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Wisdom & Planning

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Series: Wisdom for the Holidays
Proverbs 3:5-6

BIG IDEA – IF WE'RE GOING TO MULTIPLY, WE NEED TO HAVE A PLAN

If that doesn't excite you, I don't know what will. When you came in today, you got a Hold the Rope card. I want to talk to you about what Hold the Rope is. You just heard from our partners in 2023 and all of the things your generosity did, whether that was churches planted or women served or prisoners ministered to. It's really incredible.

Before I talk to you about Hold the Rope, I need to tell you a little bit about our story. If you've been coming around for a while, I want you to know our story, because if you call Two Cities Church home, you're a part of our story. Here's how our story started. Our story started eight years ago. We're a fairly young church. I always say we're a young church that believes very old things.

We came here eight years ago from Raleigh-Durham from a church that maybe you've heard of but many of you have never been to, The Summit Church. The Summit Church and Pastor J.D. Greear were generous and missions-minded, and they sent us out. They sent 30 people here from Raleigh-Durham to Winston-Salem.

Here's what we found. Almost immediately, our church began to grow. Pretty soon, our church was self-sustaining, and we had all of our needs met, and we began to ask the question, "How could we be generous to other churches, locally, nationally, and globally, and other Christian nonprofits?" So, way back in 2018, six years ago (so pretty early in the life of our church), we started Hold the Rope.

Okay. Where did that phrase come from? One of my favorite stories in church history. A guy named William Carey... This was in the late 1700s, early 1800s. William Carey wanted to go to India. Now, today, if you want to be a missionary, when you get to

India, you FaceTime your family. That's what you can do. You can actually stay in touch with your family and friends even while you're on the mission field.

Back then, you couldn't do that. In fact, they would... They didn't have to take a plane; they had to take a boat. It would take three months to get to India, and they would pack their coffin. If you were a missionary back then, you packed your coffin, and you said, "I'm not coming home, most likely. It's too dangerous."

So, when William Carey looked to go to India, he said to his best friend, Andrew Fuller, "India feels like a deep well. I will go into the well if you will hold the rope." What he meant was, "I'm willing to get on a boat and travel for three months and give my life to the people of India, but you're going to need to hold the rope." That meant prayerfully and financially partner. For the rest of Andrew Fuller's life, he raised money for William Carey's ministry.

So, what we do with Hold the Rope... There are partners locally, nationally, and globally, and at the end of the year, we want to give a one-time gift above and beyond normal tithes and offerings. Of what you give, 100 percent is going to help our local, national, and global partners go farther faster.

Here's our goal. We don't actually have a financial goal. Last year we raised close to a million dollars. That was really awesome. We don't have a financial goal, but we have a participation goal. We hope every person who calls Two Cities Church home (by the way, engage your kids in this) and every kid who's old enough will give to this Hold the Rope offering.

In the next few weeks, I'm going to be highlighting some of our partners. We're going to give to dozens of organizations, but I want you to know this. We're going to give locally, because we know and love our city and want to bless and reach our city; we're going to give nationally, because we love our nation and want to see more churches started in strategic cities; and we're going to give globally, because we serve and worship a global God, not a tribal deity.

So, I'm going to tell you more about our partnerships, including a strategic partnership we're going to have with ministries continuing to minister and serve in western North Carolina. The way we hold the rope is not only through financial giving but also through prayer.

So as I end, I want to invite you guys to come tomorrow night to our Multiply Night, which is going to be our prayer and worship night. It's our last one of the year. It's going to be very, very special, as we seek God's face together and pray for our church to multiply. With that said, let's pray, and then we'll get to work in the book of Proverbs.

Lord, I want to take a moment right now and pray for every person in this room to genuinely consider what it would be like for them and their family to give generously to Hold the Rope. Christmas is a time for giving, Lord, and we understand that we give because you first gave to us, that Christmas is a celebration of the greatest gift ever given, God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

In response, we want to give. We want to give to our friends and to our families, but we want to give to strategic partners where we can invest in what they're doing and we can deeply encourage them as they go into 2025. So, we pray that 100 percent of the people in our church would give something above and beyond normal tithes and offerings to Hold the Rope by the end of the year. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Today, we're going to talk about the plans you make and the path you take. We're going to be in the book of Proverbs, and we're going to talk about decision-making. Do you know how many decisions the average person makes a day? I don't know how they get these numbers. I looked at research multiple places.

