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YOUR PLACE in God's Plan

Previously titled
And the Lord Appointed You

PART OF A BIGGER PLAN

“A young man returned from the war zone feeling unsettled. Disgruntled at home, dissatisfied at work, and discouraged over his inability to ‘find himself,’ his search finally led him to seek the help of a psychiatrist. ‘What you lack,’ said the doctor, ‘is a center around which all the pieces of your life can fit together with meaning.’ This young man’s life was like spokes without a hub, and until a hub could be found it would be impossible for the various spokes to be held in place.

“A friend directed him to a Christian pastor. It took but a short while for the young man to find the solid center around which his life could be built, for in the quiet of that pastor’s office, he was introduced to Christ. For the first time, he saw himself in true perspective. Believing in Christ, he soon saw the loose ends of his life being drawn together around a sure and certain center. The scattered spokes had found their hub, and one by one they fell into place. Merely living from day to day in futility—without a purpose—leaves one feeling empty. We need for Christ to give our life purpose—God’s purpose.

“One day a man stopped at a huge construction project. He asked the first worker what he was doing. ‘I carry bricks,’ was the curt reply. A moment later he put the same question to another laborer. ‘I mix the mortar,’ this man growled. Just then a third man walked up and the man on the street asked, ‘And what are *you* doing?’ With eager expectation, he looked up to the soaring walls of the rising structure and exclaimed, ‘I’m building a cathedral!’

“All three were doing the same thing, or were they? The third man had caught a vision beyond the grasp of the other two. And having caught the vision, he was no longer merely carrying bricks or mixing mortar—he was building a cathedral. He had caught the glimpse of a glorious *purpose*, and everything he did from hour to hour was yet another step toward living out that purpose—God’s purpose, God’s plan” (from *Something to Live For*, adapted from *This Is the Life*, © 1952, 1980 Concordia Publishing House).

Yet throughout history there has been a big difference between what God planned and what God got. God planned a world of peace and harmony; we turned it into a world of war and violence. He planned people who were to love Him and one another; we turned ourselves into people who often ignore Him and hurt one another. The problem isn’t in the plans of the Planner, but in those who would live in His plan.

WHERE ARE YOU IN GOD’S PLAN?

That’s where you and I come in. Your role in God’s plan has two facets: 1) how God can use you as your life pertains to others and 2) how can He use others in ways that pertain to you?

God will not send you an angel with the “Plan of the Day,” giving you the answers to either of these questions. Nor can you open the Bible to a chapter and verse to find what God wants you to do at this very moment or what you might expect from others. Yet God does have a way to let you know what you can do for Him in your day-to-day living: from His Word, the Bible, you can find His plans, His promises and the ways He has worked in the lives of others. You will be able to see how God’s faithfulness and love were often revealed through the words and actions of people. By putting together what you learn about God from His Word and the circumstances in which you are living today, you can begin to get an idea about His plans *for* you and *with* you.

GOD’S PLAN FOR A WORM

Let’s take a look at a small part of a much bigger story to illustrate this point. It can be summed up in just four words: “*God appointed a worm.*” (You can find the account of Jonah’s experience in the biblical book of Jonah and the reference to providing a worm in Jonah 4:7.)

Now, a story about a worm is not meant as a put-down in regards to you, or to worms, for that matter. The worm, in fact, deserves the status of a biblical hero. A long time ago during the life of Jonah, when God made His plan for a day, He needed a task done that could best be carried out by a worm. So God appointed a worm; He actually included a worm in His plans for that day’s events. And from that worm we can learn how God makes plans for us—plans for what we are to do and plans for that which will be done for us.

JONAH AND THE LITTLE WORM

Most people get so wrapped up in the “big fish” part of Jonah’s story they fail to get to the part that includes the worm. But the little worm’s influence on Jonah is just as important as that of the big fish.

God’s plan was for Jonah to go east to a city called Nineveh and to warn the people of their wickedness. But Jonah didn’t like the plan, at least not the way he fit into it. So he made his own plan. He bought a ticket on the next ship headed *west*. Jonah figured that if God insisted on getting a message to Nineveh, He could always choose someone else. Maybe even someone who lived closer—to cut down on travel time. But God liked His choice of Jonah as the one to carry out His plan. So He sent a storm to take Jonah off the westbound ship and into an eastbound fish, which would take him back toward Nineveh.

God was right on track in selecting Jonah for the job. Jonah must have been a great preacher because after the people of Nineveh heard him they repented and turned to God for help. The city that God had threatened to destroy was saved.

But Jonah didn’t like the way God’s plan turned out in the end. He complained because God had not carried out His threat to wipe out Nineveh. He said, “I knew You were a gracious God and merciful. I knew You’d forgive those people. That’s why I didn’t want to come here in the first place.”

