

GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Going Where God Goes

Pastors and others occasionally resist the idea that churches should organize. Reasons expressed for not organizing vary but are generally categorized as management is (1) not needed, (2) uninteresting, (3) unbiblical, and (4) lacks trust in God.

In response, others point out that a close look at the biblical record demonstrates that God himself is a planner and organizer. He might be called the premier organizer. The principles of organizing and organization are seen throughout Scripture. For example, the early books of the Bible show the nature of God as a planner in Creation (Genesis 1), building the ark (Genesis 6), giving the Ten Commandments and Law (Exodus 20), building the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-30), the spies of Joshua (Joshua 2), Solomon's building the temple (1 Kings 6), and Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation (Daniel 2). The grandest example of planning might be the birth of Christ as the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation (Matthew 1).

God has even created all the good works we're going to do in advance. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God

prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). God truly does what he pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps (Psalm 135:6).

James warns, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But, as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin (4:13-17)."

Is James saying pastors and church leaders are not to plan or organize to reach

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goals? Is it wrong to set goals for tomorrow, next month, or next year?

While it may seem that James is speaking against goal-setting and planning, he is not. He is speaking against taking a certain pride in planning. Beginning in the first chapter, James presents examples of Christians who take their life into their own hands, with little trust in God.

- James 1:5-8 He warns against double-mindedness.
- James 1:9-11 He warns against dependence on wealth.
- James 1:12-15 He warns against unrepented sin.
- James 1:19-21. He warns against an uncontrolled tongue.
- James 1:22-24 He warns against faith that does not produce fruit.
- James 2:1-13 He warns against showing partiality.
- James 3:13-18 He warns against selfish ambition.
- James 4:1-12 He warns against wrong motives.

It is pride rather than planning that

concerns James. As he wrote: “you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But, as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.” To paraphrase James, he is saying, “Don’t take your life into your own hands. Remember that all you do is dependent upon God’s will.”

Christian letters from years ago often closed with “D.V.” The letters stand for *Deo volente*, Latin for “if God wills,” or “God willing.” Any statements about tomorrow, next week, or next year are made in faith. Notice how the responsibility of man to plan is balanced with God’s will in these verses:

“The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD” (Proverbs 16:1).

“The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). “Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand” (Proverbs 19:21).

Plainly, faith planning is biblical and an action that Christians are expected to practice, trusting in God to provide final confirmation and direction.

How is planning viewed in your church? How does it demonstrate faith in God for the future?

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