It says the average person makes something like 35,000 decisions a day. It's something close to 2,000 decisions an hour. I guess it depends on how you determine a decision...to take one step, to take another step, to sit down, to turn a page, to scroll, what social media thing to hit. These are all decisions.

This is why some of us have decision fatigue. Do you know what decision fatigue is? You're just so tired of making decisions. Let me tell you who has decision fatigue: a mom of little kids. Right? Because all of these little kids want snacks, they want sugar, and they want screens. That's what they want all day long. So Mom gets tired of making decisions.

There are so many decisions. There are decisions we have to make at the holiday. "What gifts do we give our kids? Do we give them gifts? Do we give them experiences? When do we start Christmas? Do we do Christmas decorating after Thanksgiving or do we do it in a more biblical way, like, right after Halloween?" We have to make all of these decisions.

Then there are massive decisions you have to make. These are fork-in-the-road decisions. There are maybe 15 of them in your life. Like, who will you worship? That's the most important decision you'll ever make. "Will I worship Jesus or will I worship someone or something else?" "Who will I wed?" is another big decision. You know, "Who will I date; therefore, who would I marry, and when will I get married?"

"Will I have kids, and how many kids will I have? Should we adopt?" These are major decisions. "What career path, job, and education should I take? Where should we live?"

Are we in our starter home or are we in our forever home?" Then, as you get older and your parents age, you ask, "What role should I be playing as my parents age?"

So, we're going to talk today about decision-making, but decision-making falls under the larger theme in the book of Proverbs of planning. What's interesting is today... I don't know if it's more common, but people are afraid to make decisions, especially big ones. People are delaying marriage. They're not getting married.

They're delaying having kids or not having kids. They're delaying getting a career and are having a lot of jobs. They're delaying getting a job and are just getting another master's and then another master's and then another degree. Why aren't people making decisions? I think it's because they're afraid.

Turn to Proverbs 3:5-6. By the way, for the rest of the Proverbs series, there is no way for me to preach the Proverbs expositionally in the sense of a verse-by-verse walkthrough of them, because that's not even how they're written. So, we're going to be all over Proverbs today tracing a theme and a topic, but this will be our anchor text.

It says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge the Lord, and he will make your paths straight." Today we're going to look at principles for planning, but at the heart and foundation of planning and decision-making is trusting in God.

The Bible tells us again and again and again to trust in the Lord, but why do we need to trust in the Lord? Well, there are usually three times in your life (and they'll come up again and again and again) where you need to trust in the Lord. You need to trust in the Lord when you are afraid.

I still know good and godly Christians who love the Lord and know the Bible, and they're afraid to get on a plane. If you think about it, I kind of understand. "Should I get on this metal tube and go 30,000 feet in the air at 500 miles an hour, maybe sometimes going over water?" I mean, I understand it.

Literally, I know many godly Christians who say, "Every time I get on a plane, even though I know the Lord, I have to trust the Lord." When you trust the Lord, you basically say, "You're in control when I'm not in control," because that's when you're afraid: when you're not in control.

So, people need to trust the Lord when they're afraid. They need to trust the Lord when they doubt. Here's when you'll doubt. This will definitely happen in your life. You'll doubt every time what you're reading in the Word isn't what you're seeing in the world.

So, you read something in the Word, and you're like, "Okay. This is what God says, but this isn't what I'm seeing in the world." Then you trust God. You say, "God, I don't understand why there's such a gap between what you said in your Word and what I'm seeing in the world, but I'm going to fill that gap not with suspicion but with trust.

Then the third area, where we're going to spend the rest of our time today, is we need to trust the Lord in the direction and in the decisions of our lives. Why? Because you can't change the past, and you can't control the future, so the only thing you *can* do is trust God in the present. The Bible says, "The Word is a lamp unto my feet." What does that mean? It's not a high beam. It means when the Lord leads me, he only leads me so I can see a little bit ahead of me.

This whole series is going to be unbelievably practical. Today, what I'm going to show you with our time left in the book of Proverbs is a bad example of somebody who doesn't plan and make decisions, and then I'm going to show you four principles for decision-making.

We're going to be all over the place, but let me just show you this. I'm going to give you a counter-vision in the book of Proverbs of the person who does not plan. He's illustrated. I'll show you him in a second. Then, based on that, we're going to look at four things to do to plan your life accordingly.

The big idea for today is *if we are going to multiply, we're going to need to have a plan*. Every plan needs a greater goal, a greater priority, and the priority in the next 14 months, as a church, is to multiply, but if we're going to multiply, we need to have a plan.

