

God's Plan For Your Life

By Paris Reidhead

God has a plan for every life. God's plan includes you; He has a place for you. That place is the place of blessing for you and through you to others; the place that will bring glory to God as well as joy to your own heart.

However, it is not enough to know that God has a place – and then rest where you are. You must, with all diligence, seek to learn what that place is, how you are to prepare to occupy it, and how you are to serve when in it.

The young man whose father has a "place" for him in his medical practice and at the hospital the family owns, still must go through pre-medical training, medical school, and internship before he is qualified to enter the place that has been his in the purpose and desire of his father the entire time.

The only place where folk would expect to obtain a college degree for simply reading the catalogue of courses is in the church and the things of the Lord. No one would be so ridiculous as to suppose that because he had read the school catalogue that he was entitled to a degree. Just because a person learns that God has a place for him and then learns something of the areas of truth in the broad outline of preparation does not mean that he is able to enter into that work which God has planned for him.

In college, one is not surprised to find that it includes reading the catalogue, orientation in the course, and also detailed study of the items of knowledge and procedure necessary to practice the profession. If it is important to be diligently trained and prepared to practice on our mortal bodies, how much more concerned ought we be to be thoroughly prepared to minister to men's eternal souls.

I The Place of the Teacher –Ephesians 4:11-16

This very important Scripture ought to constitute the basic premise for the ministry of an evangelist, or pastor, or teacher in the present day even as it so apparently did in the day of Paul. Unfortunately, present-day Protestantism is greatly afflicted by the fact that it has carried over one of the basic errors of Romanism into Protestantism; namely, that the "clergy" is to do the work. This was carried to its illogical and ridiculous extreme in the experience of a friend of mine in North Dakota who on the first Sunday of his student pastorate addressed one of the elders of the church with the request, "Brother, will you please lead us in prayer?" The elderly gentleman looked up and said in his broken English, "No, dat's vat we're paying you for." Ridiculous, I say, but, nevertheless, this basic fallacy has been so widely accepted in Protestantism as to make the purpose of God for His church most ineffectual.

In the New Testament plan and pattern, it was obvious that the Lord intended there to be in the church "evangelists, pastors, and teachers"; but it also clearly specified the nature of their task. Some years ago in my own ministry, I reflected the ignorance of the church generally on this portion by an outline which I hastily secured on a Saturday night to present to the people on Sunday morning. The title of the message was "The Nature of the Pastor's Work" and the three points were as follows: (1) For the Perfecting of the Saints; (2) For the Work of the Ministry; (3) For the Building Up of the Body of Christ. There again, the obvious was the inaccurate as well as the incorrect. Imagine my chagrin when I discovered the prepositions so nicely translated by the same English word were not the same in the Greek at all and that the portion ought to be correctly translated:

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teacher; For the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry unto the edifying of the body of Christ:" – Ephesians 4:11,12

This word "perfecting" basically implies a bringing on unto maturity. Primarily, this maturity is to be a maturing in relationship. Certainly the Lord has intended salvation to mean far more than mere security against punishment and escape from Hell. The Scripture seems to bear abundant witness that God's primary purpose in salvation is to save us from sin, to make us like Jesus Christ, and bring us into union and fellowship with Himself. We feel the pressure of this purpose so clearly expressed in our Lord's prayer in John 17 where according to William's translation, the twenty-first verse, we read:

“for them all to be one, just as you, Father, are in union with me and I in union with you, for them to be in union with us, so that the world may be convinced that you have sent me.”

Primarily, therefore, this perfecting is into a relationship with God Himself; and out of this relationship, is to flow the full fruitfulness of ministry through the life of the individual believer. However, the work of the pastor includes not only guiding, conducting, leading the believers into the relationship, but, also, instruction which will enable them to understand the nature of the privileges and responsibilities which grow out of this relationship. Of course, to do this, the pastor and teacher must have both entered into the relationship and have had discernment and insight into the nature of the privileges to which others are to be conducted and guided.

The close reading of this Ephesians passage will make it clear that the body of Christ is to be built up or added to by the work of the saints not the clergy, if I can use this unscriptural term here to express that which is commonly understood by it. There is a place for the ones whom the Lord has given to the church, we have seen, but the sad and tragic fact is that the evangelist, pastor, and teacher fail to understand what they are to do and then have proceeded to try to do for the whole body of saints that which could be accomplished by only them. The customary practice is to encourage the general company of Christians simply to attend the services and try to bring someone to the services with them. Generally, however, inasmuch as they have not been brought into this relationship, it is clear that they do not have sufficient influence with the unsaved to get them to come to their church, especially if the church is one where the pressure of the Word is going to bear upon the unsaved and this news becomes generally known.

How clear the pattern is and how tragic it is that we have failed to follow it! God intended every Christian to be as effectively united to the Head, Christ Jesus, as the members are united to our body; and through the members, the Head would then bring together and assemble that temple which is to be His habitation.

