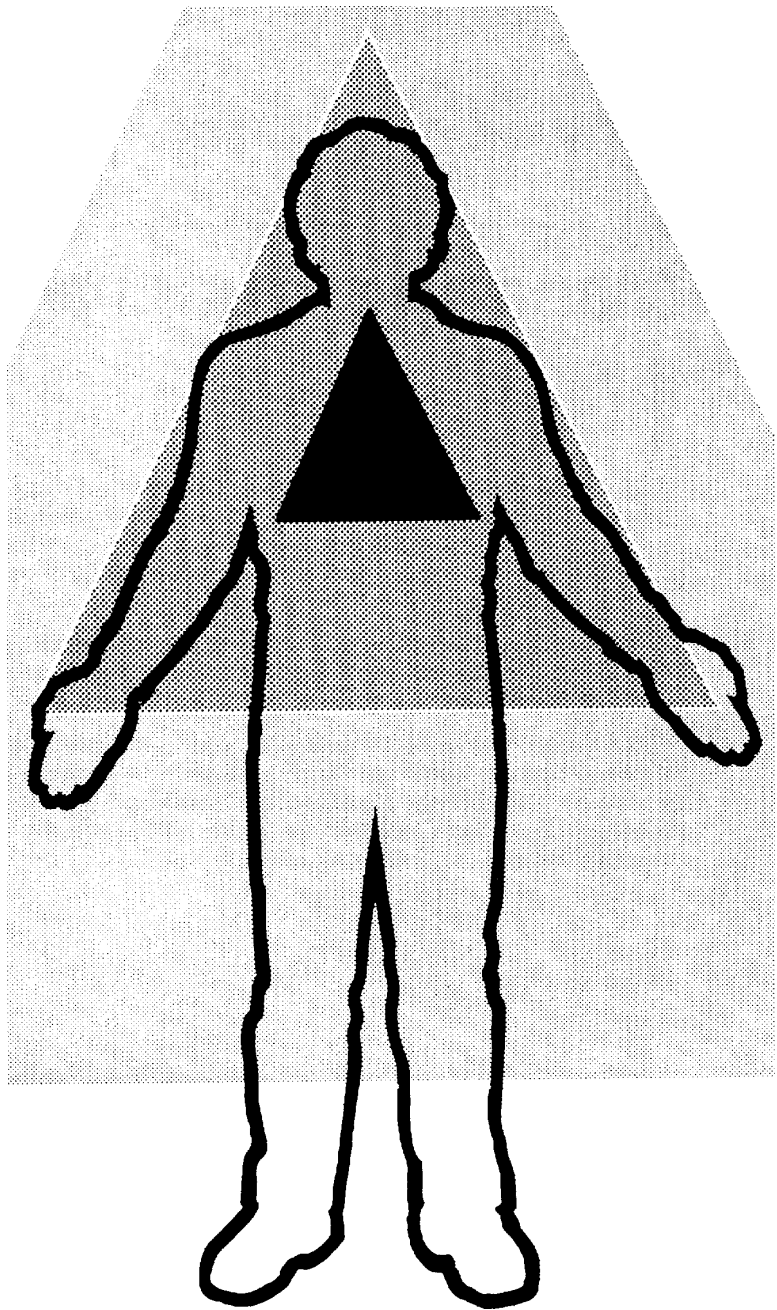


Unit Two

Stewardship and Ourselves



Lesson 3

Managing Our Lives

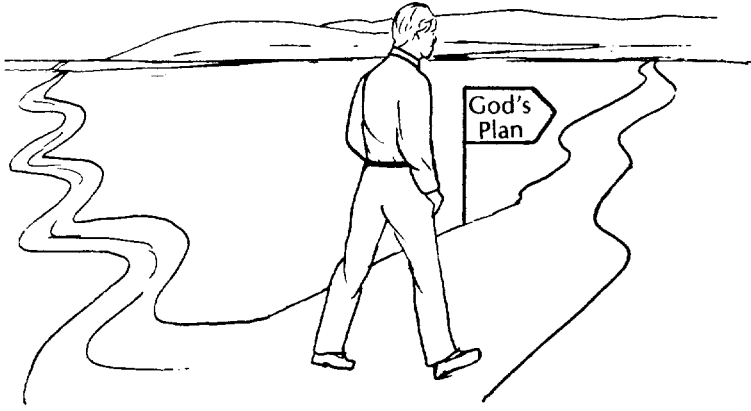
In the first two lessons you learned about God's role and ours in terms of Christian stewardship. You know also that we ourselves are both God's property and God's stewards. Now in this lesson we shall deal with how to manage our lives according to the desires of our owner in heaven.