Okay. Let me introduce you to the bad example, the counter-vision. Maybe you've heard of him before. He's the sluggard. Have you heard of the sluggard? I told you last week that in Proverbs we get all of these people we meet. We met the simple. He's nice and naïve and a novice. We met the fool. He's headed in the wrong direction. He's on the wrong path. We met the scoffer. He's settled in his rebellion, recruiting others. We met the wise person last week. Today we meet the sluggard.

I want you to see Proverbs 13:4. ***"The soul of the sluggard..."*** When I think of sluggard, I think of Jabba the Hutt from Star Wars. The root word for sluggard is *slug*. ***"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing..."*** But like often happens, there are parallels in Proverbs. People are compared. ***"...while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied."***

So, here's what we're told. The sluggard has dreams and desires, but he doesn't make the right decisions. It says he craves. Everybody in here has dreams and desires for their life. The sluggard wants to have the results without any of the work. It reminds

me of a guy named John Maxwell. He's the modern father of Christian leadership in the church. He has to be in his 70s at this point, maybe 80s.

He used to be a pastor, and then he became a book writer, and then he became a speaker. Now he's a world-renowned author and speaker. He says when he goes and speaks at these big events, afterward he'll do meet and greets and shake some hands and sign some books, and he said all the time young men will come up to him and say, "I want to do what you do." In other words, "I'd like to stand on a big stage and speak, I'd like to write books, and I'd like to travel the world."

He said, "I didn't know for a long time how to respond, because I didn't want to squash them. They said, 'I want to do what you do.' So here's what I started to say to them: 'Do you want to do what I did?'" That's the question you ask the sluggard. You meet somebody successful... Everybody wants to do what they do. No one wants to do what they did. So, the sluggard has dreams and desires without making decisions.

Here's why plans are very important. The only way we know to create positive emotion (I'm looking at some of you; you need some positive emotion)... Some people have more than others. That's what it means to be extroverted. But the only way to *create* positive emotion (this is so important; this could change your life) is you have to have a noble plan and watch yourself make progress. That's it.

This is why if someone is trying to lose 20 pounds and they lose 5 pounds, they're like, "Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah." They are so excited. Of course they are, because they have a good plan ("I need to lose weight"), and they're watching themselves make progress. If you go to Proverbs 26, I'm going to show you another section of Proverbs, the longest section of Proverbs that explains the sluggard in more detail.

Remember, the sluggard is a picture of someone who won't plan. He has dreams and desires, but he won't make decisions. Look here. Verse 13 of chapter 26. We're going to look at four verses in a row on the sluggard. ***"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the streets!'"***

Now, at that time were there lions in Israel? Answer: yes. But seeing a lion in the street was not something you saw weekly or monthly. You could go months without seeing a lion. Oftentimes, if you *did* see a lion, it was most likely a cub or you saw it from a distance, and it was more scared of you than you were of it, and it ran away.

So why are we told the sluggard says, "There's a lion in the streets"? Here's what the sluggard does. The sluggard makes excuses. The sluggard will not face things. He thinks, "If I got up and went to work, if I went out and actually did something, then a lion would eat me." It's like, no, it's not going to happen.

Here's the other big idea: *you can make excuses or you can make plans, but you can't make both*. You know this. You can make excuses or you can make progress, but you can't make both. How many of you are making excuses instead of making progress? In fact, I can tell you... Where do you need to make plans? In the exact place you're currently making excuses.

How many people make excuses for their marriage instead of plans for their marriage, excuses about their health instead of plans for their health, excuses about their jobs instead of plans for their jobs, excuses about their financial problems instead of plans for their financial problems? The problem with the sluggard is he makes excuses. Here's the other problem with excuses. If you look, he says there's a lion. He mentions the lion twice.

Here's the other thing a person who's a sluggard does: he only thinks of the downside. Some of you are like this. You think, "If I actually try to do something, if I actually make plans..." You start thinking of the worst thing that could happen. Let me free you up. There is no safe option in life. Here's what I mean by that. If you don't make plans, what you'll be is just an older version of who you are right now. You don't want to be that.

It's one thing to meet some 25-year-old whose life is a mess. They haven't done much, they aren't much, they don't know much, and they don't make much. That's fine if you're 25. It's less attractive if you're 35. It's borderline repulsive by the time you're 45. Right? If you don't make plans and you don't make decisions, you just get old. You end up becoming a worse, older, grumpier version of you.

