

Joy's Corner...

GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN part 1

God's incredible plan and His purpose for your life are the same thing.

Creation, the cross, and Jesus's second coming are the three big events that connect you and me to God's eternal plan and His purpose. He has a plan for this world—for today and every day. This plan is as huge as the universe and as tiny as each atom that makes you who you are. Every part of you was planned and designed by God.

Unfortunately, evil showed its ugly head long ago through the very first people God created. The Bible is the book that tells how sin destroyed our original face-to-face connection with our Creator (Gen. 3:1-10). The Bible is the book that tells us of His incredible plan to save us FROM our sins. The Bible is a book about God's saving love.

God's PLAN or PURPOSE was to create a world and make it beautiful: light, air, trees, flowers, sun, moon, stars, fish, birds, and animals. Then the highest of God's creation: PEOPLE—Adam and Eve.

The joy of Adam, Eve, and their Creator was God's very desire. In the garden, walking together, they talked about the pure love they had for each other. It was all good. Caressing a bird, petting a lion, holding a butterfly, walking on carpets of vibrant green grass, eating ripe fruit right off the trees, hearing angels' songs, smelling the aromas of heaven—these were all beautiful and unspoiled delights without end (Gen. 1:26-31, Gen. 2:1-25).

But one day, the enemy of God did his dirty tricks, and the world has been in a tragic situation ever since then (Gen. 3:1-3).

When we question, "WHY?" No matter the tragedy, we can rightfully look back to the tree

of decision, also called "the tree of good and evil." The devil spoke through a snake, and Eve was deceived. She reached out, took, and ate the forbidden fruit. Adam also fell for

the lie Satan expressed: "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

Yet, the tragedy of sin came with a PROMISE. The promise was the plan of salvation (Gen. 3:15). This was GOD'S INCREDIBLE PLAN!

In the Holy Bible, the first two chapters in the book of Genesis and last two chapters in the book of Revelation give us a picture of beauty and purity—without sin. The entire rest of the Bible describes how God, in His incredible love, dealt with the problem of sin.

I think of Cain, offering a sacrifice of fruits and vegetables instead of a lamb (Gen. 4:3). Cain knew this was a sin and that his offering was not acceptable to God. Why? Because the blood of the lamb pointed forward to Jesus as the Lamb who would be killed to take away our sins. But Cain rebelled and refused to offer a lamb, insisting that his fruits and vegetables were equally as good. This kind of wickedness grew year by year until, in the sixth chapter of Genesis, God had to do something about the cumulative evil that the people continually chose (Gen. 6:5-6).

However, there were always a few people who chose God over evil. Noah was willing to do God's will. The Lord gave him blueprints for a large boat, an ark. Noah spent 120 years building the ark and preaching—warning people about a coming flood (Gen. 6:7-22;

Gen. 7:1-24; Gen. 8:1-19). Noah and his family alone chose God's will.

After the flood, the Lord started things up again. Noah and his family, along with the animals that had been protected from the flood, left the ark, as new vegetation began to grow. By and by, the earth became populated again. But

there was a repeat of the tragedy of people turning to evil. Now, as they built the tower of Babel (in an attempt to reach heaven to never again be hurt by a flood), their evil grew to such desperate proportions that God had to intervene again (Gen. 11:4-8).

Sin, the devil's specialty, became so normal for people, that God had to pluck out another person for His plan and purpose. Abraham, a man of God's choosing, became "a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4). Abraham was 100 years old and his wife, Sarah, was 90 when the promised son, Isaac, was born. In Genesis 22:1-18, we find an incredible story of how Abraham took Isaac (who symbolized Jesus as God's Only Son) and was willing to sacrifice Isaac as an offering to the Lord. Isaac's willingness to allow Abraham to sacrifice him also came from a heart that trusted God. God honored these two, as He blessed them with a special promise.

Isaac had only two children, twin boys, Jacob and Esau. Jacob gave birth to 12 sons who later were called the "tribe of Israel."