This lesson has been written to help you manage your life as God wants you to. The first part deals with God's plan for your life; the second deals with your part within this plan.

You certainly couldn't cut a piece of wood using the smooth side of a saw. The saw is a tool designed to cut with the teeth. If the saw is to be used to cut effectively, it must be used as the designer intended it to be used. In the same way your life will be effective only if you manage it according to God's plan.

lesson outline

God's Plan
Our Part



lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- List several steps you can take in order to find and carry out God's plan for your life.
- Realize that there is joy in following God's plan.

learning activities

1. Study this lesson in the same way you have studied the previous ones: find the key words in the glossary, pay attention to the objectives, read the lesson development and Bible verses mentioned, and answer the study questions.
2. Pay close attention to the diagrams. These help to illustrate some of the important ideas in the lesson.
3. Complete the self-test after you have studied and reviewed the lesson. Check your answers with those that are given in the back of the study guide.

key words

cultivate

goal

intermediate

obstacle

persecutor

priority

sculptor

secular

strategy

lesson development

GOD'S PLAN

Objective 1. *Identify descriptions of the three aspects of God's plan.*

There are a lot of things that simply can't be done without having a plan. For example, you couldn't put a clock together because—you might have some pieces left over. This is why when God made the world He did it following a plan (Genesis 1:3-31). The marvelous order of the universe testifies to this fact. But above all, God has a wonderful plan for every person. We will study this plan, looking at it stage by stage.

God's Plan Viewed From Eternity

The Bible says that God made man like Himself and gave him dominion over the entire world (Genesis 1:26, 28; Psalm 8:6-8). God was the owner of the world and man was His manager. You remember that in the first lesson you studied that man, following Satan's suggestion, rebelled against God. Since then man has no longer been like God.

Satan believed that he had ruined God's work beyond repair. But it wasn't so, for God was prepared. He knows everything, even what is going to happen in the future. Thus God knew before the world was created that man was going to fail. For that reason He made a plan beforehand to restore him. Notice in Romans 8:29-30 a simple outline of what this marvelous plan includes:

1. Being chosen
2. Being set apart
3. Being called
4. Being put right with God
5. Being made to share in God's glory

You and I, as Christians, are part of this plan. The apostle Peter tells us that we were chosen according to God's purpose beforehand (1 Peter 1:2). And the apostle Paul emphasizes this same truth, stating that God chose us before the world was made

(Ephesians 1:4). God chose us because He knew ahead of time that we would serve Him!

But what does God intend to bring about with this plan? you may ask yourself. The best for man, of course. In the first place, God wants to restore His likeness in man. Jesus is God’s likeness (Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 1:3). Because of this, God wants us to become like His Son (Romans 8:29, Ephesians 4:13, 1 John 3:2). In the second place, God wants to form a large family of His children among whom Jesus will be the firstborn (Romans 8:29). And finally, God wants all His children to reign with Him forever (Revelation 22:5). Aren’t these purposes truly wonderful?

But in this plan God has a purpose for Himself too. He made the universe—and man himself—for His glory (Revelation 4:11, Isaiah 43:7). In the same way He planned to restore us so that we would be a praise to His glory (Ephesians 1:6, 12-14; Revelation 5:11-13).

1 Match each Scripture verse with each phrase that tells what it says.

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| a Explains what God’s purpose is for Himself | 1) Romans 8:29-30 |
| b Gives an outline of God’s plan | 2) Hebrews 1:3 |
| c Tells us who God’s likeness is | 3) Revelation 4:11 |
| d Lets us know that God wants us to become like His Son | |

God’s Plan Viewed From Our Birth

Has it ever seemed to you that your life had no meaning? That you were an unnecessary person in this world? That it would have been better if you hadn’t been born? You might have felt that way before you came to know Jesus as your Savior. You didn’t know then that you were born because God wanted you to be, because He had a plan for your life.

The Bible gives us many examples of people for whose lives God had a plan before they were born. God had a plan like this for the life of Moses. By faith his mother found out this plan and

avoided having the child killed by the Egyptian soldiers (Hebrews 11:23).

