

I. Intro

A. How far into the future do your headlights shine? How far out are you looking and thinking?

B. In the Book of Proverbs, the fool is characterized by several things – one of them is a failure to look ahead and plan. The wise is someone who does the opposite. Proverbs 14 describes the wise as the person who is thinking about what tomorrow – and next month and next year – is going to bring.¹

C. What about you? What time do you spend thinking about and preparing for next week and next year and 2025 and... eternity.

D. Today we are going to be looking at what I think is one of our culture's most prevalent blind spots – a failure to think ahead. My contention is that we are a nation of Esaus.

E. Last week I noted that Jacob and Esau were twins but had little in common. Esau was big; Jacob was small. Esau was strong; Jacob was weak. Esau preferred the outside; Jacob the inside. Esau was Dad's favorite; Jacob was Mom's favorite. Well, we also see that – at least as young men – Esau preferred to live for the moment, while Jacob was looking and planning - and plotting and scheming – about the future.

F. As the older of the two, Esau was set to inherit most of the money and power of his family. Jacob didn't like those rules and – along with his Mom – devised a way to take these things away from his brother.

G. If you've read the middle chapters of Genesis, you know that Jacob is no Boy Scout. He is not much of an example for us to follow. The fact that God uses him is understood to illustrate God's willingness to use anyone. If God can use a broken, selfish, conniving scoundrel like Jacob, he can use broken, selfish, conniving scoundrels like me and you. That is a pattern we see throughout the Bible.

H. He is not a model for us to follow, except when he is, and he is here.

I. What I am going to suggest today is, Jacob was right to be looking ahead. Esau was wrong not to be. And that one of the blind spots we have as a culture is short term thinking.

II. Just to be sure we are on all the same page.

A. In week one I said: I am assuming you want to get better; you agree that better looks like Jesus and you know that getting better is hard. I then said: part of the reason it's hard is because we do not see ourselves very clearly, and we then looked at King Saul as an example.

B. Last week we drilled down on Genesis 25:28, a brief but ominous passage that read: Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. I spoke about the problems and dysfunction that arose from this parenting approach, most notably a host of problems in Jacob's life. In particular, I drilled down on how important Dads are; talked about the Father-wound and noted how it played out in my own life.

III. I have heard from a number of you about this series.

A. Apparently, some think I am going to let Moms have it today. I'm not that brave! Rebecca – Isaac's wife and Jacob's Mom - is no Girl Scout. There is enough in the text to go after her if I wanted to. But last week's message is all I intend to say about how we might pick up our blind spots. I want to look ahead.

B. Some have urged me to note that not all blind spots are bad. That some people are blind to how kind they are. OK. I'd love to think I'm blind to how thoughtful and humble I am." I am pretty sure that is not true. But I will concede we might be blind to some good qualities we have.

C. Some want me to stress how hard it is to admit to our blind spots and fix them. Yes. I'm trying to make that point. Of course, ultimately, we do not fix ourselves. All real gain is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. What I am trying to point out is that we have them and we need the humility to see that and ask God's Spirit to help us grow.

D. This week I was sent an interview with Dr. David Dunning, a psychology professor at University of Michigan, whose name is attached to the Dunning-Kruger effect. Which I had not heard of, but which says, it is highly likely that if you think you do not have any blind spots, you have a lot. That a very few people under-estimate their ability to see themselves clearly – and that the more blind spots you have – the more like Pat you actually are – the less you get it.

E. Finally, I have been in a few conversations in which people have asked for an assessment tool to identify your blind spots. There are lots of assessment tools out there – and many recognize the value of the Enneagram here. However, by virtue of the fact that you are blind to your blind spots, taking a self-assessment is of limited value. We need each other. American mystique celebrates the cowboy that rides alone. The rugged individualist. The Bible does not. In a lot of different ways, Scripture calls us into community. It stresses the fact that we need each other – that we belong to each other, especially as Christ followers. In order to see and process your blind spots, you need friends, a small group, perhaps a counselor.

