

What Do We Do When Our Plans Fall Through?

6) When Our Minds Don't Understand God's Plans

Luke 24:44-53 • 2020-05-24 • Easter Series



A man goes through a long day at work. He is exhausted. He just wants to get home and grab a cold drink so that he can relax for the rest of the evening in front of the TV. But on the way home he is delayed. The traffic is so busy that it takes him twice as long to get home as usual. He's frustrated. When he finally arrives home, he opens the door to find that his family had been expecting him. But they weren't expecting him to come home and relax. They were expecting him to give them their undivided attention. His frustration grows. Soon he is busy on various projects, disciplining children, and parenting instead of relaxing. All it will take is just one more straw and he feels like he will burst out in anger. His plans fell through for the evening. It feels like he has no control over his schedule or his anger. A woman arrives late for work. But it's not her fault. Her husband forgot to put gas in the car last night and she had to stop to fill the tank. She's feeling like nobody listens to her or helps her. It gets worse when she realizes one of her co-workers has called in sick. Now she'll have to work twice as hard to keep up all day at work. Her frustration grows. All it will take is one rude customer and she will probably explode. Her plans for the day fell through. It feels like she doesn't have any control over her day or her mounting emotions. Have you ever felt like you had lost control of your life? Did your emotions begin to follow as you lost control of them too?

These past few weeks we've been going through a series asking, "What do we do when our plans fall through?" And each week we heard how God carries out his plans. Today we'll consider the final part of our series. And we'll see how God opens our minds so that we see who is in control. When he does, we go from frustrated and fearful to filled with joy.

Everyone wants to feel like they are in control of our lives. Don't we see it all around us? The craving for a sense of control is probably why some people resort to things they can control to unwind from stress. They eat whatever food they want. They draw, knit, crochet, or tinker. Some people might lock themselves inside their office, home, or garage for hours working on something they can control. Some feel like they are in control when they take on projects and yardwork. Others feel like they are in control with baking. Some will go so far to feel in control that they enjoy hobbies in which they manipulate miniature model worlds. Others aren't content to control their own lives but like to assert their control over the lives of people around them. They boss others around or try to manipulate the fabric of society.

I don't know what it is that makes you feel like your plans have fallen through. No doubt this pandemic has exacerbated the perception that things are out of your control. Many have lost their jobs. Some have lost their feeling of security. Others have lost their summer travel plans. Not a few have lost someone they love. I just heard word from a pastor who is serving the church body that is in fellowship with us in India. He sees many around him are filled with fear over the loss of jobs and the collapsing economy in India. People worry if they will begin to starve without food. Even if the pandemic hasn't affected your life you still have felt the loss of control. And don't believe for a moment that money can offer the type of control that people crave. How many people who are used to having control with their vast wealth find out that they aren't in control of everything? Picture the man who losses all his money because of falling markets. Or consider the man who gets word from the doctor that he'll have to cancel all his summer plans. He has a medical issue and needs surgery. It will be a few months of recovery to get over it all. He is frightened, and frustrated. All his plans fell through. Money can't help him now. It feels like he has lost control of his life. He breaks down in tears. I'm sure there have been numerous things that have caused you to feel like you don't have control of your life.

It shows how much people crave control. Those who lose control of their lives often end up losing control of everything else. During this pandemic some have fell into depression and despair. Their plans to see others fell through. Other people have gotten quite angry. Two extreme sides of an issue seek to dominate one another. Some have punched people for not wearing masks or being asked to wear a mask. Some have vandalized or even burnt down churches that they can't control during the pandemic. Family members will even turn against family members. And need I even mention the things which the craving desire for control does in politics?

So, what did you do the last time your plans fell through and you lost control of the situation? Did you lose your temper? Did you lash out at someone else who wouldn't listen to you? Did you break the eighth commandment by slandering those who hold control in your family or in the government? Did you lose control of your temper or collapse in fearful despair? So many sins stem from our desire for control: anger, fear, hate, and despair!

The disciples of Jesus all felt like things were out of their control. All their plans for the Passover holiday went down the pits. They were gathered after dark and wondering what was going on. They had lost control of the situation for days and were filled with frustration and fear. But suddenly they saw something entirely unexpected. Jesus appeared to them.