It seems so clear that in the mind of God every Christian is as vital to the purpose of God in Christ as each member of our body would be to our general health and effectiveness. Perhaps the great responsibility lies upon those who taught the pastors and evangelists; but we cannot longer escape our guilt by blaming those who taught us. The Word is before us; and even though we have been improperly and inadequately instructed, we have the Word and are capable of responding to it. We must realize that God's plan is to bring together from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation those who will believe through the ministry “according to the effectual working in the measure of every part”. To summarize the place of the teacher, we would state that it is his responsibility to guide into this vital relationship the individual believers and then to thoroughly instruct them in the use of the privileges and responsibilities that are theirs in Christ.

II The Place of the Tool

Every task has to have its tools. Those of us who have tried to become “Do It Yourself” experts at home realize the difficulty, and often, impossibility, of doing a proper job without adequate tools. God is a wise Administrator; and He does not ask the “evangelist, pastor, and teacher” to perform this vital task without providing with adequate tools.

The primary tool that God employs in the work of “perfecting the saints into the work of the ministry” is His Word. Of this He has stated:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” – II Timothy 3:16,17

With the ultimate purpose of the Word of God being that the man of God may be “perfect”, matured, thoroughly furnished unto every good work. But, as we have suggested earlier, it is absolutely necessary for the teacher to have received discernment and insight into the nature of the task and also to have experienced the reality of the truth if that teacher is going to be successful in bringing the individual believers into a place of effective service for Christ.

However, it is also absolutely necessary that the lackadaisical, indifferent attitude which characterizes many Christians should be exposed for the sin against God that it is. Here again, we may have a malady of deeper roots than we are desirous of

admitting. It does seem from much of what we hear called “Gospel preaching” that the thrust and drive is the pleasure and security of the one who responds to the message and its invitation. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when dealing with sinners, made it absolutely clear that they were enlisting in that which would be a lifetime of obedience to His total Lordship. I do not see anywhere that He has authorized us to change this message; and I think further that we are responsible to tell all who profess the name of Christ what is implied in their profession.

We must remind Christians that they give evidence of their love for Christ by their obedience to Him. He has stated it repeatedly, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” – John 14:15 “He that heareth my words and doeth them, he it is that loveth me.” – It is just as much the commandment of Christ when uttered by Paul as when recorded by one of the Apostles in the Gospels; and when we hear Paul write, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” – II Timothy 2:15, this is a commandment of the Holy Ghost, and as such, a commandment from the throne of the resurrected, glorified Son of God.

We are exalted to give all diligence to the study of the Word, to meditate in it continually, and to obey it wholeheartedly. Therefore, we must impress upon the minds of Christians everywhere that they are responsible before God to give diligent attention and consideration to the Word and to open their hearts to the teaching of the Holy Ghost that He can make it inwardly real to them. I believe in that day when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ we will be judged not only for what we did but also for that which we could have done had we been diligent in our acceptance of the privileges that are ours in Christ and so clearly set forth in the Word.

No child of God dare be left content until he has personally experienced that which the Lord Jesus died to make his and has entered into the privileges and responsibilities which are an outgrowth of this relationship.

We rejoice that in addition to the Word as the source of our instruction as to the relationship and the task, we also can count on the continued ministry of the Holy Ghost to illuminate the mind so as to cause there to be discernment and then to actually make that Word experientially real in the heart and life of the believer. To the individual believer, therefore, we would encouragingly say, “The tools for preparing you for God’s plan for your life are the Word of God illuminated by the Holy Ghost Who will cause this Word to become experientially yours and guide and empower you in the exercise of the ministry which is yours in Christ.

III The Place of Your Service

We must recognize that in the Mid-twentieth century, service has almost come to mean some participation in the organizational activity of the church. Generally, also, it is associated with the building where the church meets and has been erroneously called “the church”. By the same token that we would be somewhat unhappy about this identification of a building with that mysterious and marvelous organism called the church, “the body of Christ”, we do recognize that there are places of responsibility and service in just this very situation. We are not going to suggest for a moment that the choir is less than important and that person who has gift and can use that gift in enabling others to the more effectively worship the Lord in congregational gathering has a ministry.