God also had a plan for Samson's life (Judges 13:1-5), for Jeremiah's (Jeremiah 1:4-5), for John the Baptist's (Luke 1:5-17), and for the lives of others.

God said to Abraham: "you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2); that is, he would be a blessing to the world. History, however, records accounts of men whose lives were a curse and not a blessing for humanity. One of these was Attila, the king of the Huns. But though some historians have called him the "Scourge of God," Attila's life of war and murder is not an example of what God has planned for even some men. God would rather have every human being to be a blessing in his earthly life. This world is often a very unhappy place and each one of us can help to make it more bearable.

Perhaps at one time or other you have heard someone say something like this: "Poor thing! It must have been his destiny." This is sometimes said to express sympathy for a delinquent or a vicious person who has met a tragic death. But *God* didn't plan such a destiny for that person! God doesn't want anyone to be lost; on the contrary, He wants everyone to be saved (Ezekiel 18:23, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3 :9). What happens is that some people confuse *God's* plan with what *men* have done with *their* lives.

2 Suppose you wanted to show someone an example of a person for whom God had plans before he was born. Which Scripture passage would be the best to use?

- a) Psalm 8:6-8
- b) Luke 1:5-17
- c) Romans 8:29-30
- d) 2 Peter 3:9

God's Plan Viewed From Our Call

The plan that God has for our lives enters a decisive stage when we respond to His call and accept Jesus as our Savior. This is when God begins to restore His likeness in us (2 Corinthians

3:18, Colossians 3:10). And this is also when God begins to bring about in us the specific purpose for which He brought us into this world.

God called Abraham to be the founder of the chosen people (Genesis 12:1-2), Moses to be the liberator of His people (Exodus 3:1-10), Isaiah to be a prophet (Isaiah 6:8-10), and Saul to be an apostle (Acts 26:15-18). God called me for a specific purpose. And no doubt He has called you too!

Suffering is an important part of God's plan for our lives on earth. As the sculptor hits the stone with the hammer and chisel until he has shaped it the way he wants it to be, so God uses suffering to make our lives conform to His plan. Consider Joseph (Genesis 37:1-36; 39:1-23) and Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). They were great men of God, but their lives were marked by suffering. Jesus Himself "endured suffering and pain" (Isaiah 53:3). He learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8). Don't be surprised, then, if your life up to this point has seemed to be like the experience Jesus went through on Calvary. Without a doubt God is preparing you to be used the way He wants to. Later on, though, the joy you will have will more than repay you for the suffering that was part of your preparation (Romans 8:18).

3 Match each aspect of God's plan with each phrase that describes it the best.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| a God actually begins to restore His likeness in us. | 1) From eternity |
| b God wants His children to reign with Him. | 2) From our birth |
| c Suffering is part of God's plan. | 3) From our call |
| d God has a specific plan for each life. | |
| e God wants His children to become like Jesus. | |
| f We were born because God wanted us to be. | |

OUR PART**To Search Out God's Plan**

Objective 2. *Choose examples showing how to search out God's plan.*

You already know that God is the owner of your life and that you are only to manage it. You also know that it is the owner who makes the plans for how his goods will be used and the manager who carries them out. Since God has a plan for your life, it is very important for you to find out what it is. Then you can manage your life the way He wants you to. For this it is necessary that you do the following.

1. *Examine your situation.* It may be that up to this point you have thought that God has only called you to be simply a passive church member. You understand that others can indeed do a variety of things for God, but this is not true in your case. You think that going to church is the principal activity of your Christian life. Actually, you are not very different from a person who goes to church as a visitor. You have reconciled yourself to this situation, but as time has gone by the routine has tired you—so much so that perhaps you even find yourself dozing a bit during the services! This isn't what God wants for you! Surely He has something better!

Perhaps you think that God doesn't have anything important for you because you have failed Him. You have wasted your life and you feel like a broken jar. But God is an expert in mending broken jars (Jeremiah 18:1-8). He still has a plan for those who have failed. Consider Jacob, who deceived his father who was almost blind (Genesis 27:1-35); Moses, who killed an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-15); David, who fell into adultery (2 Samuel 11:1-27); and Peter, who denied his Lord (Matthew 26:69-75). Every one of them failed, but God forgave them; and, what is more—He used them again! God can still use you again too.

