



## Promises, Not Promises Part 2 – Tomorrow vs Forever Pastor Ted Cunningham

Last week, we kicked off a brand-new series. How many of you think Travis did a fantastic job? I learned a lot in that message and was encouraged by it. Today kind of flows right out of that as we talk about *Tomorrow vs Forever*. How many of you have ever been asked the question: “Where do you see yourself in five years?” I always freak out when I’m asked that question. I’m like, “I think doing the same thing.” How many of you would say doing the same thing? How many of you have a word for the year? That’s a popular thing. I didn’t have one and Amy said I needed to have word for the year, so my word is “careless.” It’s actually two words. I want to care less as the year goes on... No, that is not my word for the year.

But we can stress over planning and we can stress over the future, but today, we’re kicking right off with the Promises, Not Promises. **We are not promised tomorrow, but we are promised eternal life.** The reason we’re doing this series is so you know what you should be clinging to in this life and for eternity. This is important.

I don’t know how many of you watch those rock-climbing documentaries. If you’ve watched a rock-climbing documentary, would you raise your hand? I know I’m talking the movies... you’ve got K2 and Everest, but I’m talking about how all these rock-climbing movies are so inspiring. They’re climbing the Dawn Wall and they’re climbing El Capitan; these guys are just brilliant in how they prepare for it. They’re strong, they use two fingers to hang on the side of the mountain and then they’ll put their thumb on it to get leverage. It’s crazy to watch them scale a 3,000 ft. of what looks like a marble slab or a granite slab.

You know before they go up to that mountain, you see them... And I love this in the movies. They have a map out. They have their friends, fellow climbers, people who have been on the mountain multiple times before, going over the line that they plan on taking. Sometimes the line looks crazy to us because they’re going to go up a little bit then they have to come back down to get a new ledge and go up. These other advisors or experts are coming in and they’re telling them, “Okay, when you get to there, there’s going to be a one-inch place for you to put your finger or maybe have a toe hold.” How many of you watch these and think, *I can do that? If I’d stop eating so much ice cream, I know I could do that. I could take on that mountain.*

There are also the stories of people who fall. We want you to know that as these guys gather around the map and they’re studying it and they’re learning it, they know what they are clinging to. The problem today is that many of us cling to promises God never made. And when we fall or when life

doesn't work out as we planned, we start looking to God like, "Hey, what just happened?" You were clinging to something he never promised you. We want you, as we would sing growing up in the church I grew up in, standing on the promises of God. We want to cling. We want that toe hold on something God promised.

Today, we're talking about how we're not promised tomorrow, but we are promised eternal life. So, here's the tension. **How do we plan for the future when we're not promised tomorrow?** How do we move forward? How do we cling to the truth? How do we plan while consulting the Lord?

If you have your bibles, turn to James 4. We're going to start in Verses 13-16 and then we're going to look at a checklist today of what we need to do to consult the Lord in our planning. Because in this text... When you first read it, you think planning is a bad thing. No, planning is a good thing. Scripture calls us to plan. If you're going to build a tower, you need to sit down, count the cost, figure some things out before you begin. Plans fail for a lack of wise counsel or advisors. We're called to plan. Planning is not the problem. In the house of the wise are choice food and oil. Planning for the future, planning for a time when you can't work like you're working right now, it's wise to do that.

The problem in this text... And James is addressing readers who are making plans without the Lord. They're arrogant in their future plans. **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."** It's very important. If you look at Verse 13, you're going to think *so the attitude is we shouldn't be entrepreneurial, we shouldn't pursue making money for our family.* Not at all, it's the arrogant pursuit of making money that we are going to see today.

**14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist...** This is a theme throughout all of scripture and we're going to see it today as one of the check points that we need as we plan, but your life, like a mist, like a vapor, like the articles of impeachment, are here for a very short time and then it's gone. We want to welcome all the democrats; you're welcome here at this church, you really are. And republicans and independents and Bernie Sanders supporters. We're glad you're here at our church. But it's a theme throughout all of scriptures. Your life is a mist.

