



---

## Making Decisions in the Meantime

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Let's jump into *Making Decisions in the Meantime*. If you have your Bibles, turn to 1 Corinthians 16. We're going to be in 1 Corinthians 16 and then jump over the 2 Corinthians 1 and then spend some time in the Proverbs, the wisdom literature, as well to look at how important it is to make decisions in a framework that you can take in making decisions right now, in this time of great uncertainty.

A lot of us seem to be sitting around waiting for people to make decisions for us when in the meantime, there are plenty of decisions you and I need to be making and not sitting around waiting for others. We want to follow the guidelines, the restrictions that are put in place by local and state officials, but there are so many decisions that we need to make. I find myself talking to people and hearing from people who are just kind of in... I think the term would be *limbo*. They're just kind of waiting because they don't know what is going to happen. So, they're not making solid decisions for their family, they're not making solid decisions for their work and the future of their work or their careers, and there is plenty we can do.

Today, we just want to talk about the framework for how to use biblical principals to guide our decision making. So, this is a biblical framework. I want to start with the Apostle Paul because he came under attack from some of the Corinthians in the Corinthian Church for plans that he made, but then he changed his mind. He went a different direction, ultimately fulfilling what he wanted to do, but he did it in a different way. Some of the Corinthians in the church thought that he was unreliable because he changed his plans.

If ever there's been a time where we have been changing plans, changing plans, changing plans... Amy and I go on a walk almost every night. We've been driving down to The Landing lately just to mix it up. For about an hour, we make plans and we go through every possible scenario. Then at the end of it, we look at each other, smile, and throw them all away, saying, "You know what? We don't know." But we have some planning and some decisions that are going into effect this month. In just a few moments, I'll tell you what we're doing as a church.

I want to jump into 1 Corinthians 16 where Paul lays out his plans for the Corinthians of coming to visit them, which he ultimately does, but he doesn't do it in the way that he lays forth here in 1 Corinthians and it brings him under great attack. When we get to 2 Corinthians, we'll see he has to defend the change of his itinerary or the change in his plans, the change of his schedule.

In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul says, ***5 I am coming to visit you after I have been to Macedonia, for I am planning to travel through Macedonia.*** Now watch. ***6 Perhaps I will stay awhile with you, possibly all winter...*** Because traveling by sea in that day, in the winter was dangerous; it was hazardous, and he shouldn't have done it. ***...and then you can send me on my way to my next destination. 7 This time I don't want to make just a short visit and then go right on. I want to come and stay awhile, if the Lord will let me.***

***8 In the meantime, I will be staying here at Ephesus until the Festival of Pentecost. 9 There is a wide-open door for a great work here...*** We're going to see in just a moment the purposes that Paul was living out in his ministry and in his life never changed, but his plans did. His purpose never changed. We're going to look at all five of them in just a second. They never changed, but how he fulfilled them did. ***...although many oppose me.*** So, his plans changed, and the Corinthians accused him of being unreliable. "You're not trustworthy." "You didn't follow through with what you said you were going to do."

In 2 Corinthians 1, here's Paul's defense. ***17 You may be asking why I changed my plan.*** Let's talk for just a second. There are probably two types of people watching. They are the planners and the non-planners. There are people who love plans. That's my wife. She's sitting in here right now. When we go on vacation, she wants to know where we're eating, when we're eating, where we're staying, what time we're going to get there. What time we're going to leave. She enjoys vacation more with a solid plan. She allows a little bit of flexibility, but let's stick with the plan. I'm not the planner my wife is. I like a little more spontaneity on vacation and believe it can be fun. Somewhere over the last 24 years, we have met in the middle.

Paul is going to ask two rhetorical questions because his plans changed and he's going to ask them to talk about why they changed. Both of these questions are very rhetorical and are to be answered with a no.

***Do you think I make my plans carelessly?*** Now some of you see *careless* and you think, *I'm not a careless planner; I'm a carefree planner.* But this first question really isn't an integrity issue. You could put it in the competency issue. Not the character issue, but the competency issue. He says, "Do you think I make my plans carelessly? That I didn't think through what I was going to do as I shared the gospel and as I took up this collection for the needy in Jerusalem?"

