

## WHAT'S THE PLAN?

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Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

September 7, 2025

Pentecost 12

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### **Jeremiah 18:1-11**

This word came to Jeremiah from [Adonai]: “Get up and make your way down to the potter’s house. I will give you my message there.” So, I went down to the potter’s house, and there the potter was working at the wheel. Whenever the object of clay that the potter was making turned out badly, the potter tried again, making of the clay another object, of whatever sort the potter pleased. Then the word of [Adonai] came to me: “House of Israel, can I not do to you what this potter does? – it is [Adonai] who speaks. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel. At any moment I may announce that a nation or a dominion is to be uprooted, announce that a nation or a dominion is to be uprooted, pulled down or destroyed. But if the nation I threatened abandons its depraved ways, I will change my mind and not inflict on it the disaster I planned. At another moment I may announce that I will build up a nation or establish one. But if it does something displeasing to me, refusing to listen to my voice, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. “Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ‘Thus says [Adonai]: Beware! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. Turn away from your evil life, each one of you, give up your evil ways, amend your conduct.

### **Luke 14:27-33**

Anyone who doesn’t take up the cross and follow me can’t be my disciple. “If one of you were going to build a tower, wouldn’t you first sit down and calculate the outlay to see if you have enough money to complete the project? You’d do that for fear of laying the foundation and then not being able to complete the work – because anyone who say it would jeer at you and say, “You started a building and couldn’t finish it.” Or for the leaders of one county were going to declare war on another country, wouldn’t they first sit down and consider whether, with an army of ten thousand, they could win against an enemy coming against them with twenty thousand? If they couldn’t, they’d send a delegation while the enemy is still at a distance, asking for terms of peace. “So count the cost. You can’t be my disciples if you don’t say goodbye to all of your possessions.

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(prayer)

You can probably tell from my playing with the Play-Doh earlier that I'm a Star Wars fan. You know, I wear a pretty big geeky kind of hat. One of my sons has got tickets to the Edmonton Expo coming up and uh and I get to go with them for a couple days. I think all four of the Hobbits are going to be there. But, there's bound to be all sorts of really cool cosplay costumes and some celebrities from various corners of the sci-fi fantasy world.

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Like a lot of people, my love of Star Wars began in 1977 with the release of the first movie that we didn't know was going to be just the first movie. It was just called Star Wars. A few years later it got rebranded episode 4: A New Hope. I like all of the Star Wars. I've watched almost all of the Star Wars: whether it's the movies or the TV shows or the streaming things. About the only thing I never really got into was Star Wars Resistance. It's kind of a kids show.

1977 begins with that big Imperial destroyer chasing Princess Leia's little ship and the lasers going back and forth and then the tractor beam pulling them in and the first line ever spoken in a Star Wars movie by C3PO: *Did you hear that?* And we see in those first scenes Leia Orana, princess of Alderaan, placing something into the droid R2-D2. We learn later learned that those are the plans to the Empire's ultimate planet destroying weapon, the Death Star. The hope is that with those plans, they can find a weakness to stop the Death Star from doing what it was designed to do.

Flash forward a little bit in after the last prequel movie came out, we got Rogue One, which was the first Star Wars movie that didn't involve the Skywalkers. Rogue One was all about getting those plans that eventually got to Leia so she could put them in R2-D2 so the rebellion could get the plans to the Death Star. And Rogue One is all about how they went about figuring out where those plans were and how to get them. I thought it was an amazing movie and I've enjoy re-watching it a number of times. And it ends with the plans being given to Princess Leia.

Fast forward a little bit more to 2022. Now we're in the Disney era of Star Wars and we get what I think is the best of the new Star Wars, the streaming series Andor. Andor is the story of the main character of Rogue One. Well, the male main character of Rogue One and how he became involved to the point where he helped to get those plans. Andor starts off with Cassian Andor just being a petty thief, moving from one opportunity to the next to try and get enough money to get by. And he's spending far more time running from his debtors than he is making a living. One of the first story lines is Cassian joining up with Luthan Rael who is a leader of the very young resistance movement. And to raise money for the rebellion, he recruits Cassian to help rob a bunch of credits from the empire. And so they go in and they steal the monthly payroll for an entire imperial sector. About halfway through season one of Andor, we get to see the Empire's reaction to this robbery. And Wolf Yularen, who is a colonel within the Empire, is talking to the Imperial Security Bureau board about the robbery. And he says, "The criminals for last night's atrocity at Aldani, which is where the robbery happened, think they've taken the Empire by surprise. We know better. We know the real shock will be when they discover how ready and eager we are to respond. This is why we plan. This is why we work so hard, why we recruit so carefully and demand so much."