**...that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead...** As you make your plans to go to a city... This is an entrepreneur; you're going to a city (a specific place) and you're going to spend a certain amount of time there, and you're going to make money, so you're making plans. Instead though, here's how you need to make those plans: **"...you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will..."** After Travis' message last week, some have asked for our church's position statement or position paper on healing. Well, here it is again. This is our position on healing. **"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.** So, we see it is planning that does not consult the Lord that is what James is dealing with. **All such boasting is evil.**

Today, let's look at this checklist of how to plan for the future when you know that tomorrow is not promised to you, not promised to me.

**1. Plan for the future without boasting about it.** In Proverbs 27 we read, ***Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.*** This Proverb is speaking specifically to those of us who allow the concerns for tomorrow to be greater than or to outweigh what is right in front of us today. How many of you have concerns for tomorrow? You have things going on, you know something is on the horizon and it's making you very nervous, so you begin to fret about it. We are not to boast about tomorrow because we're not promised tomorrow, but we're also told not to allow those concerns to keep us from making the most of today.

In other words, yes, you're planning to go to college. Mom and Dad, you may have a junior or senior right now that's planning to leave home. Those concerns can begin to outweigh the time you have with them right now. Mom changing diapers today. That's all you can handle today. In the middle of the day, you're stressed about raising this toddler and getting this toddler going. You've got so much on your mind and then someone pops the question, "Are you saving for your child's college?" And that hits you. "Have you thought about what you're going to do and what school and how you're going to do schooling and all that?" You're just trying to get through today. We're not to boast about the future.

**2. As you plan for the future, do so knowing life is short.** This is a theme throughout all of scripture. The brevity of life. In Psalm 39, we read, ***5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. 6 Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom...*** Look at all these word pictures speaking to the brevity of life. ***...in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.***

I love what Pastor Tommy Nelson says. *"Mom and Dad, make sure the last check you write in life goes to your children, but make sure it bounces."* This is why we're doing this series. Maybe you've heard a Christians say money is the root of all evil. Money is not the root of all evil. It's the love of money that is the root of all evil. Greed is the sin. This is why we can't allow social media, the Hallmark store, the Hallmark card, the Hallmark channel to begin creating in our mind these promises that God never made. We also can't allow our feelings to turn into the promises of God.

We all know this. I'm going to ask you to sing with me. It came out years ago and I love this. We did a series on this probably 15 years ago. It's Live Like You Were Dying. Sing with me. *"I went skydiving, Rocky Mountain climbing, I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fu Manchu."* So, you see in this song that a doctor's report changes the way a guy lived.

Follower of Jesus, a health scare should not change the way you live. We have the scripture telling us how to live. We know about the brevity of life long before a doctor says, "Hey you have six months to live." "Hey, you have a year to live." "Hey, we have to give you this treatment that has this success rate..." I know the world says, "Hey when you get that news, what do you do? You go out and do crazy stuff. You go out and rock climb, mountain biking, jump from airplanes, ride a bull," but we already know that life is short. The days go slow, but the years go fast.

Another country theologian says, "Don't blink because just like that you're six years old and you take a nap and wake up and your 25 and your high school sweetheart becomes your wife. Don't blink because just like that you might miss your babies growing like mine did, turning into moms and dads. The next

thing you know, your better half of 50 years in their in bed and you're praying God takes you instead." Trust me friends, a hundred years go faster than you think.

When we plan for the future, we do so understanding that life is short. Your time here is a mist and it is a vapor. What do you do?

**3. Plan for the future while making the most of today.** Some of us like to call it planning when it's really procrastinating. "I'll get to that tomorrow." If you've heard your spouse say that in the last week, raise your hand. Yeah. He's thinking, *Listen, I told you I was going to do that. I don't need to be reminded every six months that it needs to be done.*

We just built a fence that I've been promising to Amy for three years. We just completed it. I put all my scrap lumber in my truck and took it over to my brother's house and said, "Hey, it's an Ikea she shed." Amy has said multiple times... My brother built the fence; I was like the guy walking alongside of him watching him and helping him. Amy said, "I gotta be honest with you. I didn't think it was going to get done." It's not because I make promises I don't keep; it's because I'm not skilled with the building of a fence. I have someone here now that is skilled in it. She just never thought it would happen. I said, "I told you, what my baby wants, my baby gets." But how many of us like to tell people, "I'm going to get around to that"? Proverbs 3 speaks directly to this when it says, **28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back tomorrow (not promised it) and I'll give it to you"—when you already have it with you.** Make the most of the time. Now is the time to give it.