These children of Jacob were also called "God's chosen" (Ps. 105:6). Esau, the other son of Isaac, was much like Cain. He hated Jacob and was not interested in the privileges God had given him. Later in history, the Bible records the blood battles between God's chosen people of Israel and the Edomites, who were Esau's descendants.

Why would twin brothers turn against each other? Because Esau carelessly gave away his God-given birthright as the firstborn son for a pot of lentil stew (Gen. 25:32-33). His brother, Jacob, had different priorities; he had a wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord, and he persevered until the Angel blessed him and changed his name to Israel (Gen. 32:24 - 28). Evil and good were shown in contrast to each other once more. As history moved on, it is in-

teresting to note that when Israel chose to let the Lord lead in battle, Israel won the victory.

There is more—much more—continuing in the next chapter.... Next month!

God Bless... Joy

How Has Christ Changed You?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! - 2 Corinthians 5:17

Israeli professor Rabbi Chil Slostowski hated the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, his resentment was so great that he sharply criticized a young student who was reading a Hebrew New Testament. The young man replied by giving him the copy.

That night, the rabbi, alone in his room, stayed up until 3 a.m. reading about the Nazarene who claimed to be the Messiah. The Holy Spirit guided him to the truth, and later he confessed, "I have already found more than 200 passages of the New Testament that prove beyond a doubt that Jesus is truly the Messiah."

It's amazing how an encounter with truth can change a life. Christian history is filled with incredible stories of men and women who were dramatically changed after coming to belief in the Lord Jesus. That's because this faith step doesn't just take place in one's head - it's in the heart too.

How has Christ changed you? In what ways are you different today than before you knew Him? When you look at your life with that perspective, you'll live with more thankfulness to God because of His great work in your life

Prayer Challenge:

Pray that God would open your eyes to the scope of His work in your life.

Questions for Thought:

When you look back on your life, what's different about you today than before you knew Jesus?

What does your answer to the question above say about God's work in your life?

DRY BONES...

"A merry heart does good like a medicine: but a broken spirit dries the bones." Proverbs 17:22

The only bone in the human body not connected to another is the hyoid, a U-shaped bone located at the base of the tongue. I am always awed when I study the human body and how God constructed us. Even the skeletal system teaches us about the Creator, who lovingly put us together with this internal frame so that we wouldn't be just a blob on the floor! We have 206 bones in our body; the thighbone is the largest and strongest, while the stapes (in the middle ear) is the smallest and lightest. Interestingly, this tiny bone is the only one that is fully grown at birth.

Bones not only hold our bodies upright and in place, but they allow different parts to move around. They also protect organs from being easily hurt. God created bones to be strong; in fact, a human bone is as strong as granite in supporting weight! One scientist determined that a block of bone the size of a matchbox can support nine tons.

Your skeletal system isn't just there to keep you sitting up straight in church. Inside your bones is a factory working to create blood cells. Even though this internal structure is strong, bones are very light. They are made up of calcium, phosphorus, sodium, and other minerals.

When you think about bones, you might first picture a dry skeleton hanging on a stand in biology class. Actually, bones are not a bunch of dry sticks—they're about 75 percent water.

That means when Solomon says, "A broken spirit dries the bones," we should sit up and pay attention. Dry bones are indicators of really poor health.

Most people think the greatest impact on their health starts in their mouth with what they eat. That's certainly important, but we shouldn't overlook the connection between how we think and our health. The state of your mind impacts your health far more than you might realize. Many diseases begin not with the food on your plate, but with the grief or anxiety in your heart. It's not just what you're eating; it's what's eating you.

So put a genuine smile on your face. Ask God to give you a peaceful heart that is content and looks for the cheerful flowers on life's pathway. When you do this, your bones will thank you.

Lord, I choose to be joyful. I make the decision to set aside gloom and will practice having love, courage, and sympathy in my heart.

The Hidden Joy of Asking for Help

Pat Butler Dyson

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

Have you ever had the feeling it would be a bad day, even before your feet touched the floor? Having overslept, I was already running behind for my dentist's appointment two hours away in Houston. And my sweet little SUV that drove like a dream? It was in the shop, so I'd be wrangling my husband Jeff's gigantic new pickup truck. Frazzled from fighting traffic, I wheeled into the parking space at a crooked angle—fine in the front but too close to the rear of the car next to me. I prayed it would be a clunker. Not even close. I'd shimmied up next to a shiny new Mercedes Benz.

