



JESUS' PLAN

By Thomas E. Ward, Sr., 2008

“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” (Jeremiah 29:11).

“But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.” (Psalm 33:11).

Introduction: What is God’s plan for your life? As crystal clear as Jesus laid out his plan, if you’re like me, you have stumbled around most of your life trying to discover it. His plan has never been hidden. However, it has often been covered up by the clutter I’ve allowed to dominate my life—even the Christian clutter. Jesus’ plan for me was always right there in front of me, but like trying to see first thing in the morning without my glasses, it was blurred by my own vision. Sadly, our personal vision of life and how it ought to be, even though that vision may be good, gets in the way of Jesus’ plan. God’s plan, purpose, mission, and vision are the same for every Christ follower—love God, love others, and show the world.

Scientists tell us there is one constant in the universe by which all things are measured—the speed of light. Light moves at an incredible 186,000 miles per second and it is absolutely static—its speed never, never, ever changes. God has always had one plan,

one constant plan for your life. He wants you to love him, love others, and show the world in ways that make him known—which will surely change the world.

Your first reaction may be—I already know that. Or it may be—no way! It can't possibly be that simple. I am not saying that it is simple to follow Christ or to live for him, but I am saying that loving God, loving others, and showing the world is precisely Jesus' plan for your life. We may live out Jesus' plan in different ways, in different places, and unlike the speed of light, at different speeds, but God fully intends that we follow his plan.

When I was eighteen years old I devised a plan for my life. I was going to marry Gloria Garwood, who later became my beautiful wife I am very happy to say. My plan included becoming a lawyer and making a ton of money. I remember telling Gloria that after I got my degree from Wayne State University in marketing, I was going to go to law school. I needed to get the degree in marketing so I could make a living and pay for law school. My family had neither old money nor new money. In fact, we had almost no money. I paid twenty-five dollars for my first car if that tells you anything.

I bragged to Gloria that after law school the money would start rolling in, and that I was going to buy her a mansion with big white pillars. And after getting established, I was then going to run for public office and save the world. Instead of all my plans coming to fruition, they were radically changed by none other than God—strange. I think God was trying to tell me that he was in charge. By the way, I was making all those plans while purposely ignoring the plan of the One who created me—don't we all.

To my surprise, not to mention Gloria's complete and utter shock, God called me to full-time ministry at the beginning of my senior year at Wayne State University. Wow! After Gloria suffered a cardiac arrest, we had a long talk—extremely long—about the future. We were both Christ-followers, but this is not what we had planned for our lives—definitely not! Jesus' plan had become a divine interruption—it always is.

When a teacher of the law asked Jesus what was the most important commandment, he said without hesitation, *“The most important one, is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:29-30). Then Jesus added, *“The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these”* (Mark 12:31). In another passage he said that all the law and the prophets hang on these. Every command God ever gave is summed up in these two commandments—love God and love others. Scott McKnight calls this *The Jesus Creed* in his book by the same name and it truly is. Jesus lived it and died with it on his lips.

In addition to this, in the greatest sermon ever delivered, Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14-16). If we love God and others but we never show the world, how will God ever be praised and known? Jesus' plan was clearly designed to impact all of mankind by inserting his light-filled followers into the

culture with hearts overflowing with love for God and others and showing it by their good deeds. The reason God created you was to love him, love others, and as a result, change the world. You are not “The Light,” but you are a reflection of Jesus’ light—the only visible light this world is ever going to see until Jesus returns. Let it shine and you’ll change the world.

Love God

At eighteen years of age I helped my brother-in-law, Bill, build his first new home. We built it from the ground up. I rented a trencher, dug the foundation, and we poured the footings and laid the blocks for the crawl space. Later I helped him rough it in. We put the floor joists in place and nailed the plywood down so we could walk on it and began to build the walls on the first floor. Then we put the second floor in place, nailed down the plywood, and put up the second floor walls. We set the roof trusses on top of that and nailed the plywood down for the roof. Well, you get the idea. Never once during the whole process did Bill ever consult me on the dimensions of the foundation, room sizes, the height of the walls, the thickness of the drywall or even what type of light fixtures to put in. Why not? It wasn’t my house. He designed it and paid for it—it was his creation. And besides that, he was older and wiser than me. God is older and wiser than all of us and he has the right to decide how to design, build, and plan the lives of us all. Though every human being is a uniquely created and none is exactly the same, God’s plan is precisely the same for each of us and it begins with loving God.

I wonder sometimes why I am so hard-headed, although I was told just that quite often as a child. Why is it so difficult to understand that God is our great Designer and it

is always the right of a designer to decide what his plans are for his own creation? The responsibility falls on us to find out what God has planned, to study the plan, and to accept his plan as the very best path for our lives. God's plan for your life begins with his desire for you to love him like he loves you.

In a recent television interview, Billy Graham was asked, "What do you spend your time thinking about now that you have the time to stay home and do just that?" His response was, "I am spending a lot of my time contemplating the Great Commandment. I want to understand what it means to love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength." We were created by God to love him. To love someone you must spend time with them. Loving God means spending time in his presence—listening, adoring, learning, and being wonderfully transformed into his likeness to our very inner-core.

God's immutable plan for us to love him has always been clearly stated. The *Shema*, as it is called in the Old Testament, says this, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates*" (Deuteronomy 6:4-8). God said this commandment is so important that I want you to "impress" it on you kids. In other words, be sure it deeply impacts their lives. Talk about it with them when you're sitting, walking, and even when you're relaxing with them. He said, tie this truth on your hands and your foreheads and

frame it and hang it on your walls—it's job one. Let it take precedence over everything you say and do. Let loving God be your primary reason for living.

Jesus did not invade our tiny little planet to announce this truth for the first time, but to demonstrate what it really means to love God. He came to give us a remarkable living illustration of how to love God by living in his presence. Jesus lived a perfect life, and although we can never live a flawless life like his, if we ever hope to come close to perfection, it begins with loving God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Love Others

Jesus said that the second most important commandment in Scripture is, "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" (Mark 12:31). Jesus was merely pointing out an Old Testament commandment that was familiar to the Jews which says, "*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD*" (Leviticus 19:18). Just to be sure they got it, God repeats it and applies it to the people without a Green Card who live among them, "*The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God*" (Leviticus 19:34). It is clear that loving others is taught cover to cover in Scripture. If we are followers of Christ, we must understand that it is not part of the Great Suggestion, it is a vital part of the Great Commandment—love God, love others.

I believe with all my heart that the main reason God placed you in a family was so that you could learn how to love others. The main reason God placed you in a local church was to teach you how to love others. The main reason God places you in every