But that's not the only thing he does. He won't make progress. He won't make plans; he makes excuses. Look here. ***"As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed."*** So, he will not face things. That's why he makes excuses. Secondly, he will not start things. He stays in bed.

Now, what's interesting is Proverbs says... I'm literally quoting directly from Proverbs. A different verse, but this is what Proverbs says: "Do not love sleep." Some of you go, "I need to repent." What does that mean, "Do not love sleep"? I thought about that this week, because sleep is a gift. The Bible says in other places (this is why you need the whole Bible to make the whole Christian) that sleep is a gift. Sleep is actually part of how I humble myself and admit I'm not God. Sleep can be a way I actively trust in the Lord.

What does he mean, "Do not love sleep"? Why is he saying, "The sluggard turns on his bed"? Here's what I think he means: we should not love escaping our lives more than living our lives. For some people, sleep is a total escape. We should not want to be unconscious more than we want to be conscious.

So, the sluggard won't start things. This is going to be so practical today. What do you need to start doing today that you will be so glad you started doing six months or a year from now? Do you just need to start reading your Bible? Do you need to start praying with your kids? Do you need to start getting some accountability in an area of your life? Do you need to start giving? Do you need to start saving?

The sluggard will not face things. The sluggard will not start things. Look here. There's another thing it says. I'm just reading the next verse. ***"The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth."*** Religious people do not get this verse, because religious people do not understand that sometimes the Bible needs to make fun of you because the Bible loves you. Sometimes God uses humor, satire, and hyperbole to get the point across.

It basically says the sluggard is so lazy he takes the nacho chip, dips it in the nacho cheese, and then says, "Nah, forget it. It's just too much work." The sluggard is so lazy he can't finish the basic task of feeding himself. Okay. It's funny to laugh at the sluggard. The problem in most of our lives, I bet... I'm looking around. I mean, here you are. You're at church on a Sunday. You're at the 9:00 service.

The problem with most of us in this room right now is probably not that we don't start things but that we don't finish things. Is that not the problem with New Year's resolutions? How different would you be if you had finished every New Year's resolution you ever started? You'd be a superhero. How many books would you have finished? How many dates would you have gone on? How much money would you have saved?

This is why when you go to the gym on January 2 you can't even use any of the machines. Everybody is there in their new workout clothes. Right? But by the Super Bowl, it's empty. The sluggard will not face things. The sluggard will not start things. The sluggard will not finish things. This all has to do with decision-making and planning.

Finally, what's the biggest problem? The biggest problem with the sluggard is mentioned last. Verse 16: ***"The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly."*** So, you may ask, "What's the biggest problem with the sluggard? Is it that he's lazy?" No. "Is it that he doesn't start things?" No. "That he doesn't finish things?" No.

The biggest problem with the sluggard is he won't listen, which means, actually, the biggest problem with the sluggard is something under the reason he won't listen, which is he's prideful. It says here that seven men can answer him sensibly. *Seven* in the Bible is the number of completion or perfection.

It's basically saying that a bunch of people come to him and tell him a better way to live his life or try to correct him or try to encourage him, and he doesn't listen because he thinks he knows better than other people, but if anyone would look at the sluggard's life, they would be like, "Uh...you need to get your life together."

By the way, how do you know if you need other people to speak into your life? Here's the question: Is your life perfect? All of us go, "No, it's not." Okay, good. If your life isn't perfect, there's something you don't know, and what you often need to know is in the people you know. You're like, "There's so much I need to know about finances, marriage, reading my Bible, sharing my faith, making disciples, and raising the next generation. The information I need to know is in the people I often already know."

Okay. So, we're given a counter-example. We should all go, "I don't want to be the sluggard." It's a ridiculous example. If we're honest, and certainly in certain parts of our lives, it's easy for us to be like the sluggard. With our time left, I want to give you four principles from the rest of Proverbs on how to avoid being the sluggard.

The first one is so simple and so straightforward you don't have to write it down, but you can if you want to. Let me read you the verse, then I'll tell you the first principle of planning in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 12:20: ***"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy."***

Okay. Here's the first principle of planning from the book of Proverbs: *do not plan evil*. You go, "Easier said than done." Do you know that there are people who plan evil? It actually is one of the reasons that shows us we're sinful in our hearts, that we are sinful by nature but also sinful by choice. People do sinful things, and they were planning on doing them.