Jesus, please let that Mercedes be gone when I'm done, I prayed. But when I returned to the parking lot, it was still there. I climbed into Jeff's

truck, started it up, then turned off the engine, convinced if I tried to back up, I'd scrape the truck *and* the Mercedes. I had no choice. I'd have to ask for help, my least favorite thing to do *ever*.

I went back up to the dentist's office and explained my situation to the receptionist. Just then a policeman came to the checkout. "I bet Jason will help you," she said. Cringing, I told Jason what I needed, and he said he'd be glad to help me. I handed him the keys and he expertly backed out the truck, without scraping the car.

"How can I thank you?" I asked. "May I pay you?" He shook his head and said, "It's always my pleasure to help someone, ma'am." I felt a nudge from Jesus. Like Jason, I delighted in helping. Was I depriving others of that joy by not asking for help myself? Ask Jesus to teach you how to ask for help.

5 ways our past can control us

Francine Rivers

1. You focus on what has been done to you

Focusing on what has been done to us keeps the experiences alive in our mind, stirring up emotions, reviving hurt, fanning anger and hunger for revenge, as well as making us see ourselves as "a victim." Thus, we label ourselves as a casualty, a person duped or tricked, a loser and fool, quarry for sacrifice, a scapegoat for another's sins. Putting on those identity markers is crushing to spirit, and can keep people from taking the first frightening step toward recovery. If we see ourselves as "survivors"—people who suffered greatly, but came through with body and soul alive, heroes who found strength to cope and rise above the sins done to us—we can move ahead.

2. You focus on what you've done

Focusing on what we've done often fills us with shame and guilt. I know this was the case with me when I spent years looking back at my abortion and the circumstances around it. Though not yet a Christian, I knew and smothered the truth in my heart that I was doing wrong. The "solution to a problem" brought shame and guilt which grew even stronger when I married and became pregnant. My husband and I were excited from the moment we knew I carried a child. When I suffered a miscarriage, we grieved. It struck me then that the baby I aborted was as much a child as the one I wanted. Celebrated from conception or not, a human life is a human life.

How did I overcome the devastating feelings of shame and guilt? 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I confessed, I grieved, and I attended a nine-week post abortion class through a local pregnancy counseling center with other women suffering the same feelings I was. We came out the other side healed. I can testify that God keeps His Word or I would have carried the heavy, heart-crushing secret to my grave.

3. You rely on conditioned coping mechanisms.

Relying on conditioned coping mechanisms is yet another way we hold ourselves back. I have loved ones who are recovering or active alcoholics. I learned unhealthy ways to cope, alternately mothering, manipulating, managing, and playing the martyr. I knew what was wrong with the alcoholic. He drank a substance that altered his personality. It took time to realize I had a problem every bit as destructive: trying to play God over another person's life.

What was the answer? I acknowledged I was powerless. I needed to stop trying to fix things and allow God to take over. Continuing to love the person, I learned not to take responsibility

for another person's life. This lesson applies to many situations in life. God is God and I am not. Jesus calls me to self-examination, not to condemnation of others. I am responsible for my thoughts and actions, no one else's. My work is to realign my life to His will. We all have the sin nature we inherited from Adam and Eve, the desire to control our lives—as well as others. Trusting and relying on God is essential to experiencing life abundant out of what life throws at us.

4. You try to overcome and heal in your own strength.

Trying to overcome and heal in our own strength is one of the more common ways we hold ourselves back. We set our minds on forgetting and moving ahead, sure we can be or do better and make all things right in our own strength. When we find ourselves right back in a similar situation or relationship, we are surprised and demoralized.

A journey through 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles in the Bible shows how a nation repeats history. The same is true of individuals. We are not at fault for what has been done to us, but if we fail to examine the past honestly and follow God's instructions on how to be healed and live a whole and fruitful life, we are complicit in repeating (practicing) the sinful behavior. Holding on to the past often skews everything in our lives, from our relationships with other people to our relationship with God. We are all ultimately responsible for the choices we make.

