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**Praise for
the Planner;
Praise for the Plan**

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Series: In Everything Give Thanks

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It was an interesting assortment of people. There was Jerry, the halfback for the varsity football team. He was All-Conference, consensus All-American, and everybody's all-around hero. From the world's point of view, he was already "Mr. Success". There was Marylou, the head cheerleader, a "straight A" student, and the one voted "Most popular" by her classmates. There was Andrea, the one voted "Most likely to succeed." She was majoring in political science and was already being groomed to run for the state legislature at the ripe old age of twenty-one. There was Alonzo, the most promising pro-basketball prospect in the Midwest. He had broken every record in the conference and was expected to be taken in the first round of the NBA draft.

This unusual group of people had gathered together the day before graduation to represent their respective groups and talk about making plans for a ten-year reunion, when they would all come together again to see just what lot in life fate had handed each of them. Oh, yes, there was one other person present that day. It was Ellen, the President of the Handicapped Club. There she sat in the corner, a bit shy, but somehow there was something in her spirit that made you aware of her presence.

Ellen was the product of a broken home. She had suffered child abuse, was injured in a near-fatal car accident when she was ten and consequently confined to a wheel chair for life. Her oldest brother was killed in a freak hunting accident, and her mother, the light of her life, had only recently been discovered to have an incurable heart condition. In a room filled with people who from man's perspective had everything going for them, Ellen seemed strangely out of place. Each of these so called "class leaders" was asked to write out what their goals in life were, and they were going to seal them in an envelope, not to be opened until that much touted reunion ten years hence. If this group, except for Ellen, of course, didn't prove to be the leaders of the next generation, then who would?

And so ten long years went by. Ten years is a long time; long enough for life to begin to take shape, and for the forces that form our futures to begin to harden into patterns that will ultimately

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reveal who we really are.

It was an even stranger assortment that gathered in the school conference room that Spring morning ten years to the day after graduation; for while it was the same people, somehow the people were not the same. The rule was that each person would open the envelope and read what they had written as they told how their lives had developed in the past decade.

Jerry, State U.'s halfback and a half, began. He carefully opened his envelope, an obvious note of embarrassment in his voice. His goal, he read, had been "to be the best NFL running back in history". A leg injury in his second year had taken care of that. He had drifted from job to job and was on his third marriage. Clearly his goals had all been in the realm of athletics, and when they faded into nothingness, so did his whole life. Marylou, the peppy little cheerleader with the good grades, had jumped at a chance for an acting contract that had led her up a blind alley, and only four years ago, depressed and discouraged, she had tried suicide. Her goal according to what she had written ten years ago, was to "be somebody". Her inability to gain recognition was more than she could handle.

Andrea had run for public office, had been elected, and amidst the pressures of the political process, had become a casualty of the local party machinery. Her idealistic stands on key issues were not palatable enough for the party bigwigs. Without their endorsement, she was handily defeated. She tried marriage, and that too, was a disaster. At present, she was undergoing counseling and was hesitant to talk about her future. Alonzo, the six-foot eight-inch tower of power on the State basketball team, was drafted by an NBA team, only to be traded twice in three years, and finally put out to pasture at the ripe old age of twenty-three. He had pretty much drifted since then, still trying to recapture the thrill of being recognized and applauded.

Well, I guess that's about it. Not much to write home about: four college heroes, headed for success, all of them living somewhat defeated lives, devoid of fame, only ten years later. Oh, they almost forgot. Ellen. "What's happened to you, Ellen?" they asked, almost as an afterthought. Ellen Harrison, still obviously unable to walk, rolled her wheelchair into the center of the circle. It became apparent as she began to address the group that there was a sort of glow about her, a kind of radiance you don't often

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see. Softly, Ellen spoke. “My life these past ten years has just been glorious,” she began, humbly, yet excitedly. “About a year after graduation, I was working as a clerk in a department store, and a young woman came up to me and asked me if I knew for sure, that if I died tomorrow, I would go to Heaven.” She paused for a moment and looked around at the group. There was dead silence. I answered, “No, I guess I really don’t know for sure,” she went on, “and this woman lovingly showed me that I was missing the only thing in life worth having—a relationship with God.”