That's the first question. The second question he asks is about integrity. ***Do you think I am like people of the world who say "Yes" when they really mean "No"?***

There are two ways of looking at these two questions. We'll spell it out this way: **there are those who plan with no thought behind them.** You just kind of throw decisions together quickly, you throw a plan together quickly. This week, a friend of mine told me, "Ted, we have planned for every possible scenario in our ministry, including an alien invasion." They have thought it through. Some of you make really loose plans, but you don't cross all the Ts or dot all the Is. Paul is saying to the Corinthians, "Do you think that's what I did?" The answer is no.

The second question goes even deeper. **There are those who plan with no intention to follow through.** This is the person who shares with you they are going to do something and as it's coming out of their mouth, they know good and well they ain't gonna do it. Paul is saying, "That's not at all what I shared with you." The plans changed, but the purposes did not. Plans changed, but the ministry kept going. "My plans and my travel schedule and my itinerary have changed, but people are still coming to know the Lord. People are still be disciplined in the cities that I stopped in and in the churches I've planted."

If there is anything we've learned over the last couple of months, it's that the church needs to be flexible. We need to learn how to pivot. For those of you who hate change, you had no choice but to change. You have no choice but to say, "The way we've always done it is not the way we're doing it now."

In the midst of so much change, in the midst of so much uncertainty, and in the midst of so many decisions being made for us... Tomorrow, the City of Branson will be meeting. A lot of decisions will be made that we will need to adjust our plans around, that we will need to make decisions after we hear the plan. But we still need to make decisions. This is important.

I travel a lot for ministry. Let me say I used to travel a lot for ministry. I would usually leave on Friday morning and come home Saturday night in time for church on Sunday. I usually fly American Airlines. If you're in Branson, you know that getting out of Branson requires SGF – Springfield Airport. It requires connecting in Chicago or Dallas, or you can take Delta to Atlanta, or you can take United to Chicago, Houston, or Denver. That's pretty much it for business travel.

I've always been amazed at the number of flights that cancel. It happens a lot. I don't go to Springfield Airport without two or three backup plans for how I'm getting to where I need to be. And then the next day, when I want to get home, I have multiple plans. My family cracks up at this. I have multiple plans for how I'm getting back. If I can't get into Springfield, I have plans to drive from Dallas, Northwest Arkansas, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Tulsa, Oklahoma City. I have the plans in place.

My family has been with me when we're sitting on a plane and my app pops up that this flight we're sitting on right now is cancelled. I immediately jump up when I see the word *cancelled*. I'm usually the one that informs the flight attendants the flight is canceled, and I need off immediately. I get off quickly because I have to go either get another flight or rent a car and drive a few hundred miles to get to where I'm going.

I'm always cracking up... But I get it. There are all different types of travelers. But I always crack up at the person that sits at the gate or sits on the plane and waits for American Airlines to tell them what they're going to do. I want to make an announcement sometimes. I want to go up to the gate agent and borrow the mic and make an announcement to everybody, "American Airlines is in charge of their airplanes. When you are on their plane, you have to do what they say, you have to obey and submit to their authority, but please hear me. You are in charge of your life. You determine how you get to where you're going and when you get there. You get to decide that."

I've gone up plenty of times to American Airlines, after they have canceled a flight, and said, "When's the next flight available for me to get to where I'm going" and they will not even crack a smile and say that it's three days from now. Oh, okay. You just want me to sit around the airport for three days? No, that's when you take charge and you make decisions. You make new plans. You decide you don't sit around for a gate agent or someone else to tell you what to do with your life. I don't know why I'm getting so worked up because I haven't traveled in months and I'm not all that stressed about traveling.

The bottom line is this. That's how many people are acting right now with the government. We are to submit to the government, we're to be good citizens, we're to do good, we're to be peaceable, but a lot of us are just sitting around going, "Oh, when's the government going to tell me what to do next? When is the government going to send me more money?" You have to make plans in the meantime. You have to make decisions. Obey. Submit. You have some decisions you have to make in the midst of all of this.