The future is not certain. The future is not set but it can be influenced. This is why we plan.

Now I won't give you too many spoilers about Andor. The two seasons of Andor are available on Disney Plus now. And there won't be a third season because it ends right where Rogue One begins. So, and I'm not going to spoil Rogue One, but there's really not room for a sequel beyond Rogue One involving Cassian Andor. Each side is making their plans to try and influence how the future might unfold.

Now, spontaneity and just living in the moment are deeply valuable ways of living and they have their

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place. But if we want to influence how things might happen going forward... planning, anticipation, hoping, dreaming, those are all essential to creating our best possible future. Now, it doesn't always work out. There are factors we can't account for, but this is why we plan.

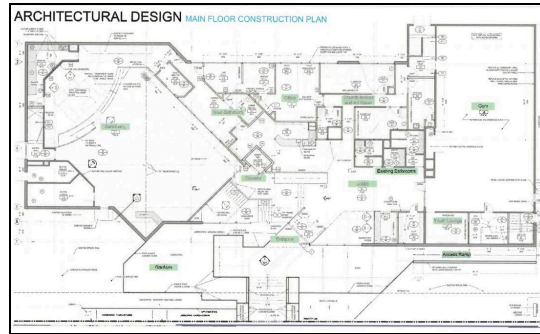
We're into September and as you could tell during the announcement part of our service, there are lots of things going on and very quickly and there are different ways for people to be involved if they if they would like to. Just have to look at the spark. it's just going to start getting longer. We actually had what, a two and a half hour leadership team meeting (church board meeting) on Thursday... not unusual, but we had a full meeting. We had lots of things on the agenda because meeting in uh September is different than meeting in July.

For the first time since 1999 in my household, this is the first time in all those years that I have nobody going to school this far. I didn't have to go or worry about school supplies or figure out how to arrange rides to different universities here and there. I didn't have to set a new alarm on my phone to double check and make sure that whoever needed to be up was going to be up on time. I didn't have to think about whether I was going to make a lunch or just send 20 bucks with the person. Um, so my fall this year is a little different in terms of the way I'm planning.

The reading we had from the Gospel of Luke and actually the one from Jeremiah all talk about how we look into the future. They were both pretty negative in tone. You may have noticed and there's some reasons for that. In Luke, the first thing I need to say about Luke is that the cross language in there, you know, take up my cross and follow me. That's anachronistic. Jesus wouldn't have had any reason to tell his disciples, take up my cross, because the crucifixion hadn't happened yet. That's the language of the generation that is writing and reading the gospel - for whom that's an important statement. In the wake of the crucifixion, we, like Jesus, go into the hard places; to be Jesus' follower. But Jesus' message outside of that catchphrase is really think and plan. Think and plan before you start. Know what you're going to be getting into, know what you're going to gain, know what you have to give up before you start going down the path that you may not be able to get off of or may regret going down. If you want to be my follower, if you want to learn from me to be my disciple, then know what that means. And if you think about this in the context of the people who are reading the Gospel of Luke a few decades later and their place in the wider community and this difficulty and the struggles it was to be a follower of Jesus in those early decades, know what you're getting into before you join and try to be part of this because it may be more than you can handle if you're not ready.

Jesus uh gives a couple of examples. You know, if you're going to build something, you can build a tower in the case of the example. Make sure you map it out properly so that it's structurally strong and you have enough materials to make it happen. The other example is if you're planning on going to war, maybe you should double check and see whether you think you can get what you want out of the war. It's not always an example that makes the most sense to us in our day. Although I suppose if your last name was Putin, you might be thinking about that.

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See the picture on the screen. I don't know if you can make it out from where you're sitting, but that's the plan of where you are right now. That's a drawing of the upstairs that was planned during the renovation the church did a few years ago. And if you look on the left side of the picture there, you can see that big square. Well, that's the room that we're in right now. And all of the other places uh in the middle is basically new walls and new things. Uh the stuff on the right is the gymnasium that was largely untouched. Although the rooms at the bottom on the right are different than they were before. There used to actually be a couple dressing rooms even with bathrooms and things like that there. We didn't just get people to bring a bunch of hammers and start putting nails into walls and knocking things down. There was a whole process to figure out what that might be. And even after the plans were done, there were still people going, "Oh, well, what about this and what about that?" And, you know, we did our best. We thought before we invited those skilled at building to make it a reality for us. It's why we plan.