They were terrified and thought they saw a ghost. But Jesus assured them he was no ghost. He was alive. He showed them with convincing proofs. But Luke records how they were still wondering about everything and were confused. Moments earlier everything was out of control. "How could he be alive? His plans fell through! He was arrested. He died."

At the heart of the need to be in control of our lives is a fear that someone else isn't. We doubt that there could be some plan that is bigger than ours which affects us and every human being. But Jesus clears that all up for us. Jesus then gave his disciples an especially important message: "God is in control." *He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."* There is a plan. And there is a God who is in control of history and our lives. "Everything must be fulfilled." It doesn't matter if our life doesn't go the way we want. We are not in control. It doesn't matter if the people who are in charge don't do what you want. They ultimately are not in control. The only truth that can remove your fears and frustrations is "God is in control. He is in charge of everything."

And his plan is written down for us! The Scriptures record the account of mankind's struggle to be in charge. From the very beginning man and woman have dismissed the Creator's plans. They have strived to be in charge and died in frustration at their fallen plans. But alongside every failed plan of mankind is God's fulfilled plan for mankind.

You might say, "But I don't see his plan for me!" In fact, one of the most common things I hear as a pastor is, "I want to know what God's plan is for me." I can tell you that God has not hidden his plan for you! But it is impossible to see his plan when you can only think about your own plan. Our greatest problem is letting go of our own plans and looking at his. We have trouble seeing that plan because our minds are too closed. By nature, we only want to see our own ideas and our own plans. We cannot see or piece together all of God's plans for us. Not knowing the plans of the one who is ultimately in charge would indeed be frustrating!

But we don't remain in the dark. God opened the minds of his disciples so that they would understand. *Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He said to them, "This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name..."*

God opens our minds to understand his plan too! It is a good plan to bless us! All of God's plans center on the work of Jesus. To take away our frustrations and fears the Christ came to take our place. He suffered for us all. But in victory he rose again so that he could remain in charge and carry out his plans for us. Now in his name, that is according to his plan, repentance and forgiveness of sins is preached.

God's plan is that this message of his suffering, death, and resurrection be proclaimed, beginning in Jerusalem. Repentance and forgiveness spread with the proclamation of his plan. And it didn't just end in Jerusalem. It went out to all nations as the eyewitnesses of his resurrection proclaimed God's plan long written down. And his plan was carried out throughout history. The message of the Christ who suffered and rose again has been proclaimed throughout the world. His plan is still being carried out today.

It cannot fail. That's because behind his plan is his Spirit and his working to complete it. Just as he sent power from the Holy Spirit to his disciples he continues to empower and equip his church for this task. By the Spirit's working today the gospel message is being proclaimed. And though many have tried to stop it, his plan cannot fail. Jesus lives. The Spirit is working to make that known and open minds to understand.

As the gospel spreads God opens the minds of many others to see that they are not in charge. He is in charge. They repent of their sinful refusal to see him as the one in control. They repent of trying to take control and be God. They let go of every sinful plan and hold only to God's good plan. They trust in the promise of forgiveness. They look to the working of the God who controls all history.

When that happens frustration and fear vanish. In their place are only understanding and joy. What happened next could have been surprising to the disciples. Jesus, after forty days, led them out near the city of Bethany on the Mount of Olives. And then he ascended into heaven. The disciples could have been frustrated that Jesus had left them. They might have been afraid of what was going to happen next. Their minds could have been confused about what tomorrow was going to bring. But the disciples went back to the city filled with joy and praising God.

Why were they filled with joy? They now clearly understood God's plan for them. They were now able to put everything together and understand. And it was an inescapable conclusion for them! God's plan was to do what Jesus was doing while he was being lifted from them. He was blessing them.

You might be confused or flustered at times when your plans fall through. But what do we do when our plans fall through? Instead of anger, frustration, hatred, or fear God provides understanding and joy. We remember that we are not in charge. Our God remains in charge. And his plan is written down for us to understand. He opens our minds to understand how his plan is being carried out for us today and always. Your risen and ascended Savior is in charge. He holds all authority. He uses his authority to fulfill every good plan for you. His plan includes bringing you to repentance, giving you forgiveness, and providing you with his lasting blessing. With opened minds, our frustrations turn to understanding and our fears turn to joy. Only our glorious, wise, and gracious God could ever devise and carry out such a plan!