By the way, you need to plan good. In fact, maybe the full point is *don't plan evil; plan good*. Think about it. Does Satan plan evil? Yes. Does Satan have a plan or does he go, "I don't know how I'm going to tempt everybody"? No, he has a plan. "I don't know how I'm going to infiltrate the church with false teaching." No, he has a plan. "I don't know how I'm going to make sure the church gets persecuted all over the world." None of this happens accidentally.

Guys, there are entire organizations that have a plan. They even put it in their name...Planned Parenthood, which is about planning but not parenthood. There are entire governments in which you would never want to live. You wouldn't even want to visit these places where the entire government is always, only, continuously planning evil.

Here's what's interesting. A lot of times, the Bible will tell us *not* to do something before it tells us to do something. I've told you this before, but nine of the Ten

Commandments are given in the negative. Why? Because anyone who has ever raised kids knows you have to tell them what *not* to do.

Little Timmy, who's 2, just needs to know, "Do not stick a fork in that outlet." He doesn't need to understand voltage and that in the future that's how he'll charge his iPhone. He doesn't need to know that. On a serious note, where are you planning to do evil? Isn't it true that, for some of you, so much of your time and energy go into figuring out how you can sin and not get caught?

Students, quit planning to do evil when your parents aren't around. Quit planning to do evil when your roommates are gone or your spouse is gone. So much energy is spent on planning to do things that are wrong and then figuring out how we'll cover up and not get caught about the things we've done wrong.

If you're new to Christianity, let me tell you a little Christian background on what Christians do. Christians love to use euphemistic language to talk about their struggles with sin. They'll say things like, "I fell into sin." It's like, "Let's roll the tape. Nope. You were planning it. It was clear you were planning it."

Here's the thing. You have to plan to not do evil. Purity will take a plan. Billy Graham (you know I love him), who went to be with the Lord several years ago, had what was called the *Billy Graham rule*. It was actually four rules, but the most famous of the Billy Graham rule was he'd never be alone with a woman who wasn't his wife. Of course, that rule has been critiqued, and all those other kinds of things, in modern culture.

One of the reasons (I just heard this, like, two weeks ago) Billy Graham had that rule... Listen to this. This will take a minute to get, but this is really powerful. He said the reason he had that rule was, "Because I wanted to be able to say about my life not just it *didn't* happen but it *couldn't* happen." Is that not amazing? That's why Billy Graham was Billy Graham.

He said, "If I were ever accused of something, I didn't want to have to say, 'It didn't happen.' I wanted to be able to say, 'The way I've designed my life, it *couldn't* happen.'" Once you've decided, "I won't plan evil; in fact, I'll plan how to avoid evil," then you can do the third fun thing, which is starting to plan good things.

You know, what would your marriage look like if it could be the marriage you wanted? What if your kids actually liked you and wanted to come home when they didn't have to come home anymore? What if you had enough money to provide for your family and then be generous to others? Those are all great things, so make a plan.

Here's the second thing: *make sure your plans are under God's greater purposes.* I'll show you this. Your plans should serve God's greater purposes. Proverbs 19:21: **"Many are the plans in the mind of a man..."** You and I are going to have many plans, and those plans will change across our lives. That's okay. **"...but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand."**

So, you have plans, but God has a purpose. What you basically want to do... See, I'm not interested in just giving us advice, like a TED Talk seminar, on how to organize and plan your life. I'm interested in us being uniquely Christian in our decision-making and our planning, and that probably most clearly happens by saying, "Okay. I want my plans to serve God's greater purpose or purposes." That means I'm going to have to know what God's purposes are.

In *this* text it speaks of his main purpose. Sometimes the Bible talks about God's *purposes*. Sometimes it talks about God's *purpose*. We could say no less than God's purpose is to glorify himself (to make himself look great in the world) and to save sinners. Well, then you might go, "Okay. How do my plans fit under God's purposes?" Here's the interesting thing. Every Christian asks this question, but they don't normally ask it like *this*.

In the early 2000s, Rick Warren was probably the most famous pastor in America. He was called *America's pastor*. He pastored in Southern California for 40 years. I heard him say that in 40 years of ministry he was asked, "What was the most common question Christians asked you in your church or on your radio show or as you traveled the world?" He said, "That's easy. The most common question is 'What is God's will for my life?'"

That's the question you need to ask if your plans are going to be under God's purposes, but that's a hard question to ask, because sometimes people talk about the will of God in all of these different ways. Something happens and they go, "I guess that was God's will." Other times, they talk about God's will like, "I just want to obey God's will." Other times, they talk about God's will like, "I want to find God's will," like it got lost somewhere.

