



Devotion

PLANS & THE HEART

King David begins Psalm 20 by expressing a series of desires for God's people. Here is one of them.

**May [the LORD] give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed. (Psalm 20:4)**

That verse is telling. If God is the one who makes human plans succeed, then clearly he approves of us having plans. But this verse doesn't simply tell us God approves of our plans. It implies that if God makes our plans succeed, it is because the desire of our heart was appropriate.

So what is the desire of our heart? Twenty psalms later, King David tells us the desire of the heart of a child of God.

**I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)**

The Christian desires do to all that which makes God happy. The Christian aligns his desires with God's desires, his delights with God's delights. Simply put, the Christian does not think of himself. He loses himself in Christ.

That attitude needs to permeate our planning. It is very easy for sinful desires to come across in our planning. Why? Jesus said, "**Out of the heart come evil thoughts**" (Matthew 15:19). A thought need not be lustful or hateful to be evil. Any thought that seeks our own glory rather than God's glory is evil.

For example, say we plan our ministry with the desired result of adding forty new members to our church. Why do we want those forty new members?

- Our budget is full of red ink, and so there is a lot of pressure for us to give more. We don't like that. We want more people to so others can pick up the tab.
- There is a lot of work to be done around church, and we get tired of volunteering the hours ourselves. We want more people to pull the weight.
- We would like other congregations to look at us with admiration — "Look at how well they're doing!" — rather than it being the other way around.

All of those seek *our* glory, not God's glory. We are thinking of ourselves as we plan, not the one who took our place on the cross. If those were the true goals behind our congregational planning,

while our planning would look pious and godly, it actually is just a collection of “evil thoughts” in the eyes of our holy God. If those were our goals, we would have to acknowledge that even **“our righteous acts are like filthy rags”** (Isaiah 64:6).

The harsh reality is that everything we do—including our most seemingly godly actions—is tainted by our sinful nature. Nothing we do is perfectly righteous. Yet, we need not fear. St. Paul tells us why in Romans 3:22. **“Righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”**

We place our faith in Jesus Christ, and *his* beauty is credited to us. In our baptism, that perfection of Christ was wrapped around us like a white robe. When our Father looks at our sometimes selfish planning—planning that seeks *our* glory and comfort—he sees saints, not sinners, because he sees Christ. He accepts our service, though it is tainted, as a good work. What love! What grace!

It is that grace that moves us to cry out to God and ask him not only to save us, but to transform us. **“Create in me a pure heart, O God!”** (Psalm 51:10). We ask God to give us hearts that order things in the following way:

1. What God wants matters to us above all else.
- 2a. What shows love for our fellow believer matters next.
- 2b. What shows love for the lost ties with that.
3. What we want... *That doesn't matter to us at all.*

My friends, if you ask God to give you a heart like that, do you think he will say no to such a godly request? He would grant it gladly! In fact, he promises it. **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you”** (Ezekiel 36:26). Through the Word and sacrament, the Holy Spirit changes our heart so that it better aligns with Gods.

When everyone involved in congregational planning has the priorities and desires of their heart ordered like that, planning goes very, very well. And David will repeat his wish.

**May [the LORD] give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.** (Psalm 20:4)

Prayer: Most Holy Spirit, you know that nothing good lives in us, that is, in our sinful nature. But you have created faith in Christ within us. Through that faith, you clothe us with his perfection. Now we ask that along with Christ's righteous you would give us his mind. As we approach planning in our congregation, help us to think nothing of ourselves, but only of others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.