

CO-MISSION: PLANTING

Planning and Goal-setting

Share something a planning issue or struggle that you have or something that you are currently working on planning.

¹³ Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.

- V13 = a very [English sin](#)
- ‘Arrogant schemes’ – pretending we are God, immortal and unstoppable accomplishing our will
- But there is still planning – v15 – ‘we will... do this’ – but with awareness of contingency, conditional, provisional, flexible planning
- And v17 – it’s evil to plan arrogantly but it’s also sin to do nothing – we still need to get good things done

Wisdom categories

When we’re talking about planning and decision-making we’re talking in wisdom categories. That’s where the Bible talks most about these issues – in James, Proverbs, the Wisdom literature. But what I find humbling when I read through Proverbs (as I’m doing at the moment) is that planning and decision-making there are not about tools and techniques and spreadsheets – it’s about character. It’s about:

- Wisdom & Foolishness – to live without regard to God and without regard to others and without regard to your own ways and the future is simply stupid, foolishness.
- Hard Work & Laziness – when I’m not planning it is generally that I’m simply being lazy; I’m not making the time to plan, I’m not willing to do the hard work of asking all the questions that make my head hurt, I’m not willing to stop and do the necessary background research
- Humility & Pride – a lot of the time it’s pride that undercuts my planning because I’m unwilling to seek counsel or take criticism, I skimp on the unseen background work, I think I can get away with winging it – that’s pride
- Fear of the Lord & Fear of man – fear of man or seeking to please men (which is basically the same thing) distorts planning and it results in bad decision making – I either rush decisions because of fear or am paralysed in indecision because of fear
- Faithfulness & Untrustworthiness – we can have clever long term strategic plans but if we don’t do the thing we’ve said we’ll do then it all rings hollow

Also, biblical wisdom is counter-intuitive – is the foolish wisdom of the Cross (e.g. Prov. 11:25) – so a truly wise plan may actually look unimpressive and weak – e.g. reading the Bible with people or giving people away. For more on wisdom, see my notes below from Tim Keller’s talk to the Co-Mission elders last year.

If an essential foundation to good planning is wise character then how do we get that wise character? Well by a number of means. Having good mentors is key. But another vital one is:

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The most important minutes of the day – a personal meeting with our Lord

All the books and blog articles on planning say your first 15 or 30 minutes of your day are crucial – as a time to plan your week and prioritise your day – but for us the first minutes of our day are supposed to be a personal meeting with our God – it's a relational thing not a paper exercise. This is probably obvious stuff but it's worth reminding ourselves. We open our Bibles each morning to meet with the living God, a personal God, to relate to Him. [Bible reading as encounter](#)

What's the point of saying all this? It's a relational meeting – and that meeting with the living God in his living Word is the thing that really deals with our hearts, deals with our natural foolishness, laziness, arrogance and fear of man that threatens to distort and undermine all our planning and decision-making. Meeting with Him is what humbles us, spurs us out of our lethargy, gives us a healthy fear and reminds us what exactly is the good we should be doing, what is God's mission, what is his strategy.

The benefits of planning:

There are loads but here are a few:

1. Overcomes paralysis – when we're stuck looking at all the options
2. Provides concrete steps that should get you moving towards the goal – starts to make the vision happen
3. Anticipates issues ahead – we won't see all of them but we should be able to foresee some and mitigate against challenges that will arise
4. Keeps us on course – not just getting more things done but getting the right things done
5. Stops us frustrating people – because good people in your plant will want there to be a plan
6. Stops us simply being reactive – dealing with the tyranny of the urgent
7. Stops us doing everything under stress – when we fail to plan and everything is last minute our blood pressure is high and we skimp on sleep and that's disastrous long term
8. Makes decisions easier – not easy but easier, because you can point people to what we agreed, what we're planning to do and why, so there will be some things that we don't have time, energy and resources to do as a church this year¹
9. Produces higher quality ministry – in fact planning produces generally higher quality (Proper Planning and Preparation Prevents Pathetically Poor Performance) but especially what will suffer when we fail to plan is prayer and Word prep – you will probably be able produce something that looks superficially quite high quality without much planning but what gets pushed out is good time in prayer and the Bible – and so the gospel ministry is going to be much lower quality
10. Greater buy in – people know what the plan is and have time to schedule to be there
11. Opens up more options – e.g. if you're planning an event with a speaker, think who you could get if you are able to give them 2 years' notice, then think who you could get with 9 months' notice, then with 3 weeks' notice, then 1 week...
12. Fuels prayer – when you're communicating with prayer supporters, it's very difficult for them to pray for your church unless they know what's coming up for you.²

¹ Though other things may be able to happen in an organic independently organised way. David Robertson talks of dealing with people coming to him and saying, Can the church do this arts project or this social event or this action on climate change? – by saying, We're not going to do that *as a church programme* because we just focus on meeting together to hear the Word and pray but please do go ahead and do what's in your heart, it'd be great for Christians to be engaged in that – the church does a few things structurally and then encourages members to be involved in each other's lives in an organic way and go off in all directions and do a whole load of good things.