I want to talk about God's will. I'm indebted to a guy named Kevin DeYoung who wrote a book called *Just Do Something* where he unpacks this. Just for a few minutes, I want to talk about this, because this is how you're going to understand how to put your plans under God's greater purposes.

Put your thinking caps on for a second. God has three wills. He's higher than us, so that would make sense. This is going to help you understand the whole Bible very simply. God has a *will of decree*, a *will of desire*, and a *will of direction*. Let's talk about those.

So, the *will of decree*. "Define it, Kyle." It's God's secret, sovereign will. If you ask the question at any moment in human history, like right now, "What is God doing? What is God doing in the world?" one answer you can always give is "God is accomplishing his will of decree." This includes sickness, sin, and suffering. It includes all of the things God allows in the world for his greater purposes.

I don't know if you've ever heard of Joni Eareckson Tada. She became a quadriplegic at 17 years old. She's a brand-new believer at 17 years old. She becomes a quadriplegic. If I said this, it wouldn't be very powerful, but here's what she said. She said, "Sometimes God temporarily allows something he hates in order to accomplish something greater that he loves."

So, the will of decree... It brings up a lot of questions, but here's the whole point. The point with the will of decree is you're never going to know it fully, and you trust God with the will of decree, but that's not what a lot of people are asking about. The next is the *will of desire*. The will of desire, if you say, "Define that," is his stated will in the Scriptures.

His will of decree is his secret, sovereign, mysterious will. It's what he's doing in the world. It's how he's playing chess throughout all history to glorify himself and save sinners and how everything is moving to the book of Revelation. The will of desire is his stated will in Scripture.

Here's the principle here: you will only know the will of God as well as you know the Word of God. This is the fun part, because you could open up your Bible and go, "I can know God's will for my life," because most of the things that are God's will for my life are stated very clearly in the Bible. Every time I read a command I go, "This is God's will for my life."

In fact, this is what's so amazing. There are 5 or 10 passages in the New Testament that even get more specific and give summary statements, and they say, "This is the will of God for your life." First Thessalonians 4 and 1 Thessalonians 5 are two of the biggest chapters. It says, "This is the will of God: that you be holy." Then in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians it says, "This is the will of God: that you be prayerful, joyful, and thankful."

This is what's so amazing. I knew a guy who was very successful. He graduated from the Naval Academy. This was years ago that he told me this story. He had all of these job opportunities as he got older. He was telling me this when he was in his 50s. Super-high-level guy, and he was offered these two big-time jobs at the same time. One was going to be in *this* location and one was going to be in *that* location.

He was talking about how he and his wife were thinking through it. I'll never forget it. This is a big-time guy, and this is what he said to me. "Kyle, I couldn't decide. They were both great jobs. So I asked, 'Where could I be holier, where could I be more thankful, and where could I be more joyful?' And that was the job I chose."

So, you trust the will of decree, you obey the will of desire, and you will discover the will of direction. The *will of direction* is the specific will for the self. Does God have a specific will for you? That's what people are asking. "Who should I marry?" and all that. Does God have a specific will for your life? Yes. Does he expect you to figure it out before you make decisions? No.

Think of all of the biblical characters...Abraham. I mean, God spoke to him audibly, and he still didn't know what was going on. Moses, David...all of these guys. They got a little bit of information. There were twists and turns and plot twists, and they didn't know any of it.

I think about my own life. I've read the whole Bible. There's no Bible verse that says, "Marry a young lady from Chattanooga," but the will of decree in my life was, "Okay. I believe God loves me and has a plan for my life. Marriage is probably included in that plan." That would be will of decree. Will of desire was I knew what to look for in a wife, and I was trying to become the type of man a wife would want according to the Bible. Then will of direction... I bump into Margy in 2008. We have a friendship that turns into dating that turns into marriage.

Is there a Bible verse that says, "Plant a church in Winston-Salem in 2016"? No. Will of decree: God was building his church. Will of desire: I was trying to become the type of person who could be a pastor. Will of direction: The Summit Network offered an opportunity to plant a church in Winston-Salem. That's how it works, and you only understand it looking through the rearview mirror.