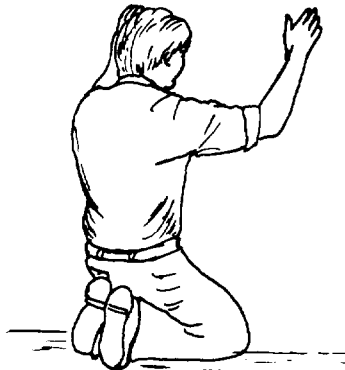
2. *Give up your own plans.* Before your conversion you considered yourself to be the owner of your life; you did as you pleased. But since then you have begun to do what God wants—or so you have thought. However it is possible for a person to

think that his own plans are God's plans. Moses thought that it was God's plan that he liberate God's people by means of violence (Acts 7:23-25); Saul thought he was defending God's cause by persecuting the Christians (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2; Philippians 3:6). Both were mistaken. Therefore you won't be able to know what God's plans for your life are unless you first give up the plans that you have.

3. *Acknowledge Christ's lordship.* While Saul is fallen on the ground, he replies "Lord" to the voice that talks to him (Acts 9:5-6). He understands that the voice and the power that has struck him to the ground belong to one and the same person. The persecutor has yielded. He has given up his plans to arrest the believers in Damascus. Now he is willing to obey the Lord. Everyone who wants to know the plan of God for his life must come to this point. Without acknowledging the lordship of Christ and surrendering completely to Him, you will not be able to know God's plan.

4 List two things that are necessary for you to know God's plan according to the above discussion.

.....



4. *Ask the Lord what to do.* Saul asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). What an important question! If you have taken the first three steps, you are ready to put the same kind of question to God. You may ask Him in prayer to show you the plan He has for your life.

5. *Be ready to accept God's plan.* While you are praying be ready to accept what God wants for your life. God doesn't have the same plan for everyone. Just as He made us different from each other, so He also has a different plan for each of us. Maybe He will make you a good pastor or evangelist; but He might also want to make you a good laborer, office worker, or professional person. Perhaps you might become famous; but you might also remain unknown. God made Saul to be a great apostle and writer; but Ananias was no more than an obscure disciple in the church of Damascus. Simon Peter became famous; but not so his brother Andrew. But Andrew brought Simon to Jesus (John 1:40-42) and Ananias led Saul in the first steps of the Christian life (Acts 9:10-17).

6. *Listen to God's voice.* Now that you have asked the Lord for the plan He has for your life you need the answer. God can give it to you in different ways. Notice some of these:

- a. God's audible voice (Acts 22:10)
- b. An angel (Acts 8:26)
- c. A vision or appearance (Exodus 3:1-10; Acts 16:9-10)
- d. A dream (Matthew 1:20-21)
- e. A prophecy (Acts 13:1-2; 22:15-16)
- f. The Holy Spirit's voice in the believer (Acts 8:29, 10:19)

The ways listed above have been used by the Lord to give *specific* directions. God also uses other means, but only to make some *suggestions* to us in our search for His plan for our lives. These means may be the Bible, a sermon, something written by another believer, or the advice of a believer who is mature in his walk with God. The Bible, for example, gives general directions which apply to all believers; but it doesn't say that you, specifically, should be a deacon or leader in your church.

If you don't receive an immediate reply after you put your question to the Lord, don't be impatient. Wait. Remember that

God is your owner and you are only a steward. When you receive an answer, make sure that it isn't contrary to the Scriptures or to common sense (Galatians 1:8-9). If it seems that the Lord has only given you a few signs as to what His plans are, obey these and later He will reveal others to you (Acts 9:6).

It may be that you have heard a prophecy giving you directions for your life. Wait until the Holy Spirit confirms it to you personally. If you have had a dream that *seems* to be a revelation from God, don't set *yourself* up as the interpreter. Ask your pastor or other more mature believers for advice.

5 Which person is following the steps the lesson suggests for searching out God's plan?

- a) Jim has become a pastor. His brother John thinks that he should follow his brother's example and he decides he should become a pastor too.
- b) Susan has a dream that leads her to believe that she should become a missionary. Without asking anyone's advice, she gives up her plans to become a secretary.
- c) Jane wants to know God's will for her life. So she spends time in prayer, asking God what she should do. Then she patiently waits on Him and is ready to accept His answer.