Again, you don't have to say yes to every opportunity that comes your way. Just because you can doesn't mean you should. So, some of you have learned boundaries. You've got your boundaries up and you know what to say no to, but maybe it's time for you to start saying yes a little more often. You know who I'm talking to. The one who is so goal oriented, so future oriented; they've been to a lot of seminars on how to fulfill your dreams and don't let anybody stop you, don't let anybody get in your way. So, anything that comes your way throughout the day is an immediate, "No, that doesn't fit with my plan." I wonder how many of us are missing spontaneous ministry because we're living for tomorrow and we're not living in today and we're not taking the time to make the most of today. Again, you don't have to do everything, but I'm wondering if tomorrow there are going to be a few more yeses. *This person that just crossed my path that needs my help, I'm going to help.*

**4. Plan for the future while resting in the sovereignty of God.** We're going to now transition into this. I studied this week and it was a fun study to do. I typed in "human will" or "freewill" "sovereignty of God." That was my search, but then I would just put a scholar or theologian or a pastor behind that and watch a video, listen to a clip, or read an article. If you've studied theology for any amount of time, you know the tension between your freewill and the sovereignty of God and the conflict and the conversation that that can create in the church and institutions of higher learning.

I was excited to see a name pop up in my search. His family goes to our church and he's down in Arkansas – Ron Hutchcraft. It popped up *The Purpose Driven Day*. I thought, *hey I know that guy. I like that guy.* Our church started 18 years ago influenced heavily by The Purpose Driven Church. I am grateful for the lives that have been helped and encourage by *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Then I read this and thought it was so good. Talking about making the most of each day and then living in the sovereignty of God. It's so practical and so on a level for me to grasp. Here's what Ron Hutchcraft says, "If you want to live smart, you do life as purpose driven days." Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, was a giant best seller and touched millions of lives, but it's important to remember that the way to have a purpose driven life is to have a purpose driven day today. God takes all those days, lived his way, and then weaves them into an awesome life. **You do the day; God does the life.** I'm making a bumper sticker out of that right there; that is really good. You do the day; God does the life. That makes life manageable instead of overwhelming. It makes it doable instead of undoable.

So, yes, plan for the future. Here's how you rest in the sovereignty of God. Proverbs 16 say, ***9 In their hearts humans plan their course...*** Again, here it is – plan. ***...but the Lord establishes their steps.***

It goes on in Chapter 19 - ***21 Many are the plans in a person's heart...*** We all have a lot of goals and dreams. Set it up; go for it. ***...but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*** When you read in Job, do you know what we read about the sovereignty of God? There is no human authority, there is no person in here right now that can thwart the purpose of God. Nobody. When we say sovereignty, sometimes we... There are a lot of definitions that we can give. One of my favorites that I've had since seminary days is this: "The right of God to do as he wishes with his creation." Can you rest in that? Can you get up every morning and say, "My life is not mine; it is yours. I've got some plans, Lord, direct my steps." I have to tell you, at 45 years old, I am nowhere that I planned on being when I was 18. Raise your hand if that is true of you. It's every single person. How many of you have a college degree you ain't using? In the first service, two doctors raised their hand. Have you seen that commercial? "Guess who just got reinstated?" It's one of my favorite commercials. "He's okay."

Piper says this of the sovereignty of God, if you're looking for definitions. Of course, John Piper can't give one sentence, there are like 42. Let me give you a couple. Powerful. In charge. He overrides all other powers and authorities. Which means he can override your plans. But how do you make the most of each day while resting in the sovereignty of God?

Ron Hutchcraft continues. This is good. Frame this. Have somebody do the fancy lettering and put this on your wall. "Each day, start with Jesus. Each day, look for people who need you. Each day, confess and renounce the sin that may have brought you down yesterday. Each day, give each member of your family all of you, even if it's only for a short time. Each day, pray for God to give you an opportunity to tell someone about your relationship with Jesus. Each day, make some progress on your long to-do list, (I added the word fellas) putting the most important ones first. Now watch this. And each day, at the end of that day, sign off with God, crowning Jesus the Lord of what you didn't get done today. We do it around here often. We resign as general manager of the universe. Do you want to rest at night? Do you want to sleep at night? Make the most of today while resting in the sovereignty of God.

