

Purpose and Plans

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INTRODUCTION

Christians should live with purpose. In the physical and spiritual realms, proper planning is an important part of achieving success. Benjamin Franklin once said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." Without a definite plan, goals are mere wishes. Plans must be put into action.

Individually, we make plans, both small and large: buying a vehicle or purchasing household appliances, building a new house or renovating an older home, achieving personal goals and professional advancement, etc.

Considering this subject from a biblical standpoint, we recognize that God has a purpose and plan. So also does man. While the former are perfect, the latter are often flawed. It is imperative that our purpose and plans match those of God.

Definitions

The Greek word *boulē*, derived from *boulēma* (purpose, will) and defined as "counsel" is rendered "counsel" (1x), "decision" (1x), "motives" (1x), "plan" (4x), "purpose" (5x) in the NASB (Thomas).

BDAG say it is defined as "(1) that which one thinks about as possibility for action, *plan, purpose, intention*; (2) that which one decides, *resolution, decision*; (a) of humans; (b) of the divine will; (3) an assembly that takes up proposals or deliberates, *council meeting*."

Occurrences

This word occurs 12x in 12 verses (Luke 7:30; 23:51; Acts 2:23; 4:28; 5:38; 13:36; 20:27; 27:12, 42; 1 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 1:11; Heb. 6:17). Collectively, these occurrences provide a full portrait of purpose and planning, human and divine, good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, acceptable and unacceptable.

[Luke 7:30](#) But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's [purpose](#) for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

- [Luke 23:51](#) (he had not consented to their [plan](#) and action), *a man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;
- [Acts 2:23](#) this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined [plan](#) and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.
- [Acts 4:28](#) to do whatever Your hand and Your [purpose](#) predestined to occur.
- [Acts 5:38](#) “So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this [plan](#) or action is of men, it will be overthrown;
- [Acts 13:36](#) “For David, after he had served the [purpose](#) of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;
- [Acts 20:27](#) “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole [purpose](#) of God.
- [Acts 27:12](#) Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority [reached a decision](#) to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter *there*.
- [Acts 27:42](#) The soldiers’ [plan](#) was to kill the prisoners, so that none *of them* would swim away and escape;
- [1 Cor 4:5](#) Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the [motives](#) of *men’s* hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.
- [Eph. 1:11](#) also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the [counsel](#) of His will,
- [Heb. 6:17](#) In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His [purpose](#), interposed with an oath,

OF A RIGHTEOUS GOD

Beneficial

God’s purpose and plans are beneficial (Eph. 1:3-14, esp. v. 11). He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. God chose us. He loved us. He adopted us as sons He freely and lavishly bestowed His grace upon us. He redeemed us through the sacrifice

of His Son. He revealed the message of truth, making known the mystery of His will. He offers us an eternal inheritance. He sealed us in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise.

*Ephesians 1:3-14 (NASB95) — 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after **the *counsel of His will**, 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.*

Predetermined

God’s purpose and plans are predetermined (Acts 2:22-24, esp. v. 23; 4:23-30, esp. v. 28). Wicked men conspired to crucify Jesus Christ, but God was in control. While Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were held accountable, each acting according to their free will, God’s hand guided the process and His predestined purpose was realized.

*Acts 2:22-24 (NASB95) — 22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined ***plan** and foreknowledge **of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.*

Acts 4:23-30 (NASB95) — 23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things? 26 ‘The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord and against His Christ.’ 27 “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the

*Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and **Your *purpose** predestined to occur. 29 “And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”*

Unchangeable

God’s purpose and plans are unchangeable (Heb. 6:13-20, esp. v. 17). The Greek word *ametathetos*, occurring twice in this context, and translated “unchangeable” and “unchangeableness,” refers to that which is “immutable, unalterable, or unchangeable” (Thomas & BDAG). Gamaliel rightly understood, “If this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God” (Acts 5:33-39, esp. v. 38-39).

*Hebrews 6:13-20 (NASB95) — 13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, “I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.” 15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way **God**, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the ***unchangeableness of His *purpose**, interposed with an oath, 18 so that by two ***unchangeable** things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

*Acts 5:33-39 (NASB95) — 33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 “For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 “So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if **this *plan** or action is of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God.”*

OF UNRIGHTEOUS MEN

Sinful

Man's purpose and plans are often sinful: in plotting to crucify Jesus, the Jewish Council committed the crime of the ages (Luke 23:50-53, esp. v. 51).

*Luke 23:50-53 (NASB95) — 50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man 51 (he had not consented to **their *plan** and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; 52 this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain.*

Self-Willed

Man's purpose and plans are often self-willed: in rejecting Paul's inspired advice, the ship's captain decided to continue sailing to Rome, with disastrous consequences (Acts 27:9-15, esp. v. 12).

*Acts 27:9-15 (NASB95) — 9 When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, 10 and said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." 11 But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul. 12 Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, **the majority *reached a *decision** to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there. 13 When a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore. 14 But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; 15 and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.*

Evil

Man's purpose and plans are often evil: when Paul's ill-fated ship floundered on the rocks, the Roman soldiers planned to kill the prisoners who were aboard (Acts 27:39-44, esp. v. 42).

Acts 27:39-44 (NASB95) — 39 When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. 40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. 41 But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the

vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves. 42 **The soldiers' *plan** was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

CHOICES

Reject

Like the Pharisees and lawyers, we may reject God's purpose (Luke 7:24-30, esp. v. 30).

*Luke 7:24-30 (NASB95) — 24 When the messengers of John had left, He began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 "But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are found in royal palaces! 26 "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. 27 "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.' 28 "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." 29 When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected **God's *purpose** for themselves, not having been baptized by John.*

Serve

Like King David, we may serve God's purpose (Acts 13:32-37, esp. v. 36).

*Acts 13:32-37 (NASB95) — 32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.' 34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' 35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.' 36 "For David, after he had served the ***purpose of God** in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;*

Proclaim

Like Paul, we should faithfully proclaim God's purpose (Acts 20:25-32, esp. v. 27).

Acts 20:25-32 (NASB95) — 25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole ***purpose of God**. 28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 “Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

CONCLUSION

Man’s purpose and plans are often hidden, but one day they will be revealed. What will happen when God discloses the motives of your heart (1 Cor. 4:1-5, esp. v. 5)? What does your future hold?

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (NASB95) — 1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose **the *motives of men’s hearts**; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.

Sources:

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