Ellen went on. “I became a Christian,” she said quietly, but boldly. “And suddenly my entire life began to have meaning. I began to attend a little church near my house, and one day a very wise older woman who had been crippled since birth, invited me over for lunch. I went, not sure why I was going. During that two hours that woman unlocked the door to my entire life. She asked me if I knew that God had especially chosen me above so many of the other saints in the world, to have the special privilege of having what the world calls a “handicap”. At first, I didn’t understand. Privilege? Chosen? I had always believed that God was punishing me or my parents by allowing the tragedies that had followed me around all of my life.”

“That’s not so,” the woman explained. “God chooses special people with special hearts to give special grace to,” she went on, “and He takes each of those tragedies and molds them, one by one, into the fabric of life until the pattern that emerges is totally different and totally God-honoring. She showed me how the experiences of my childhood that the world calls so tragic had given me a sensitive spirit. She showed me how the ‘accident’ about which I had become so bitter, was really not an ‘accident’ but an ‘incident’ in God’s divine plan to give me a heart for those who are hurting, and to take away from me some of the abilities that I would have come to trust in, were I not ‘handicapped’. Even my brother’s death,” she exclaimed, “taught me how to minister to those who are grieving, which leads me up to what I am doing now.”

Blushing a little, she went on, “I am the vice-president of a national organization called S.C.A.G. SCAG stands for Special Christians Afflicted with Grace,” she went on, “and we go out each morning into nursing homes, and hospitals, and orphanages, and childcare centers, and even funeral homes, to look for people who are hurting. We tell them what a wonderful God they have,

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and how those little setbacks God has allowed them are just God's special marks of love upon their lives to make them His, and to touch other lives." Opening the little piece of paper she had written on ten years before, she read its contents. "I wrote that my goal was to come to understand who I am and just why I am like I am," she grinned. "I sort of said a little prayer the day I wrote that and asked God (if there was one) to help me find out. I just realized God answered that prayer!"

Ellen was embarrassed that she had talked so long. The other four "heroes in the making" by now were all looking down, and some were looking within, wondering just where in all of their quest to find their dreams they had missed the meaning of life. "I thought you were the handicapped one," Marylou said, tears beginning to run down her face. "Now I know better."

The agreement they had all made ten years before was that after they had shared their dreams and then what had actually happened, they would vote on who had become the greatest success. The balloting was brief, and the verdict unanimous. Ellen Harrison was the Class Success Story. Handicapped? Not on your life. In fact, the very absence of any visible handicap may have been the downfall for the other four. What was Ellen's secret? Ellen had met the Planner. And Ellen had caught a glimpse of His Plan. That's all it takes to turn what the world calls tragedy into what God calls grace. That's all it takes to turn a heart destined for bitterness into a literal fountain of praise.

I- PRAISE FOR THE PLANNER

We have looked at the subject of praise from the vantage point of God's character, and from the perspective of Calvary. Now, we will look at how praise should be affected by our past experiences, our present dilemmas, and our future promises. In other words, if we are to in everything give thanks, then we must look at what everything is. And I believe that there is no use in looking at how to cope with life today through the eyes of praise if we have not ever come to grips with the sovereignty of God and learned to praise Him for everything that has ever happened to us in the past.

This is a difficult subject. It sometimes uncovers bitterness and anger and ingratitude that has been buried beneath the surface of some of our lives for years. Our goal is not to dredge

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up the past by looking at individual incidents or experiences. Our goal is rather to look at basic principles and apply those principles to everything in our past, which will, of necessity, include some really unpleasant things—things we may be holding against our parents, against society, or as is usually the case, in reality, against God Himself. We may praise Him with our lips, but on many occasions our hearts are buried in bitterness all the while.

I want us to begin by understanding some very basic principles.

