

God's Providence: Our Plans, His Providence

Esther 5:1-8 Rev. Donghyeok Kim



1. The Movie "Parasite" and the Paradox of Planning

There is a famous line from the Korean movie Parasite: “You always have a plan!” Making plans and putting them into practice is crucial. Yet, people often hesitate to plan. Why? Because no matter how carefully we plan, things rarely go according to plan. As we move forward, plans fall apart, things don’t turn out as we wished, and eventually, people grow cynical, thinking, “Why bother planning when nothing goes according to plan anyway?”

2. A Common Misconception and the True Meaning of Faith

An unusual phenomenon often seen among those who consider themselves deeply faithful is the belief that because God guides us, we don’t need to make plans at all. On the surface, this might sound like great faith, but it reveals an immature oversight: an attempt to shift all responsibility onto God. It stems from a passive mindset that says, “Since I didn’t plan this, and since God placed me in this situation, He will take care of it.”

True faith does not mean abandoning our own plans to passively wait for God's. Rather, it means giving our utmost effort to make plans in order to fulfill God's will and purpose. As we carry out those plans, we begin to discover how God's thoughts and plans differ from our own. But a person who has no plans of their own cannot even discern how God's plan differs from theirs, simply because there was no baseline plan to begin with.

3. Reflections from Planting a Church in Ohio: God Uses Even Our Foolish Plans

I, too, have made countless plans in my life, and rarely have they unfolded as I intended. Yet, God takes even my foolish plans and uses them to fulfill His work. When I planted a church in Ohio, I gave my all to build relationships and invite people to church—everyone I knew and met. I spent time with a local Taekwondo master, actively joined a community soccer group, and regularly attended an ESL program at an American church to connect with newly arrived Korean immigrants. But from my own carefully laid plans, not a single fruit was born.

Then one day, out of nowhere, people began coming to church. I discovered something remarkable: a Korean immigrant family had sent their daughters to the Taekwondo dojo, and while chatting with the master, mentioned they were looking for a soccer group. Knowing that I played soccer, the Taekwondo master connected them with me. As it turned out, the husband was the son of a church deacon, though he was not currently attending church—his wife was a devout Buddhist who disliked church.

However, that very wife happened to be the group administrator for an online band/forum for immigrants working at a local poultry plant. She posted a wonderful review of our church on the platform. As a result, newly arriving immigrants started reaching out to me. As I helped them settle in, the church naturally began to grow. Not a single person I directly evangelized came to church initially, yet God did not let my efforts go to waste. In other words, He accomplished His work through the very plans I had set in motion.

The Biblical Narrative: Esther's Diligent Preparation and God's Favor

1. Esther Approaches the King

Today, Esther also made thorough plans. Through prayer, she did everything within her power. Finally, on the third day, she approached King Ahasuerus. To signify that this was an official matter rather than a personal visit, she put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, where she met King Ahasuerus face-to-face.

The Bible records that as soon as the king saw Queen Esther, she found favor in his sight. This expression appears 66 times in the Old Testament, describing a superior granting favor to a subordinate—a notable example being Genesis 6:8, where Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

In life, there are people we dislike for no particular reason, and others we find endearing without them having done anything special. Times like these make the world seem unfair. Esther seems to have been someone who was naturally loved wherever she went. When she stood before the king, a desire rose within him to give her whatever she needed. Where did that desire come from? It was the very heart God placed within the king. This truth is deeply significant.

2. A Wise Banquet Strategy to Open the King's Heart

Because of this, Esther was spared and could draw near to the king. What did the king surmise when Esther approached him? He immediately guessed that she had a request to make. Very few people would risk their lives to approach the king without a compelling reason. Moved by love for the woman before him, the king resolved to grant whatever she asked.

As Esther stepped closer, the king offered to give her whatever she desired—even up to half the kingdom. Did he literally intend to hand over half his kingdom? No; it was a powerful statement of his willingness to fulfill her request.

Normally, upon hearing such an assurance, most people would get straight to the point: expose Haman's plot and beg the king to execute Haman immediately. But Esther did not do that. Instead, she asked the king to attend a banquet she had prepared, along with Haman. The king knew right away that her request wasn't simply

about attending a banquet. Yet, since Esther had not disclosed her true desire, he agreed to her modest request and decided to attend the banquet with Haman.