**When should I go back to work?** This is a tough one. We were just talking about it this morning. There are some people pretty frustrated in our town and some people that are very happy in our town. There are some people in our town that are working their hind end off for half the money as people who are no longer working. That's just the way it worked out. And these people are making decision for their family to keep going with this check that they are getting until July or are they going to let this go and go back to work and take that job that they know will be here long after July. Again, you get to make decisions on when you go back to work. It's why I sent out on social media all the help wanted signs that went up all over town when the PPE came to small businesses. You get to decide when you go back to work. You can make that decision.

**Will I wear a mask?** Is there a more polarizing question in Branson right now? It's interesting because you get to decide where you're going to shop right now. I know one big box store, Menards, says you have to wear a mask when you come shop there. But then you can go a couple hundred yards away to Lowes where you don't have to wear one. You have to make the decisions for you and your family.

**Should I go back to the same job?** I talked to many people who don't like that their employer got the PPP but didn't give it to the employees. They're thinking, *Well, I guess I know where I fit on that whole thing.* You may not go back to the same job. That's a decision you get to make.

**Should I consider a new career?**

**What about my child's schooling?** This is a big one.

There are many decisions that you get to make in the meantime. So, how do you do that? In just the few minutes we have remaining, I want to give a biblical framework for answering all of these questions, for answering all of the decisions that you and I need to be making right now. We need to be making them as church leaders, ministry leaders, business leaders. There are some asking "When does my theater open? I know when I'm going to get permission, but when do I see the tourists start rolling into Branson again and kick the show off?" "When does my attraction get to open, and how do we do social distancing in church services and in theaters and in restaurants?" These are all decisions business owners right now are wrestling with, church leaders are wrestling with, civic leaders are wrestling with.

Here are some biblical guidelines:

**1. We seek the Lord first.** We don't go to the Lord with our plans after we've made them. He's at the beginning. It's why usually, whenever I pray to start off a foundation board meeting or a staff meeting, the words *wisdom* and *discernment* always find their way into my prayer. I want to make sure I am being guided. I want wisdom and discernment from you, Lord. Not from worldly, conventional wisdom, but from the Lord, first and foremost.

In Proverbs 3: 5-6, we read, ***5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*** Begin with prayer, begin with the Lord. Don't sit down and make all your plans, and then at the end, bring them and push them across the table and say, "Lord, would you bless these? Lord, would you guide these?" "Lord, would you give me discernment and wisdom as I plan."

As I talked to one pastor this week, I love what he said. "We're just praying, praying, praying. We know when we're going to be allowed to go back to church, we know when the state or the city is going to allow us to go back, but we still need to make decisions based on the individual needs of our flock, of our church."

**2. Prioritize purpose over plans.** We see that the Apostle Paul did this. The purposes of God never changed in his ministry, but his plans did. He changed his plans and then, if you've read the New Testament enough and read enough of Paul's letters, you know people changed Paul's plans. He would often write, "This isn't what I was expecting, but this is where it is and yet the purposes of God go on."

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

To look at this quickly with Paul's ministry and just to walk through it:

- **Loved the Lord** (Worship). That never changed whether he was in prison or on the road traveling or in a city visiting with believers. He loved the Lord and worshiped wherever he was.
- **Proclaimed the gospel** (Evangelism). Wherever he went, wherever he was.
- **Loved God's people** (Fellowship). You cannot read the letters in the New Testament that Paul wrote and walk away going he really just had a disdain for God's people." No, he loved them. He longed to be with them. He longed to see them. He cared for them.
- **Trained leaders** (Discipleship).
- **Collected offering to meet needs** (Ministry).

So you see the purposes of worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry. If you read a little bit ahead of where we started today in I Corinthians 16, you'd see about the collection that he was

gathering from the churches to take back to the poor and the needy in Jerusalem. He collected offerings to meet the needs of people.

I have to tell you, Woodland Hills, during the last two months, we have done all of these purposes. They have continued a very different way, not according to original plans, but after a pivot, we keep going.

- **Ministry** - I'll just tell you, our giving is up over the past eight weeks. We have a reserve that we were planning, day one, to go into to begin to meet the needs and take care of our church family and our community. We haven't had to touch reserves during this time because your giving has been so strong, because you've been so generous.