Principle 1- The Sovereignty of God. It is the right of God to do with us and with our lives as He chooses. If you do not understand that, you cannot grasp the rest of the principles in this study. The Scripture is very clear on this: *The earth and all that is in it belongs to God. He may do with it and with us as He chooses.*

You may not understand it, but at least come to believe it.

I Samuel explains it without apology. Listen:

The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.

(I Samuel 2:6-8)

I Chronicles adds this:

Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.

Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

(I Chronicles 29:11-13)

Job says this:

Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?

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In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:9,10)

Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up; also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth.

With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his. (Job 12:15,16)

Did not God in the book of Job make this statement about Himself?

Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine. (Job 41:11)

Psalm 24 gets specific.

The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. (Psalm 24:1,2)

And did not Jehovah say to Israel?

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. (Jeremiah 18:6)

The first clear-cut statement made in Scripture then about the sovereignty of God is woven throughout the tapestry of the Word from start to finish. It is this: *Nothing can take place in this world without either being the perfect will of God or the permissive will of God.* In other words, nothing has ever happened to you or ever will happen to you that was out of the control of the hands of God. He either engineered it or allowed it, but in either case, (a) He could have prevented it had He so chosen, or (b) He plans to use it for His purposes. In a bit we'll review what those purposes are, but it is important at the outset to clearly understand this concept. Much of what has happened to you in this life, even that which appears to be bad, may have happened as a result of the effects of sin in the world, but at no point has Satan ever been allowed to go beyond the parameters God has set for him, nor at any time has God freed him to do anything that did not suit His purposes.

Read the first three chapters of Job over and over and over. There Satan and God had a summit conference over the spiritual warfare that was about to take place in one man's life. Satan ruled the world of circumstance. He had it in his power to take

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possessions away, to take loved ones away, and even to take health away, but only upon receiving permission from God. His purposes were always to destroy the child of God. Always.

God's purposes, on the other hand, were always to take the very same things Satan gained permission to use against us and use them rather as tools to accomplish His purposes in us and through us.

So Satan, the deceiver, ultimately becomes the deceived. He never learns. He seeks permission from God to do things to us that he has engineered to destroy us. At times God grants permission, knowing that as Satan takes from us that which is physical, God is freed to fill the vacuum with that which is spiritual. As Satan destroys our confidence in men, God is freed to replace it with confidence in Him.

As Satan destroys our image of self, God is freed to replace it with the image of Himself. That is exactly what happened to Job. God allowed Satan, in two stages, to destroy everything Job had worth having. Satan's goal was to get Job to deny God. God allowed it, because He knew that once Job lost everything, he would have to face the real issues of life. So God said yes, and it wasn't until Job lost it all that He found the one thing He was missing—a deeper understanding of who God really is.

At this stage we will go no farther. Our goal here is simply to acknowledge that never does the sun rise except it be authorized and energized by a sovereign God. Never does the rain fall without God's specific permission. Never is a baby born that God does not choose to allow it. Never does a death occur apart from the sovereign plan of God. Never. "The earth is the LORD'S and they that dwell therein."¹ That means that everything and everyone on planet earth is God's to do with as He pleases, and only if He pleases, is Satan free to touch any man or woman.

Principle 2- Purchased with a price. Not only is this earth and those who are in it God's, those who are God's by second birth (and He knew, remember, in eternity past, who would be) are twice-God's to do with as He chooses. We are His, first by virtue of creation, "the earth is the LORD'S and *all* who dwell therein,"¹ but we are also His by virtue of our re-creation. We who are twice-born, "are not our own, we've been bought with a price."²

¹ Psalm 24:1

² I Corinthians 6:19,20

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So now, not only does God own us by virtue of His ownership of all mankind, but by reaching down into His own heart and paying the highest price ever paid for anything, He went out on the slave market of sin and re-purchased that which was already His. Therefore, He is not only able to do with us as He wills, He is authorized by our own choice to do so. When we traded the title of our lives for His, we traded in the right to tell Him what He could or couldn't do. It's a right we never had; but at conversion, we acknowledged it and signed the transaction for all eternity. We are God's, and we are His to do with as He chooses.

