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CHAPTER I

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR HIS CHILDREN'S LIVES

The first thing that must take place within the Christian's consciousness in relation to the all-important matter of God's will, is to realize that God has a very definite plan and purpose for every redeemed life. The Christian's life is not like a bit of fuzz from a frozen pussy willow, tossed hither and yon through the atmosphere at the whim of the autumn breeze. There is a course and goal for each believer's life, marked out and set by a tender and wise Hand of a loving, heavenly Father.

Once this vital fact grips the heart and consciousness, the whole matter of living the Christian life takes on new meaning. To many this comes as a climactic and revolutionary experience. When once this great truth becomes a *conviction*, the logical result in the heart of every true child of God will be to *find out* what that will and plan for *his life* is. It is as this precious truth becomes a reality to him, and only as it does, that any Christian will get down to serious business seeking "*that perfect will of God.*" There can be little enthusiasm in one's seeking something one is not sure actually exists. Rest assured, Christian, a divine plan does exist for you—and rest not till you have sought and found that plan for your life.

The fact that God has a definite will and plan for each believer's life is abundantly proved. Nature itself would attest it as well as the Bible. If God has such wondrous plans for His natural creation as is apparent on every hand surely His children, as human beings and the very crown of creation, and as His "new creation" in Christ Jesus, would receive no less consideration. To reorientate yourself in the wonders of God's creation, read such books as "The Secret of the Universe" by Nathan Wood, "God and You" by Arthur I. Brown, and "The Heavens Declare His Glory" by Nettie Sletten; also view if you have the opportunity, the film productions of the Moody Institute of Science, "The God of Creation," "The God of the Atom," "The Voice of the Deep," "Dust or Destiny." (The last named of these is unusually fine.) In this same connection read such Scriptures as Psalm 8, Psalm 19:1-6, Job 38, 39, Isaiah 40:12-15, Isaiah 55:8-10. After acquainting oneself with the glories of the created universe with all its perfect design, plans and intricacies, which the Psalmist referred to as "the work of thy (God's) fingers," what Christian could fail to conclude that the God who has so deliberately made all this also has a holy will and plan for his life?

In the Word of God there is amassed evidence that there is a divine plan for each redeemed life. David prayed, "*Teach me to do thy will for thou art my God,*" Ps. 143:10. Paul exhorted Christians to "*present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*", Rom. 12:1, 2. The same apostle in Eph. 5:17 says, "*Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" In Col. 1:9 he declares, "*We . . . desire that*

ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will." In Colossians 4:12 we read, "That ye may stand perfect and complete in the will of God." Peter says, "For it is better if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing than for evil doing," I Pet. 3:17. Hebrews 10:36: "For ye have need of patience that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (the reward). The saints at Caesarea, concerned over the fact that the Spirit-filled prophet Agabus had predicted suffering and imprisonment for Paul in Jerusalem, finally ceased trying to dissuade Paul from making the journey, saying, "The will of the Lord be done", Acts 21:14. We cannot overlook here the glorious promise in I John 2:17, "And the world passeth away, and the lust (desires) thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

There are also a great many *examples* in the Bible of lives chosen by God for specific tasks—*lives that were lived in the will of God*. In the New Testament we have pre-eminently the example of our own elder Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, the "Son of Man" and "servant of Jehovah." His birth and entire life were exactly according to the definite plan and specific will of God. Back in eternity, as He offered Himself for the great ministry of the Incarnation and Atonement, He said to the Father, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:9). That will embraced His entire earthly sojourn. All through His life He spoke and wrought in accordance with that will; how often the gossellers commented on His words and deeds, "That the Scriptures (where the will of God and the plan of redemption were revealed) might be fulfilled." He Himself repeatedly made such statements as "I came down from heaven not to do mine own (fleshly) will, but the will of Him that

sent me" (John 6:38); "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me" (John 4:34) etc. In the Garden of Gethsemane He sweat blood agonizing in prayer over the ordeal of the cross which loomed up before Him, and cried out, "Not my will but thine be done!" (Luke 22:42).

