

Let's Face It!

Proverbs 19:21

Let's face it! You and I seem to be fascinated with the idea, the beautiful idea, that God is interested in our lives. And we like to think that we are in His plan for our lives, and that we are walking according to that plan.

But let's face it. You and I have a long way to go before we are fully surrendered to the will of God. We know almost nothing of what it means to be completely owned by Christ. We claim to be in God's will for our lives, and that sounds pretty, but oftentimes we don't even know what that will is. We not only do not know God's will for our lives, but more often than not, we don't even know where to start looking for it.

You may have been thinking in the last few days of the resolutions you need to make for this year—read more, lose weight, exercise more, stop smoking, do more for others.

And this is as good a time as any to review some of the plans you have for your life. What do you hope to accomplish in your lifetime, in the years you have left? Will you make a difference in your world, or will you just live it out, passing each day without much of a plan or purpose? This is a great time of year to reexamine some of the goals and dreams we may have. You may be very proactive in deciding that you want your life to count for something. And you may have some very big plans for the coming year.

But in all your dreaming and planning, have you included the Lord? Have you included the Lord's will for your life?

For instance: Young person, have you asked God about His will concerning your education—if you are to go on to college from high school, where you are to go, how you are to pay for it? Have you asked Him?

Some people earnestly seek and find the mate God has for them, and others just get married. Which will you do? Or have you asked if you are to marry at all? And what is God's will concerning your life's work? Some people discover what it is that God wants them to do with their lives, and others just get a job.

Or suppose you're a little older. Have you asked God what it is He wants you to do with your life? Some people seek the face of God and live meaningful, purpose-filled lives, and others just exist. Which will you do?

George Mueller, a man who constantly sought God's will and plan, once said: "Nine-tenths of the difficulty is overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. The difficulty arises when we ask God to reveal His will before we are ready to do it unreservedly." A little boy put it in a much simpler way: "It isn't honest to pray if you're not prepared to do what God says."

No, let's face it! Most of us live our lives the way we want to, and even though we claim to belong to Christ, rarely do we ask direction from the Lord. And I can tell you from my own personal experience that that usually results in a lot of pain and heartache.

You remember the Old Testament story of how Joshua led God's people in the conquest at Jericho, and then over the city of Ai. The news of their victories traveled through the territory pretty quickly, and the inhabitants of a city named Gibeon were frightened for their lives by what they heard about the Hebrews. God had told the Hebrew people not to make treaties with anyone who lived in that land, and somehow the Gibeonites knew this. So they devised a plan. A group of men took worn-out sacks and put them on their donkeys. They took wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, and they put worn-out patched sandals on their feet, and put on worn-out clothes. They took dry, moldy bread with them in their sacks, and went to see Joshua.

When they arrived after a trip of only about seven miles, they lied to Joshua, saying, "We have come from a far country, so make a treaty with us. This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey."

This big ruse was done in order to make Joshua and the Hebrews think that these men had come a great distance.

But the Scriptures tell us something drastic about God's people. If they had asked God, He would have told them that these men were imposters. But they didn't, and the Scriptures say, "*The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord*" (Joshua 9).

That was the problem, and it caused other problems. When the Hebrews found out, they quarreled among themselves, and they no longer trusted their leaders. When the kings of the neighboring cities found out, they declared war on Israel and on Gibeon. All kinds of problems were caused because Joshua and his aides did not ask direction from the Lord. It wasn't that they were openly rebellious; they just did not think to ask God what His will was.

Let's face it! Perhaps it's just that we simply have not thought to ask God about His will for the coming year. We haven't thought to ask because we are fairly satisfied with the way we've handled things. We've fooled ourselves into thinking that we are in control, that we don't need any help from God or anybody else. I suppose that is part of the "American spirit," but let's face it, when we fail to ask direction from the Lord, we have sinned.

In later years, Israel sent an embassy to Egypt, seeking military support against Assyria, rather than rely completely on the Lord. Isaiah considered this to be rebellion against God. In the 30th chapter of Isaiah, the first verse reads, "*Woe to the obstinate children, declares the Lord, to those who carry out plans that are not mine...*" The next chapter carries the thought a little further, telling us that those who depend on other things and people for help will be very disappointed: "*Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord*" (Isaiah 31:1)

What a lesson for our nation, particularly at a time like this! Let us not rely on military or economic power alone. Let us not rely solely on the number of troops or ships we have. Woe to those who rely on their own power, and never consult the Lord about His will.

Yes, let's face it! Let's face the fact that there are flaws in every plan we could ever devise for our lives. Let's face the fact that one moment we have a dream or a goal, and soon it vanishes and is replaced by another.

