

Living Successfully In Christ

FINDING GOD'S PLANS FOR OUR LIVES

We shall base this study upon the question asked by Saul of Tarsus at the very moment of his new birth: "What shall I do, Lord?" Did Saul's conversion just "happen"?; was it by "chance" that he was suddenly converted on the Damascus road, or was it according to a divine plan and purpose?

Acts 9:15 tells us that it certainly was "according to plan" – God's plan. "But the

Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." But has God a plan for my life? If so, how may I know it and what is involved in finding it? These and many other questions demand an answer.

1. THE LORD HAS A DEFINITE PLAN AND PURPOSE FOR THE LIFE OF EVERY ONE OF HIS CHILDREN

There are three strong reasons for believing this:

1. It is reasonable to expect it. God is a God of order and method. If we are building a house or designing a dress, we work according to a plan, a pattern. God does the same.

2. It is according to experience. Think of Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-10) "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God";

Moses (Hebrews 11:24-27) " By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. 27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible"

David (1 Chronicles 17:7) "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel'"

3. God's Word teaches it. Look up Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." and compare Psalm 27:11 "Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors."; Proverbs 3:6 "in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.";

James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

Notice the following three characteristics of God’s plan for our lives:

1. It is a personal plan. Notice the personal pronouns – “you” and “me” in Acts 9:4 “He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

There is no one else in the world like you, and therefore God’s plan for you is unique and personal – just for you! He has a purpose to fulfill in and with your life which cannot be fulfilled in and with the life of any other person.

2. It is a perfect plan. In Romans 12:2 (which should only be read in conjunction with Romans 12:1), we are told that the will of God, or God’s plan and purpose in the lives of His children, is “his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

3. It is a practical plan. It is workable and it is thoroughly related to everyday living and service. It is not a plan which only sounds “good, pleasing and perfect” in a theoretical sense, but it proves to be so in experience!

2. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN LIFE, THEREFORE, IS TO DISCOVER GOD’S PLAN AND PURPOSE FOR OUR LIFE

This is obvious, but it is sadly true that some Christians fail to discover God’s plan and purpose for their life, and in consequence their whole life is filled with disappointment and defeat, frustration and failure. How wonderful to feel that we are achieving something really worthwhile and to know that we are doing it, not for ourselves, but in accordance with the will of our loving heavenly Father! Every unconverted person is living a self-planned life, as Saul was up until the time of his conversion – see Acts 9:5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.” but it is also sadly true that many Christians plan their own lives. We make decisions and choices which afterwards prove to be so wrong – compare John 21:3 “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.” There is nothing greater or more comforting than to know we are in the centre of God’s will, and every one of us can know just that.

3. WE ENTER GOD’S PLAN WHEN WE ACCEPT AND ACKNOWLEDGE JESUS CHRIST AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR

Saul entered the plan of God when he submitted to what the Lord told him to do – Acts 9:6 “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”, and compare with verse 8 “Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.” The Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Saul, saying, “I am Jesus...” – that is, “Saviour”.

This is not to say that God was not interested in Saul and watching over him prior to his conversion, but it is true to say that Saul only really entered into the plan of God when he bowed at the feet of Jesus Christ and accepted Him as his Saviour and Lord.

4. WE GO ON TO DISCOVER, AND WE CONTINUE IN GOD'S PLAN, BY A DAILY SUBMISSION TO HIM AND TO HIS REVEALED WILL

He has the whole plan of our life in front of Him, but He only reveals it a bit at a time – look up Psalm 37:23 “The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him”; . He knows the end from the beginning. But the human condition which has to be met, if we are to know and to do God's will, is complete submission to Him and a strong desire to obey Him – see Acts 22:10 “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. ‘Get up,’ the Lord said ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’

This enquiry as to what God's will is involves four things:

1. Communion with Him in prayer. A suitable prayer is recorded in Psalm 27:11 “Teach me your way, Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.” and it is when we know what it is to go regularly into the secret place that the Lord graciously reveals His plan to us step by step.

2. Studying and searching His Word. How wonderfully all the saints of God have been led as they have read and submitted their lives to the commands and guidance of the Word of God! – look up Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

3. Prompt and unquestioning obedience. God reveals His will as we obey Him – look up 1 Samuel 15:22 “ But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. He only does it a step at a time; Saul had to go into the city before the Lord told him the next step He wanted him to take.

4. Complete and implicit trust. We can rarely trace God's working in our lives, for we are living by faith and not by sight. This means that we have to trust Him. The Lord chose Saul to be “a chosen instrument”, and Saul had to trust Him in all that He permitted in his life – sufferings, privations, stonings, imprisonments...We must remember that God's plan includes His permission of life's testing's – look up 1 Peter 4:12-13 “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

5. GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE IS AN ETERNAL ONE

Perhaps, as you have reached this last point in our study, you are saying, “What a thrilling theme for young people who have the whole of life before them!” But it is an

equally thrilling theme for the most aged Christian, for all of us who belong to the Lord have a glorious eternity before us, and God's plan has an earthly and a heavenly part. The earthly part is like the foundation of the building; the heavenly part can be likened to the structure of the building. We are apt to have a very limited conception of God's plan. When a Christian dies at the age of 30 or 40, we say, "What a tragedy!" – which it is from earth's limited viewpoint; but God's loving plan for His children is an eternal plan – look up Ephesians 2:10 " For we are God's

handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."