

## **“WHEN GOD CHANGES OUR PLANS.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Proverbs 16:1; 19:21; 20:24; 27:1**

### **Introduction.**

Moms and dads took a double hit from the virus this week. For dads college football has been canceled. For moms schools have been closed. This is not the fall anyone was planning on. And this is on top of a summer no one planned on, like the fact that tomorrow is supposed to be the beginning NW Washington Fair and third annual pastor MooWich give-away.

OK, so maybe the football thing is not that huge a crisis. But schools being closed is.

I have to tell you; I have been praying for the opening of the schools in our area. When I got the news Tuesday morning of the Lynden School board's decision, my heart sank. I immediately started thinking about the impact of this on so many families in our community, on moms and dads, on parents who both work, on single parents.

I thought about parents who want to be parents and not teachers, not have to be the policeman over assignments and computer time. Homework is a hard enough battle, but now all the schoolwork is homework.

Some of you have kids who are easily motivated and will jump right in and get it done, and some of you have kids for whom this is going to WWII.

I want to give you all a hug and say I am sorry, I know this is hard, it is not what we planned for the fall and for the education of our children. My heart goes out to you all. All of this has had me thinking all week about where God is in all of this.

### **God is a God of interrupted and changed plans.**

I took a walk through the pages of Scripture to see what happened to other people when God interrupted or disrupted or changed their plans.

Noah was minding his own business for 600 years, when God told him to build a boat.

Abraham and Sarah were minding their own business in the Ur of the Chaldees, when God interrupted their plans. Then God delayed 25 years the promise of a son. Then God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son.

Isaac and Rebekah waited for an eternity for a child and then had twins. God said the older would serve the younger, but that was a long winding, twisting road until that happen.

Joseph was living the dream, pun intended, until it suddenly turned into a nightmare, a really long nightmare. One plan after another turned to dust.

Moses had been following sheep around the backside of the desert for 40 years when God set a bush on fire and changed the course of his life. And even then it didn't end the way he thought, dying before he could go into the Promised Land.

Ruth wanted to be a wife and mother, and ended up barren and a widow, until God showed her His plan. And what about Job, talk about your disruption.

David, a shepherd boy, whose life was forever changed into a king.

What about John and Elizabeth in the NT, or Joseph and Mary, or the disciples, or when Paul got knocked off his horse.

What happens when God announces, "I know the plans I have for you" and they are not the plans you have for you? People read Jeremiah 29:11 like it's this most wonderful news and then the bottom falls out of your life.

My son fell in a campfire on the first day of our vacation in the wilderness of Ontario and we spent the rest of the week in a burn hospital in Duluth, MN.

My car threw a rod and blew my engine in the middle of Indiana on Interstate 70 on the way to Ohio to visit our niece who is in the hospital because just a few days before she dove into a swimming pool and broke her neck and was permanently paralyzed from the neck down.

My wife miscarries 16 weeks into a pregnancy. Death takes my mom at 61, my brother at 40 and Phama's brother at 25. I resigned my job of 14 years with no prospects of where to go.

Phama started an email chain with all of her cousins and they have been catching. It is incredible how many of them had plans to take a cruise or go to Europe this year, some to visit ancestral roots, some to go to Oberammergau. But those plans have all evaporated, like our plans to go to Catalina back in April.

God has used Covid to change how we do worship and how we do life.

What do we do when our plans fall through? What do we do when our expectation get wiped out? What do we do when God interrupts everything with a divine detour?

### **How to deal with the changes, disruptions, interruptions?**

*First*, get a clear as you can what doesn't change, what never changes, who never changes.

God is unchangeable and His purposes and promises and plans are as unchangeable as He is.

**Psalm 33:11** The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.

**Proverbs 19:21** Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Do you hear what Scripture is teaching? There is a difference between man and God.

No, that's not clear enough. There is a huge difference between man and God.

Nope, still not clear enough. There is almost no similarity at all, God's thoughts and God's ways are not at all like our thoughts and ways.

To say the difference is like comparing a worm to God is still too close a comparison.

God is not like us. We are becoming, growing, changing, maturing, being sanctified. God is never becoming. God is never growing or developing. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He can't become stronger or weaker, wiser or more truthful, more merciful or less loving.

God is unique in this. This is one of the attributes that sets God apart from everything in creation. Nothing else in all creation can claim to be unchangeable. There is nothing in God that can be altered, nothing that can be added or taken away.

*Second*, know that when God messes up your plans, He does it on purpose, He does it because He has a purpose in mind.

There is a saying, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans!"

Behind everything we say and do is the invisible working of an invisible God. Everything begins and ends with God. We don't come first, we aren't first. God comes first, we follow. God initiates, we respond.

Learn to say, "If it pleases the Lord, it pleases me." Saying that is hard and it may be a pure act of faith, even if our hearts aren't really wanting to say that.

God messed up Abraham's and Sarah's plans, and Joseph's plans, and Moses' plans and David's plans and Mary's plans and Paul's plans completely on purpose. Every one of those people will tell you that they are eternally thankful God completely changed their plans.

God has really good reasons for what and when and where and why He does what He does. He knows exactly what He is doing. Count on it. Trust it. Believe it with all your heart.

**Proverbs 3:5-6** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

You know what, it is OK to not know what you are doing or how you will do it. This is God's way of saying, stop being anxious, and trust me, I have got this.

We don't like to be in situations where we don't know what to do or how we will be able to cope.

The elders here have sympathy for your situation as they have tried to navigate the Covid impact on our church. No one has been through anything like this, no one really knows what they are doing. There is no playbook, no script, no manual with all the answers.