Let's face the fact that sometimes our plans, even our best plans, are motivated by selfishness. We are motivated by what how it will benefit us, and what we can get out of it. What appears to be the best of plans, and the highest of aspirations, are sometimes marred beneath the surface by selfishness.

And let's face the fact that sometimes even our best plans are unrealized. We wake up one day and discover that we're never going to be famous, or write that best-seller, or become a professional athlete, or perhaps never realize the dream we've been holding in our hearts. One of the "*All in the Family*" television episodes has Edith Bunker telling her son-in-law Michael that the reason Archie Bunker hates Michael is because he is jealous. Archie's jealous because he realizes that he will never be anything more than he is, while Michael has his entire life ahead of him. Archie Bunker had evidently had certain plans and ambitions for his life, and when they were not fulfilled, he turned bitter.

Several years ago, Roy Mayes was mayor of Highland Heights, Ohio. He ran for re-election, but he lost by only 170 votes. So he sent a letter to each of 1,840 homes in the town, just in time for Christmas. His letter was entitled, "Xmas Greetings from a Has-Been Santa."

He said in his letter, "I tried to fill each of your stockings with the very best gift the city could afford. I gave it the best I had but it wasn't good enough. The Lord Himself couldn't please some of you." He referred to the man who won the election as a "jolly green giant" and as "the ho ho ho kid."

Roy Mayes was a mayor who lost his bid for re-election, but he was also a man who watched a dream he had for his life fade away.

Let's face it: the resolutions we make are not always kept, and the plans we make are not always fulfilled or realized. Let's face it! Life is what happens while we make other plans. Our plans and resolutions are so uncertain because we do not know what the future holds for our lives.

But after we've faced all that—even after we've seen our aspirations and goals collapse in a cloud of choking dust—there is hope. Let us face *that*—there is hope! For the coming year, and all the years ahead, there is hope!

The hope is contained in the marvelous truth that we don't have to rely on our plans to get us through our lives. We don't even have to rely on the half-serious resolutions we make every year. The truth is that God has a plan for your life, and for my life, and we can know what that plan is, and we can know how much more superior that plan is than anything else you or I could devise. And even if life hasn't turned out the way you thought it would, God can help you pick up from here and move on to more than you think possible right now. The hope and the

promise is that God *is actually interested* in what happens to us, and *He is willing* to be involved in your daily affairs.

Let's face it! God has a plan, and the Scriptures tell us that plan has been established, and will remain for all eternity. Remember our Scripture for today? *"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."* God's purpose is worked out regardless of the plans and purposes of human beings. Sometimes our plans coincide with the plans of the Lord, and sometimes they do not. But God's plan stands when all else fails. It succeeds when all else fails. His purpose is loving when every other plan is selfish. His plan is realized in the lives of those who are obedient to Him, who strive to follow that plan in their lives.

Just think about the wonderful world our God has created! The pattern of the Master Designer can be seen in a spider's web, in the delicate interweavings of color in a butterfly's wings, in the fragile lace of the fern. The pattern can be seen as the moon changes its shape during the course of a month, and can be seen in the ebb and flow of the rising and falling tides. Doesn't it make sense that a Designer Who would give such intricate detail to lesser things of His Creation should also provide—in detail—a plan for the human soul?

He has, but with one major difference. The moon has no choice in the matter of its eclipse; the tides cannot determine to remain high when the time comes to recede. This is the plan of God as ordained by Him. This same Master Designer provides us with a detailed plan, but leaves the choice of whether or not to follow it up to us.

And that, too, is a part of His plan for our lives.

Not sure which way to go? Turn to the Scriptures! For example, Psalm 32:8 reads, *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you."* Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your path."* And listen to these beautiful words of promise from Proverbs 2:6-9—*"For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go."* (NLT)

But that's just where it begins! Listen to this collection of promises about God's guidance for our lives: *"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). *"And you shall seek me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:13). *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path"* (Psalm 119:105). *"The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail"* (Isaiah 58:11).

And then this one tells us that we don't need to be afraid when we approach God to ask for help and guidance: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5)

How do you discover what God's plan is for your life? I don't have a three-point plan with simple steps to understanding God's will for our lives. But when we put all these Scriptures together, we learn that the first step, the very first thing we are to do, is to surrender to the One Who made us, and ask Him.

Simply ask Him.

And after learning how very much He cares for us, how intimately involved He wants to be in our lives, and how far superior His plan is over anything we could come up with, why would we *ever* want to do anything else?

Have you given much thought to the coming year, about how you can discover and seek out His will and plan for your life? Face it! Have you included the Lord?