Jonah hoped God would change His mind and destroy Nineveh after all. So he sat outside the city wall (a safe place in case Nineveh was hit by fire and brimstone) and pouted. It was hot and dry outside that wall and Jonah was miserable. But God still remembered Jonah in His plans for the day. He caused a fast-growing plant, probably a castor bean, to grow up beside him to provide a shady spot. And Jonah sat in the shade and waited and watched.

Then it happened: God appointed a worm to burrow in the trunk of the plant. The worm’s activities cut off the plant’s moisture supply. Then a wind dried out the leaves and Jonah lost his shady spot. He was angry with God yet again.

“Look, Jonah,” God said. “You didn’t grow that plant; I gave it to you. Now because I took it away, you are angry. Yet you want Me to take My blessing away from all the people of Nineveh. Don’t you think that, in the whole scheme of things, they are more important to Me than that plant was to you?”

The great fish had turned Jonah around and brought him back to what God had planned. But God worked through the worm to turn Jonah’s heart around and to help him understand how God’s mercy and forgiveness are for all people.

And that’s how God used a worm.

THE LITTLE WORM AND US

The lesson of the worm is not that he was some special, heroic insect born at a time and place in history to do something that would change the destiny of Nineveh or Jonah. Rather, the significance of his work was that he did what worms do—he chewed through a plant. The worm was merely looking for a meal; he was not interested in becoming an object lesson for Jonah or for us. He did what worms do—nothing more and nothing less. And because God could count on the worm to do what came naturally, He appointed it to help carry out His plan of the day, outside the city walls of Nineveh.

GOD HAS APPOINTED YOU

Now think about God’s plan for you today. Can God count on you to follow His plan and do what you do best? First, keep in mind that God appointed the worm to do what worms do—not to become or to do something other than what He created. The same is true for you: God made you to be *you* and His plans for you will make the most of the gifts, talents and abilities He entrusted to you.

Remember also that God appointed the worm to do a small part of a much larger task. The plan for the day was not to wipe out all castor bean plants with a whole army of worms making the attack. Nor was the plan to take Jonah’s shade away just so he’d have to sweat it out in the heat. All the smaller details were part of a bigger plan.

The overall plan was to help the people of Nineveh see their wickedness and change their ways—the original command from God to Jonah. God wanted to forgive those people. For them to understand His forgiveness, they had to see why they needed it: enter Jonah. But God also had to help Jonah understand more about God’s forgiveness. Jonah knew that God was gracious and loving; he himself had experienced God’s grace. But Jonah had to learn that he had no right to limit or ration God’s love. He had to learn to follow God’s plan rather than his own. So God used a fish and a worm to teach him.

And so it is with you. You ... and what you can do each day ... are part of a bigger plan.

THE BIGGER PLAN

God the Father’s bigger plan for you is that He appointed you to be His own dear child—that you belong to Him, receive His love, benefit from the blessings He provides, serve Him in love and live with Him now and forever.

Unfortunately, none of us has followed God’s plan in quite the manner He intended. Like Jonah we have made our own plans to go our own way and do our own thing. But just because we have tried to alter God’s plan does not mean He has changed His. He still wants us, in spite of our faults. So God appointed someone who would change our way and bring us back to Him ... He appointed His Son.

Jesus Christ, God's Son, saw His place within this plan and out of love wanted all people to be reunited with the Father. And He was willing to do His part—willing to become a part of the human race as both God and man, to take on the suffering and shame of sin, to rescue us from our own evil and to turn us around from our flight away from God. He took our place in death by His death on the cross. He won victory over death by rising alive from His tomb. His death was our death; His victory our victory! He became the bridge by which God could come to us, and we could return to God.

MORE DETAILS IN THE PLAN

Through Christ, God's bigger plan for your life has been completed. And now you have been reappointed as a child of God. He has called you to be His own; He has signed you up to be on His team. Your appointment to the Kingdom of God puts you on the active-duty roster of available workers to be part of carrying out the day-to-day details of God's plan in the lives of others.

What are some of the details of God's plan? They are spelled out in His Word:

- He wants the Good News of forgiveness and salvation through His Son shared with those who have not yet heard.
- He wants those who know Him to grow in their faith and love for Him. He wants teachers and students of His Word, so His people can be equipped to learn more about His plan and use His help in following the plan.
- He wants families to live together in peace and harmony. For husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters to love one another and to live with the awareness of His presence.
- He wants the hungry fed; those without clothes, clothed; lonely people befriended; the sad comforted; imprisoned people visited; the sick healed.
- He wants us to treat His world with respect and responsibility, to use His plants and animals, water and air, soil and minerals according to His plan, not according to our own.

The list could be longer. But all of the day-to-day details are a part of the Master Plan—He wants you to be with Him. The key is to remember that the “you” does not mean you alone; it means *all* people. Therefore we work in carrying out the details of God's plan with an awareness of using the talents and gifts He has entrusted to us, as part of a larger team.