To Prepare to Follow God's Plan

Preparation Is Necessary

Objective 3. *Select statements that express the importance of preparation in following God's plan.*

Once you are sure what it is that God wants to do with your life you need to prepare yourself. There are many kinds of work which require a certain amount of previous preparation. The Lord's work is one of these. Jesus took three years to prepare those who were going to be the first leaders of the church. And all of our life on earth is a preparation for eternity!



Sometimes God's plan goes along with our own personal desires. This happened in Moses' case. God had planned for him to be the liberator of his people. But Moses was in a hurry; he was an impulsive and violent man (Exodus 2:11-14). Forty years went by during which God prepared him until he became a humble man (Numbers 12:3). Are you eager to be a worker for the Lord? You desire an excellent work! (1 Timothy 3:1). Prepare yourself, then, so that you will have everything that the Bible requires for that work (1 Timothy 3:2-7). Don't be discouraged if your time of preparation seems to be a long one. It takes longer to make the hard wood of an oak tree than the soft wood of a pine tree.

- 6** Jesus prepared His disciples for three years because they
- a) were not willing to follow Him right away.
 - b) needed to learn how to carry out His plan.
 - c) were lacking in dedication to His cause.

A Strategy for Life

Objective 4. *Identify the relationship between God's plan and our plans.*

Objective 5. *Select a plan that follows the strategy given in the lesson.*

In Luke 14:28-32 Jesus teaches us, by way of passing, the importance of making plans so we can be sure that we will achieve our goals. But you might say, Haven't I had to give up my plans so that I can know what God's plan for my life is?

Shouldn't I follow God's plan instead of making my own? Well, that's true; as owner of our lives God gives us general instructions as to what we are to do with them. But He leaves the details to us. Otherwise we would be like machines for God to run instead of managers that were responsible to Him. A casual reading of James 4:13-15 might seem to indicate that God is opposed to our making plans. But if we look at it more closely we see that what God actually wants is that our plans meet with His approval. Note that James 4:15 says: "If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that." These are the kinds of plans that God is inclined to bless (Proverbs 16:3).

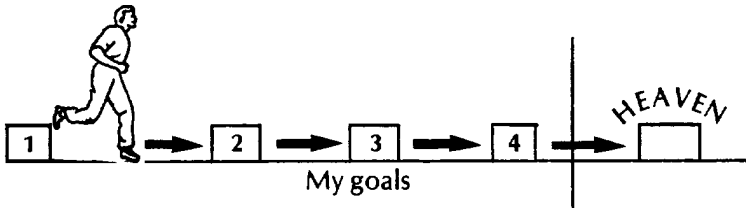
7 Which statement best describes the relationship between our plans and God's plans?

- a) God's plans for us are His general instructions. We make plans as to the specific way in which we will carry out God's plans.
- b) According to James 4:13-15 we are not supposed to make any plans for our lives because God has already made His plans for us.
- c) We shouldn't make plans because what God wants us to do is usually totally different from what we think we want to do.

At this point, the fact that we can and should make plans in our Christian life has been made clear. We can now consider a strategy for managing this life that God has given us. This strategy has three parts, which are: *goals*, *priorities*, and *plans*. If you are going to run in a race, your greatest desire will be to reach the goal. The Christian life is like a race (Hebrews 12:1) in stages; we need to reach a number of intermediate goals in order to reach the final one, which is heaven. The apostle Paul hoped to reach that goal (Philippians 3:14). At the end of his life he could say with satisfaction: "I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance" (2 Timothy 4:7). We may say, then, that *a goal is a statement of what you propose to achieve in your life*.

Whether they realize it or not, everyone makes goals for his or her life. The popular saying, "Man proposes, but God disposes" bears this out. Of course now that you want to

prepare yourself to serve the Lord your goals will be subject to God’s plan for your life. For example, if God wants you to be a preacher, one of your goals might be to read the entire Bible through. Another one might be to study in a Bible school.



Goals must be specific if they are to be useful. That is to say, they cannot be as general as, for example, to be a good Christian or a faithful steward. Goals like these involve many different aspects of your life. Furthermore, goals must also be reachable. To take 50 visitors to Sunday school next Sunday would be an unreachable goal if you haven’t yet been able to take 5. But to spend an hour in prayer each day during one week would be a reachable goal.