5. You set up idols.

Setting up idols can be an unconscious or conscious way of replacing God. Idols used to be carved of wood or stone. Now, we idolize celebrities, sports figures, our body image, money, technology. Wherever we spend most of our time and money is our idol. Inevitably, idols crumble. Celebrities and sports figures

change with the season. Our bodies grow weak and wrinkled. Economies shift. Money evaporates. Possessions can be stolen or lost in a fire. That new iPhone or entertainment system is obsolete within months of buying it.

Idols offer empty promises. When tragedy or some catastrophic event comes, most people know instinctively to cry out to God. Only He is faithful. The question is: Will we stand firm and abide in Jesus or waver and fall with the first breeze? If we stand firm and seek Him, He will make sure we find Him. And when we do, we will experience the fulfillment of what we long for: real, life-changing, eternal-lasting love.

The past is part of who we are. We need to pray for open eyes and hearts as we examine honestly what happened and what unhealthy patterns or coping mechanisms came out of it. It helps to talk with a wise and faith-grounded mentor.

We all live through trouble and painful experiences, some far worse than others. If we dwell on those things, we make ourselves captives. When we make excuses, defend ourselves, trust in our own strength and ability to outwit or outrun the enemy of our souls, we lose. The truth is only the Lord has the power to free one's heart, mind, and soul. Only He can be trusted to bring beauty from ashes, light from darkness, and open our eyes to see our past as a part of who we are while setting us free to live the beautiful, abundant life He planned for us.

When we give our lives fully to Jesus Christ, we begin the journey to becoming the person He created us to be. We are God's masterpiece, created anew in Christ Jesus for good works which He has already prepared for us. He is our true Father and our real home is with Him, now and forever.

Jesus' approach to sin

Emma Danzey

John 8:10-11 says, *"Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"*

In John 8, we see the Pharisees (the religious rulers) once again trying to test Jesus. They always seemed to be after Him to stump Him and make Him look bad. Literally, He was the Christ, the One they and their people were waiting on, but His words and His answers were not what they imagined, and instead of having humility and spirits to learn from Him and hearts to love Him, they had hatred and desire to humiliate Him.

At the beginning of John 8, they literally bring a woman caught in the act of adultery to Him publicly to stone her. They must have plotted and watched this relationship unfold so that at just the right moment, they could use this woman as a "lesson." The Pharisees say that in the Law, she should be stoned, and what does Jesus say about that? After writing in the sand, Jesus says in verse 7, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." All of the people go away one by one, beginning with those who are older (more aware of their wrongdoings). Suddenly, Jesus, the only perfect One, is left there with the woman.

"Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are they?'"

The fact is that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. No one was able to stay around and stone the woman. I love how Jesus asks the woman where they were. He is proving the point that He is the only one who is sinless because He stayed, and they were not able to be her judge. Have you ever felt humiliated by others and actually did something that was cause for embarrassment? This woman is caught in her sin. She is wrongly treated. She

is a public display of our sinful condition. However, Jesus, who is able to be wrathful and justly stone her, chooses to refrain. He is the only righteous and perfect One.

Has no one condemned you? 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,'

Because of Jesus, there is no condemnation in Him. He asks the woman if anyone has condemned her, and she says *no*. He tells her that He does not condemn her. The point is not that he cannot, but He chooses not to and gives her undeserved grace. The truth is that we are all just like this woman. We all have sinned and been brought before our Savior in our shame and guilt, however, He took on our suffering and freed us instead. This kind of love changes us.