Principle 3- God is Spirit. Therefore, at any time He deems it beneficial, He will trade that which is physical on the trading block of life for that which is spiritual. If in order to gain love, we must lose a loved one, He will allow it. If in order to gain peace, we must endure warfare, He will allow it. If in order to gain joy, we must experience pain, He will allow it. If in order to gain patience, we must pass through trial, He will allow it. God is spirit; and as with Job, and as with Paul, and as with Joseph, and as with John, and as with Moses, anytime He can gain that which will be eternal in our lives, He will allow Satan access to take that which is temporal in order to gain what is spiritual and eternal. If treasures on earth are preventing your gaining treasures in heaven, and you've asked God to change you, He may well allow Satan to do something that you construe to be unfair.

Principle 4- God's plan for your life. It began long before your conversion. The psalmist says in essence in Psalm 139 that He knit us together in our mother's womb and scheduled each day of our lives even before we were born.³ Therefore, that experience that took place when you were a child, although something happened years before you came to Christ, was not because you were not yet a believer, outside of God's divine control. Every day of your life was on God's calendar, even before you were born.

Principle 5- God who is Omniscient. He has always has been in control of the circumstances of your life, *cannot make a mistake*. Were God at any time to err, He would no longer be God.

Deuteronomy 32 says,

He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.
(Deuteronomy 32:4)

³ Psalm 139:13-16

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As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried:

(II Samuel 22:31)

Principle 6- His Divine purpose. God has a unique, special, purpose for every child of His; therefore, He has by divine decree made each of us totally different; and He has allowed totally different experiences to come into each of our lives in order to ultimately accomplish His specific divine purpose. Job chapter 8 and Psalm 139 make that clear.

In other words, *you are who you are for a reason.* My friend, if you do a biographical sketch of all the famous heroes of Scripture, two things will stand out: 1) No two heroes were remotely the same and 2) no two of their ministries were the same, either. The truth of the matter is that God in eternity past has designed for each of us a special, wonderful plan, unlike His plan for any other person. To accomplish the uniqueness of that plan, He gave us each different parents, a different appearance, different talents, different skills, different levels of intelligence, different spiritual gifts, different experiences as a child, different experiences as a youth, and on and on and on it goes. So unique are we that none of our fingerprints are the same. So unique are we that none of our voiceprints are the same.

So committed to uniqueness is the heart of God that He custom designs each snowflake to be different. He tailors every petal of every flower. God has designed each of us differently, and in the case of His children, that difference has a divine purpose. In other words, *you are who you are for a reason.*

YOU ARE WHO YOU ARE FOR A REASON

You are who you are for a reason;
You're part of an intricate plan.
You're a precious and perfect unique design,
Called "God's special woman or man".

You look like you look for a reason;
Our God made no mistake.
He knit you together within the womb;
You're just what He wanted to make!

The parents you had were the ones He chose,
And no matter how you may feel,
They were custom-designed with God's plan in mind,
And they bear the Master's seal.

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No, that trauma you faced was not easy,
And God wept that it hurt you so;
But it was allowed to shape your heart
So that into His likeness you'd grow.

You are who you are for a reason,
You've been formed by the Master's rod.
You are who you are, Beloved,
Because *there is a God!*

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You are who you are for a reason. And everything God has allowed into your experience has been allowed with that reason in mind.

These six principles ought then, to clarify for us the reasons we have to give constant praise to the Planner Himself.

1- God is; therefore, whatever He does is perfect. And it is important that we remember that this world is His, and everyone in it. Therefore, nothing happens apart from His permissive will—nothing.

2- We must never forget that we who have been born-again are not only His by creation, but by a deliberate act of our own will. We have designated God the rightful director of the drama of our lives. Whatever He chooses to do with that which He owns is His business. It is not our prerogative even to question Him. All of Romans chapter 9 assures us of that.