- **Fellowship** – To be honest with you, I feel closer to our church than ever before. Yesterday, Amy said to me, "You have truly loved sitting and standing in those parking lots, seeing people as they come by." Not one person drives into Andy's or Chick-fil-A or Crispy Crème with a scowl on their face. No, everybody is happy. I know they are about to get a treat, but I truly believe beyond the treat, it was fellowship, seeing people again.

**3. Don't rush, but don't delay.** We shouldn't rush decisions, but we shouldn't unnecessarily delay them either. So, we seek the Lord first. We prioritize purposes over plans, knowing plans change, but purposes never do. This is a little bit of a tricky one to grasp. Here's what Proverbs 21 says, ***5 The plans of the diligent... the hard working ones ...lead to profit as surely as haste... excessive speed ...leads to poverty.*** Hard word, get after it, don't wait around too long.

I read the story this week. I want to share it with you. I think it's too good that fits this idea.

"A farmer hired a man to work for him. He told him his first task would be to paint the barn and said it should take him about three days to complete. But the hired man was finished in one day. The farmer set him to cutting wood, telling him it would require about 4 days. The hired man finished in a day and a half, to the farmer's amazement. The next task was to sort out a large pile of potatoes. He was to arrange them into three piles: seed potatoes, food for the hogs, and potatoes that were good enough to sell. The farmer said it was a small job and shouldn't take long at all. At the end of the day the farmer came back and found the hired man had barely started." Not like the first two tasks that he completed quickly. This one, he didn't really even get into. "What's the matter here?" the farmer asked. "I can work hard, but I can't make decisions!" replied the hired man."

This is where some of us get to when it comes to planning. We're not in a rush and we delay because we have analysis paralysis. We've looked at this passage before and this is what I love... Travis Brawner really encouraged us with this day one of the shutdown. Proverbs 3 - ***28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you"—when you already have it with you.*** Don't delay when you have it with you right now. Make decisions, do good, do what you're called to do, live out the purposes. And that's what you've been doing. For many of you, it would be very easy during this time to conserve, to hold back, and to say, "I need this for a season down the road," when you know now is the time to give.

**4. Seek input from others.** This is very important as you're making decisions. I've probably had eight to ten people close around me over the last two months that I've been bouncing ideas off of, making decisions with them. Pastors in other states. Friends of mine. "What are you thinking?" "What are you doing?" I want that wisdom. Church members calling... We are in unprecedented times. I'm called to make decisions right now that I've never had to make before and I'm asking people who have never made these decisions before. But when you gather wisdom in the room... I've always been taught that true leaders understand they are not always the smartest person in the room, and you need to lean on other people. You have to get guidance and understanding.

Proverbs 15 puts it this way. ***22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*** Proverbs 20 - ***18 Plans are established by seeking advice; so if you wage war, obtain guidance.*** I want to say thank you to all those who have helped and have brought wisdom to the table. We know that to be an authoritarian leader means you listen to nobody and you just make decisions on your own. But to be authoritative means that you know you have to ultimately made the decision, but you want to get the feedback and you want to hear from others without the analysis paralysis.

**5. Make a decision and get after it because you're going to be dead soon.** I've been excited to share this one. It's a little strong, but it's very biblical. You must make a decision at some point. Seek counsel, seek the Lord, don't rush, but don't delay, get after it. Sitting around all the time not making a decision... Make a decision. We get this from Ecclesiastes 9, ***10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going...*** Welcome to Woodland Hills Family Church; we're glad you're here. ...***there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.*** It's time to decide.

We've been making decisions. Tomorrow's a big day. I'm going to ask you to pray for Branson. Pray for our city leaders, our aldermen, our mayor. They have much to decide as they talk about the governor's guidelines and then how they apply here in Branson. We're waiting to hear the results of that meeting and then on Tuesday, as we gather, we're going to talk about what it looks like to open on the 17<sup>th</sup>. We've made that decision.

