

**Planning for Life and Death**  
Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13-16  
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In our fast pace society, keeping a calendar of coming appointments and events has become a regular part of our lives (especially with a failing memory like that of my own). We schedule appointments to see the doctor, meetings to see a client or business associate, a day to go shopping, an examination to be taken at school, or a vacation three months in advance in order to get in on a ticket sale. We become so oriented to filling our calendars and making future plans for this or that until we forget that it is God that holds our future and ordains our paths every day. We forget to sanctify our plans (even mundane, ordinary plans) with God's blessing and prayer. It is so easy with such a busy schedule to act as though we ourselves are sovereign in directing our own paths and ordering our own lives.

Listen to the Word of the Lord. "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). "There are many devices [or plans—GLP] in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand" (Proverbs 19:21). "Man's goings [or steps—GLP] are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way" (Proverbs 20:24). Man proposes, but God disposes all things for His own glory. Therefore, what a sad commentary upon us as Christians (who profess to believe in an absolutely sovereign God) when we do not look to our gracious God to direct us and to bless us in all of our plans for tomorrow—especially since our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15). From our text, let us consider (1) A Caution about the Future (Proverbs 27:1a); (2) A Reason for This Caution (Proverbs 27:1b).

**I. A Caution about the Future (Proverbs 27:1a).**

A. Solomon warns us concerning a sinful inclination to which we are all subject: presuming upon the future that we will live another day to fulfill all of our appointments just as we have planned. Such a presumption on our parts proceeds from sinful pride and unbelief. For in so doing, we usurp the place of God, acting as though time was our creation rather than God's, and living as though we were masters of our own destiny.

1. Dear fellow Christians, when the Lord is excluded from your plans for the future (even in your ordinary plans to go shopping, or to go to work, or to attend school), you sinfully presume that the Lord will grant you another day to do these things and all apart from any acknowledgement that tomorrow belongs not to you, but to the Lord your God.

2. James draws our attention to the same presumptuous sin (James 4:13-16). Notice that James writes concerning this sin that when your plans for tomorrow are not made tentatively in your mind (and even tentatively with your lips "if the Lord will") you show that you rejoice in your own pride. James declares that all such rejoicing in your pride about the certainty of there being a tomorrow for you is evil. It is to proudly rob God (by your actions and speech) of His sovereign power and divine authority over your life.

a. From what source does such pride issue forth? Ultimately, it issues from unbelief and misplaced faith. For the Lord reveals in His Word that it is in Him that we live, and move, and have our being and not in ourselves (Acts 17:28). Every beat of the heart, every breath that you take, every thought that comes to your mind, every movement of the hand or the foot, every sound you hear, every sight that you behold, every minute that you live is ordained by Almighty God (Job 14:5). Do you believe this is true? As Christians of course, you believe it is true. However, the unbelief appears in that you think, speak, and act as though it were not true when you make plans for tomorrow apart from sanctifying those plans with God's blessing and prayer. For just as the food you eat is to be sanctified by God's blessing through prayer, so your todays and your tomorrows are to be sanctified by God's blessing through prayer.

b. God reveals that He is to be included in all of your plans for the future (not simply the big plans, but even in your ordinary plans): Proverbs 3:5-6. Here the Spirit of God says that if you do not acknowledge God in all of your ways or plans, the issue is one of lack of trust in the living God to direct your future paths.

B. Now, dear ones, I would have you see that God is not condemning all goals and plans you might set for the future, as if it were sinful in itself to make plans or set goals for tomorrow. What the Lord condemns is not seeking His blessing in all of your plans of the future and thus acting as though you were the master of your own life.

1. In various ways, we see how God approves of such godly foresight in preparing for the future.

a. Consider the following admonitions from Scripture: Proverbs 10:5; Proverbs 24:27; Proverbs 30:25.

b. Consider the example of Joseph (in Genesis 41) who made preparation for the 7 years of famine during 7 years of prosperity when it would have been easier simply to set back and enjoy the present abundance rather than preparing for the future famine.

c. Also note the parable of the talents (in Matthew 25:14ff) wherein the Lord commends the foresight of the those who planned and made a profit from the money given to them by their master, but condemns the one who did not prepare for the future day of reckoning when his master would appear, and rather presented that same one talent the master had originally given to him. The servant had not lost that talent of gold or silver, but he had not made plans to use it, to improve upon it, and to multiply it for the Master's benefit.

d. Paul planned to visit the saints in Rome after his visit to Jerusalem (according to Romans 16:24-25).