But lest some fail to apply this example to their own lives, and say, "It was different with Christ—He was the Son of God and of course came into the world in accordance with a divine plan, but with us it may not be the same—we cannot make such a comparison," let us draw several examples from men of like passions as we are. Another great New Testament example of a life patterned after the divine will is that of the Apostle Paul. From the very moment he met His Saviour and was marvelously converted, the cry of his soul was, "*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*" (Acts 9:6). At the same time, over in the city of Damascus the Lord was dealing with the disciple, Ananias, who was to be the *human instrument* in this case through whom the divine will would be revealed to Saul of Tarsus. When Ananias objected, fearing Saul as the chiefest persecutor of the Church, God said, "*Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before Gentiles (heathen), and kings, and the children of Israel . . . I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake*", (Acts 9:15, 16). Here, at the time of this man's spiritual birth, the whole panorama of his future life is laid out in view. And his succeeding life was lived after the pattern thus laid out: he did bear the name of Christ to the Gentiles, becoming the first great Apostle to the Gentile world; he testified also before "kings," Agrippa, Felix, Festus, Sergius

Paulus, several other rulers, and at last even before the Emperor Caesar himself; he presented Christ to the people of Israel throughout the entire world where they dwelt. And he certainly suffered "great things for Christ's name's sake" as the account of his life in Scripture reveals—all according to the will and plan of God. It is interesting to note how his ministry to the heathen world began. The story is recorded in Acts, chapter 13. We read there, in verses 2 and 3, "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.* And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Thus was inaugurated a great life and work according to the will of God.

In the Old Testament one sees these demonstrative lives by the score. There is the patriarch Abraham, called to be the father of the chosen nation. Then consider Joseph's unusual career, noting the words he spoke to his brethren after the many eventful years of separation, "Ye thought evil against me: but *God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*" (Gen. 50:20). Consider his whole life in the light of this revealing statement, and apply the principle to your own life. Moses stands out in bold relief as a man for whose life God had a great plan and purpose—also his successor, Joshua. Then contemplate the life of David, of Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, John the Baptist—time fails us to refer to them all.

Even outside of the Sacred Record one can point to multitudes of demonstrations of this same thing. Consider Luther, Wesley, Carey, Livingstone, Taylor, Moffat, Paton, Judson. Read the biographies of these and other

servants of the Lord for clearer evidence of the point in question.

Now, if God has demonstrated in such numbers of cases that He had a specific will for individual saints' lives, why should you doubt that He has just as definite a will and plan for you? *God has a will for every Christian's life*, as definite for one as for the other, and not only for the select few who are called to devote their lives and time to "full-time service." The fact is that all Christians have a "full-time service" to render to the Lord, i.e. their whole lives are to be in submission to His will from the moment of conversion to the hour of death.

Dr. William W. Orr, in his booklet on the will of God has said, "Don't think that God's plan includes only ministers, Christian leaders, missionaries, Sunday school teachers, and lay *workers*. Rather, God invites every Christian from the least to the greatest to be a co-partner with Him in the accomplishment of this great task (Matt. 28: 18-20). God wants your help. You may have thought God worked only through specially called people. The truth is that God calls everyone. The Great Commission is to all Christians. You're a missionary the moment you become a Christian.

"Do not misunderstand me, however; I am not implying that every Christian ought to seek to be a minister, foreign missionary, or actively engaged in some full-time Christian service. It is not safe for you to be in China if God wants you to serve Him in America. Nor is it right for you to endeavor to be a preacher if God wants you to be a Christian businessman. God must have His representatives as workers in all walks of life. And every Christian is needed whether he be a storekeeper, a

student, a housewife, or a street sweeper. Do not be misled into a false differentiation by dividing those who are in full-time Christian service and those who are in full-time secular service. All are important, and God uses everyone. God calls a Christian doctor or a Christian school teacher just as definitely as He calls an evangelist."

Can you think of a father who has no will or plan for the life of his son? Can you imagine a mother who has no clear will or definite ambition for her daughter? Can you imagine a man who has no special desire or pattern in the one he chooses to be his wife? Can you conceive of a king or ruler who has no will or desire or law to govern the conduct of his people? A captain who has no plan for his soldiery? An employer who has no plan or pattern to guide the labor of his workers? A shepherd who has no object in view for his sheep? A vine that has no positive purpose in its branches? If so, then you may also think that God does not have a plan for your life, for every one of these symbols is used in the Bible to represent the relation the Christian bears to His Lord.

Know, therefore, Christian, that God has a will and plan for your life.

CHAPTER II

IT IS POSSIBLE TO MISS GOD'S WILL AND PLAN

When I was a student in Christian training, one of my teachers startled our ears one morning in class by saying, "I have lived most of my life on God's second best." Following that remark, instead of devoting the class period to the lesson for the day, he felt prompted by the Spirit to tell us his story. God had manifestly called him to be a missionary in his younger years. He turned aside from this course, through marriage. He had in fact practically given up Christian work and begun a selfish business life as cashier in a bank, with the primary purpose of setting up a nice home and making money. The Spirit of God kept dealing with him, but there was no yielding. A number of years passed. Then one day there was a telephone call to the bank. Their small child had toppled over in her high chair and was dead. It took that bitter experience to bring this Christian to the place of surrender. After he spent a night alone with God on his knees, in tears and agony, the surrender came. But it was too late now to go to Africa; his disobedience of earlier years had closed that door forever, though he knew God *had once called him*.

