

God's Plan For Your Life

(Note: The following article is somewhat lengthy, but I recommend you read it all the way through and reflect prayerfully and carefully the passages of scripture in it, and consider how God may be speaking to you today.)

What is God's plan for you? Why did he create humans? Where and how does one find meaning in life? Mankind has been trying to answer this question for a very long time. There have been scores of answers with their philosophical systems. Many have already witnessed and experienced the disastrous results of some of these, whether it was communism or fascism.

Like any other creation, one can only understand the purpose, and design of something from its creator and designer. Not understanding purpose, meaning, and design can lead to gruesome failure. One does not put syrup in a gas tank because that is not part of the design. One does not use a hammer to fasten a screw because that is not what its purpose is. This illustrates the importance of learning about our purpose from the creator and designer. Human beings do not create their purpose. Rather, they discover and learn it from their creator.

God's word teaches us about our origin and purpose

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' Then God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food'; and it was so. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Gen 1:26-31).

"The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'

Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.' Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:16-25).

This teaches us several important truths about human beings.

- 1) Unlike the other living creatures, humankind was created in the image of God.
- 2) Humankind was to multiply and fill the earth
- 3) Humankind was to have dominion over the earth and rule over it
- 4) Humankind was to be a keeper, or caretaker of the earth
- 5) In the beginning, the crown of God's creation was humankind, and everything was "very good."
- 6) It was not good for the man to be alone, so God created woman for him.
- 7) The very first social institution, marriage and the family, was designed and created by God.

Unlike other living creatures, humans are inherently different. They were created in the image of God. Though the scriptures do not give details as to what this means, we can establish empirically how humans are different than other living creatures. Humans have creative capacity. Like the creator, humans create, fashion, and build. Humans appreciate art and beauty. Humans have a sense of morality, justice, right, and wrong. Humans have wisdom that enables them to think and reflect about life philosophically and theologically. Humans have the capacity for love, compassion, and self-sacrifice. All of these, and many other characteristics, are a reflection of the image of God. God endowed humans with the capacity to have dominion over the earth and be caretakers of the world God created. Mankind was not to abuse or oppress the earth, but to order, care for, and govern righteously and justly.

God also gave humans the capacity to choose. This was a risk, because this left open the possibility that humankind might choose evil over what is good, which would taint mankind and the world God had created. Later, humankind was tempted to choose, and chose the evil rather than the good.

Humankind and all creation becomes twisted

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?' The woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.' ' The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate' (Gen 3:1-6).

The first lie in human history came from the serpent, whom the Bible identifies as Satan (Rev 20:2). He told a lie and a half-truth in order to deceive the humans into disobeying God. The forbidden fruit held the false promise of autonomy, of independence from God. It held the false promise of wisdom and knowledge they didn't yet possess. It seemed to hold the promise of delight. So they ate. Then knowledge came rushing in, but not as they had expected.

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.' " (Gen 3:7-10).

Alienation and guilt replaced the intimacy and joy they once had. This was not just a feeling of guilt, but real guilt. Satan's half-truth is that they would not die. In a sense, they did not die. They didn't fall to the ground dead. Instead, they suffered the worst death possible, which was alienation from

God. God had to call to those made in his image as they cowered and hid from him. The natural consequences of their actions would be dire.

"To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.' " (Gen 3:16-19).

Alienation from God meant alienation from all that came from God. It was alienation from life, from goodness, from wisdom, and a host of other things. They died spiritually, and their body would eventually follow suit. The only reason they continued to exist after eating the fruit was due to God's grace. As the Bible will go on to reveal, God had a plan to enable humans to be redeemed to him. God told Satan this,

"And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen 3:15).

Sin had come into the world and would wreak havoc with it. According to God's word, here are some of the ways sin has affected his creation.

1) A Dangerous Society

" Cain had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. Now to Enoch was born Irad, and Irad became the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael became the father of Methushael, and Methushael became the father of Lamech. Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives, 'Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give heed to my speech, For I have killed a man for wounding me;

And a boy for striking me; If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.' " (Gen 4:17-24).

Humanity grew and began to multiply. Humans created society and culture. They also developed art and music. They built cities. They developed metallurgy and they farmed. They discovered and harnessed the creation for its uses. However, instead of using these scientific and cultural advances for God's purposes to be caretakers of the world by having dominion over it graciously as God instructed, they served themselves. The wickedness of men grew on the earth until the time when God said "...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5b). This grieved God greatly.