2. It is the lazy sluggard who does not make godly goals for his future, but merely waits without preparation to see what each day will bring. Can you imagine how foolish it would be to take a trip but to make no preparation for it all? Dear ones, we will only waste the time God has given to us if we do not prepare for the future by making godly plans. We will continually spin our wheels with a lot of noise and a lot of promises (like a car stuck in a snow drift), but we will never move from one spot to the next if we do not sanctify plans for tomorrow, next month, or next year.

3. But the point of our biblical text is that in all of your ways, you must acknowledge the Lord (which implies you do not simply do what you want to do and then seek His rubberstamp upon your own plans). Our text implies that you must seek the will of God as found in Scripture. Dear ones, there is a revealed and divine standard by which the Christian must live. The Holy Scripture is your only infallible rule for faith and practice. If your desires and goals cannot be supported or defended by Scripture, your goals and desires must vanish. As Christians who trust in Jesus Christ alone for your eternal salvation, you cannot be conformed to the desires of this present world. You must be transformed by the Holy Spirit to do the will of Christ as He gradually renews your mind from worldliness to godliness. If you are not willing to follow the Lord and His will wherever He may lead you, that must first be resolved. Who is the Savior and Lord of your life?

4. He may take you down the very paths that you had planned, or He may scrap those plans and take you down another path which you had not planned. For who among us ever included in our own plans setbacks in health, injuries, loss of work and financial trouble, discouragement, the death of children and loved ones, broken personal relationships, or periods of time where it seems that nothing is falling into place as we had planned? But, dear ones, all of those very events were included in God's plan for your life and mine in order to cast us upon Christ, and that is why the present and the future must be committed every day to the Lord—for man proposes, but God disposes.

5. Have you become frustrated, angry, and even bitter over hopes, dreams, and plans you

had made for the future, which have been interrupted, delayed, or cancelled? Are you wiser than God? You imply as much if you think or act as though you could have done a better job of bringing your future plans to pass. In your anger (perhaps even silent, buried anger which no one else sees), you attack the very character of the Lord—you attack His wisdom, His love, and His faithfulness to His promise made to the Christian in Proverbs 3:5-6.

6. Where is our peace and contentment when it appears that all of our plans for the future have been radically changed due to circumstances beyond our control? Remember the words of Paul who knew what it meant to have future plans changed by unforeseen events which God brought into his life, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

7. Although you are to make godly plans for the future invoking God’s blessing upon them, you are not to give way to anxiety and fear about the future (Matthew 6:31-34; Philippians 4:19; Psalm 37:4-5). There was a slogan years ago by one of the insurance companies which said, “You’re in good hands with Allstate.” Beloved, you’re in good hands (yea the best hands) with Christ (Romans 8:28). Where is your trust in the Lord when your future plans don’t work out? Do you give up, throw up your hands, and dive into the depths of depression? Why? The Lord has not failed you. He is leading and guiding you into the future—into uncharted waters and unknown territory just as He did Abraham (Hebrews 11:8). Make godly plans for your life that are agreeable to God’s revealed will in Scripture. Every day work diligently by God’s grace toward those goals. But rest in Him to bring it all together in His time and in His way and for His glory and for your greatest good. Thus, let us not boast proudly about all the tomorrows we have scheduled, for they belong to the Lord and not to us.

## **II. A Reason for This Caution (Proverbs 27:1b).**

A. The reason given here by Solomon as to why we must not boast about tomorrow is that we are not omniscient in knowing what tomorrow may bring. The Lord declares the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). All events are within the grasp of God’s purpose, knowledge, and almighty providence. From the casting of the lot (Proverbs 16:33), to the exact number of hairs of your head (Luke 12:7), to the falling of a sparrow to the ground (Matthew 10:29), to the sin of man (Acts 4:27-28), to the provision of your daily needs (Matthew 6:30), and to the salvation of God’s elect (2 Timothy 1:9). Nothing is left to chance from God’s perspective.

B. Therefore, James (in James 4:15) declares that you should always make tentative plans for the future and even qualify your godly appointments for your future on earth with “if the Lord will” or “God willing” (if not explicitly then implicitly in your own mind).

C. One significant event that may occur tomorrow which you have not foreseen may be your own death or the death of a loved one. Consider the following ways that the shortness of life and nearness of death is portrayed in Scripture: as a night’s sleep (Psalm 90:5); as grass that grows one week and is cut down the next week (Psalm 90:6); and as a vapor or mist which quickly dissipates when the sun appears (James 4:14).