F. There were other emails. But let's move on. I want to look at a few passages that encourage us to look ahead.

IV. We start with Esau in Genesis 25.

A. Esau makes a few appearances in Genesis. When we first read about him, he comes off as a dumb jock: an impetuous, somewhat dim-witted outdoorsman who likes to hunt, but doesn't think ahead. And as a result, he sells his privileged position as the first born, for a cup of soup. Let me read. Genesis 25:29:

1. Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

2. "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

3. But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

4. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

B. We are told several other things about Esau.

1. At the end of chapter 26 we are told that he took two Hittite women as wives – and that these women were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca.
2. Then in Genesis 27 we read about how he is outwitted when Jacob and Rebecca team up to deceive Isaac – who was dying and nearly blind. They persuade Isaac that Jacob is Esau and have Isaac give the blessing to Jacob instead of Esau. When Esau finds out he is so mad about this that he vows to kill Jacob, and so Jacob decides to leave home.

V. At this point, the Bible follows Jacob – and does so for the next several decades.

A. In Genesis 28 he flees to Haran in Upper Mesopotamia. (What is now Eastern Turkey). He goes there to live with Laban, a relative of his Mom's.

1. While he is on his way, he stops at Bethel. Not the college. The word Beth El literally means “House of El” or house of God. He names it that because while he is there he has a famous vision. It's one in which he sees a ladder up to heaven with angels going up and down it. (Modern scholars are actually more inclined to translate the term stairway. I do not think they are doing that in deference to the Led Zeppelin song – Stairway to Heaven – but maybe they are).
2. I share this to say whether you want to think of it as a ladder or a stairs, it points ahead to Jesus – who (in John 1:51) identifies himself as the Stairway to heaven – the ladder the angels descend and ascend between heaven and earth.²
3. If you are reading through Genesis, you realize that the ladder coming down from heaven stands in contrast to the Tower of Babel mentioned just a bit before. The Tower represents our efforts to ascend to heaven – which do not work. Religion doesn't work. We cannot be good enough to climb up. God has to come down.
4. That is what Jesus does. He is the ladder. Last week I said, the Old Testament sets up the New. And in particular, it points ahead to Jesus.
 - a) The Old Testament has prophets, priests and kings. That is because Jesus is the new and better prophet; He is our High Priest; and He is the King of Kings.
 - b) In the Old Testament, Israel fails in their assignment. Well, Jesus is the new and better Israel.
 - c) In the Old Testament, the Temple is destroyed. Well, Jesus is the new and better Temple.
 - d) He is the new and better Job and Jonah.
5. Here we see that He is the new and better ladder. He is the passageway to heaven. And in Genesis 28 we find it being lowered to Jacob of all people. Sinful, conniving, selfish Jacob.

B. In Genesis 29, we read about Jacob finding Laban, falling in love with one of his daughters, working for her hand in marriage for seven years, and then – after too much to drink – he is tricked by Laban into marrying her sister. (This seems like karma for duping his father and brother). By the end of 29, Jacob is married to both of them.

C. In the next chapters we read as Jacob ends up with four wives, 12 sons and lots of money.

D. Decades go by before we get to chapter 31 where Jacob has a falling out with Laban and he and his family – now lots of wives and children and sheep – leave Haran to head back home.

E. In chapter 32 he prepares to meet Esau – hoping Esau is not still mad. And this is where he wrestles with God and has his hip thrown out of socket

F. We meet back up with Esau in chapter 32, and he appears to have gained some wisdom. In fact, he almost appears in contrast to Jacob – who still has lots of issues (blind spots). Esau has grown up. Matured. Jacob is still Jacob.

G. Esau is mentioned briefly again in Genesis 36 – before the biblical story turns to Joseph (Jacob’s favorite son).

H. By the way, as Genesis plays out, we realize that Jacob plays favorites with his sons, hurting them in exactly the same way Isaac hurt him. He repeats the pattern.