As they ate and drank at the banquet, the king's mood grew pleasant once again. He asked Esther a second time what she desired. Yet again, Esther held back her ultimate request and invited the king and Haman to another banquet the following day, promising to reveal her petition then.

Characteristics of Those Who Believe in Providence: Esther's 3 Attributes of Wisdom

Esther's name means "star." When does a star shine brightest? When the surrounding darkness is deepest. And when did Esther's wisdom shine brightest? When she lowered herself to the fullest. She did not position herself as the strong party, but revealed her vulnerability. She elevated King Ahasuerus while completely humbling herself.

Approaching the king at the risk of her life clearly implied that she had something important to ask. The king understood this. That is why he asked what she wanted as soon as she appeared. Yet Esther refrained from bringing up Haman right away. Had she raised Haman's name immediately, it could have been perceived as a political power struggle between the two of them.

Although Esther was a vulnerable queen, she was still a figure of significant royal influence. If handled unwisely, her actions could easily have looked like a political maneuver to slander a rival. This was not a political contest between two factions, but a desperate struggle to save her people from annihilation. If she had acted foolishly—pouring out her grievances like a throw-up of emotions or throwing a tantrum—her request would very likely have been dismissed.

First, Humility

Esther's strategy was to lower herself completely. Finding favor in the king's eyes, she might have felt tempted to crush Haman's faction in one swift stroke, but she chose humility instead. What is true humility? Humility is not being brought low by external forces when we have no power. True humility is choosing to lower ourselves voluntarily. Esther humbled herself before King Ahasuerus. In doing so, she framed the upcoming confrontation not as a battle between equal political powers, but as an innocent victim standing against an unscrupulous man abusing his authority to destroy her.

My own past foolishness illustrates this principle. Years ago, I served as a military chaplain's assistant in the army. When I was a Corporal, a new Battalion Commander arrived who happened to be a devout Christian. He granted me a special privilege: an open-door policy allowing me to come directly to him whenever I faced difficulties regarding chapel events. However, the Personnel Officer at the time was an

unbeliever who harbored hostility toward religion, systematically rejecting every administrative request I submitted. Frustrated and angry, I wanted to go straight to the Battalion Commander and report the officer's misconduct. But someone offered me wise counsel, advising against it. Had I acted impulsively just because the commander shared my faith, the Personnel Officer would likely have grown even more bitter toward Christianity. At the time, I thought I was doing good by leveraging the highest authority in the unit, but it was not a wise course of action.

Second, Patience (A trait of those who trust in Providence: Not acting out of haste)

Esther's second strategy was patience. Impatience ruins things. Those who trust in God's providence do not act in haste, because they know things will come to pass in God's timing. People who lack a grasp of providence often live with a subtle anxiety that if they don't act immediately, they will miss their chance and ruin everything. Con artists exploit this very fear and impatience. People fall for scams due to greed and fear—the greed to make quick gains and the fear of missing out, which clouds rational judgment.

Believers, however, are far less susceptible to such traps. First, their greed is restrained. As those who have resolved to live and die for Jesus, their focus shifts from accumulating wealth to living righteously and holy. Thus, when tempted with get-rich-quick schemes, they remain unswayed, knowing that what they have received by God's grace is already enough. Second, they lack haste. They firmly believe that all things unfold under God's sovereign control and according to His timing. Rather than listening to the urgent whispers of scammers, they quietly wait on God's providence.

Esther clearly demonstrated this posture. Rather than rushing to destroy Haman on the spot, she patiently waited for God's moment. In an era where everything moves at a breakneck pace, isn't this a message we desperately need? Those who trust in God's providence do not ruin matters through impatience, for they trust that God will surely fulfill His purpose in His time.

Third, Strategic Action (Be innocent as doves and wise as serpents)

Those who believe in providence do not jump into things recklessly. They never adopt a careless attitude like, "Well, God's plan will happen anyway, so I'll just coast along." Experiencing God's providence deeply teaches us that He works through even the smallest details to bring about good. Therefore, those who trust in providence act with great strategy—not to show off their own cleverness, but to discover God's wisdom at work through their careful steps.

Esther did not enter the king's presence on a whim or like a spoiled child throwing a tantrum; she approached him with a meticulously crafted plan. And God moved precisely within those plans. Her first step was risking her life to go before Ahasuerus, and God moved the king's heart with compassion toward her. Her second

step was preparing a banquet to put the king in good spirits, and God moved there as well. One might ask, "Aren't banquets always enjoyable?" But if the preparations had gone wrong or if the king had fallen ill from the food, Esther's entire plan could have collapsed in a moment. Yet God ensured that her efforts worked seamlessly.