2) Separation from God

"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isa 59:2).

Sin is contrary to the nature of God. God is good, righteous, and just. When mankind sinned, mankind separated himself from God.

3) A weakened Moral Will

" ... for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

Believers do not transform themselves from the inside out. This passage says it is God who works in us. For us to will, or to desire to work for God's pleasure, we need him to work in us. This clearly implies that our very will and desire has been tainted by sin.

4) A weakened Intellect

"For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools ..." (Rom 1:21-22).

5) Malfunctioning Creation, both human and non-human

"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God,

insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Rom 1:28-32).

"... that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:21-23).

According to this, sin not only affected humans, but has affected the entire creation. Even though the created order was very good when God created it, sin has twisted and corrupted it. It is not completely as it should be. It, along with ourselves, are held in slavery to the corruption caused by sin.

God's Redemption Through Christ

Fortunately, God is not only just, but is also gracious and merciful. God found a way to satisfy both his justice and his mercy. The first hint of his plan is when he told the serpent that the seed, or descendant of the woman would crush his head, and it would only injure the descendant's heel (Gen 3:15).

Later, he selected an Aramean named Abraham from whom this seed, or descendant would come. After Abraham demonstrated his faithfulness and trustworthiness to God, God told him, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen 22:18). The Israelites were descended from Abraham, but God was not referring ultimately to the nation of Israel when he spoke of the blessing of Abraham's seed. The scriptures make it clear that this is a reference to one person, Christ.

"Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ" (Gen 3:16).

The Bible makes it clear that Christ is like no other person that has ever lived. He is human and God at the same time. Notice these passages.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:1-3, 14).

He became flesh! He became one of us and lived among us!

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Col 2:8-9).

This passage tells us that all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form in Christ. He has not just humanity when he became human, but also deity. He is both God and man.

"But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM" (Heb 1:8).

The passage calls the Son, "God." Jesus is God.

Why did Jesus have to be both man and God?

"For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

Since sin came between us and God, we needed a mediator. Jesus is the perfect mediator because he is God. He can represent God to us in his mediation. He is also man, so he can represent man to God in his mediation. Since he never sinned (Heb 4:15), he is the one human being that could approach God on our behalf.

Since God is just, he could just arbitrate on our behalf without satisfying God's justice. A mediator, he needed to find a way to satisfy both God's justice and his mercy. This he did through the Gospel. Notice.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

The power of salvation is in the Gospel. What is the Gospel? Look at how scripture describes the Gospel

"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:1-4).

It says we are saved by the Gospel, then describes specifically what the Gospel is. The Gospel is Christ's death for our sins, his burial, and his resurrection from the dead. Remember that sin is what separated us from God and twisted our heart and mind.

Our mediator, Jesus Christ, needed to offer up the penalty for our sins, which was his own life on the cross. He paved a way for us to be able to be reconciled to God. This is how he became our mediator.

The gift is not forced on anyone. God never forces it on anyone. It has to be accepted through faith. The passage above in Romans 1:16 clearly says that the Gospel is the power of salvation *to everyone who believes*.

How we Receive Redemption and Salvation

One of the most well known verses in the Bible is John 3:16 which says, ""For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Bottom line, we must believe. Many misunderstand what this faith, or believe entails. Many will say, "Yes, I believe in God." Is that the belief we are talking about here? The Bible calls this kind of faith, "useless."

"But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:18-20).

The demons believe too! They probably believe more strongly than many humans who never give God a second thought. However, it is useless faith because it is not demonstrated by actions. One who believes in God and is disobedient has a useless faith.

So how do we know we believe? Do we just say it? Is there some demonstration of faith that needs to take place? Fortunately, God has been specific about how we are to demonstrate our faith in the Gospel. When we hear the Gospel and accept it.

1) Belief and Confession

"...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom 10:9-10).

Our belief should lead naturally to confess Jesus as Lord. This means we have accepted him not just as our savior, but also as our Lord who rules our life.

2) Repentance

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Belief should lead us not only to confess, but also to repent. Repent means to change. Faith is not a matter of affirming something exists, but of submission and obedience.

3) Obedience to the Gospel

"...dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess 1:8-9).

This is a sobering passage. Eternal destruction away from the presence of God is for those who do not obey the Gospel. What does it mean to obey the Gospel? The Gospel is the death of Christ for our sins, his burial, and his resurrection. Obviously, the Gospel has a call for us, something we need to do in order to respond. There needs to be an obedient demonstration of faith in the Gospel. What demonstration is this to be? How do we obey the death, burial and resurrection?