8 If goals are to be useful, they must be
and

Now you may sit down and write a list of all the goals that you want to achieve. Are there a lot of them? If there are, you are an ambitious person! I congratulate you. But there is a saying in my country that goes “Grasp all; lose most.” Perhaps you won’t have time enough to reach all your goals and later you will discover that you have only reached the ones that are the least important. In such a situation you would feel frustrated or defeated. If you have several goals you need to establish *priorities*. Or, in other words, you need to determine which goals you want to achieve first. To do this you could classify your goals or aims according to an order of priorities like this: a) most important, b) important, and c) least important.

In Lesson 2 you had an example of how to make investments according to a set of priorities, which actually was the biblical

system of priorities. You can apply it to the rest of the goals of your life as well.

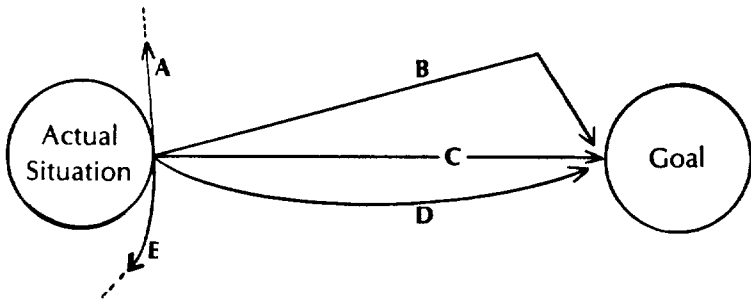
9 Which person is setting priorities?

- a) George wants to read the Bible through in a year. He then decides how many chapters he is going to read each month.
- b) Mary has decided that she needs to study to do well in school. She sets aside an hour each night to do her studies.
- c) Harry decides to spend a year studying in Bible school before he starts to save money to buy some things he wants.

10 Arrange the following goals according to the set of priorities given in Lesson 2.

- **a** Take care of your family's needs. 1) First
- **b** Buy some extra clothes for yourself. 2) Second
- **c** Go to the meetings of your church. 3) Third
- **d** Visit a friend who is sick.
- **e** Spend time in prayer and Bible study.

Once you have established which are your most important goals, you need to make the *plans* that are necessary to achieve them. There may be many ways to reach a goal, but a plan helps us to find the best one. Without a plan you may never reach the goal you have decided on. Or if you reach it, you may have taken longer than necessary because you have chosen the most difficult way. You are aware that there are people who intend to go to heaven but who are following the wrong road.



Of the ways above represented by arrows, the best is the most direct, or **C**: this is the plan. Notice that ways **A** and **E** do not go towards the goal at all, and ways **B** and **D** are indirect and longer than necessary.

To continue, I suggest a strategy you may follow in making your plan. In the following lessons you will find some practical ways to apply this strategy to the different situations in your life.

1. Describe your actual situation.
2. Describe your goal.
3. Describe and take advantage of factors that will help you to reach your goal.
4. Describe and remove the obstacles that keep you from reaching your goal.
5. Make note of the steps you need to take in order to reach your goal.

Of course you need to be in prayer as you are making your plan. Your prayer should be like the talk a manager would have with the owner. In this way God's timely advice will be yours (Proverbs 16:9).

11 Which, person has followed a good plan for reaching his goal?

- a) John decides he wants to be a teacher. He finds out there is a good teacher's school in a nearby town. He goes right away. But after a month of study he has to leave for lack of money.
- b) Fred wants to be a teacher. He finds out how much money he will need to go to the teacher's school nearby. He saves his money for a whole year, goes to the school, and finishes his course.

12 In study question 11 the person who didn't follow a good plan made a mistake. What was it?

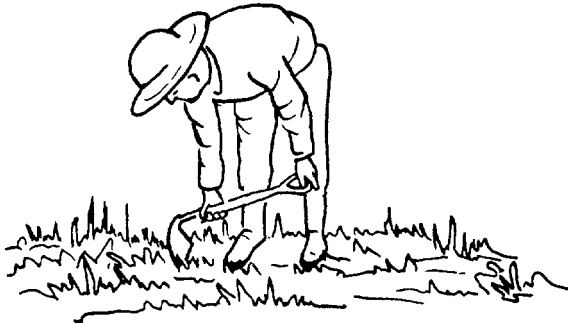
- a) He didn't describe his actual situation or remove the obstacles that would keep him from reaching his goal.
- b) He didn't describe his goal or take advantage of the factors that would help him to reach it.