3- This God who owns us and all the world besides has one thing on His mind primarily: it is things eternal. He is Spirit, and though we live in a physical world, its provisions to meet our needs are not His primary concern. He has told us it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for one whose eyes are riveted on things to ever find the Kingdom of God. He has told us to lay up treasures in a different kingdom where they will always draw interest and never be in danger. His kingdom is spiritual and eternal, and the decisions He makes about what is best for us are all made with that in mind.

4- Even before we were formed in our mother's womb, God began the process of preparing us for something.

5- In the process of that preparation, He did not make any mistakes. He cannot make a mistake and still be God.

6- And all of this leads up to the fact that this perfect,

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sovereign, loving God has from eternity past had a distinct, unique, divinely-ordained plan for your life, and everything that He has ever allowed to happen to you has been a part of that plan.

II- PRAISE FOR THE PLAN

We, then, ought to have nothing but praise for the Planner. He is perfect, His ways are perfect, His plan is perfect. Therefore, what He does for us and with us is perfect. His Kingdom is higher than ours. His ways are higher than ours. We may not always understand, but we must never stop praising Him. *He is! Therefore, we are blessed.*

But we must go even one step beyond that. We must learn to praise not only the Planner, but the Plan as well. To do that, we must begin to be grateful *for everything that has ever happened in our lives*. You may be asking—everything? God answers—everything!

You say, but how can I praise God for an alcoholic mother? How can I praise God for allowing my father to be killed when I was three? How can I praise God for allowing my sister to come down with an incurable disease? How can I praise God for that accident, you might ask, if I were Ellen Harrison, an accident that wasn't her fault that put her in a wheel chair for life? Get practical, you may be thinking. It's one thing to lay out principles; it's another to make them work. Why should I praise God for that which hurts, or grieves, or takes or kills. Why?

Well, remember, God did not engineer the things you are describing; they are the result of sin. Before the fall, there was no disease, no murder, no anger, no fear, no pain, no affliction; nor will there be after we are glorified and taken home to be with the Master. But until then, we must live with the curse of sin. How then, ought we to view those horrible things that have happened to us? I'll tell you how—as part of God's permissive will and thus as a part of His plan to accomplish three things.

Now remember, His goals are eternal and spiritual. So even if your world caves in physically...marriage, job, finances, health... God's purposes have not only not been thwarted, He now has in his hands the very tools He needs to accomplish His real purpose on earth. He has three things in mind. When you understand those three you will always be able to praise Him.

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Goal 1- To conform us to His image.

God's first objective is always that we might become in character, more and more and more like Him. Paul gives us that *clear* admonition in Philippians 3:10, an often-quoted, but not always often-understood passage. Paul, in that one concise verse outlines one of the three major reasons for the Christian's remaining on planet earth. It is this: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."⁴

Paul is saying that He has only one goal in life and that is to know Christ more intimately. He goes on to say that the obvious vehicle to accomplishing that is to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, until He has actually become conformed to Christ's life by being conformed to Christ's death. In II Corinthians 12, Paul goes on to explain the principle and how it works. He tells us that God often must create or allow physical weakness in this life, in order to create a dependence on the strength of God. When he became weak, Paul discovered, he then allowed God to be strong. When the physical power was no longer there, God's spiritual power was needed more than ever. It is called *weakness grace*, and it is the secret to understanding why God allows so many of the things in our lives that He does.

Therefore, nothing that has ever happened to you is without spiritual importance. Nothing. And the things that were the most unpleasant and unexpected in the physical realm are the most likely to become the most beneficial in the spiritual realm. Ellen, in the opening illustration, found that the very traumas of her childhood that had caused her to be *handicapped* from man's perspective, were the tools a sovereign God had used to fashion her into a sensitive saint. The tragedies taught her to love. The hurts taught her to listen. The pain taught her to seek her strength in the Living God. From the world's vantage point, she was the loser. From God's perspective, the very things the world was pitying her for were becoming the stepping stones to what would become her strength. Her self-image suffered. God gave her *His* image instead. Physically, she could not walk. God compensated by giving her an ability to walk with Him that few others had. *She was not handicapped*. She was becoming conformed to the image of her God. And all because that God loved her enough to shape her future, using the pain of the past.

