

## Look Around: Look Ahead

### **1 John 3:1 through 1 John 3:3 (NKJV)**

**1** Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

**2** Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. **3** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

### **Series Introduction**

### **1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup>But as it is written:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor have entered into the heart of man  
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

### **1 Corinthians 2:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup>But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

In the purest sense, we do not know what tomorrow holds for us. But God knows. Eyes have not seen and ears have not heard, but God has prepared some things to happen in our lives. He has prepared blessings and opportunities. He has prepared challenges and rewards.

God holds every day of this New Year in his hand. He already knows the ministry we will perform next month. He has already ordained and commissioned the blessings you will receive six months from now. He knows the lives he plans for us to touch in the fall. He knows who he plans to bring into our lives and he knows the people who will walk out of our lives this year.

Since our God has already prepared a course for our lives, I believe we must work to position ourselves to receive his blessings. It would be a shame for us to miss the blessings of God by being out of position to receive them. Why? It is because God has already ordained that he will reveal his plans for us by his Spirit.

To help us position ourselves to receive the fullness of God's blessings in this year, we are taking a look around. We began with Look Back. We also took a Look Around. Last week we took a Look Down. Now we are ready to Look Ahead. We will take a look at God's Plan, Man's Plan, and Our Plan. I will give you four steps to planning with God, then we will conclude for the day.

## God's Plan

God has a plan. God always has a plan. He is actively involved in making his plan work. God is constantly reaching his goals. He is looking ahead to the future and is ordering events and circumstances to bring glory to his name. The single greatest proof of God's planning is prophecy. Over and over in the scriptures God tells his people what he plans to do, when he plans to do it, how he plans to do it, and in some cases who will be involved.

Let's look at one together.

Genesis 15:13-16

**12** Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. **13** Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. **14** And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. **15** Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. **16** But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete."

Our God had planned the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the drowning of Pharaoh's army, and the conquest of the Promised Land at least four hundred years in advance. Stop and think about it. Centuries before Jesus was born, God told us details about his birth, life, betrayal, death, and resurrection. God was fully aware of his plan to redeem mankind.

Let's look at another example. Turn to ...

Jeremiah 29:4-11

4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. 7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace. 8 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are in your midst deceive you, nor listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. 9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them, says the Lord. 10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at

Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Some people think of God as a kind of clock maker. Clock makers create the intricate details of their clocks, wind them up, and set them in motion. They don't have to make the clock work because it will run on it's own. Some people think of God as if he is just another person who may or may not know what's going on. For them, God is making things up as he goes along.

*God is neither.*

Here in Jeremiah, God identifies the plan (the people are to remain in captivity), God gives the scope of the plan (they will be captives for 70 years), and God tells the end result of his plan (God will do good towards them, cause them to return, give them a future and a hope). God is actively planning the future. His plan includes the time for his return. We may not know the day or the hour, but God knows. Even as we live out our lives, we are a part of God's plan for the world.

Every believer needs to recognize God is in control, God is always at work around us, and God has a plan. One of the most amazing things about God's plan is in the big picture of God's plan, he has made room for mankind to still exercise our free will and formulate plans of our own.

## **Man's Plan**

Proverbs 16:1-3, 7-9

**1** The preparations of the heart *belong* to man, But the answer of the tongue *is* from the Lord.

**2** All the ways of a man *are* pure in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the spirits.

**3** Commit your works to the Lord, And your thoughts will be established.

**7** When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

**8** Better *is* a little with righteousness, Than vast revenues without justice.

**9** A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.

Planning is in our hearts. It is a gift from God. Proverbs says it belongs to us. It is a gift that can make life rewarding and fruitful. If we take what we have learned about the Laws of the Harvest and formulate a plan we are able to see the fruits of our labors. It takes a plan to sow. It takes a plan to cultivate. It takes a plan to reap. It takes a plan to sow again. Otherwise we will just eat up the seed.

Jesus also reveals something to us about man's plans.