By the same token, we will readily recognize that there is a tremendous opportunity of service in the Sunday School; and in many instances, the Sunday School can become a most effective evangelistic arm of the church reaching out into homes to bring children who are interested in coming whose parents often would never darken the church door. That teacher who accepts this responsibility from the Lord and faithfully and diligently exercises it can surely consider that such ministry is a service unto the Lord. Again, we will consent that the young people’s hour in the evening is of tremendous importance in training. If it is properly used as a training hour, it can make a tremendous contribution in preparing young people for effective witness and service for Christ in the years to come. The various auxiliary organizations of the men and women all have a place; and we are not going to minimize it. But, when we have said all of this, we then still are brought face to face with the fact that we haven’t begun to touch on Christian service as the Scripture would suggest it to be. Primarily, our Christian service is to be in the ordinary environment. We should recognize that one of the best pulpits from which we can proclaim the grace of God is our home. If every family would realize that they are living where they are not by accident, but by the appointment of God; if

each Christian family could recognize that they are exposed to the scrutiny of the unregenerate continually to so conduct themselves that the lost about them would see the Gospel commended and the grace of God honored, undoubtedly, our impact on the communities would be far greater than it is. If it does, in any instance, come to the place where the Christian home is less than God purposed for it to be, you can be sure that in some measure the total testimony of the church is affected.

Where we work is important. You should see yourself a foreign missionary placed in the office, shop, or school, factory – wherever it may be– by the deliberate design of your wonderful Lord. He put you there that He might use you as a portable antenna of His grace through your life, your personality, the message of His love to be broadcast to those about you. Your testimony ought to be not just in terms of the words that you might speak, which have a theological content, but every word and the tone with which you speak it is part of the total sermon of your life. The cheerfulness with which you do your work, the understanding that you bring to your task, and the willingness to go beyond that which is required to the more effectively serve your employer – all are part of your testimony. Not that one should seek to expose the faults of their fellows who are not so inclined, but there are numerous ways whereby one can make it clear that they are not simply serving for the salary secured, but also for the Savior unto whom and for whom they do all. Undoubtedly, this is an important part of “the testimony” that we are to bring. In your home and its extensions– the place at school, the P.T.A., the cleaner, the grocers, all the many contacts of your life in every organization which may be a part of your activity is to be considered the place of your service. There, too, you are to manifest Christ. There is a sense in which the Lord Jesus desires that we should forever seek to distinguish between the secular and the sacred. He has made this clear by His Word:

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” – Colossians 3:17

We are to realize that the most seemingly mundane and unimportant activity has tremendous consequences. How many times we hear someone say something like this, “I watched the way she worked; I watched him paint his home. I saw him, and I wanted to know his Christ because I knew him.” Would God this could be true of each of the members of the body of Christ! Then you recognize that geographical aspects of your ministry are the least important.

A close and careful consideration of the teaching of the Scripture will reveal to us that in the New Testament it was not primarily the place of assembly for worship, but was to be the scene of evangelistic effort. How sad it is that we have changed the Word of our Wonderful Lord which was, “Go and preach” to a new commandment not given by Him, but by us to sinners, “Come and hear”. If we could just do things the Lord’s way, I am sure we would secure a far greater measure of His blessing than we now enjoy.

We will recognize that there are still many being born of God in the place of church meeting; but a close study of such cases almost invariably reveals that they have been witnessed to elsewhere. All too frequently, those who casually drop in to a Gospel service and then respond to the invitation just as casually drop out a few days later and give no continuing interest. When we do find such notable exceptions as the case of young Charles Haddon Spurgeon who went into a chapel on a snowy night and heard the Gospel of the grace of God, we need but look a little ways to find he had been under Gospel influences preceding that period and there were those diligently praying for him. This seems to be the pattern. Whereas I shall not imply that I am opposed to evangelizing inside the church building, I do want to suggest that there is great difficulty in justifying our present almost exclusive use of such for our evangelistic endeavor.

There are very real reasons why we should be most desirous of finding other sources of evangelistic work. There are so many today who are members of religious groups, some far larger than our Protestant churches, who are prejudiced against evangelical churches and won’t enter. To some, it is a sin which must be confessed, if they should darken a church door. In the light of this, it seems that we must realize that God had real reason for the expressions that He leaves us when He said, “Go.” Go where they are. Go find them. Deal with them where they are. Serving in New York City has made me see the almost impossible task of getting the unsaved into that little bit of concentrated geography that we call the church building. Prejudices of centuries stand in the way and they are there disenfranchised of their nations and their cultures and their own religious systems to which they give such a wretched support; and they are waiting for somebody to come to them, but our customary

thinking is so rigid that the only means we can envision of reaching them is to get them to come into this bit of real estate we call “the church” where there is a certain standard too high for the poor and too low for the rich and only a given company feel at home – where they must accept the social implications of the group to which they are coming as well as the Gospel. All of this seems so foreign to the New Testament.

A careful study of the Word seems to indicate that the New Testament believers went everywhere preaching the Word; and incidentally, the Lord went with them confirming the Word. There are two things which are incumbent upon us. One is to find out the Word God wants us to preach and with which He is willing to identify Himself. Secondly, to find out the place that God wants it preached where He is willing to accompany that proclamation with the seal of His own power and blessing. Interestingly enough, as far as the place of worship is concerned in Acts 5:12-14 we read about that early church and its place of meeting; and the surprising word relative to the reaction of the non-Christians to this group was, “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them”; because great fear was upon them. God was in the midst of His people and they couldn’t happily assemble there.