⁴ Philippians 3:10

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Goal 2- To give us a testimony.

In Philippians, chapter one, Paul wrote these immortal words:

But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
(Philippians 1:12-14)

Paul says, “Wow, a neat thing happened on my way to Glory. I got thrown into a Roman prison for crimes I did not commit. Bitter? You must be kidding. This is the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me. God has, through my response to this trial, given me a testimony, and that testimony has strengthened the rest of the church. “If that’s the case,” Paul is saying, “prison is the place to be.” The world was watching Paul. All the Christians were watching Paul. God let him be thrown into prison so those who were watching could see how God acts when he’s thrown in prison. So impressed were they, that many were coming to Christ. And God has taken you over some bumpy roads in bringing you to where you are, so that those who are watching you—your children, your friends, your neighbors, can see Jesus Christ in action when the heat of the battle goes beyond man’s ability to bear it. Your testimony today is the result of the tests of the past. How could you be bitter over that?

Goal 3- To give us a ministry.

Just as a testimony is the image of Christ you project to others in a given situation, a ministry is what you do with that image. II Corinthians reminds us:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

(II Corinthians 1:3,4)

He is saying that our ministry is basically the result of taking the comfort God has given us as we passed through past hurts and sharing that comfort with others who are passing through

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the same troubled waters. In other words, if you are the product of a broken home, God has given you special equipment with which to minister to those who are struggling in broken homes. If you are the product of abuse, of neglect, of rejection, of misunderstandings, of sickness, of physical affliction, you have been placed in the ministry. And the scope of your ministry has been widened and deepened by the very things you, if you were God, would have removed from your life.

You are who you are because of what God has allowed you to go through. Others are looking at God through what you have become as a result of what you have been through, and your very ministry will, in most cases, be the result of passing on to others the same grace that God gave you.

So don't you see, the very things in your life that you have been angry at God over, the very things that you have blamed society for, that you have been bitter at your parents about—these very things have become the jewels in the crown of your life through which the sunlight of God's glory reflects the nature of God's character into your life, and through your life, into the lives of others. The issue then, isn't simply learning to accept those things as something you could not help.

III- GOD'S "50-20" PLAN

The secret is learning to turn the past into praise. It is going one step beyond accepting the past as part of God's will; it is coming to get excited about the past as part of God's perfect plan for your life. There is a decided difference. We'll call it "God's 50-20 plan" because Genesis 50:20 is a good verse to claim as you do it.

But as for you, 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. (Genesis 50:20)

Satan meant each thing for evil, but God meant to use them for good. So Praise Him! Here is how you do it. Take a sheet of paper, and on that paper, make a list, one by one of the things that have happened in your life up until now that if you had been God, you wouldn't have allowed to happen.

It may be your looks. Nobody likes how they look. The thin women want to be fat. The fat women want to be thin. The short men want to be tall. The tall men wish they were shorter. Nobody likes how they look. But that's an affront to God. God designed

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you just the way you are, as the best possible showcase for His grace. Madison Avenue may want all the women in the world to be 5 ft. 10 in. tall and weigh 80 pounds, but God didn't design them all that way. Set aside a day to praise God for making you just the way you are. It may be your parents that you are angry about. It is popular today to blame your problems on having the wrong parents. You can't have had the wrong parents unless God made a mistake. And God can't make a mistake. It may be that experience in the fourth grade when you felt so rejected. That rejection may well have been the tool God used to create a need that later led to your accepting Christ. Praise Him. Don't just accept it. Praise Him.

Maybe it was the experience of a tragic family crisis. Don't you see? God has given you a ministry—a ministry to others who even right now are going through the same thing. Praise Him.

