

Does God have a plan for my life? (2)

Last time we started looking at the type of plan that God might have for our lives. We saw that

(Write headings on board – keep drawing from last time, we need it later)

- **An all encompassing** plan must include everything I do, or have done to me, and the terrible things some people suffer. It also raises the question of how could God plan the sins I commit and the times when I disobey his plan? He must also plan when I become a Christian. For many more people he would have had to plan that they never do become Christians.
- **A Flexible Plan** has millions of permutations covering every possible decision I could possibly make in my life – and actually is no plan at all. It simply says that whatever I do, God must have planned it that way. I don't find that very satisfactory.
- **A very general, high-level plan** is actually not a plan – it's a purpose.

A plan is rigid and has to be followed in order for it to succeed. A purpose is much more flexible and allows for many different routes which will all bring success.

Suppose we decided to have a day out next Saturday. Our plan might be to catch the 09.33 train. Or we could drive there, or go by bus. We could even go there on Friday and stay at a B&B. All of these would achieve our purpose. And our purpose would not even be upset if the trains were delayed, or there was an accident on the main road and we had to take a diversion. What would have upset our purpose would have been if one of us had said 'No, I'm not going to go'.

We sometimes feel – if only God would reveal what his plan is for my life it would make it so much easier. I've told him that I've given my life to him to do what he wants with me, couldn't he just show me what he wants me to do and I'd be happy.

God doesn't want us to be robots. But neither does he want us to simply live like other human animals with no regard to God's purposes. He wants us to use the abilities he has given us to work out his purpose in the best way that we are able. Of course he will help us, and he will often give us guidance when we are faced with difficult decisions.

Philippians 2:12-13

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Then what is God's purpose for my life? *Ephesians 1:11-12*

*11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, **might be for the praise of his glory.***

Let's look at Paul. God's purpose for Paul was that he would be Glorified through him. The way Paul was living was actually having the reverse effect. Yet Paul himself also wanted God to have the glory – he believed that Christians were a dangerous sect, drawing people away from God's truth.

The first thing we have to learn is that we can never say 'God can't'. God is God and can do all things, whether we think he can or not.

So God breaks into Paul's world and stops him in his tracks

Acts 9:1-22

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.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.⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.²¹ All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who caused havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"²² Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Having said in a loose general way that God has purposes for us, now we see just how specific he can be if necessary. Paul is stopped in his tracks, and Ananias is spoken to in a dream.

Has God interfered with Paul's free will? Yes – though when Paul had become a Christian he was more thrilled than anyone that God had stepped into his life.

How about Ananias? He was a Christian and like all other Christians, he had probably said to Jesus 'take my life – not my will but yours be done' As Christians we have surrendered our will. Not so that we no longer have any control over our life – that remains – but rather we expect God to have first say in all that we do.

So even though Ananias was uncomfortable about it, he went.
Now lets continue from Acts 9:23-31

23 After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,²⁴ but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.²⁵ But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.²⁸ So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.³⁰ When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Look at v24 and v26. People trying to kill Paul, and disciples scared of him.

Now look at 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have

been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.²⁷ I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

I don't believe God planned all the things that happened to Paul. God had a purpose for him which Paul was determined to carry out even though it might cost him his life. God would save him from many of the situations he got into, but he also allowed him to suffer in others. But all the time God received the glory that Paul was desperate to give him. And many were saved by his life.

We need to remember that we all live in a fallen world. Not the world that God originally created, but a world where sin has entered and brought with it corruption.

We are not immune from the problems and dangers that everyone has to face. Christians have accidents, Christians have illnesses, Christians suffer from natural disasters, Christians are attacked by other humans.

Now God doesn't plan these things, but that doesn't mean that he is impotent to do anything about it. Many times he intervenes: often without our knowledge, but sometimes we do see miracles happen.

Let's recap. Man has chosen to live apart from God and as a human animal can do that – if that's all he wants. Like all other animals he must suffer whatever now happens in this fallen world. He has as much free will as any other wild animal. But man still has a latent spirituality which is seeking expression.

When we accept Christ as our Saviour and Lord we are changed:

Ephesians 1:7

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

We become children of God:

John 1:11-13

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

More than that, Ephesians 1:4 tells us we are holy and blameless in his sight. And we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, marking us out (Eph 1v13) not only to God, but to others too.

[Add yellow and say 'The holy spirit is in us and the righteousness of Christ clothes us.](#)

Something else – when we gave our life to Christ, and became part of his family, he didn't take away from us the duty we all have of finding work,

providing our food to eat, somewhere to live etc. – it's still our responsibility to live like a human.

We still have our own free will, but the difference is that as we've given our lives back to God, he is now at liberty to influence our wills – our thoughts, our desires, our attitudes etc.

Why doesn't he just tell me what to do? He has, our Christian life came with an instruction manual. Let me read a few easy instructions:

Matthew 22:37

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

Matthew 22: 39

'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

Mark 16:15

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Acts 1:8

be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

So why hasn't he sent me to the ends of the Earth? How do I know if I'm in the right place?

If God wants us somewhere else he will make it unmistakable to us. Until then simply being a Christian where we are is a witness to others around us. If **we** choose to move, that is not a problem to God, we can't go anywhere where we will not be surrounded by people to witness to. Simply being a Christian is often all that is wanted of us, and sometimes that is the most effective witness.

Look at our picture again. Are there any unbelievers near me that I could witness to? **Would I be any more effective if God moved me somewhere else?**

Look at some of the things which I consider important: **(Write on board)**

- Where I Live
- What I do for a living
- What church I attend
- What my role is in that Church
- How well I maintain my spiritual connection to God
- How my Christian life impacts those around me

On one level, Where we live and what we do for a living; what church we attend and our role we have within that church is of much less importance to God's purposes than how we maintain our spiritual connection with God, and how our Christian life affects other people.

What we do, or where we do it is of less importance than the amount of God's glory we reflect to those around us. But we also have another responsibility, which we can also exercise wherever we are:

1 Peter 2:5

*you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house **to be a holy priesthood**, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Hebrews 10:19 tells us that as priests *we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,*

And also as priests we are expected to bring petitions on behalf of those who don't have this access – another instruction in the manual is:

1 Thessalonians 5v17

Pray continually

God does not normally interfere, or intervene in a world where he has been told he is not welcome.

But if we, as representatives of the people, ask him to, he is prepared to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. (Eph 3v20)

How does he intervene? Often in the same way that he works in us – by changing people's minds. Putting ideas into people's heads. Giving them a strong desire to act in a particular way.

God will actually do anything he needs to to protect his Glory. He will work miracles and overrule people's free will, if we ask him to. I have no idea if God works without being asked, but whenever the hand of God is detected, it seems someone, somewhere, has been praying for just such an outcome. It seems that when God wants something done, he encourages his people to start praying for it!

So we have an important part to play for God in his world even if we feel isolated from the fellowship of other Christians. As our relationship with Jesus grows, we can confidently live in the knowledge that he has a purpose for our lives, as he lives in us we are witnesses to those around us. And as we are inspired to pray, we become an active part in God's work in the world.

Of course, if we are living close to the Lord we may be asked to leave our nets and follow him. For Philip the initial instructions were very specific:

Acts 8:26-39

"Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

and having done that: *"Go to that chariot and stay near it."*

But the rest was up to Philip.