We may be allowed to meet on the 10<sup>th</sup>, Mother's Day, but we've decided to have a soft opening. It's just going to be for staff and elders and family so we can see if we still know how to do physical gatherings and social distancing in physical gatherings. We also heard from Mom saying, "Mother's day isn't going to feel all that special if I'm with all of my children in the service trying to figure out how to social distance." So, we already have the bouquets of flowers purchased and the coffee on the schedule. We said let's make the weekend special for Mom. And then completely stress her out on the 17<sup>th</sup>. No, that's not at all what we thought.

Here's our plan to reopen campus on May 17<sup>th</sup>. We want you to know with everything we just talked about with biblical guidelines for making decisions, we believe this fits in that. We're just going to give you a broad list of decisions made and what it will look like. Next week, we'll be more specific as we learn more tomorrow.

**1. There will be new service times.** Obviously, to social distance six feet apart or more, three services will not cut it. We have the Castle, the Chapel, and the Cabin. We will be utilizing all three spaces. We're even looking at an outdoor venue for our seniors that do not feel comfortable gathering inside again. Lot's going on there. It says to be announced; it's also to be determined. But there could be many more new service times depending on what we hear tomorrow. I know many of you are laughing. "Yay, more service times; Ted has to be excited."

**2. We will have family friendly services.** So, not all the services will look alike. We're going to have services programed for those of you with families can come in and your kids be fully engaged for the hour or so that we are together. So, know that there will be different types of services. Those will be announced next Sunday.

**3. Social distancing.** We are planning it where you're going to be able to come in, not touching anyone or anything. You can sit down and leave afterwards. I want you to think about a wedding because you're like, *Have you ever tried to get out of Woodland Hills at the end?* We are going to be dismissing by rows much like a wedding. There will be no piling up in the lobby. We're going to have guidelines for all of that. But we're going to make it work.

**4. There will be coffee.** It's not going to be self-serve just like we won't be passing an offering basket. You'll be able to give your offering in the back when you leave. Someone will hand you your coffee much like you get it in a drive thru situation. I love that Saturday we'll be able to practice that as well.

**5. Livestream will continue.** I even saw some people on Facebook this morning say, "Oh, I'm going to hate to miss this once we go back to physical gatherings." For those of you that are not comfortable coming back on the 17<sup>th</sup>, we honor that, we understand that. For our seniors, for those with underlying health conditions, we honor you staying home. We will have livestream going as it always has, so rest assured in that.

I heard a pastor yesterday say he believes when we open back up (he's in another state) that a third of the church will return immediately, a third will wait a couple of week, and a third will wait a while. Frankly said, I think you're off. We've polled our people and a lot more than a third are coming back. I think if that's the guidance that churches use that only a third is coming back, and they plan for that, they are going to be in a mess on that first Sunday. But, whatever your decision is, whether you're coming back on the 17<sup>th</sup>, waiting a couple of week, or going to waiting a couple of months, we honor all decisions and we will continue with you and the purposes of the church. All of those purposes still prevail, still move forward.

**6. Make your decision.** The choice is yours. We get to make decisions as a church family collectively, but ultimately, you make decisions for the health you and your family.

Thank you for joining us today on the livestream. Woodland Hills, you've been going strong. Continue to go strong, continue to meet the needs of your neighbors, continue to fellowship in ways that we're allowed to fellowship, be safe.

Someone asked me, "Are you concerned with the safety?" We're taking everyone's safety so seriously. I have to be honest that with the spread low in Branson and with what I've seen at the big box stores, I think we're going to be able to social distance better than what I've seen a lot of us doing in the big box stores. We're taking it very seriously. We cannot wait to be with you again even though there are no elbows, no high fives, no shaking hands right now.

I mean to say... There are some of you watching right now and I know it... I can hear the tone coming through the camera. It goes something like this, "Ted, I ain't afraid of no virus!" Okay. I know nobody in our church really talks like that, but I want you to know we're all called to honor all the decisions being made right now. So, when you come back, we want you to honor those around you. Whatever your opinion is, whatever your political party is, let us honor all as we come back. If you don't, we will tase you. No kidding. We will tase people that get too close. We love you and we'll see you next Sunday.