Maybe it was the disappointment of not becoming a success in your chosen field. Praise God for that. That very success might have served as a diversion to satisfy in the physical realm a need that only God can really meet. Praise Him. He never makes a mistake.

Maybe it was the fact that you never had any friends. Praise Him. He gave you the capacity to reach out and touch the truest friend you'll ever have, the only friend who ever died for you.

One last thing: Let the Scripture be your picture book of praise! Satan is going to ask you "What good ever came out of such a thing as that?" You can always answer, "It is written." These questions and these answers are a start. You can find dozens more for each of the situations you have encountered.

What good could come out of spending years in a lonely job with no recognition? Ask Moses.

What good could come from being sent to a place you've never even heard of? Ask Abraham.

What good could come from a life being "snuffed out" in its prime? Ask Stephen. Ask Abel. Ask Jesus.

What good could possibly come from the loss of loved ones? Ask Ruth. Ask Naomi. Ask Job. Ask Mary.

What good could come from losing your fortune? Ask Job.

What good could come from friction in the family? From

Praise for the Planner; Praise for the Plan

parental favoritism? Ask Joseph. Ask Jacob.

What good could come from physical affliction? Ask Paul.

There is no limit to the portraits in God's picture book of character that you can extract to stand upon and draw out the kind of spiritual benefits God sends through physical disappointments, the kinds of victories God wins through the defeats of the past.

Praise Him, Beloved, and begin a constant, continuous season of praise that will go on until Jesus comes, lifting your heart morning noon and night to the Father with thanksgiving for everything that has ever happened to you.

Once you can go back and instead of just burying the past you can lift the past into the realm of praise...then, Beloved, you are set free from the bitterness and the anger that has bound you to shackles of defeat. You are free to go on to become a man or woman of praise; a man or woman who has learned the secret—the secret of how to in everything is to give Praise for the Planner; Praise for the Plan.

PRAISE FOR THE PLANNER, PRAISE FOR THE PLAN

Praise for the planner; praise for the plan;
Ah, that's the heartbeat of God's kind of man.
He sees the future in light of the past;
The grief is fleeting; but the character will last.

He sees the heartache as part of the way
In which God, the potter, is molding the clay.
He knows the setbacks will gradually fade,
And leave but the fiber of which real life is made.

That which Satan would use (if he could),
Our loving God takes and turns into good.
Those very same heartaches the enemy would use,
God turns into vessels, His grace to infuse.

Oh, blessed Christian, live out your days
Filled with thanksgiving; fountains of praise,
Thanking God for the past. Don't you see? Now you can!
Give praise for the Planner...and praise for His Plan.

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Praise for the Planner; Praise for the Plan

A Challenge to Additional Study and Application

1- How would you explain the sovereignty of God to a friend who is struggling with life's circumstances? Meditate this week on the Scriptures found on pages 65 and 66. What is God saying to you through these verses?

2- Based on Job's experiences, what rights does God sometimes give Satan? Why? Are there limits? Why? As believers, how does God's right to do with us as He chooses become even more understandable?

3- The principle that "God is spirit" is crucial to understanding why God sometimes does what He does. Can you explain this principle?

4- Have you ever looked back on your life and made a timeline listing the experiences you have had that have influenced your life? Have you ever stopped to praise Him even for the things you wished had not happened?

5- Can you pray Philippians 3:10 with Paul and mean it? What does it mean to be conformed to His death? What is the "fellowship of His sufferings"?

6- Can you understand what Paul meant in Philippians 1:12-14? Have you ever had a "prison-like" experience that ended up being an encouragement to other believers and an opportunity to share your faith? Have you ever asked God to allow that to happen or to allow it to happen again?

7- God is looking for men and women who praise Him morning, noon and night for everything that has happened, is happening and ever will happen, knowing that, indeed, all things really do work together for good. Would you like to be one of those men or women? The first step is to tell God you want to "know him, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death,"⁵ whatever it takes. Ask God for the grace to pray that prayer.

⁵ Philippians 3:10

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