happen when you invest in ministers!
- iv. Look at the fruit! Apollos became a great and effective minister! Do not stop investing!
  - a. So, if these things are true, what should we see in this church? People who are devoted to reading scripture, praying for the Spirit's guidance and coming together for wisdom!

- a. And as we make our plans, we say over them all: If the Lord wills
  - i. The Methodists had a regular practice that we would do well to learn from. When they would sign their letters which contained their plans, thoughts and dreams for the future, they would sign the letter with this phrase Deo Volente.
- b. Like their post script, this should be written over all our plans!
  - 1. "If God wills I will attend school here..."
- c. To say "God willing" is not some kind of magic formula...
- d. It is the posture of the heart which is set upon God.
  - i. Saying this assumes a life dependent on God! Are you?
  - ii. One of the biggest lessons I have learned is that walking by faith is not a box you tick, it's a life you live!
    - 1. (Our story)
    - 2. Risk... stuck because you won't risk...
- e. To say the Lord wills is the posture of a heart that comes under God
  - i. How have you been making your plans?
  - ii. Are you willing to bring what you have planned to scripture?
  - iii. How do you respond when plans change?
  - iv. And are you willing to change your plans??
- f. Here is a pattern we can follow...
- g. Express your desires - Praying is not about suppressing your needs but expressing them. (It is only right for children to ask their Father!)
- h. Surrender your desires - What are your desires? Your experiences?
  - i. If we do not learn as a church to express our hearts to our heavenly Father we will become cold and religious
  - j. But we must also be honest about our lack of understanding and surrender all of our requests to Him
  - k. God does not give us exactly what we ask for. Instead He gives us what we would have asked for if we had known everything He knows.
- Jesus set this very pattern for us in the garden... hours before...
  - Expressing- the anguish as our representative (yet without sin)
  - Surrendering- perfectly on our behalf. He died in our place.
- How do I know that my life is safe in his hands? Because he laid down his life for you. You can trust that his will is good. Our plans can change, because he won't change. My certainty is not upon what will happen tomorrow. My certainty rests on the goodness of God.
- Your life is short. Tomorrow is not promised to you. Have you confessed your sin to Jesus? Received his forgiveness and eternal life from Jesus?