**5. Plan for the future by prioritizing the kingdom.** Now, what Jesus taught in Matthew 6 - ***33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** Don't be the one that makes plans and then takes them to the Lord. Don't be the one that like, "Okay, I'm going to do all this..." Seek first the kingdom. Ask yourself this question. "What is God saying to me today?"

Some of you are like, "He's silent." I heard this a couple of weeks ago: stop saying God is silent when your Bible is closed. What is he saying to you today?

A few weeks ago, I had a friend tell me that. I was in a period of decision making and I needed to decide on something. He's a wise friend and I go to him often for counsel. I have a tendency to just go on and on and talk a little too much. He just listened and then that's what he said to me. "Ted, what is God telling you to do today?" I'm like, "We've got today covered. I've got everything covered. Amy and I put that together earlier. We're good today. What I'm talking about is..." He said, "No, what is He saying today?" Because often times, what do we do? We make decision and plans and then we go to look for the scripture to back them up. When maybe we don't take our plan tomorrow morning... When we open God's Word and we begin to read, just say, "What are you saying to me today?"

Are you surrounded by people that are seeking first the kingdom? Dave Ramsey says it all the time. When it comes to your financial planning, stop asking your broke friends for advice." Isn't that true? How many of you have talked to your financial planner this year? How many are like, "I've got no finances that need consulting." Make plans, but some of you, when you're making your plans and you're at the foot of the mountain getting ready to climb, you're relying on people who've never even put on the harness, you've got people that have never been there. Do you have people that are seeking first the kingdom and reminding you, as you plan for the future, as you look to the future...

It's been a great year in the stock market. We got our reports back and we were earning 23%, 24%, 25% in these 401ks. This is absolutely incredible. But when I go and seek... I'm not a financial expert. I have financial experts that I can go to, but I also want to go to people that are 10, 20, 30 years down the road and be like "I know what I'm told to do and I see all the commercials where people are running out of money, but what have you done?" Even in financial planning, seek first the kingdom. Some of you have financial planners who don't tithe. I want somebody advising me on how to deal with my money who tithe. I want someone who understands you earn then you give then you save then you spend. I want someone seeking first the kingdom in all of my planning, whether it's career, vocational, financial, relational.

**6. Plan for the future without worrying about it.** So, we're not supposed to boast about it and we're not supposed to worry about it. We saw this already in Proverbs 27, but here it is again in Matthew 6. **34 Therefore...** Remember the *therefore* is always now what are we going to do with what we just learned. Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness. If you're doing that, if it's at the forefront of all your planning, the kingdom of God and his righteousness, **...do not worry about tomorrow...** Go to sleep tonight in the sovereignty of God, knowing the kingdom ain't about you anyway. The best first line of *The Purpose Driven Life...* and it's worth the whole book. When you open the book, the very first sentence say it's not about you. **...for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.** And all the parents said... Amen. And all the high school students said... Amen. And all the college students said... Amen. Yes. There is plenty that we are dealing with. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

**7. Plan for the future while resting in the promise of eternal life.** For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. This

is a promise you can point to. This is a promise you can rest on. I've been to a lot of funerals, a lot of bedsides and hospice care where I have stood, and I have heard people clinging to promises God never made. The promise you can cling to is those who believe in the son of God have eternal life. If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by grace you are saved through faith. It's not of yourself or your own works because you could then boast about it. No, it's about what He did. It's about faith alone in Christ alone.

This is what John was writing: ***and this is what he promised us – eternal life***. We are not promised tomorrow, but we are promised this. Have you made sure you are clinging to, your foothold is on this promise? Your two fingers on that one-inch nub and pressing down that you are clinging to this promise. He is writing not about the source but the overflow. I want you to know that you have eternal life.

We used to have these preachers who came into our church and if the invitation wasn't going like they wanted and they didn't have enough people coming down they'd turn to the Christians and they would say things like, "Do you know that you know that you know that you know?" At 10 years old, I'm like, "Well, I thought I knew. When you put it like that, I don't know; probably not."

Look what John says in 1 John 5 - ***13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God... I believe in the name of the Son of God. ...so that you may know that you have eternal life.***

Seek first the kingdom. Rest in God's plan and purpose. Nothing can thwart his purposes in your life, his plan for your life. Rest in eternal life.