Luke 14:25-33

**25** Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, **26** "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. **27** And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. **28** For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it* — **29** lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' **31** Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. **33** So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

Jesus acknowledges in this passage that it is unwise to operate without a plan. We are to plan ahead and count the cost. We are to weigh all of the options to see if our plan will succeed. It was common knowledge to his audience. Everybody knew you didn't build a tower without a plan. There are too many steps involved and too many people involved to leave it to chance. Everybody knew you didn't go to make war without a plan. There are issues of soldiers and supplies, and armor and it all costs. For warfare we can't just send out the troops without knowing how many.

A football team takes the field with a plan. Businesses are started with a plan. Cities operate from plans. Teachers teach from a plan. Even criminals make plans.

If you don't have a plan for yourself, you will be part of someone else's. We can only reap what has been sown. So when we don't have a plan, other people sow into our lives for their benefit more than ours. We work for them and they make more than us. We serve them so they will have a higher quality of life. We play their game so they will be entertained. We follow their rules so they can benefit from our obedience.

If we want to break the cycle of being used, we need a plan. If we want to change the game, we need a plan. If we want to get ahead, we need a plan. If we want to improve our quality of life, we need a plan.

### *Illustration on Planning*

*British sculptor Sir Jacob Epstein was once visited in his studio by the eminent author and fellow Briton, George Bernard Shaw. The visitor noticed a huge block of stone standing in one corner and asked what it was for.*

*Epstein the sculptor said "I don't know yet. I'm still making plans."*

*His visitor, Shaw was astounded. "You mean you plan your work. Why, I change my mind several times a day!"*

*"That's all very well with a four-ounce manuscript," replied the sculptor, "but not with a four-ton block."*

The more important the outcome will be, the more important our plans should be. The bigger the goal the bigger the plan. The greater the potential, the bigger the plan. An old Chinese proverb says "If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people". There is nothing bigger or more important than our lives. There is nothing more precious and worthy of our attention than the plan for fruitfulness in our lives. But never forget that it is unwise to make a plan without God.

## **Our Plan**

### *18 Wheeler Illustration:*

*Imagine that you are traveling on Interstate 85 South headed toward Montgomery. You are traveling comfortably at 70 mph in the right hand lane. As you pass the Tallassee exit, you notice a large fully loaded 18 wheeler barreling down the on ramp. You have the right to stay in the lane if you wish because it's his responsibility to speed up or slow down to merge into traffic.*

*But this particular truck driver either doesn't see you or he has decided he is merging one way or the other because his lane is running out. What will you do? Well, if you are like me, and you like living, you either slow down and let him in, speed up and let him in, or move over to the other lane. I know that I have the right of way and the free will to do what I please but I also recognize the truck is bigger and I need to have a healthy respect for it when I see it on the road. So I look ahead and make room for him. I'm going to do my part to insure he reaches his destination and I will reach mine.*

The same is true for my plans and God's plans. God has given us a free will to make our own decisions. As we read earlier God has also given us the blessing of planning

to help chart a course in our lives. But our greatest success comes when we allow God's plan and personal plans to become Our Plan. The reason is, it's dangerous to plan without respecting God just as it is dangerous to drive on the highway without respecting large trucks.

James 4:13-17

**13** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; **14** whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. **15** Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." **16** But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

**17** Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

*Dallas Truck Story:*

*My wife, her younger brother Tony, DeVonti, and myself were all returning from a trip to Dallas Texas when drove into a heavy rain storm. We were just exiting Interstate 20 to get on highway 80. The storm was so bad I couldn't see the road so we pulled over at a gas station. We started praying for God to keep us safe and provide a way for us to get through the storm. Out of nowhere comes a Wal-Mart truck. The driver stopped right next to the gas station then slowly started out on highway 80. We knew this was our answer. His truck wasn't pushed around in the wind like our small car. He sat up higher and had a better view of the road than we did. He knew the way and his bright lights would show us the way. We set out in the heavy rain right behind him. All we could see were his lights in front of us. We were following him in faith. 45 minutes later, we were out of the storm on our way home and he was in the Wal-Mart parking lot.*

Our lives are only a vapor. We can't literally see what will happen tomorrow or next month or six months from now. But God sits higher than we can. His light shines to reveal the way so we can see it all clearly. So James warns us that when we make our plans, we must consider God.