² And within the church, this is the way to present your planning – not as a top down enforced timetable but as milestones coming up which we really need to be praying towards.

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What horizons do we plan on?

- 1, 5 year - Mark Ashton, the ex-Rector of St Andrew the Great, Cambridge said at the EMA one year, 'the most common mistake leaders make when they plan is to overestimate what they can accomplish in one year and underestimate what they can accomplish in five years'.
- 2-3 year plan revised each year – this seems to be the optimum – not so far that things will have changed out of all recognition but beyond the current year. 3 years is often the sort of length of time that seed funding last for. The key thing is to keep pushing the plan out by a year every year.
- Annual – Think about the shape of your year. What are the seasons of church life? What is the rhythm? Is it school terms? Are Easter and Christmas key markers? Is the Revive Festival something you need to be building up to? (Yes!) Think about the congregation's energy levels. Best time for mission? Staff holidays? The [Dundonald 2019-2020 planner](#) is an example of something that works as a confidence-building communication tool for this church while also helping staff to see graphically when might be the busy times. However, there are clearly lots of cultural factors and different levels of detail will work better for different stages and types of congregation.
- Termly / quarterly – have a short document (2 pages) divided into the three or four chunks of the year and under each chunk put a) the three or four or five big events, activities and deadlines in that period and b) six or so objectives/goals/targets. Ideally, each term/quarter could have a theme – i.e. where you are particularly putting your efforts and emphasis as a team in that period e.g. fundraising or relationship building. Refer to this document every few weeks to remind yourself on your focus, big objectives and check how you're doing.
- Weekly / monthly – best to be working a few weeks ahead all the time – danger of getting to the end of the month and going into the next without looking ahead



How do we plan?

- Prayerfully
 - with the Bible open
 - together – get other involved – you need more than one pair of eyes on this – impossible to see all the angles, foresee all the difficulties and catch all the details on your own
1. Where are we now?
 - Where are we weak? What are our strengths? What resources do we have? What are we assuming? Who holds the power?³
 - Inventory of everything you are doing
 - Know your people – the key thing is where people are at spiritually – do the research, list where everyone is at

³ Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership*, chp. 57.

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2. Where do we want to go? Where do we want people to be? Vision / Long term goals
 - Break down into different areas – where do you want the committed core to be (e.g. all investing in a younger Christian), where do you want the kids work to be, where do you want those currently on the fringe to get to...
 - Break down into different time horizons – e.g. if I want 100% of the committed core to be investing in a younger Christian, in 2 years I might aim at 60%, in one year at 30%, in 6 months at 10%

3. How will we go about thinking how to get there? Mission / Strategic Anchors⁴ / Theological Vision⁵ (Keller) / Methodology / Values / Culture – this is the stage that is often forgotten – this is the stage where it's especially important to have our Bible's open and to make sure we're all on the same page as a team – what is our overall strategy, what is our basic modus operandi, what do we think is important, what are we assuming as our base, what is non-negotiable. We need about four boundary markers within which we will 'play the game'. Examples of these sort of markers/poles/anchors:
 - Word ministry will be the central ingredient of everything we do
 - We focus on the poor and marginalised
 - We have very high standards of presentation
 - We work with teams as a key unit
 - We are very concerned to be multi-cultural

4. What are we going to do to get there? Strategy / Pathways



- What is our pathway?
- What will deliver this pathway? We want people to be 'moving to the right'.⁶ This could be through existing programmes⁷ or new programmes.
- How does each of our ministries/events/programmes serve as a step?
- Why do you want people there? **What is this seeking to achieve?** – this is the absolutely essential question, whether you're evaluating existing programmes or designing new ones. Very easily we default to the aim of 'bums on seats' but surely the point is not attendance. We want people to move to the right. What is the core business of each activity?⁸
- What will you use to get people there? – "How they come is how they stay." "Why they come is why they leave." Whatever our means, is that what we can and should be delivering consistently every time?
- Are the steps too big? e.g. from 'not in a small group' to 'in a small group' – do we need a transitional 'entering the church' small group? How does that fit into our membership process?

⁴ Lencioni, *The Advantage*.

⁵ Keller, *Center Church*.

⁶ *The Vine Project*.

⁷ Consider tweaks to existing programmes and systems (see *Wisdom in Leadership*, chp. 61) e.g. injecting prayer into a meeting that always starts in a hurried way without prior prayer, or being very specific about a question you want people to ask each other after the sermon over coffee.

⁸ There will inevitably be some overlap of aims – something like a church service or small group may well have multiple aims for different groups of people – but generally it's good to be clear on the core business of a particular programme – e.g. the normal small groups are for establishing Christians, this special small group is for equipping men for leadership etc.

