

What About... *Goals and Plans*

By Dave DeWitt

First, the most basic thing we know about goals and plans is that God's sovereignty trumps them all.

- Psalm 33:10 *The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples.*
- Proverbs 19:21 *Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand.*

I find that most Christian comments on the subject end here—with some reiteration of the idea that both exist, but God's sovereignty trumps our plans. But let's go a bit further. When does making plans undermine the whole idea of trusting God? Is it a good idea to make plans at all? Well, apparently it is.

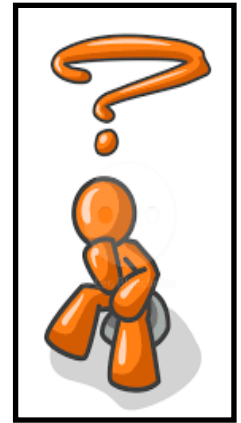
- Proverbs 21:5 *The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.*
- Proverbs 15:22 *Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.*
- Isaiah 32:8 *But the noble man devises noble plans; and by noble plans he stands.*
- Philippians 3:14 *I press on toward the goal [literally, target] for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
- Luke 14:28 *For which one of you when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it.*

So, we know that God's plan trumps our plans, yet plans are a good idea since they give us a way to avoid personal economic poverty. Plans can even be beneficial in our spiritual growth toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. But we also need to remember, Jesus discouraged worrying about tomorrow.

- Matthew 6:25-27, & 34 *For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life ... And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? ... So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

That would mean goals and plans which cause us to worry about tomorrow are detrimental. For example, James, the half-brother of Jesus, warned about making definite business goals and plans, because we can come to depend on them for our future, which is always uncertain.

- James 4:13-15 *Come now, you who say, "To-day 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."*



Goals vs Plans

It seems [to me] that there is a difference between goals and plans.

Goal: "the object of a person's ambition or effort; an aim or desired result."

Plan: "a detailed proposal for doing or achieving something." [New Oxford American Dictionary]

By these definitions, plans are good, but goals are usually not. Here is a four-fold distinction:

1. A **Goal** is usually quantifiable in numerical terms, like how many pounds to lose or when to retire.
A **Plan** is a proposal for how to organize activity, without a specific number to be achieved. Success in the Bible is not tied to numbers. It's associated with planning.
2. A **Goal** dominates our life, potentially ignoring moral values in order to meet the numerical objective.
A **Plan** proposes how to achieve things, without giving them dictatorial power.
3. A **Goal** creates something urgent, which tends to dominate what is important. Goals can be good in the sense that establishing goals keep order from chaos.
A **Plan** organizes what is important, while recognizing that certain things are temporarily urgent.
4. A **Goal** tends to take you away from your gifts, abilities, and desires, sort of like the "Peter Principle" (a tendency to rise to your level of incompetence, where in a hierarchy your incompetence eventually catches up to you).
A **Plan** helps you fulfill your gifts, abilities, and desires by increasing competence thru newness. Jesus planned to make disciples.