Jesus commanded Christians to be innocent as doves and wise as serpents. While keeping a pure heart like a dove, we are not to act foolishly or carelessly. We must be wise as serpents. This wisdom must be distinguished from wickedness. Snakes are among the most sensitive creatures to their environment, reacting to the slightest changes in temperature. Likewise, we are called to be acutely aware of evil in this world, planning diligently as we carry out God's work.

Conclusion: A Faith That Believes in Providence and Takes Action

Today, through Esther, we have examined three characteristics of those who believe in God's providence: she was humble, she was patient, and she acted wisely. If we truly trust in God's providence, these three traits will naturally manifest in our lives.

We will cultivate a heart that humbles itself before God's sovereign care, a heart that patiently waits for His will to be accomplished, and an attitude that mobilizes wisdom to plan and faithfully execute our responsibilities, constantly seeking God's help at every step.

A person who trusts in providence is not someone who passively lives without plans, but someone who seeks God's will, makes thorough plans, and moves forward with diligence. Though our plans may sometimes appear to fail, God is the sovereign God who perfects His ultimate purpose through them. Believing that "a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps," may we all move forward in faith—humbly, patiently, and faithfully putting our plans into practice within His grace.

Pastor's Column

Financial Emergency and the Christian's Call to Care

Recently, news has been circulating that the Washington State government is facing a difficult financial situation. Washington is home to many well-known and highly successful companies. Names that anyone would recognize—such as Microsoft, Costco, Starbucks, Boeing, REI, and Blue Origin—are based here. Aside from Silicon Valley, Washington boasts one of the highest concentrations of leading tech and innovative enterprises in the United States. Yet, despite being home to such thriving corporations, why is the Washington State government struggling financially?

A defining feature of Washington State's tax system is that there is no personal income tax. While residents pay income tax to the federal government, they pay none to the state. As a result, the state government relies heavily on sales tax rather than income tax for its stable revenue. However, when economic times get tough, the very first thing people do is cut back on spending. When consumer spending drops, sales tax revenue plummets with it. Consequently, state tax revenues shrink, creating significant financial strain for the government.

Furthermore, spending increased significantly during the pandemic. In particular, state expenditures expanded, especially in social welfare programs. The problem arose when policies were crafted without fully anticipating the steep drop in federal aid once the pandemic ended. Similar issues have surfaced across the country, where excessive welfare policies were exploited by individuals seeking personal gain, while the state government failed to properly oversee these programs—allowing taxpayer money to leak away unnoticed.

Ultimately, the burden of these mistakes falls upon the residents of Washington. Faced with a budget deficit, the state government has no choice but to slash spending in welfare programs. As a result, low-income families and vulnerable populations trapped in blind spots—those who genuinely need assistance—end up suffering the most.

How Should Christians View Politics? As believers in Jesus, we must avoid becoming overly partisan or politically obsessed. This is because politics does not belong to the realm of Special Grace, but rather to Common Grace.

Christians ultimately belong to Special Grace and live for the eternal Kingdom of God; we are not bound to earthly nations to live merely for temporary earthly powers.

At the same time, however, government and public order are instruments of God's Common Grace. Just as God sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous so that crops may grow, He establishes government institutions for both the good and the bad so that all people may live peaceful and orderly lives. Grounded in this truth, we must encourage and oversee our government so that it fulfills the work God desires. Therefore, while Christians should not become partisan, we must remain deeply concerned with civic and political affairs.

The current financial hardship of the Washington State government will likely pose a significant challenge to the underprivileged for some time. Current leaders are making various efforts to resolve the problem, but the fallout experienced by economically marginalized groups may be difficult to avoid in the short term.

Yet, Washington is a state with boundless potential. With its rich tech industry and strategic logistics hub, the economy has a strong chance of rebounding as trade and business thrive. Thus, the current budget shortfall is not an insurmountable structural disaster, but an operational issue that leaders can rectify with careful management and wisdom.

Our duty as believers living in Washington State is clear: we must pray that our leaders carry out this task with wisdom, justice, and responsibility, ensuring that those in need are cared for in the process.