**Third**, rename your disruptions and interruptions and inconveniences and unplanned events "grace."

We call the good things that come into our lives grace, and God's goodness. Let's take our growing in faith to the next level and call these hard realities grace. Learn from Job.

**Job 1:21-22** The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

**Job 2:10** "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

**Job 5:17-18** Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.  
18 For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal.

Job gives no credit to Satan and Satan fails in his purpose to get Job to turn away from God. God succeeds in His purpose. The gates of hell never prevail.

Believe by faith and anticipate that God will work all things for His glory and our good. You know that God uses the hard things in our lives more than the good things, God uses suffering and trials and wounds.

I know a couple who have been through a series of incredibly traumatic, life altering circumstances, of a magnitude most of us would feel like we would be crushed. At the time it was exceeding heavy, many tears, many sleepless nights. Now years later they have said to me it was the best thing that ever happened to them, it brought them closer to God and to each other. I almost couldn't believe my ears, knowing what it was like, to hear them say that now.

What a powerful testimony to the power of God to rescue and redeem and deliver and make new.

Difficulties bring blessings. Hardship brings joy. Trials increase faith and intimacy.

**James 1:2-4** Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

When some interrupting event happens in your life, train yourself to start right away looking for the grace in it, or anticipating that at some point you will see it.

**Fourth**, pray. Turn your fears into prayers, turn your stress into prayer, turn your anxiety into prayer. Pray every day. You have not because you ask not. Pray so God can reveal to you His glory and grace in His answers. Pray for your kids, their schools, their virtual teachers.

Is it a comfort to you to know that each time to you turn to God in prayer, each time you come with a need, each time you come to confess another sin, the God you encounter in prayer is always the same?

He isn't one time happy, another time angry, this time calm, next time a volcano. We never have to wonder if God will be in a good mood or not, whether He will feel like listening to us this time. There aren't times when He is busy, or off the clock, or disinterested.

**Fifth**, learn to be OK with your weaknesses, your shortcomings, your inadequacies. Paul boasted in his and learned that Christ is our strength, Christ is our wisdom. He is our source of help.

God is stretching us and our faith. He is sanctifying us. And this sanctifying runs in two directions. It is exposing areas of sin, where we are not yet yielded and submitted to Him and His will and His ways. One of my big ones is impatience. Another is my pride in being in control. I think my plans are best and I think my plans should have priority, even authority.

God is also exposing areas of our life where He wants to change us to be more like Him. God cares more about our transformation than our comfort and ease.

**Sixth**, fight against the bitterness and anger, against unbelief and doubt and pride.

God hates pride and He will not let us be proud. He will humble us, so we depend on Him. He loves us and cares for us, and He won't let us continue on paths that make us less dependent on Him.

It is good to be humbled by the humbling providences of God. Be OK with that.

**Proverbs 27:1** Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

How many of us started out 2020 full of ideas and plans and purposes having no earthly clue it would be like this?

2020 started out with "we will have this job, we will grow our business this much or take these business trips, we will make these vacation plans, we will have these celebrations with this many people." We don't know what a day will bring let alone a year, or a lifetime.

I am aware that at the beginning of 2020 countless churches, business, non-profit organizations drew up plans with the title 2020 Vision. It seemed like the perfect year to have a 2020 Vision plan. And where are all those vision statements and mission plans now? How many of those plans included events like we have all been through?

With the closing of schools we can't yet see what good God is up too. What is He planning to do in our families? What is He sparing our child from this year? What is God doing in our school systems all across the country?

God isn't out to deprive us of things as much as He is out to give us better things, better gifts, for all good gifts come down from heaven. God is making life simpler, smaller, less.

### *LCS and Ebenezer families*

Don't boast or gloat or think you are better. It is only by grace and it will only continue by grace. God could close it with the tiniest virus.

### **Implications and application.**

How can we help each other and support each other? Can we get creative? I have heard about some moms who are banning together to make little education coops, sharing resources and abilities to cover the bases. I know some are turning to the internet and to homeschool resources and curriculum, there are great tools with a Christian foundation that may supplement what is offered by the schools.

Now let me tread into dangerous territory and wonder out loud if the church can help. Maybe there is a way for some of our families to use the Ed building space. I know we are in the midst of a Covid crisis. It's why schools are closed. But maybe with a little creativity that could be a safe space for some. I am sure someone smarter than me could figure out how to make it work.

Come up with a proposal and share it with the elders or council, lets see if we can work together.

Allow me to remind us of what we believe down to our bones, it makes all the difference.

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, as your children we come before you. And because we are children we have so much to learn. And perhaps the biggest and hardest lessons are the most painful ones, to learn how trials and tribulations and even terrible tragedies work together for your glory and our good. That doesn't make sense to us. Yet your Word says in this life we will have affliction and it says you have overcome this world; you control it and use everything in it to accomplish your perfect purposes.

So we confess to you that we have doubted your unwavering plan and ability to carry it out. We desperately need your wisdom to help us understand and accept the painful events and twists and turns of life. Enable us to even accept them with grace and joy, knowing that you can transform the ugliest circumstances into something beautiful, that you are able to resurrect life out of ashes, that you can turn Satan's most destructive intentions into redemptive good.

We ask you to increase and strengthen our faith, hope, trust and confidence in you as our most loving heavenly Father. Give us that faith that sets us free from fear and gives us endurance for whatever may lie ahead on this journey to our forever home.

Father, all this that we ask for ourselves, we ask a double portion for our loved ones, our friends, and most of all for those who don't know you and are totally lost in the midst of their suffering. Glorify yourself in and through all that you are doing in and through us. In the precious and powerful name of Jesus, Amen.