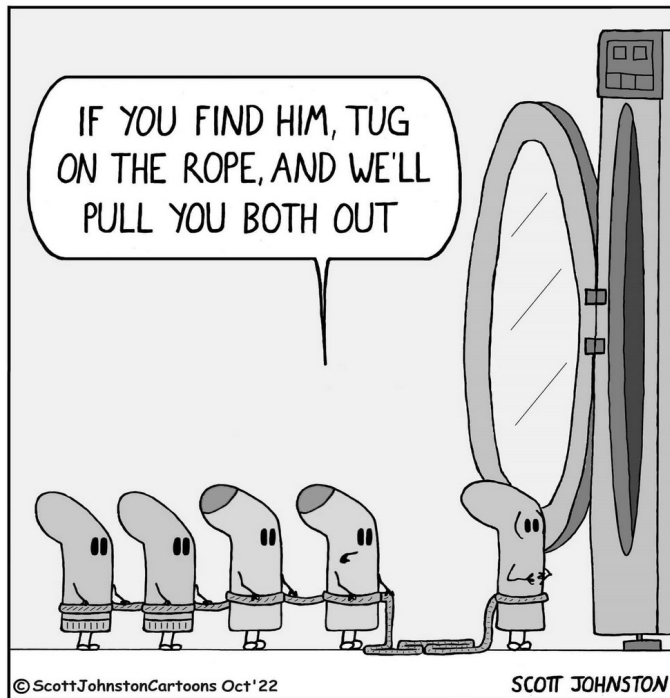
Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

So does Jesus not care if we sin? Does he ignore the sin? Absolutely not. Jesus cares greatly if we sin. In fact, sin is what separated us from Him in the first place. It is not good for us. He has better for us. Sin is the reason He had to die a horrible and embarrassing death. Jesus continually taught a life of repentance, and He is consistent with that in this message as well. He tells the woman to go and leave her life of sin. We see this instruction given to others. The goal of grace is not to sin more but to understand the depth of forgiveness we have been given and strive by the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life that is honoring to the Lord.

Intersecting Faith and Life:

In what ways have you been like the Pharisees when it comes to the sins of others? How can you relate to the woman and remember the great grace Christ has given to you? In what ways can you repent or turn from the sins that are currently in your life?

Humor's Hallway...



Don't burn bridges.... Just loosen the bolts a little bit every day.

That awkward moment when a zombie looking for brains walks right past you.

I didn't mean to push all your buttons... Just the mute.

A recipe saying made with love... Really means "I licked the spoon and kept using it".

There is no "WE" in chocolate.

According to the BMI chart in my doctor's office... I'm not overweight... I'm under tall.

My dog can find anything... He's a labragoogle.

Talk is cheap... Because the supply always exceeds the demand.

As I grow older..
I wish I was thin as my patience.

Speaking of growing older... Age is NOT a number. It's clearly a word.

The inventor of the wind chill factor died recently. He was 82, but felt like he was 64!

Never plan a wedding in winter. Someone always gets cold feet!

My wife tried to beat me at scrabble, but I wooden letter.

If you care for too many dogs... you may have a Roverdose.

Phil Collins recorded music in his STU - STU - Studio.

French fries didn't come from France... They were first cooked in Greece.

The rooster went to the gym to work on his pecks.

The tree doctors couldn't tell why my tree had died... They were stumped.

My friend thinks the English channel is a cable station for the Brits.

Did you hear the story of how the hurricane met the tornado? There's a twist at the end.

Leftover lettuce is called the remainder.

I'm giving away some small legless birds... No perches necessary.

It wouldn't have been Wright if Ford had invented the airplane

Aquariums with tropical fish have a calming effect on the brain due to all the indoor fins.