He says in verse 15 ...

**15** Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." **16** But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Planning our lives without God is arrogant boasting. It means we think we are the master of our lives instead of God. We have been bought with a price. We are not our own any longer. Our lives are knit to the Holy Spirit who guides us. For the rest of our lives, every plan we make as Christians must incorporate the will of God just as it expresses the heart of man.

*“God’s plan and my plan must become Our Plan.”*

There are things we want to do, and there are things God wants to do for us. There are things God wants to do to us. There are things God plans to do through us. God has a plan and our greatest success and joy and blessings and quality of life are found when our plans line up with his. In the old church we expressed it this way: “Put your hand in the Master’s hand.” Before any of us make big plans to change our lives, we need to look ahead, see what God is doing and adjust our plans to fit into his plans. We must consider his plan before we plan, when we plan, during our plan, and after our plans are accomplished.

1 John 3:2

2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Here in this passage I believe John gives us a key to help us plan with God. He teaches us that we don’t know what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like Him. As we plan our lives, we need to consider where God will be revealed. We need to ask ourselves, “where are the places God will be revealed in our lives?”

Some of us are planning for changes on our jobs. The question we need to ask ourselves is “if God revealed himself on our jobs, what adjustments would we need to make to make room for him?” If God just showed up at your workstation, at your desk, in your office, at your register, what would need to change? Our plan may call for a raise but God may be planning for some righteousness. You may be looking to move up, but God is looking to move in.

Some of us are planning for changes in our marital status. The question is, “if God reveals himself in your dating life, what adjustments would you need to make?” You might have plans to get it on, but God wants you to get it right. Your plan may call for some shacking up, but God is calling for you to pack it up and move out.

Some of us are planning for changes in our finances. Before we make our plan, we need to consider God and ask ourselves “where is our treasure?” When God reveals himself in your cash flow, what will need to change? Our plan may call for getting more money to buy more things today, but God is blessing us with more so we can live in abundance tomorrow. We reap what we sow.

What will your life look like when God shows up? What will life be like when he is revealed? What provisions have you made for God's plan? Have you considered what God wants for your life?

William Arthur Ward gives four steps to achievement. I believe we can use these four steps to help us plan with God.

1. Plan purposefully. Our God is a god of purpose. He has purpose for everything he does in our lives. Understanding purpose helps us to focus our efforts on the things that really matter. Ask yourself what is the purpose of my job, my career, my family, or my future? Have a reason for making the plan in the first place.
2. Prepare Prayerfully. God's guidance is crucial in helping us get into position for his blessings. Prayer will help us gather the right resources and make the right decisions throughout our plan. Prayer is our open direct line to the will of God.
3. Proceed Positively. We must have confidence in God's plan for our lives. We must have the faith to believe he will see the plan through to the end. Each step of the way, we must walk by faith and not by sight. Remember, blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.
4. Pursue Persistently. Faith without works is dead. Plans don't work by themselves. We have to work the plan. Plans that lack effort, consistency, perseverance, and the sweat of our brows will only turn out to be disappointments in our lives.

### **Conclusion:**

Psalm 37:23-25

23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,  
And He delights in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;  
For the Lord upholds him with His hand. 25 I have been young, and now am old;  
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

If we fail to plan, we plan to fail. If we fail to plan for ourselves, we will become part of someone else's plan. If we fail to include God in our plans we will falter. The word teaches us that there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end result is death.

Instead of suffering the pains of misfortune we need to look ahead. We need to plan with confidence in God. If we look ahead with God to plan our lives he will order our steps. He will uphold us with his hand. He will not forsake us and we will not suffer to beg for bread.