VI. There is a lot in these middle chapters of Genesis. What I want to focus on is what the end of Genesis 25 focuses on: Esau’s early foolishness. His failure to look and plan ahead.

A. I am picking this because I believe this is one of our culture’s signature mistakes. I believe we are a nation of Esau’s – living for today and not thinking about tomorrow.

B. There are several ways to argue this point. By one definition, adulthood kicks in when you take responsibility, you’re yourself. And that keeps getting pushed back. Lots of books on that. You might also watch Peg Jay’s TED talk, *Thirty is Not the New Twenty*.

C. I think a clearer way to suggest we are thinking like Esau is the data on debt. I am not as doctrinaire on debt as, say, David Ramsey is. Sheri and I took on some debt for our house. But we have worked hard to avoid debt for anything else, mostly because our parents drilled that approach into us.

1. I realize this is a sore spot for some of you who struggle under a lot of debt. Let me direct you to either the Financial Peace University classes we offer or to meet with those who staff our Justice Center at the Crossroads campus.

2. I also realize that in some business situations where taking on some debt might make strategic sense.

D. I simply want to point out that debt is borrowing from the future. It has an aspect of short term thinking about it. And our culture is characterized by a lot of debt.

1. Our Federal debt is in the Trillions.

2. Our state debt is a bit of a mystery.

3. The consumer debt is now over 13 trillion. We owe more than a trillion for cars and more than a trillion in student loans.

E. There are other things that we might point to as evidence of thinking like Esau: unfunded pension funds, no savings, our failure to take care of the planet, or our failure to take care of our health. But I do not think I need to persuade you that we are not thinking ahead as much as we should.

F. So, I will move on to say: the chief excuse I hear about why we do not plan ahead is our pace of life. We know better than we do, but we are too busy to look ahead.

1. I get that. In the Forum talk a few weeks back, I argued that one of the uniquenesses of this moment is the pace. It is driven by our high standard of living and by the pace of change, which forces us to keep adapting. I get it. Our pace is a challenge. But, the failure to do so is a huge blind spot. And we are better off facing it.

VII. In fact, it is important to note that God directs us to look ahead generally and also to think about eternity in particular.

A. We not only get this in Genesis 25 and the Book of Proverbs, we see it with the example of Nehemiah and the teaching of Christ – such as the Sermon on the Mount. And one of the more interesting passages we see it is in Luke 16. In my devotional reading this past week I was struck again by the odd story Jesus tells there.

B. It's about an accounts manager for a very wealthy man. He is given his two-week notice, and instantly thinks, "What am I going to do? I'm too old to start a new career; I'm too old to work in the fields; and I've grown accustomed to buying \$5 Starbucks drinks every day. I am not going back to Folgers." Then he has this brilliant idea: He calls up all his boss' clients who still owe his boss money, and he starts cutting some shady deals.

1. "I see here that you owe my boss \$100,000. I tell you what. If you'll pay \$25,000 right now, I'll give you an official 'debt settled' certificate, and we'll just call it even." You see, the manager still had the legal authority to do this, since he is still on his two-week notice.

C. Then the manager tells each debtor, "Just remember later who took care of you."

D. As others have noted, if you feel like this story sounds familiar, you might be thinking of The Godfather. The similarities are actually a little unnerving.

E. Jesus then says, "What a wise manager! He used an opportunity he knew was coming to an end to prepare for the future, to make friends for his new future. That's how you should be with your money and life with regards to your future.

F. Jesus actually praised the shady manager. Don't miss the point: If you know your time in your current reality is coming to an end, isn't it wise to use these precious few moments you have to prepare for the coming reality—the permanent one?

G. In other words, if we know eternity is real, and that compared to eternity this life is like a vapor and will soon end, isn't it wise to leverage these brief moments for our coming, permanent reality? In fact, it's just outright foolish to do otherwise, right?