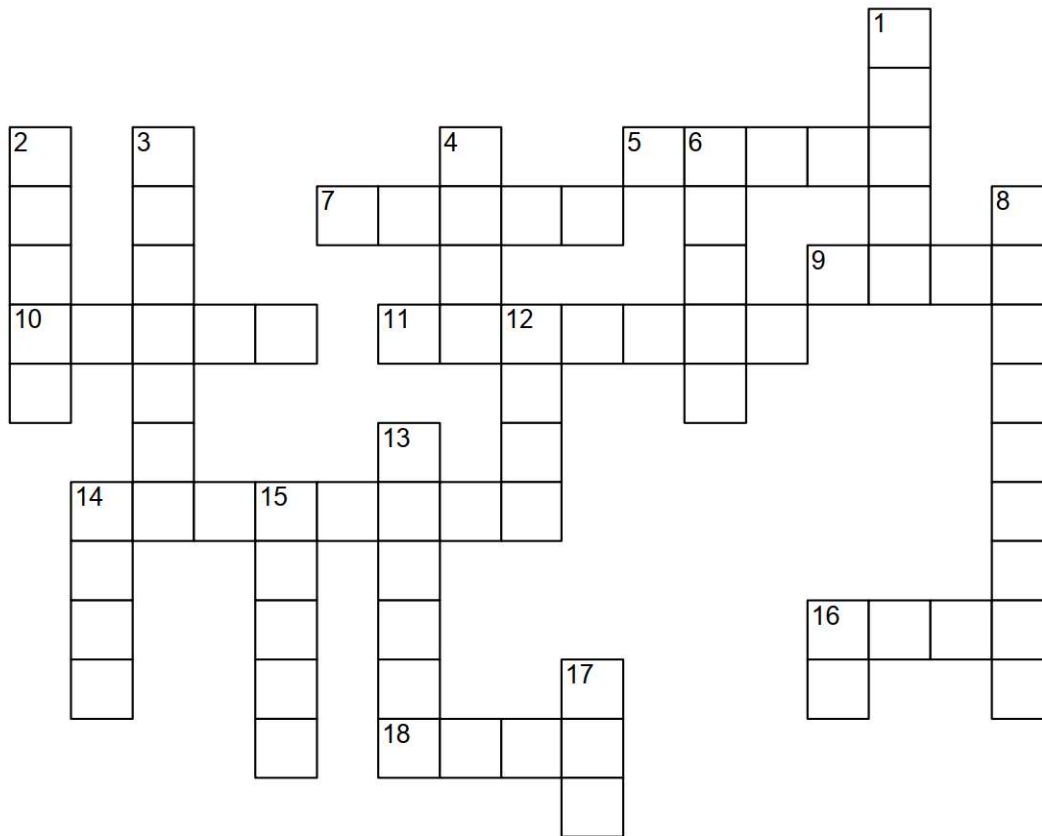
I'm taking my red crayons to the hospital. My doctor told me we're going to draw some blood.

I finally watched the documentary on clocks... It was about time.

My landlord wants to talk about my high heating bills. I told him my door is always open.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

1 Samuel 17



Across

- 5 It is the Lord who _____ His people when they put their trust in God.
- 7 David had a pouch of stones and a _____ to meet Goliath. (1 Samuel 17:40)
- 9 When the Israelites saw Goliath, they all ran from him in great _____. (1 Samuel 17:25)
- 10 David's oldest brother (1 Samuel 17:28)
- 11 Since the Lord gave power to David against the lion and bear when tending the sheep, he knew that the Lord would _____ him from Goliath. (1 Samuel 17:37)
- 14 A person who cares for sheep is called a _____.
- 16 Goliath was over _____ feet tall. (1 Samuel 17:4)
- 18 The Philistines called Goliath their _____. (1 Samuel 17:51)

Down

- 1 David's father was _____. (1 Samuel 17:12)
- 2 Eliab, David's oldest brother, was full of _____ against David thinking David only came to watch the battle between the Israelites and the Philistines. (1 Samuel 17:28)
- 3 This Philistine soldier was from Gath (1 Samuel 17:4)
- 4 The number of stones David picked up from the stream to put in his pouch (1 Samuel 17:40)
- 6 Commander of the Israelite army (1 Samuel 17:55)
- 8 David trusted the power of the Lord and _____ over the Philistine giant. (1 Samuel 17:50)
- 12 David gave credit to the _____ for the victory of the battle with Goliath. (1 Samuel 17:46)
- 13 King Saul would give great _____ to the person who would kill Goliath. (1 Samuel 17:25)
- 14 King of Israel at the time David had a contest with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:56-57)
- 15 Saul said David could not kill the Philistine. The king forgot the _____ of God.
- 16 Was David able to wear the armor and helmet King Saul had placed on him for battle against Goliath? (1 Samuel 17:28)
- 17 David was a _____ when he heard about Goliath. (1 Samuel 17:33)

Puzzle answers....



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