This is why we read... This is now how we're supposed to live. Matthew 6 - ***19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

John Piper, wrestling with this freewill and the sovereignty of God, I love what he says. It just sums up the whole message for me and the whole Promise, Not Promise for me. *"You will exist forever. You and God are both in the universe to stay – either as friends on His terms or as enemies on yours – which it will be is proven in this life. And this life is a vapor. Two seconds, and we will be gone."*

The bottom line – we're not promised tomorrow, but we need to plan for the future, and we can rest in the promise of eternal life. We're going to live for today. We're going to make the most of the opportunities that come our way. We are going to plan for tomorrow. We're going to make our plans financially, vocationally, with our family, with relationships, but we're going to make sure we are all prepared for eternity. If you've never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day.

We had BTown this week at our church. Fifty-four of our junior high and high school students came to BTown. If you went to BTown and you're in here, raise your hand. I was driving Carson, my 14-year-old son, from home here to the church. He asked the question, the question every parent has to be ready

for because this is like a big moment and you don't want to blow it, although I think we've had plenty of these moments and we'll have more, but it's like *okay I have to make the most of it*. It was coming from the heart. It wasn't just a conversation. It was my son trying to connect with me, but I could tell it was coming from a place of deep thinking and processing his heart. He asked me this question: "Dad, what do you see me doing when I grow up?" Okay, this is important. We're speaking a special future over our child. We started talking about career paths.

I said, "You have people skills, so maybe in PR..." The days of being a Lego engineer I think are gone. We don't talk about that as much as we used to. But we fed into that. I've bought more Legos. If your kids are still into Legos, spend as much money as you possibly can on Legos. But that has kind of moved a little bit toward him now having a job. He asked about marketing. We talked about marketing. I don't know a lot about how to break into that. We talked about ministry... We were talking about his career path, which is what that age group and what teenagers and young adults are talking about. What are we going to do? How are we going to make a living? Am I getting married? I mean all these big questions to be asking.

All of that was trumped by us pulling into the church parking lot. It was at night, so the castle was lit up. Then he said these words that absolutely took me there. He said, "Man! I love our church!"

"Oh, thank you, Jesus." I know my kids love our church, but this wasn't just a flippant statement. It was coming from a different place; I could tell that. And I just want to say... Many of you right now... Young people, please hear me. You're thinking about the future, getting married and career and jobs and you have a lot of decision to make and a lot of plans to make. Seek first the kingdom of God. Seek God today. Make plans, yes. But you just looked around at a bunch of people raising their hand who are functioning in life with a degree that they are not using.

There are too many parents today who are stressing over which college their child is going to go to when they should be thinking and praying and pleading with their Heavenly Father. I want my kids to leave home loving Jesus and his bride. Its amazing to me. We've always prioritized church over everything, everything in the community, everything in school. We just have because we want our kids leaving home... You've heard it said what you will marginalize, your kids will probably dismiss altogether. You can't expect your children to prioritize something you say, "If we have time, we'll do it." I'm so grateful my son is going, "I love this place."

I have an extra burden of him being a pastor's kid. And you've all heard the rumors about them. There are whole ministries to help them recover from their fathers. I hope he doesn't need that ministry one day. But whatever we can continue to do as a church, don't we want our kids, don't we want every single student that went to BTown to pull up to the place and be like, "I love this church. I love what Jesus is doing in my life." Seek first the kingdom. Plan for the future, yes. Make the most of today, but start with being prepared for eternity.

I'm going to invite you to stand and join me in prayer. If you've not placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day that you would confess with your mouth and believe in your heart. We'll have our prayer team down front. They would love to meet with you.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that I thank you for all those who went to BTown this week and the work that was done there in the hearts and lives of the generation that will be leading this church in the very near future. I pray that you would continue to work in the hearts and lives beyond this weekend. As they make plans for the future with schooling and jobs and careers and all of that, that all of it would be done with the priority of the kingdom, that all of it would rest in the sovereignty that you are in control and you are in charge.

But that that would ultimately begin for those who have not placed faith in Jesus that they would cling to, hold onto the promise of eternal life by placing faith in Jesus Christ.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.