



“Does God have a plan for my life?”

Well-meaning people will often try to comfort others by letting them know that God has a plan for their life. This sentiment often gets backed up with a quotation of Jeremiah 29:11, which reads “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (The favorite verse of high school yearbook signing everywhere).

I think that what people mean by this is sort of like “Well, you just gotta suffer through this time in order to get to the good, big thing that is ahead!” Or, in other words, “cheer up, chin up, surely it can’t be that bad!”

The problem, of course, is that sometimes it *is* that bad. If God has a plan for us, then why is God’s plan for some people apparently a life of pain and misery? Or a life that goes well for a long time, then abruptly turns horrible? This is a topic that the wisdom literature of the Old Testament explores: think of Job, who was blameless but miserable, or the writings of The Teacher in Ecclesiastes, who said that you may as well enjoy life now, because you never know when it might get bad again!

I have a book in my office that I generally keep where I can see it, entitled “Suffering: a Test of Theological Method.” The book is a reminder to me that when I use “God-Talk,” we should only do so in a way that includes the knowledge that human beings **DO** often suffer, and that that suffering is often **WITHOUT** apparent benefit or meaning.

A longer look at the whole of Jeremiah 29 is enlightening here. Jeremiah lived while the ever-shrinking Kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and the remaining Israelites taken into Babylon. In Babylon, the Israelites were not precisely slaves, but they were distinctly second-class citizens. Jeremiah 29 is partly a letter written from Jeremiah, who remained in Jerusalem, to the oppressed people. His word from the Lord was, in part: “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Only then, after imploring the Israelites to grow where they were planted, did Jeremiah say that God had plans for them.

While it is true that God can create good things out of suffering, it is never true that God intends, plans, or ordains misery to create some “larger plan” for your life. Nor is it true that God has a plan for your life that is your “destiny” or your “one true purpose.” What God truly has for you is *will*. God’s will for all humanity is that they come into a life-giving relationship with God, that they seek the welfare of the place/world where they are (in suffering or in happiness), and that they live in loving-kindness with their neighbors.

Scenes of Christmas



Welcome to 2023!





December was an exciting and busy month! We're looking forward to a fresh start with fresh ideas for our Children's Ministries.

The Day School has resumed after a 2-week Christmas break. The children are very energetic and happy to be back! We are scheduled to open enrollment for summer 2023 and the 2023-24 school year 2/1/2023 for our current families. Enrollment will open to the rest of the public on 2/15/2023. I'm happy to report that we have rehired a former Day School teacher, Jayme Butler. Jayme comes to us with a wealth of experience and training. She is sure to be an asset to our program and great addition to our wonderful staff! Speaking of assets, we couldn't do what we do without our beloved volunteers! If you're interested in getting involved with either the Preschool or School Age Aftercare program, please contact me. If you're not up for a weekly commitment, I'm always looking for reliable subs! If you aren't in a place to be able to physically help with the children, please consider donating some items from our "giving tree" located in the hallway by the sanctuary. We appreciate the connection with and support from our church family! It truly makes our program special.

Children's Ministry is moving right along with exciting events and new ideas on the horizon! Stay tuned for ways to get involved with our community events. In the meantime, please contact me if you would like to be part of our children's ministries on Sunday mornings. It takes a village, and we are so grateful for ours!

Love and Blessings,

Brittany Fox

Director of Family Ministries

UMPTENAGERS

Umpteenagers are having 2 events in February. On Wednesday, February 8th we will be seeing a movie at Circle Cinema (see below). A sign up sheet will be available.

If you want to know more about Umpteenagers, then the meeting on Sunday after church on February 26th at Bros. Houligan 4848 S. Yale Ave. is for you. Information as well as your questions will be answered. Those who are familiar with Umpteenagers will also want to attend as we will be planning our activities through 2023. Since we had made plans before and while the pandemic was ongoing that we had to cancel, we already have several ideas on the drawing board, but welcome your ideas as well. Sign up sheet will be available. Call Alon at 918-622-7006 or email at alon.soderfelt@cox.net for questions.



Our next Umpteenager outing is Wednesday, February 8. We are going to see the new movie “A Man Called Otto” starring Tom Hanks. Meet at the church at 10:30 a.m. to ride the mini-bus. Our plan is to go to lunch and the movie. We aren’t sure which theater will still be showing this but we will definitely find one. A sign-up sheet will be placed on the hallway table soon!!

Hear Ye, Hear Ye!

Potluck January 29th.

Join us to get acquainted with New Haven's new Pastor.

Reverend Ben Pascoe joined us November 15th and I'm not sure he has stopped running. Advent messages, worship messages on Christmas Day, as well as New Year's Day, meeting new faces, getting acquainted with church staff, the building and (most importantly) unpacking and organizing his library of tomes in his new office.

Putting names with faces takes a little time for all of us so let's break bread together on January 29 and meet our new Pastor with questions that only inquiring minds might want to know... I should say, maybe some of the sheep in his flock want to know.

He will have questions for us as well....be prepared.

There is a sign-up sheet on the table in the hallway leading to the Sanctuary. Sign-up and come join the fun on January 29th.



Partners In Education News

Our Giving Tree is expanding to include our own New Haven Day School. The budget is tight this first year back, so we thought our New Haven family might like to help provide snack items and classroom supplies from time to time. Items will be marked with "C" or "DS" to differentiate which school is receiving the donated item. Thank you for your generous support!

Discipleship Opportunities

Roundtable Connection Group: Tuesdays @ 7:00 pm. One of our newest small groups. Generally for "Baby Boomers," those in their 50's - 70's. Contemporary discussion, join this group @ Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81896340189>.

Sunday Morning Small Groups

Fellowship Class: Fellowship Class is using material from The Wired Word. Each lesson is based on the foundations of Christian faith and relates to a current news article. Each week we are reminded that the Bible is alive by relating selected Bible verses to the news of today. All are welcome. We meet in the parlor on **Sunday morning at 9:45**. Class is taught by Danny Hall. Zoom Link: <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82706398620>.

Interlude Class: Meets in the Chapel **Sundays @ 10:00 am**. A DVD study on "A Not So Silent Night" by Adam Hamilton Join this class for spirited discussion in person or on Zoom. Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85463997302>.

New Friendship Class: Meets in Room 209 (second floor) **@ 9:45 am**. This class offers studies on Christian and Bible - based topics that relate to contemporary issues along with lively discussion. Various activities with a lot of fun, fellowship and learning.



January

01/07 Sami Hardgraves-
Bruce
01/10 Kay Garwood
01/11 Ron Unterschuetz
01/12 Rose Unterschuetz
01/13 David Toalson
01/14 Sallyanne Wallace

01/16 Joan Beebe
01/19 Stephen Merrick
01/20 Derek Lamkin
01/21 Dwayne Boyd
01/28 Bryce Percival
01/28 Julian Smith
01/30 Bayleigh Boles



Prayer Requests:

Gregory Family
Karyn Maio
Greg Gotcher
Ron Unterschuetz
Tom Black
Marion Wilkerson
Kelly Sartain
Lana Gotcher
Jean Roberts

Also prayer for Carol Morgan, our SPIRE editor, whose recent injury means Pastor Ben has had to step in to produce this edition of the SPIRE. We miss you, Carol!

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