



Planning Ahead

Ephesians 1:11-12 NIV

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, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Do You Have a Plan?

One day when I was in elementary school, I had a plan. I was going to skip school. The school had a large playground and behind that was a great big grass field where we used to play football and tag at recess. Beyond the field stuck in a corner on the far end just off the school property was a preschool playground. Kids from our school weren't allowed on it or go that far back on the field. During the morning recess, I wandered down toward the back of the grass field, and then without the yard teachers seeing me, I drifted over into the preschool playground. On the playground were several play structures, one being a giant concrete turtle sitting in a bed of deep sand. As recess was ending, I hid under the turtle in the sand and pondered what my next move would be. I knew I couldn't go home because my mom and sister were there. My friends were all at school. I could wander the streets, but I had no money to buy lunch or even a coke. I had no book to read and no idea where to go that I wouldn't be caught skipping school. My plan was simply to avoid being in class, and I had accomplished that. So, afraid of leaving the safety of the turtle, I lay under it in the sand with nothing to do until lunch recess. When I heard the bell ring and the rest of the kids coming outside, after lying under the turtle for almost two hours bored out of my skull, I crawled out from under the great concrete beast, knocked the sand off my pants and shirt, wandered back to the school playground and returned to class. Not exactly a great plan.

If I were to ask you what your plan is right now, what would it be? Do you have specific action points in place that determine your next steps or are you kind of living randomly without any real direction? The verses we are examining remind us that God formulated a monumental plan that would completely alter the universe and He followed it precisely. Our key verse uses four distinct terms to drive home the point that God has put a plan in place for restarting the universe top to bottom. **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,** (Ephesians 1:11 NIV) The first term, chosen is the translation of a Greek word kaleo. Kaleo means to call, to beckon. In other words, Christ, who is the "in Him" calls us, motions for us to come. This calling is not continual but once in time, a shout out to us that happened in the past. The second term is predestined and is the translation of the Greek word proorizo which means to mark out beforehand or to design in advance. This too is describing something that happened once in history, at some point in the past. Our third term is plan or prothesis which speaks of something decided before, a purpose predetermined. We have one more word to underscore in this verse and that is the verb works which is more literally "working". It is a Greek verb energeo and we get our English term energize from it. Energeo means to put something into operation, to activate. This verb is in the Greek present tense which tells us that working out of everything according to his planning and organizing is happening continually, it is never stopping. God had a plan decided long ago and He is making it come to pass even today.

So what is that plan, what has God decided long ago to do? Pay close attention to these previous verses. **And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.** (Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV) God's plan, His predetermined will is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head...Christ. This is a monumental declaration, a revelation that changes everything in your life. God has decided that Christ alone will run all of heaven and earth, and He is the means by which the complete transformation of the universe will take place. Christ is the plan of God, the predestined, preordained, plan God has to make everything in heaven and earth perfect once more. God does not have a backup strategy if that doesn't work. It will work and it will be accomplished.

One of the greatest of miracles was the virgin birth. It was preordained by God, planned ahead and it was put in place at a particular moment in time. When an angel of the Lord informed Mary that she was going to have a son who would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and not a human being, he told her the sort of Son she would bear. **You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.**" (Luke 1:31-33 NIV) This prophecy was dumfounding of course to Mary and although it may not have alleviated her fears of giving birth to a boy and the potential humiliation that might bring as an unmarried woman in a small village, it certainly had to provide her a sense of the eminence and majesty her son would enjoy. The promise of such a bright and elevated future for the boy she would bear and the honor it would bring her must have been somewhat exhilarating. This son of hers would be king forever over Israel! She was to be that boy's mom!

However, notice the way the Lord prepared Joseph for his fiancé's virgin birth. Joseph, who was betrothed to be married to Mary, was scandalized when he found out that she was pregnant. The fact that she claimed she was still a virgin despite the child in her womb was unreasonable to Joseph, but because he clearly loved Mary, Joseph decided to quietly end the engagement. This was not in God's plan; Joseph was to serve as a father to the Son Jesus, so the Lord sent an angel to Joseph to intervene. What that messenger for God told him was an astounding revelation, bigger even than what was shared with Mary. **"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."** (Mathew 1:20-21 NIV)

Here you have God's preordained and predestined plan. Jesus would save His people from their sins! What was the Lord going to do about a universe ruined by sin and death? He was going to take the Sin out of it through Jesus. That was it, the plan the Father, Son and Holy Spirit developed. Jesus Christ would take out of His people the sin that brought their destruction and give them a new life. By doing so, He could then give the entire universe a fresh start. I just finished reading the spiritual autobiography of the late Nabeel Qureshi entitled Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus. In it he describes the horrific inner turmoil Nabeel experienced when his parents discovered that he had left Islam and become a Christian. He wept uncontrollably as he considered the terrible anguish his mom and dad were going through and how his decision was permanently shattering his family. He shook convulsively as he cried his lament to God. "Why did you not kill me before my parents found out I had been born again? Why didn't you strike me dead, so they never knew?" As the tears rushed down, suddenly the Lord spoke to him as with a megaphone into his brain. "Because this is not about you". Nabeel stopped weeping. The shaking ended. For about ten minutes, the Lord, as he put it, rebooted him. When he arose, Nabeel felt no sorrow, no anguish or self-pity. Nabeel looked around at everything about him, the trees, the sky, even the steps where he was standing, and he saw it all in a new light. He realized the potential of the world rebuilt through Jesus and His salvation.

Looking out the window, he noticed a man he didn't know walking toward the medical school Nabeel attended. A revelation of God came to him. The man had a backstory with personal struggles and broken relationships, a wrecked sense of worth. He had been taught by the world that he was the result of blind evolution, he came about through random chance, with no purpose to life except to dig up whatever pleasures he could yank out of the day. Chasing pleasures just brought him guilt and pain and without God, he had no hope to break the cycle. Did that man know that God had come to rescue him, to give him new life? Did he realize Jesus Christ died to take his sin out of him and make him perfect in every way? Did the stranger have any idea how passionately Jesus loved him and how important he was to God? Nabeel saw the genius of God's plan to bring salvation to the world and the privilege he had to carry that message to the people Christ came to save.

Recently I heard about a Nigerian Christian who was beaten to within an inch of his life for becoming Christian. Left in his home to die, he asked God to forgive the ones who attacked him, not aware that they were in another room listening. That same night, two of the Muslim priests who were involved in the beating had visions. One of them said that Jesus showed him his three most hidden and worst sins. The two priests both repented of their sins the next day and led eighty of their followers to a church to find Christ. We serve a Great God with an amazing plan to set us free from sin and make us perfect forever. Find someone to tell about Jesus and don't give up until you do it. Do you have the courage Jesus had to endure the Cross and die for your salvation? If you have the Holy Spirit living in you, then of course you do.