Okay. So, very simply, do not plan evil. Secondly, when you're planning, consider God's purposes. Thirdly, when you're planning, *understand your season*. This will make sense in a second. You plan according to your season. We're going to go back to the sluggard. Proverbs 20:4 tells us something about the sluggard. "***The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.***"

We've already talked about a lot of problems with the sluggard, but the problem with the sluggard in *this* situation is he does not plan to do the right thing in the right season. Let me try to make this simple. I'm oversimplifying, but in Bible times they did not think of seasons the same way we do. We think of spring, summer, winter, and fall. They were an agrarian society.

They lived off the land, which meant they thought of seasons in three ways: plant, wait, and harvest. They understood. "If I didn't plant, I'd have nothing to wait for, and if I didn't patiently wait, I'd have nothing to harvest." Now here's what's interesting. I don't know if this is true, but I heard a guy say you can directly connect civilization to humans discovering seasons.

Think about this with me for a second. Here's what happens. Imagine you have no understanding of the seasons and it starts to snow. You're like, "I can't do anything. I can't plant in this. We can't live in this." If you do not understand seasons, if you don't understand there's winter, but then there's spring, but then there's summer, but then there's fall, but then there's winter...

If you don't understand there are seasons, you freak out in a season or you try to escape that season and go somewhere else. What's true in the natural world is true in the spiritual world. If you understand your season, you can plan appropriately for it and, if God is gracious enough, actually plan not just for *your* season but maybe, if you're mature and sophisticated enough, plan for the season to come.

You know this, but life has seasons. Singleness is a season for most people. It's a season of unique divine enablement where the apostle Paul says you don't have anybody else you are primarily responsible for or have to take into your consideration. It's a season. Being married with no kids is a season. It's a time to merge your lives and start your careers.

Having little kids, especially under 5, is a season of not sleeping...or anything else, being completely overwhelmed. It's a season. Having teenagers (I'm just entering this phase) is a season, and you become a free Uber driver. This is what happens. It's like, "I'm paying for it, but I'm driving Uber." Being an empty nester is a season.

Now, here's the principle of seasons: seasons don't adapt to you; you have to adapt to the season. You can't be like, "I don't like winter." Tough. Get used to it. It comes every year. It's for three or four months. You'd better adapt to it. So, what you basically want to do... It's so simple. I don't have time to get into each season and how to plan, but each season needs a different plan.

There's a lot of frustration, because we will not plan for the season we're in and tend to idolize past seasons. "Oh, when I was single..." "Oh, before we had kids..." "Oh, when the kids were still in the house and we were a family and we had dinners..." You have to embrace the season you're in. You can't idolize a past season. You can't fantasize a future season. Instead, you make a plan for the season.

By the way, sometimes you'll have a season within a season. Someone gets sick. Someone needs to move back in. Someone loses a job. The plan is "I will make a plan

for the season I'm in, and if I make a plan for the season I'm in, then maybe I could even begin to plan how best to handle the next season."

Okay. There's a lot there, which is why I think the best place to end is the fourth principle for planning. Don't plan evil, make sure your plans are under God's purposes, and plan for your season, but here's the one that brings it all together: *talk to people about your plans*. This is one of the main themes in Proverbs in regard to plans. Here, I'll just read you one verse. There are many verses I could have gone to.

Proverbs 15:22: ***"Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."***

If you could simplify and summarize (this is part of what I try to do for a living) the entire biblical teaching, and you could take all of it and ask, "How do you make biblical decisions?" the answer would be "The Word of God and wise counsel, and then I take it to the Lord in prayer."

If you can get this in your teens or in your 20s, it's going to save you so many pains and problems and pressures in your life. You need the Word of God, and you need wise counsel, two wings on a plane, and then you take what you're reading in the Word and what you're talking to in wise counsel and pray about it.

Now, this is different than how people tend to make decisions today. It depends on who they are. People love to isolate themselves, and because we have AI and Wikipedia and Google, we do a lot of researching and make big pros and cons lists. Some people don't really like to make decisions, so they just do what's popular.

"Well, everybody goes to college, so I guess I'm going to college. Everybody, when they're young, moves to a big city, so I guess that's what I'm going to do. Everybody, if they don't know what they're going to do, just goes and gets more education, so I guess that's what I'll do."

Sometimes Christians, instead of Word of God and wise counsel... Christians can be silly. Sometimes we're looking for signs. I'm not saying God can never speak to us in signs, but sometimes we're trying to see a certain sign. "I don't know if I should buy that outfit, so if there's a parking spot in the front row, it's God's sign for me to buy it. When I drove around, after 20 minutes, there was."