Many would at this point teach that one must say the "sinner's prayer." The problem is that nowhere in scripture will you find a "sinner's prayer."

Nowhere does the Bible teach that one must say a sinner's prayer as the response God desires to the Gospel.

Take a look at this passage.

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be {in the likeness} of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin" (Rom 6:3-7).

When we are baptized, it is not just a getting wet. We are baptized into death, buried with Christ, and raised to walk in newness of his life. When this happens, the old self is crucified with him and that body of sin is done away with. This makes Christian baptism a watershed moment in a person's life. Upon your demonstration of faith through repentance, confession, and baptism, the Lord washes away all of your sins. God offers it to you as a gift based on the faith you demonstrate. In other words, it is not something that you "earn." The only one that has "earned" salvation for you is Jesus when he died on the cross. This is why the passage we just read also goes on to say this:

"But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Rom 6:17-18).

Notice, it is when we are obedient "from the heart" that he sets us free from sin. Obedience and faith go together. Even the demons believe and shudder because they have not obeyed.

After one obeys the Gospel, God starts a process of renewal and transformation in your life. The sin that separated us from God and twisted us from the inside out has been washed away. That is what the scripture says the old person has died and we have been raised up a new person in Christ.

After faithful obedience to the Gospel, we look forward to our own resurrection.

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor 15:20-24).

Notice, this passage says that Christ rose from the dead, therefore he is the first fruits of those of us who die in him. There will be more to follow. In other words, he is not the only one that will be raised from the dead. The passage says that when he returns, those that belong to him will also raise from the dead. Christians look forward to eternal life with God, the Father.

Your Life Now

After one obeys the Gospel, life is not about merely waiting for the end to come. Even though the ultimate Christian hope is in the future, Jesus did not call us to be disconnected from the present.

Being raised up with Christ as a new person means a new way of living life. His death, burial, and resurrection, and our own death, burial, and resurrection through faithful obedience to the Gospel determines our pattern of life. Here is a passage that expresses this.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal 2:20).

So, we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ. We have been buried with him in baptism and our old self has died and we have become a new person. We put aside wrath, malice, greed, devil desire, and abusive speech, which are things that were part of the old person. Now, Christ rules our life.

"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1-3).

Since we have been raised up with Christ to walk in newness of life, we are a new person in every way. This means we are to put on "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one

another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Col 3:12-14).

We have been "bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:20), which means we now belong to Christ and serve his purpose, a purpose which is higher than our own.

Eventually, Christ will return, abolish all rule, power, and authority, and establish his heavenly kingdom. The Bible says,

" . . . and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

At that time, there will be a restoration, reminiscent of the creation at the very beginning.

"Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever" (Rev 22:1-5).

The curse that came as a result of sin in Genesis 3 will be done away with. Redeemed humankind will be able to see his face, something only Adam and Eve could do before they sinned. Finally, it says humans will "reign forever and ever." This reminds us of our purpose from the beginning. God told humans to have dominion over the earth. They were to oversee it as God's caretakers. With sin dealt with, man can take his place as the suitable overseers of God's creation, serving his purposes perfectly without being afflicted by sin or death.

Where are you at right now?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he died on the cross for your sins and rose from the grave? This belief, or faith, is no faith at all unless it is demonstrated by faithful obedience (James 2:14-17). Even the

demons believe and shudder (James 2:19). Their so-called belief is dead and empty because it is not demonstrated through obedience. God desires that you repent, which means to change your life (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Pet 3:9). This is your decision of faith. God desires that you confess the Lord Jesus (Rom 10:9; Mt 10:32-33; 1 Jn 2:23). This is the profession of your faith. God desires that you be immersed into Christ (Rom 6:3-7; 1 Pet 3:21; Mk 16:16). This is your demonstration of faith. After you have demonstrated your faith in the crucified and risen Lord, God frees you from sin through the blood of Christ (Rom 6:6).

At this point you are raised up with Christ, and as Colossians 3 says, you seek the things above as a new person.

Where are you at on this timeline? What do you still lack? If you are lacking, then don't wait to take the next step. Contact us if you need assistance, advice, or help.

TIMELINE

Unbelief --- Belief --- Repentance --- Confession --- Baptism/Rebirth --- Discipleship