

God has a plan for each and every one of our lives, a good, a perfect plan. A plan for my life, a plan for little Lewis' life, a plan for your life.

1. Sometimes this is easy to believe, sometimes life just seems to flow but sometimes it's really hard to believe. I want to talk with you this morning about God's plan for each of our lives, encouraging you to believe that God does have a plan for your life, but also encouraging you that perhaps God's plan for your life might look a little different than what you expect. For God maps out his plan for our lives with different markers than we use. Jeremiah 6.16 invites us **"Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."**

2. There is a story told of a large retail shop that is burgled one night. But the burglars didn't actually take anything. What they do is that they spent the night swapping the price tags on everything in the store so that which is worth a great deal is suddenly labelled as very cheap and what is of very little value is given a high price tag. The next day people come to the shop and for a time are able to buy a diamond ring for a dollar, but a hairbrush is priced at \$1000. Can you imagine the chaos?

I find this a great analogy for the confusion of our culture, things that are of great value are sometimes treated as worthless while we give too much value to other things that are truly trivial. Integrity is sometimes seen as quaint, whereas a great social media presence is over-valued; faithfulness is seen as boring, whereas exploitation is seen as exciting. Sometimes we value the comments of a stranger more than the wisdom of an old friend. I love the analogy and I encourage you to explore it. Jesus made an interesting comment when he was being questioned. **He said Wisdom is proved right by her actions; meaning do the right thing and don't judge that by an opinion poll.**

God has a good plan for your life; but he draws his map in a different way.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." I love this verse about take my yoke, Jesus is saying that Christian discipleship, following him should feel like a good fit. A yoke was a wooden collar that was used to tie an animal to plough or a cart, if it was well designed it would fit the animals snugly and there wouldn't be chaffing or rubbing. Jesus is saying that a Jesus shaped life, should be a good fit for us, not too heavy, not too hard. But a yoke was also always for two animals, what Jesus

is inviting us to do is to walk and work beside him, that's what makes the yoke – makes life bearable and a place of rest for your soul. To walk alongside him – learn from me, walk alongside me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. I want to suggest God's plan for our lives always involves Jesus.

Plan A Does God have a plan for our lives? He knows what is behind us and what is ahead, he knows where good choice could get us and where bad choices would leave us. So I passionately believe that we should involve God in our life planning. Yes, let's pray what school we should send our kids to. Yes, let's pray about what subjects to take. Yes, let's pray about who I'm going to date, and who I should marry? Pray about what boards I'll sit on; what sports teams I'm going to join? God does care about these sort of things, he wants you to live life to the full and he created all the good things – he loves cricket and biology, commerce and rocket science. Sometimes we have too small a view of God, God wants us to enjoin and celebrate life. He doesn't want to micro-manage our lives, but he can guide us. God has a good plan for our lives. And I encourage you to pray for God's guidance in every area of life. In Jeremiah 29.11 **For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. God has plan A**

Plan B But you know that Jeremiah spoke those words to a people going through hard times, and sometimes our life seems to go off the rails and we ask, has God got a plan for our lives really? Is it a good plan? What of God's plan when I don't get the marks I was expecting. Or if my child is not managing at school– that wasn't part of our plan God. Or what if I find depression is consuming me, or schizophrenia, is that part of his plan? What if I'm attracted to the same sex, or I feel transgender, where does that fit? What if I just can't get the job I'm hoping for? What if the board I joined is suddenly confronted with a crisis, it wasn't mean to be the way? What if my partner develops dementia, or my brother Parkinson's? What if I break my neck or get caught?

Life has a lot of events that seem like Plan B. Where is God in that? I want to offer you these two ideas again, perhaps the prices have been changed and the things I thought were important aren't as important as I thought. And what is Jesus offer, none other than to be beside me in life. Maybe having Jesus beside me through this trauma is the most important things. Maybe?

Plan C. The scriptures teach us two things that appear contradictions but perhaps aren't. They teach the sovereignty of God, that God is in control of

the world, that he allows the rulers who are present to be there and that he is in control of our world. That he has predestined our way, **no one knows the Father except the son and those to whom the son chooses to reveal him.** Yet the scriptures also teach that we have individual moral choice and agency, that the decisions that we make matter, that we can choose our way and the most important choice is to follow Jesus and that is our freewill. **Come to me all you who are weary.**

In an individual life that means that God has drawn us to faith in him, but also that God respects our choice to follow him. This is what we are saying in a dedication; we want to start our children in Christian faith, we want to set them up as claimed by Christ; but we also want to respect their agency, that their decision matters. Even if you have been brought up in the church, at some point you need to internalise that faith and own it for yourself. I love it when kids grow up saying I never knew a time when I didn't know God. But God still wants them to choose life with him.