1. Physical death is divinely appointed for all men (whether male or female, whether prince or pauper, whether married or single, whether parent or child, whether young or old, whether Christian or non-Christian). Men may be late for appointments here upon the earth. They may forget about certain appointments in this life. They may even refuse to keep some appointments because they do not want to go. But there is one appointment for which no man, woman, or child will be late, will forget, or can refuse to keep: death (“As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” Hebrews 9:27). To those who have not embraced the Lord Jesus Christ as their only hope of eternal salvation, death is the end of earthly joys and the beginning of eternal sorrows. To those who have received by faith alone Jesus Christ and His free offer of eternal life, death is the end of earthly sorrows and the beginning of eternal joys.

2. But someone may ask, “Why should we become familiar with the certainty of our own death?

a. Because your death is certain, you should shake yourself from your own hypocrisy in going through the mere motions of faith and worship. You cannot play games with God. For there is coming a time when all facades and acting the part of a Christian will fade away, and you will either enjoy the heavenly blessings of a genuine living faith in Jesus Christ or suffer the hellish curse of a dead faith which trusted in your own good works.

b. Because your death is certain, you should realize that not only do you need life through Christ, but your loved ones do as well (in fact all men will perish if they do not trust in Christ alone to save them from their sins). You should see the eternal significance of pressing home to your children their need of Christ, of earnestly praying for God to draw them to Christ, of spending more time in that which will promote their spiritual well-being than that which will merely promote their earthly pleasure. Dear ones, as you become acquainted with the certainty of death in your daily life, you will also become more interested in bringing the gospel of salvation to this needy world of lost sinners. You will weep for the lost who are perishing. You will pray for faithful ministers. You will give of your resources to the proclamation of the gospel through preaching and distribution of literature, and to the establishment of faithful reformed and covenanted churches.

c. A sober consideration of your own death ought not to cause you to press the panic button (for it is God your Father who has ordained the days that you should live for His glory and for our own good). But this truth ought to bring the Christian out of fantasyland and back to reality if he/she has allowed the cares/pleasures of this life to blur his/her spiritual vision.

d. Because you have no guarantee that you will be alive tomorrow, you cannot waste the time, the talents, and the resources that God gives you, but rather you must redeem everything in your life for Christ’s use (time, talents, and resources). You may not see yourself as possessing any great talents to be used in Christ’s Kingdom, but the Lord has blessed each of you with certain gifts and abilities to be used for His Kingdom (cf. the parable of the talents). One thing you all have the same quantity of is 24 hours in each day. Do you give each day to the Lord in prayer and use it for His glory, or does your day involve little or no planning for Christ’s Kingdom—It just happens?

e. Dear ones, an intimate and personal recognition of your own weakness to rescue yourself from death should drive you from placing confidence in man (whether in your own ability to provide for yourself the necessities of this life or to provide for yourself by your own good works a righteousness of which a holy God will approve). People can trust in so many things to usher them into heaven: their own good works, their church, their minister or priest, or their good intentions. But God, speaking in Scripture, is ever so clear that none of these things can of themselves save you from hell and usher you into heaven. All of your righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Your good works are the fruit and not the root of your salvation. The good works of Christ are the root of your salvation. The church and its ministers are mere human beings and they cannot save—not even the apostles themselves could save those to whom they ministered (1 Corinthians 3:4-7). Ministers preach the gospel, but they cannot save sinners. And dear ones, good intentions cannot save you, for there is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death (Proverbs 14:12). Only Jesus Christ can save you from hell and usher you into heaven. And His righteousness which you need is only received by resting by faith in His finished and completed work. To think you can save yourself by your own works is to make the work of Jesus Christ insufficient for your salvation. It is to say that Christ did not suffer enough to secure your salvation. It is to say that Christ did not fulfill the law of God sufficiently for you, His people. Dear ones, your good works as Christians are not done in order to be right before a holy God, but in order to demonstrate to God your great love for Him in freely saving such an unworthy sinner. You are helpless to save yourself. You are doomed to die (both physically and eternally in hell) if you lean upon your own strength, your own works of righteousness, or your own wisdom; and it is that

earnest confession that drives you out of yourself and into the open arms of Christ who is freely offered to sinners (even to the chief of sinners) in the gospel (Romans 5:6).

The question today is not whether you will die (that is a certainty)? The only question is when will you die? It could be today, tomorrow, next month, next year, or many years from now. Regardless, of how long (whether sooner or late), you must not plan your life as if death will never happen. Rather you must plan your life in such a way as to consider the certainty and nearness of death in order that you may make your todays and your tomorrows count for the Lord. If that thought is fearful to you today and you would rather run from it than face it, I encourage you to hear these words and believe them: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55). Jesus Christ alone is the resurrection and the life. His empty tomb is the shout of joy and certain victory over death to everyone who will turn from trusting man or trusting their works, and rather place all of their hope and confidence in Jesus Christ, who alone is righteous and powerful to save.

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