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- Are there unnecessary steps?
 - Is the next step clear? At the end of every event or programme is everyone clear on what the natural 'next thing' is to take this forward?
5. What do we need to do to get there? Plan / Logistics / Tactics / Specifics / What's best next?
- What exactly do you want to do? (concept) – This is the annoyingly simple but hard-to-answer question that management consultants ask you. Being really super clear on the What and Why will be very important both for communication and for planning.
 - What obstacles will this face?
 - What resources will be needed?
 - Who will do it? (Stewardship delegation – results (what, why) / guidelines (when, where, how) / resources / review)⁹
 - Break it down – e.g.
 - Given what I think we need to do, what type of people do I need to recruit?
 - Where can I get them from?
 - Therefore who do I need to speak to?
 - How am I going to get access to them?
 - Create the timeline: What needs to happen when? Work backwards and schedule everything – when design, when invite leaders/speakers/trainers, when book venue, when promote, when prepare content
- These two things – breaking it down to the minutiae and making the timeline scheduling when it's got to happen – are absolutely key. The tools and apps listed below can help or you can just use a big piece of paper on the wall but it needs to happen.
6. How are we doing?
- Monitor monthly / quarterly / termly
 - What would people in your team say if you asked, 'How did it go?' – That will reveal what they thought the criteria were. "It was great to see 25 people there" = numbers are the criteria. "It ran really smoothly" = efficiency and slickness were the criteria.
 - What were you seeking to achieve? How effective was/is the event/programme at achieving that? – Admittedly it's difficult to come up with metrics for spiritual impact but we need to try. E.g. how many new people committed to a small group, how many have started to meet up regularly with another Christian, how good are people at explaining the gospel...
 - Leave systems 2 years before radically changing

SMART targets

When I looked into this I realised that there are a dozen different ways that people assign adjectives to S.M.A.R.T. So I collected them together into themes:

1. Significant, Appropriate, Aligned, Meaningful, Acceptable, Resonant
2. Specific, Simple, Actionable
3. Measurable, Results-orientated, Tangible
4. Assigned, Resourced
5. Time-related, time-bound, Trackable
6. Stretching, Aggressive, Ambitious, Motivational, Aspirational
7. Achievable, Sustainable, Manageable, Attainable, Realistic, Reasonable

⁹ Matt Perman, *What's Best Next?*

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The first five of these are the sort of things you could have as column headings in a plan:

<i>Vision/goal area that this target falls within</i>	<i>Measurement criteria</i>	<i>Specific objective</i>	<i>Who is assigned to this and any resources/budget necessary</i>	<i>Time frame</i>

The other two areas (points 6 and 7 above) are in tension with one another and are more things to discuss in the process of coming up with the targets – to what extent are we wanting to aim really high (shoot for the stars on the basis that we have a great God and we'll end up higher than with a low target) and to what extent do we need to have realistic deliverables that will not be too daunting? The **realistic** element is especially important when it comes to events and special services – best to aim at doing something simple well than going for something really complicated and impressive that is biting off too much.

SMART targets keep us honest and make sure we get really clear on why, what, who, how, when. And ultimately that's what planning is about – asking the questions and keeping asking them until we've got the answers.

Tools and Apps can be useful

- Diary
- Planner
- <https://evernote.com/> - get thoughts out of your head, can use for lists and reminders too
- <https://todoist.com/> – some find this a very helpful way of prioritising and working through lists
- <https://wunderlist.com> – I find this really helpful - log things and do them, share lists with others
- <https://www.officetimeline.com/make-gantt-chart/google-docs> – critical path analysis / Gantt chart creation to schedule everything you need to do for a complex project
- <https://asana.com/> – similar to Gantt charts, team working, schedule everything that needs to happen and assign to particular people (cf. also other free team tools I have used - [Bitrix24](#) and [Slack](#))

Other Resources:

Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership* – esp. chp. 16, 31, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 68, 69, 71, 75

Matt Perman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done*

The 4 Cognitive Biases Entrepreneurs Should Avoid - <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/320679>

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Tim Keller, Leadership Wisdom

What is wisdom? Obedience plus...

Prov. 1 – insight (take time to examine carefully), foresight (work out the most likely scenarios), knowledgeableness (deep personal and second hand understanding of your field and its deep structure)

1. *Lead by character*
2. *Good judge of character of others – not gullible or cynical*
3. *Decisive but not impulsive*
4. *Lead without lording – steward (Luke 12, Matt. 25)*
5. *Catalysing (using the Bible to cast vision, make progress, not be happy with status quo) and organising (in charge of time)*
6. *Desire to serve (love for people - love is foundation of throne) not to get identity out of work*
7. *Know it will be lonely and hard and escape the trap of self-pity*

How to grow in wisdom:

1. *Reflection on daily life together – case studies, what are we learning from this?*
2. *Taking withering criticism and rebukes with a smile*
3. *The gospel changes: a) temperament (James 1:9-10); b) identity (from having identity in ministry to identity in Christ); c) suffering (from a proud, bitter, anxious response to suffering with assurance and joy in Christ - 1 Peter 1)*