What was to be done in a case like that? Surrendering himself then and there utterly to God, with a broken and contrite heart, this man pleaded with the Lord to

take up the tangled threads of his disobedient life and make of the wreckage whatever He could. God heard that prayer, and gave him a useful and quite fruitful ministry the rest of his days. He was the means eventually of training and helping to send out other missionaries. But, as he testified with tears to us young men that morning, he had missed God's first and highest choice for his life and had been living on His second best.

I have since met numerous people who have borne similar testimony. Usually these testimonies have been bathed, or at least marked, with bitter tears. For, while, thank God, He has ways of using even those who have sinned and have gone past that single entrance into the channel of His perfect will, life can never be the way He originally intended it. It is a tragedy to miss the perfect will of God for one's life. Christian, mark well these words and this testimony, lest you too miss His first choice. God doubtless will use any life that is submitted to His hands, anywhere along life's pathway, but let us be among those who have sought and surrendered to His will at the outset of life's journey, and thus avoid those painful and shameful detours of the way.

There are some sad cases in the Bible, too, of men who by-passed God's will. Saul, first king of the Hebrews, is an outstanding and sorrowful example. He was God's choice for the throne of Israel, and also the choice of the people (I Sam. 9:15-20; 10:1, 6; 10:17-24). Everything was in his favor. He was divinely called, anointed and publicly coronated to fill the role of leader, captain, and king of Israel. The Spirit of God came upon him for his task. But through selfish pride and insane jealousy Saul turned aside from the divine path of blessing (I Sam. 13:9-14; 15:13-26, 35; 28:7-9; 31:3-5).

The Spirit of God departed from him, and he was rejected by God and another was chosen to carry out his task. His life ended in failure, disgrace, defeat, and finally, suicide.

Solomon too is a sobering example of the same tragic thing. Though he served long as a wise ruler in Israel in the pure will of God, he allowed the love of women and the lust of his flesh to lead him astray. Because of his disobedience and failure he was told that the kingdom would, after his decease, be divided and would disintegrate. It was only because of the promise the Lord had made with his father, David, in behalf of Solomon, that the disintegration did not take place during his lifetime. Many a man, like Solomon, though "wise" in many respects, has missed God's will for his life through love of women, or a woman. I refer particularly to those who ignore the known will of God for their lives and enter into marriage with a partner who never could, or would, go the direction of God's choice. Many a person who has surrendered everything else on God's altar, has been unwilling to surrender his love-life and has because of this made havoc of his whole life. Also one comes across sad examples of men who apparently were *once surrendered* to the will of God and faithfully serving Christ, and then have fallen for women and made shipwreck of their lives through moral delinquency—fornication and adultery. Alas!

There was King Uzziah. In 2 Chronicles (chapter 26) we read of him, "Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem . . . and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord . . . and he sought God . . . and

as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper . . . and his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah, the priest, went in after him . . . and said unto him, 'It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed' . . . Then was Uzziah wroth . . . and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead . . . and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence . . . because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several (separate) house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord." This good king deterred from the will of God and was very sorely chastened as a result, though he retained his throne till his death.

Consider also Abraham. God had a specific plan and purpose in Abraham, namely to make him the father of the chosen nation. But, being in perplexity because he and Sarah had no children, and wondering how God's purpose was to be carried out, he took the Egyptian maid, Hagar, as his concubine and had a child by her. This erring from the will of God caused untold havoc, first in Abraham's own household between the two women and later between the two children. Later, serious trouble resulted between the Ishmaelites and the Israelites. The trouble in Palestine the past

thousand years, and until today, is still between them (the Arabs are Hagar's seed, the descendants of Ishmael). Out of the Arabs came also the terrible scourge of Mohammedanism, which has been a spiritual blight and a curse upon the world, opposing the Gospel of Christ in many lands and slaughtering thousands and thousands of Christians who refused to bow to its commands. Abraham missed God's perfect will at one important point and the world today still reaps the tragic results! Who knows what the price may be if you, too, miss God's will in your life?

Some of these men failed to do God's will through lack of surrender, some through human weakness, some through open disobedience, and some through doubt and bewilderment, as in Abraham's case, but the results were much the same. It is possible for God's people still, for these same causes—lack of surrender, human weakness, deliberate disobedience, or lack of understanding—to miss the perfect will of God. Let us beware lest we be in that sorrowful company. It is possible to miss the way. It is possible to miss His will. It behooves us to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise . . . understanding what the will of God is" and walking in it.