Isn’t it tragic that we have had to appeal to the carnal interest of the unconverted in order to get them to come inside of our building and in so doing we have deprived the Christians of the strong meat of the Word which they need to become matured and strengthened and established and the place where believers ought to gather where they can meet God and God can meet them and they can be mutually instructed and strengthened now has become the scene of our evangelistic endeavor and so we have in so doing deprived the children of God of any place of being prepared “unto every good work”.

In Acts 1:8, our Lord Jesus Christ made it clear that every believer was to be a witness for Him. Isn’t it interesting that He stated, “... after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”, (and it is so clear that everyone upon the Holy Ghost was to come was included) “...ye shall be witnesses...” Without being an iconoclast, may I suggest that the Word of God makes it clear that witnessing is to be the task of the Spirit-filled believer. Might it be asked, “Where did the emphasis in ‘soul winning’ come from?” There is only one place where it is referred to; and that is the Proverbs 11:30 where a careful reading of the context indicates that it is in more or less of a “Dale Carnegie setting” and should better be translated, “If you want to get along with folks, you have to be wise to do it.” There seems to be little grounds for assuming that this has even the remotest connection of leading people to an experience of regeneration. The unfortunate implication of many of the books on soul winning have been to impress upon the readers that their task is to get people to a decision for Christ. This is the end result; but witnessing is far wider than that. Farming is not only harvesting, it is also ploughing and hauling and rocks and pulling stumps and building fences and sowing, cultivating; and it includes, of course, harvesting. Many a Christian has heard some enthusiastic preacher expatiate on “soul winning” and has gone out to engage in it. To his grief, he has discovered that he doesn’t have the type of personality or approach that the speaker who enforced the matter upon him had and he becomes greatly discouraged because he doesn’t get the response that was suggested that he would get if he diligently applied himself. Why can’t we realize the Lord Jesus wanted every Christian to be a witness and say, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, the appropriate thing in terms of that which God is doing in the life of the individual Christian?

It is clear that our Lord intended us to be witnesses where we are. The geographical aspects were relatively unimportant. We were to be witnesses in Jerusalem. When God changed our geographical course and put us into Samaria, we were to be witnesses for Him there. Let us recognize that God wants each Christian to be where he is exactly what he wants the missionary to do when He sends some to distant difficult lands. This dichotomy of clergy which includes pastors and missionaries, and then the lay people has such crippling effect upon the church of God. It is so unscriptural, so indefensible. Our Lord Jesus said in behalf of each of the believers in His high priestly prayer, “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.” – John 17:18

There are some practical means of service for the Lord which we ought to consider because they include many who would be considering this message. Open-Air evangelism is of ancient and proven blessing and effectiveness. Our Lord Jesus used it. He never hired a hall, even though the Apostle Paul did. The Lord Jesus preached on the curb of the well and in the fields and along the path – wherever He could get a company of people. We should realize that the disciples did this as well in most of

their preaching. In fact, the school of Tyrannus, where Paul gathered a group of believers for regular instruction on a daily basis, they then in turn would go out.

I have been greatly encouraged by the coming to the United States of the Open Air Campaigners of Australia who for the past sixty years have been endeavoring to make the New Testament pattern effective and have developed many sterling policies and splendid techniques of reaching people where they are. Their motto, "You Don't Catch Fish in the Bathtub", ought to work its way into every Christian's heart; and we should realize afresh and anew that we are to go where people are.

Likewise, I am convinced that we have barely touched the important ministry of Home Bible Classes. Every strong evangelical church has many lay people that could have Bible Classes. The whole church ought to give careful consideration to the most successful ministry of the Scofield Memorial Church in Dallas, Texas, where for over twenty-five years, the pastor Dr. Harvey Roper has seen the importance of this ministry and has, at times, had as many as thirty to thirty-five Bible classes conducted by men and women who are members of his church. The women have been meeting in the afternoon with the men having evening classes. What a wonderful testimony it is to the effectiveness of this Biblical approach. Certainly, in almost every city, is a place which can be opened. Where it is not practical for one to invite people to come and hear him teach, he can ask one of the other men of the church to come and then gather in his neighbors.

The conclusion is that God has a plan for each life.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" – Ephesians 2:10

We must be impressed again with the truth that every Christian is a member of the body of Christ; he is related effectively to the Head and under the control of the Head. This means you if you are a child of God. Have you found your place? Are you occupying your place? Are you prepared to fill your place? May God stir your heart with a deep desire to be all that He purposed for you to be. In that day you will be called to give an account of whether or not you have done that which he prepared you to do. May it be that you are not ashamed in that awesome day!