It's been over three years since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. What was Russia's plan from the beginning? I mean, the fact that they marched on Kiev right away uh tells us that the plan was to take over the seat of government. It didn't quite work out that way. Even though they may have followed the example in the Luke story that while I've got more troops than you've got, I should be okay. It didn't work out that way. But we're three years and more into it. What's the plan? What's the plan for the invading country that started this?

It's been almost two years since the Simhat Torah attacks in Western Israel, the kidnapping and the killings by Hamas and other organizations coming into music festivals and kibbutzes... the beginning of the current war in Gaza. What was Hamas's plan at first? We've seen how Israel has responded, and we start to wonder, what is the plan for all of this after the fact? In both Russia and in Gaza, in both Ukraine and Gaza, what are the plans for there to be no more conflict, for people to be able to live their lives and go about their daily existence, to make themselves and their families and their neighbours happy and fulfilled.

It's one thing to have a plan at the start, but it's necessary to make the adjustments along the way. In the story of Andor, Luthan's first plan for Cassian was simply to use him as someone who could make the robbery successful and then toss him aside. But plans changed and it all led to Princess Leia getting those plans. When we plan, we begin with a vision.

In the United Church of Canada, when a church wants to do significant maintenance or make a big change to their building, the way the United Church is structured, the region's property commission

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has an oversight role over that. The main thing that the region does is to make sure that the congregation has thought about the bigger, larger picture of what they think are doing. It's not just about we want to build a certain room. It's how does that make you the church that you want to be? Starts with a vision. How does this move our vision along?

Jesus questions the crowd. Why are you interested in following? Why discipleship? In our stained glass window on the 79th Street side of the church, the east side of the sanctuary here. We've got our stained glass motto: learning, growing, and changing. All words that imply movement. They're not about sitting still. They're not about waiting in one place and not going anywhere. They're all about movement. They're all about evolution. They're all about going off in some direction here or there. They're about movement of thought and mind and body and community. And the last window, the bottom right window: together. The vision is making this movement together.

I may not have any school this fall to plan for, but I do have a family wedding that I talked about a little bit last week. And I spent some time this week actually putting together my notes for the ceremony. even thinking a little bit about what I might say in terms of a wedding sermon. A unique experience doing a wedding for one of my children. And I'm probably going to talk a little bit about the value of community, picking up on a quote that Jesus makes from Genesis that the two have become one. And why do we choose to join together as opposed to simply being one?

Planning is not something that we do that's one and done. I mean the pre-planning piece is essential. Know as best as you can before you start how it might go so that you can try and influence the direction. But you always need to be re-evaluating and adjusting and noticing new things along the way and saying this isn't working out the way I thought. Is there a different way we can go? I mean that's Jeremiah's pottery image. The context of Jeremiah and why it's so negative is that the Babylonian Empire is moving west. They are moving toward the Mediterranean Sea right where the land of Israel is. And so Israel is the prime goal of that move west to be able to get those Europe to Africa, Asia trade routes all secured. And most of the countryside has been already taken over. And the people that are left with Jeremiah and others are behind the walls of Jerusalem. And Jeremiah knows it's just a matter of time. Jeremiah knows that the legacy of their time in that land and the walls that they built can't hold them forever. And so Jeremiah is thinking ahead. What will we have when the walls are gone? What will we have when this is no longer our city to control? We'll have our connection to God. We'll have our relationship with that which is our life essence, that which is our creator. And so let's put our plans into establishing a good relationship with God. That will be what we can hold on to. And the story would go on to not only would the Babylonians overthrow Jerusalem, but they would send hundreds and thousands of people into exile where they would have to literally start over again. And maybe some of them remembered that Jeremiah said, "Hang on to your faith."

For anyone who does pottery or any sort of creative thing, your goal is the best vessel possible. And sometimes your initial plans don't quite come out of your fingers properly. And so you restart and you go again. Resets are always possible in any stage of our lives. Even if we've found our lives going in a direction that's been really unhelpful for us or not really great for us, we always have that opportunity for the reset to move into a new direction, a new future that we can try and influence that way.

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One of the things that the leadership team has been working on along with the trustees is to install solar panels on our flat roof at the church here. We were hoping to have some on the pyramid as well I think but I don't know whether structurally that was in the end possible so certainly on the flat roof... hoping to cut the significant costs of electricity for this building.

Planning ahead and so we plan, we reset and we replan again; we evolve, we change and grow and learn together and it's all from our vision in terms of our faith life. We're like Jeremiah's encouragement. Hold God central. Let that be your foundation, your rock all the way through because we have a huge influence on how tomorrow might roll.

Let's pray. Thank you God for this day, for the opportunities before us and the encouragement to move into this next time together. Amen.

Singing: #371VU Open My Eyes

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