I was talking this week to some friends about how our plans for life are often onto plan D,E,F. God has a plan for my life but!

Plan D. Sometimes we muck it up through our own deliberate and damaging sin. I think when we are looking at our lives and trying to discern God's guidance, we should consider the role of our own sin, sometimes the sins we don't see, and sometimes the sins we try to cover over. When we come to realise that we have sinned then we need to repent of it. To ask God's forgiveness and seek to change. But sometimes those sins change what we can do. I want to suggest one of the most damaging **sins** is hardness of heart, when we allow our heart to harden, it shuts the door on some of the things that God might want to do with us. I remember a pastor friend of mine who had a real difficulty with another pastor in town. What God asked her to do was to contribute financially to the other pastor's ministry. That is a way of softening our heart, as is praying for someone. There are obvious sins, like drunk driving that can leave you losing a job or hurting someone. But I think it's the sins of the heart that we also need to be careful of. – Did God plan for us to fail, I don't think so, did he know we would, yes and he always has a way forward. Polish proverb, no matter how far down the wrong road you are, turn around. **Repent for the kingdom of God is near.**

Plan E. Sometimes someone shafts you, the sin of others, and an opportunity that looked like plan A goes away. People do horrible things, good people get

assaulted, kind people get abused and sometimes the best person gets walked on. What do we do, where do we turn when the plan we believe God has for us is side-swiped? This is where I remember the story of Joseph in Genesis, sold into slavery by his brothers. How awful. He starts to recover and then someone with considerable power over him tries to seduce him and then he is falsely accused of sexual assault, and ends up in the dungeon. But God is with him. And when you are shafted, God is with you. It's like Jesus comes alongside us with his yoke and says, let me walk with you. We have to get it into our head that Jesus is not an optional extra in life, but walking with him is the key to everything in life. For Joseph, God rescues him and in the end he is able to say, **what you intended for evil, God used for good**. Sometimes God can turn even plan E into something better. The problem is that when we are in the pit, it's hard to trust that God can still have a plan for us. But he does.

And here's the hard thing, remember that illustration of the store with the prices changed, God values things differently than we do. He counts our physical strength as far less important than we do, he counts our mental acuity as far less important than the world does. He could care less how many dollars we have, and he values purity by our hearts not what is done to our bodies. You see in his plan God wants to grow our souls, our compassion, our faith and our courage; and sometimes even when we are shafted we grow stronger in love.

Plan F. Sometimes life just doesn't roll like we expect, things don't work out, no one is in the wrong, someone else got the position, someone else got a better mark than me, someone else has a nicer voice than me. Just life, God doesn't promise us a certain type of success in life, he promises to be with us.

John Ortberg wrote a great book a few years ago I loved, called "When the game is over, it all goes back in the box". His analogy is that at the end of a monopoly game all the money and property goes back in the box. And so it is in life, **naked we are born and naked we die**. The things of this world are of little value in the next world, but richness towards God and love for our neighbours, those are things that are of eternal value.

Plan G. Sometimes the unexpected plan of course can go in the other direction. Sometimes we are asked to do things that we don't think we are capable of. We become chairman of the board, or General Manager, Captain of the team, our business takes off, we are asked to sing the lead and of course someone has to be prime minister. There is a sense that ideally we will learn

to hold that as lightly as we hold the down turns, yes we will do our job to the best of our ability, but success is always built on gifts that we were given at our birth, on the platform of the work of others and on coincidences we know are providence at work. **To those whom much is given, much will be expected.**

There too we need to serve and find Jesus beside us as you discover God's lead. In success as much as struggle Joseph had to find God's leading. Remember to value things in the way that God values them.

I believe that God has a plan for each and every one of our lives. A plan for little Lewis, and a plan for you and for me. Seen from our perspective the plan will always appear to have many twists and turns, it may derail a number of times, but he does have a plan; and the most important part of that plan is to grow close to him through it all. The thing that God values most is faith and familiarity with him. God's plan for our lives look a lot more like us sitting together on the porch, looking back at the journey and being together, than about how big or what shape the mountain was.

Life is not about success, it is about relationship, wisdom is proved right by its actions, not by its popularity, purity is how we treat others not how they treat us, and purpose is not about a set of goals, but about a life lived well yoked to Jesus, **for his burden is light and his yoke is easy, and he is gentle and humble of heart.**