God looks at what needs to be done and selects the workers. He knows all there is to know about you (see Psalm 139). He knows what will make you comfortable and what will be a stretch—and He supplies the motivation and the strength to serve Him in the manner appointed. He knows you, loves you and forgives you. So, if you feel that you have failed God in the past through word and action, be assured that His love for you is unconditional and that He forgives you for Christ's sake.

Looking at the various tasks listed above, what might He have in mind for you?

IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

The worm was chosen because he was at the right place—outside the Nineveh city limits, he had the ability—sharp teeth or whatever chewing method God has given worms, and he had the desire—after all, worms have a great appetite for the castor bean plant.

Now consider where God has placed you to do His will—your personal life, your family, your place of work or study, your community, your church, your country. Each field of activity in your life is a setting for you to be God’s ambassador. As a person made new by Jesus Christ, you are put into each arena as His representative to do His will.

Consider your resources. How has God empowered you to carry out your unique contribution to His overall plan?

1. You have faith—complete trust that God has redeemed you (made you right with Him) and that from this faith grows your desire to serve Him. In case you are thinking, hey, wait a moment! I’m not sure I have that faith. Please keep reading!
2. You have a mind and senses that let you see, hear and understand the people with whom you live. God appoints you to use these senses. The ability to be aware of others is crucial so that the other resources can be used.
3. You have time—time to live on God’s earth with His people. God appoints you not just to use a percentage of your time in His service, but He appoints you to be His person, to use all of your time in His presence.
4. You have financial resources—money to spend, give, invest, save. Again, not just a percentage for Him and the rest for you; rather, He appoints you to use your resources to share His Word and to care for others.
5. You have special talents—a voice that can sing, witness, or teach; a way to make people smile; an ability to comfort; a willingness to listen; patience; hope—all these are qualities that can be used as resources for helping others.
6. And you have countless other resources: a coffee pot, a postage stamp and envelope, a vote, an extra coat, a spare bedroom, a football, a car, a holiday meal, a book or magazine, a flower. The list could go on—not as an inventory of your personal belongings but the things through which you can express and share compassion and care.

Consider your motivation and use what God has given you to serve Him with a grateful heart and share His love in serving others.

YOUR APPOINTMENT

So far we have focused on two components: one is an overview of what God wants done; the second is what you can do. When you match what God needs done with what you are gifted to do, you find your appointment from God. God’s total plan for today is too much for you (or any one of us) to complete on your own, but when you see yourself as part of a larger plan and willingly do your part, God’s will is done.

For example, faith and love can team up with your coffee pot and kitchen table to meet the need of a woman who is worried about her husband’s health or her son’s marriage. Your car can be matched up with someone’s need to go to the doctor or the grocery store. Your vote as a citizen or stockholder can support someone else’s need, as well as your own.

Don’t forget that you have also been a part of God’s plan in the lives of others. There are many times when you have been His agent for meeting the needs of someone else. While being aware of your many opportunities to be part of God’s plans to benefit others, it is also vital to acknowledge that, at times, you have not followed those plans. Sometimes your actions have hurt rather than helped, but you know that God’s Master Plan includes forgiveness. Watch and listen for the needs of others around you and consider the gifts and resources God has given you to be helpful to others. You never know, new ideas and opportunities might come to mind for ways to serve as part of God’s plan.

THE APPOINTMENT OF OTHERS

Back to the story of Jonah and the worm. We learn something by seeing ourselves as the worm and how God uses us to carry out His plan for others. But we can also learn by seeing ourselves as Jonah and how God uses others to help us. God includes you in His plans not only as a coworker, but also as a beneficiary. If you have special worries and needs, you can be assured that He is appointing others to help.

There are numerous times God has provided for you through others. You may have come to know about Christ's love through parents, a pastor or teacher or a friend. In addition, you have received many of God's blessings through the efforts of others, as they helped you in your education, your occupation or your financial dealings. What reassurance there is to know that God so lovingly weaves the threads of our lives together.

THE LESSON OF THE WORM

God's method of appointing situations in life for us to help others and for others to help us goes far beyond the actions of the worm that had an impact on Jonah's life. The real power of the biblical story lies in the words "God appointed." God still appoints you to carry out His plans. Approaching the everyday tasks of life with the assurance that God is using you to carry out His plans brings an opportunity for God to bless you with great joy in living. And as He appoints others to help you, your perspective becomes even keener as you see God's plan for you being carried out through their efforts.

But there is something else significant about remembering that God appointed a worm. The term "worm" sometimes conjures up a negative image. After all, phrases like "That worm!" or "You worm!" can be used to insult others. But the next time you feel like looking upon someone else as a worm, remember that God appointed a worm and what that worm did was significant.

There's also one more thing to consider: We might even be tempted to look at ourselves as worms in comparison to others. Again, remember that the worm was appointed by God to do what that worm could do better than anything else. Never forget that you are a child of God—loved and redeemed by His very own Son. And He enables you to do what you can do better than anyone else—because you have been created ... and *appointed* by God.

NOTES

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for a variety of ministry resources*

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