We talk about feeling led. We believe the Holy Spirit leads people. We really do, but a lot of times, we feel led to do exactly what we already want to do. This is why *The Babylon Bee* (a satirical news site) had an article that said something like, "Man feels led to do, coincidentally, what he already wanted to do." "I feel led to go on that mission trip to Hawaii."

We need wise counsel for a couple of reasons. First, because we're often making decisions we've never made before, and we need to talk to people who've made them. It's like you never bought a house or you never got married or you never went on a date or you never did a job interview or you never raised kids or you never took care of your parents or you've never been an empty nester and didn't have the kids at home and are trying to figure out how to fall back in love with one another.

We're all learning how to do these, so the best thing you can do is... That's why, by the way, it says "many advisers" or "wise counsel." You're going to need different people. Nobody is wise in every area of their life. Basically, what you should be doing is looking around all the time, going, "Is there somebody I know who's winning across one dimension of life who I'd like to learn from? This person seems to have their finances together. Okay, they would be somebody I'd learn from."

So, the first reason is we've never made these decisions. The second reason is so much of our decision-making, if we're honest, is unbelievably emotional. They say in prayer and in decision-making the hardest thing to do is to get neutral, to go, "Lord, would you please speak to me?" which leads to the big thing. When you seek wise counsel, do so before you make the decision.

Do you ever see that person...? They come to you, and they're like, "Listen. I'm wondering if I should date this guy. He's not a Christian. We've been on eight dates. We told each other that we love each other. Do you think I should be dating him?" It's like, "Oh, what you want is for us to bless you. You don't want counsel. What you want is affirmation."

You know, "Do you think we should sell the house and move and take this new job, because it's under contract?" It's like, "Oh, you didn't really want us to talk about whether you should move and whether it's wise to sell your house."

I think the question to ask in regard... Because it goes back. We end with wise counsel because it was the number-one problem in the sluggard's life, and it was the problem of pride. Really, at the end of the day, here's the question to ask in regard to your plans: Are you teachable? Are you the type of person that other people can look at the plans in your life and speak into them?

The whole reason we talked about this today is we want to put together plans that glorify God, serve each other, and serve man so we can multiply. Here's why we do this, guys. If you ask at the end of the day, "Why do we plan...?" You say, "Should I plan so my life will go better, so I'll be more organized, so I'll get more things done?" Those are all secondary reasons.

Biblically speaking, we plan because God is a planner. Some of you love the verse, "I know the plans I have for you." That's God speaking. In fact, you could look at creation. Creation was God's plan. I don't mean this in any kind of snowflake way, but I just want to tell you that each of you is part of God's specific plan.

I mean, you are not an accident. There are accidental pregnancies; there are no accidental people. You are not an accident, so for some reason... This will be the joy and adventure of your life to figure this out. Why are you here? What is God's specific plan for you right now? God made you on purpose for a purpose.

Part of the way you honor God in that is you go, "Okay, God. Since you did that, I'm going to figure out your purpose, and then I'm going to arrange my plans." In fact, salvation is a plan. It was part of his will of decree, his mysterious plan. In Isaiah it says it was the will of God to crush him.

How do we know that Jesus Christ coming into the world was the will of decree? It was mysterious. It was secret. It was sovereign. Nobody understood it when it was happening. So, here's the amazing thing. Here's what we see with God. We see that when a person makes plans, it can bless a lot of people. It was God's plan of salvation to send his own Son that has blessed millions and millions and millions of people for 2,000 years.

No matter what you did in 2024, whether you were the sluggard, whether you've been making excuses, what would it look like if you took seriously Genesis 1:28 that God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply"? What would it look like if you took that and, by God's grace, together we made plans for 2025? Let's pray.

Lord, right now that's what we want to do. We want to make plans, and we want to invite you in. Lord, help us to avoid either simply praying and, therefore, being passive and not planning or simply planning and not praying and, therefore, being prideful. Help us to avoid the two ditches of passivity and pride.

Lord, would you create homes where families plan together, where spouses come together? Would you give people a unique time at the end of this year and the beginning of next year to not just work *in* their life but by the grace of God to work *on* and to work *above* their lives, Lord?

Lord, I pray that in the weeks to come people grab a Bible and in a new way ask, "What are God's purposes?" I pray that people grab a calendar and in new ways say, "Okay, I'm going to put together a plan." I pray that people would grab a journal and start asking, "Lord, where can I make progress?" and that they start making a to-do list of their next steps. Lord, we want to plan because you first had a great plan to

save us, and you saved us and set us free that we might live for you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.