

### *God's Will for Your Life*

**Micah 6:7-8** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Eph. 2:8-10** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

**Luke 19:12-13** So he said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds, and said to them, 'Do business with these until I come back.'

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The email was one of those beautiful photo essays with pretty pictures, pretty music, and pretty sentiments. In one of the final frames, the message read, "May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be." That thought stopped me cold. If I had been in a bit more of a hurry, I probably wouldn't have given it any thought. At the hurried pace of our lives, there's probably a lot that passes by us without our giving it much notice. That may even be the way we want things to be, because it's often easier to be busy than it is to be thoughtful. In fact, when we don't want to have to think about something, we often consciously choose to be busy with something in order to be distracted.

But this statement, "May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be," caught my attention and I couldn't seem to set it aside. I'm very certain that at some moments, I have been in a place where God **did not** want me to be. If you search back through your memories, I'll bet that you, too, will recall places, physical places and emotional places where you **know God did not want you to be**.

Then, at a committee meeting one day, a new member of the committee, who I didn't know, said something to the effect that God has a plan for our life for each one of us. Let's take a look at this concept for a few minutes. Does God have a specific, detailed, individual plan for each one of us? Has God placed us exactly where we are meant to be? How detailed might the plan be? Does God have a plan for who we should marry, where we should work, how many children we are to have and of which gender, and where we should live? Again, how detailed is this plan? Does God have a plan for where you will eat lunch? If you choke on your food, is that because you ignored God's plan for what you should eat – or is choking part of the plan for your life? At some time or another, we all wrestle with these sorts of questions. We ask ourselves, how will I know who is the right person for me to marry? How will I know which job to take? How much control do I have over my life? And when it seems like I don't have much control over my life, is it because God is putting me where I belong – or because Satan has overwhelmed me with temptation? Am I some sort of puppet with God and Satan fighting over who will pull the strings?

As I have pondered these questions over the years, I've gradually come to a few conclusions. The more individual and the more detailed we understand God's plan to be, the more difficult it is to discern. More and more, we will ask ourselves, "How do I know where to look and how will I know when I find it?" God's will becomes something hidden, something to search for. You hear people say things like, "I was just sure that it was God's will for me to marry so-and-so, but now I realize I was wrong in thinking that." In fact, in this particular aspect of life, it's important to know that the divorce rate is just as high among Christians who have a strong belief that God has a plan for them personally - as it is among Christians who don't believe in such a personal plan for their lives. This would lead one to think perhaps that trying to figure out God's plan for your individual life is difficult and people often don't figure it out. And does it fit with everything else we know about God, for God to make it really difficult for those who seek God's will to find it?

A second conclusion is that the more detailed we understand God's plan to be, the less free choice we have and the less initiative we can express. If it is God's will for you to live in Thomasville, then living

somewhere else, even though it might be closer to family or where there are better employment opportunities, isn't really an option because it would be going against God's will. In the process, we take less and less responsibility for our own actions. We reason that, "If I had moved to Thomasville (or New York City), I could have done such and such, but I had to trust that God had put me where I needed to be."

Another conclusion is that God has a grand plan, providence, we call it. It's a plan that we cannot cause to fail. Often it's a plan that is over such a long period of time that it isn't obvious to us. When the Jews were in Babylonian captivity, when they were occupied by the Greeks and their culture was corrupted by Greek culture, and when they were ruled by Roman puppet rulers, it was hardly obvious that the providence of God would provide a Messiah in the midst of such suffering and turmoil. God's providence may not be clear this month, this year, or in this lifetime, but history does assure us that "God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year. Nearer and nearer draws the time, the time that shall surely be, when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea."<sup>i</sup>

But what about our daily lives? We can become anxious and fret over all kinds of decisions as we try to figure out God's plan for the details of our life. We read about Moses learning God's plan at the burning bush. We read about Isaiah's vision of God in the temple with the seraphim swirling around and God's commission to Isaiah to go prophesy. We read about Peter's vision on the rooftop and Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, and we ask, when will God give me clear instructions for my life? Those stories in scripture are there, not because they are typical of how all of us interact with God, but because they are extraordinary. They are unique.

If we each had an individual plan that God had written out for our lives, we would have no need of Scripture. Instead, we'd each seek out our own private revelation and go down our individual path, much like the investors who walk on the green ribbon that Fidelity Investments lays out for each person in the TV ads. God doesn't expect all Christians to find extraordinary, spectacular, specific things to do. Rather God expects us to do ordinary things with compassion and love. Let's face it. Marriage is rather commonplace. In some places you select your mate. In other places and times, your mate is selected for you by parents. In either case, what marriage becomes depends a great deal on how the two people treat each other. God is more concerned with how you treat each other than on whether you chose one specific person. God cares far less about whether you chose to be a carpenter or a plumber than about how you treat customers and employers. God doesn't care so much about where you live as about how you treat your neighbor. It matters less whether you have one child or several than it does how you raise them.

When we spend our energy trying to figure out where God wants us to live, who God wants us to marry, or even what God wants us to do with the day that lies before us, the more we get distracted from what we have been clearly told in scripture. *What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* "What this verse has to teach us takes a lifetime to learn, but it will make a good lifetime, one that honors God."<sup>ii</sup> If we fret over what job God wants us to have, we may have little energy left to contemplate the Ten Commandments and how they can permeate our entire life. As we listen intently to hear God's will for our individual life, we can be so wrapped up in ourselves that we fail to remember to love God with all our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Looking for God's plan for me can blind me to seeing God's plan that I'm to carry out for the sake of my neighbor.

When we search to try to find God's will for our life, we focus our attention on ourselves. But scripture keeps trying to get us to turn our attention outward: to love kindness, seek justice, and walk humbly with God. The Ten Commandments are about our relationship with God and with other people. When Solomon became king, he prayed, not for his own benefit, nor for specific instructions, but that he might have wisdom and be able to discern between good and evil – and for this, God praised him.

When we try to find out what plan God has for our personal life, we are facing in the wrong direction, looking at ourselves. As a servant people, we are called to look, not inward, but outward, seeking wisdom to know how we can best love and serve our God and our neighbor. The writer to the Ephesians said that God created us for good works, and that was planned long ago to be our way of life. Amen.

It isn't so much a matter of where you are to be as it is a matter of being who you are called to be.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NRS** Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

**Leviticus 19:18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

**1 Corinthians 3:7-9** So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

**2 Corinthians 6:1** As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.

**1 Kings 3:7-9** And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

**Heb 5:12-14** For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

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<sup>i</sup> Arthur Campbell Ainger, *God Is Working His Purpose Out*, The Hymnbook, 1955, # 500

<sup>ii</sup> Phillip Cary, *No Secret Plan*, Christian Century, October 5, 2010, p 20-23