H. Set your minds on things above, not on things of the earth. Invest your life in things that matter to God. Everything we have was given to us. We are stewards not owners. Be a good steward.

I. Men and women, you need to know, Jesus spoke often about eternity.

1. It was assumed in the Sermon on the Mount, it popped up in the parables and he spoke about it directly with his disciples.

2. In John he told the disciples that he was going ahead to prepare a place for them, noting that in his father's mansion there were many rooms. In Mark He assured them that no one gave up anything in this life for him that would not be repaid one hundredfold in the life to come.

J. In light of our culture's blind spot about the future, and in light of these passages - I want to make two suggestions.

VIII. First, determine to live today in light of tomorrow.

A. Make time to look and think ahead. Realize this will be a challenge. We have a number of things working against us. For starters, our heart. Additionally, our culture.

B. About the only people who tell us to look ahead are investment brokers. Almost everyone else who is trying to get our attention is either to advertise a product they want us to buy now; or to report the news of the moment, that will be forgotten in a day or two.

C. Again – that is an odd uniqueness of this moment. Every culture has upsides and downsides. We need to realize the odd combination of: the pace of change, the pace of life, consumerism and a few other things mean, we are prone to rush. To be distracted by the moment. We need to think about tomorrow.

D. This means having a financial savings plan. It also means investing in friendships – not waiting until you are knocked down to discover that you do not have great friends.

E. It means thinking ahead about our health.

F. It means slowing down long enough to look ahead.

IX. Point Two: we need to live today in light of eternity. God promises us life after death. In fact:

A. The Bible doesn't describe this world as the land of the living and make promises about life in the land of the dying. It talks about this as the land of the dying and talks about the land of the living ahead. It talks about what to come as being far better.

B. And this is celebrated in the Creeds. The Apostle's Creed lists this as one of the key points: I believe in the resurrection of the body – which is your body, not Christ's. And I believe in Life Everlasting.

C. Our lives are to be shaped by the promises of God. And yet, many Christ followers spend more time planning for their yearly vacations than they do thinking about eternity. Which is another way of saying, many who report being Christ-followers act as if there is no eternity. "We major in the momentary and minor in the momentous."³

D. We need to live today in light of forever. In light of our upcoming death. In light of an upcoming audit by an all-knowing judge. We need to live today in light of Christ's love and priorities.

E. Some claim that when Christians do this – they become so heavenly minded that they are not of any earthly good. And there is a focus on eternity that leads some to an escapism that is wrong. That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about investing our life in things that matter to God.

F. One story and I will wrap up. I was recently in yet another conversation with someone who said, "I like Jesus, but I do not like the church." Which is popular to say, but needs to be unpacked and debunked. After all, the church is Jesus's idea. And so, after some effort to point a few things out, they modified their statement to say, "I like what Jesus taught."

G. OK, except, do you know what Jesus's number one topic was?

1. When people say, "I like what Jesus taught," you know this is not someone who has spent much time reading Jesus.

2. Does he call on us to love others. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.
 3. We are to love and serve others, including our enemies.
 4. The Sermon on the Mount has a lot of ethical advice in it.
- H. But the big topics Jesus speaks on is himself. He claims to be God. And one of the other things he calls on us to do is to live in light of forever.
1. No one talks more about heaven and hell than Jesus.
 2. Men and women, we need to live today in light of eternity.
- X. I want to encourage you to not let our culture’s blind spot be yours. There is no reason for you to do that. Look ahead.
- A. Do not drink the culture’s Kool-Aide. Be shaped by wisdom. Be shaped by the Word of God. Be shaped by transcendent truths.
- B. And plan ahead. Let me say something profound: ten years from now... you will be... ten years older. (You can tweet that if you want to). Of course, that may not be true – between now and then your life may end. But those are the only two options. You should prepare for both. Some of you have prepared for neither.
- XI. Let me encourage you to stand as we recite the Apostle’s Creed.

¹ Proverbs 14:8

² John 1:47-51 reads: Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

³ Randy Alcorn