To Live According to God’s Plan

Objective 6. *Choose descriptions of the Christian’s attitude towards living out God’s plan.*

You don’t need to finish your preparation before you begin to live according to God’s plan. We must live for the Lord, not for ourselves, because we belong to Him (Romans 14:7-8). This is what stewardship of one’s life consists of. Living for the Lord produces good returns. When we live for Him, we honor Him as the owner of our lives. As a result, He will also honor us, His faithful stewards (1 Samuel 2:30).

Work is an important part of the Christian life. When God made man, He put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it (Genesis 2:15). The garden would produce the food he needed if he would cultivate it and care for it (Genesis 2:16). Paul the apostle repeated this principle thousands of years later when he said: “Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But God also wants us to work so that we can help those who have needs (Ephesians 4:28).



13 Is it true that before man sinned he was not given any work to do?

.....

If you are involved in secular activities, don’t forget that you are working for the Lord. He is the one who is actually your employer. So you should do your work honestly, with all your heart (Ephesians 6:5-7; Colossians 3:23), as for the Lord. But

neither should you forget that you are God's worker if you are involved in the Christian ministry. Bring honor to the ministry in such a way that everyone knows that you too are a worker. Some believers still think that pastors don't work. When their pastor visits them they innocently ask him: "What are you doing around here, pastor? Just taking a little walk?" Other times it happens that the minister's children themselves don't know that the Christian ministry is work. A pastor's son was asked by his teacher: "What kind of work does your father do?" He replied, "My father doesn't work."

Some people feel frustrated if they are involved in work they don't like and have no chance to find something else. If this is your situation, it would help if you would take on the same attitude Jesus had. He told His disciples that His food was to obey the will of the One who sent Him and to finish the work He was given to do (John 4:34). Jesus didn't find it easy to be in this wicked world, but He did love to do the will of His Father (Psalm 40:8). We are also in this world to do the work that God has given to us. But if your work does not fit with your role as God's steward, don't hesitate. You may leave it and God will certainly give you another that will bring you satisfaction and peace of heart.

14 Which statement expresses the attitude a Christian should have towards work?

- a) I should keep the job I have even though the kind of work I do is not what a Christian should be doing.
- b) Because my employer is not a Christian, it really doesn't matter how I act when I am doing my work.
- c) If I do secular work, I should do it as well as I can, knowing that I am actually working for the Lord.

self-test

1 Which statement below best expresses God's plan as related to our call?

- a) God begins to make us like Jesus, sometimes allowing trials and suffering to prepare us to do His will.
- b) Before the world was made God intended to create a family of children that would one day reign with Him.
- c) God wants every person to be a blessing to the world and has a plan for each person's life.

2 Suppose a friend of yours tells you that he doesn't think God can use him because he has failed. What should you say?

- a) Explain that God doesn't have the same plan for everyone. Tell him that he can still be a good church member even if God can't use him for anything else.
- b) Show him people in the Bible, such as David and Moses, that God used even though they failed. Encourage him to continue to search out God's will for his life.

3 Suppose you have asked the Lord what He wants you to do. You haven't received an answer yet. What should be your next step?

- a) Search the Bible for specific directions.
- b) Continue to wait on the Lord.
- c) Go ahead with your own plans.

4 God prepared Moses for 40 years because Moses

- a) had different plans for his own life.
- b) was too young to serve the Lord.
- c) needed to become a man God could use.

5 Which statement would be made by a person who understands the relationship between our plans and God's plan?

- a) God's plan for me is important. So I won't make any plans of my own in order not to miss what He wants me to do.
- b) God plans for me to be like Jesus. So I in turn make plans to live the kind of life that will be a blessing to others.
- c) James 4:13-15 says that life is uncertain, so it is best not to make any plans. We don't know if we can carry them out.

6 Match each term on the right with each phrase that describes it.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| a Decisions as to what are the most important and least important aims | 1) Goals |
| b Methods giving the steps you need to follow in reaching your aim | 2) Priorities |
| c A list of which aims you want to achieve first | 3) Plans |
| d Statements of what you actually want to achieve | |

7 Mary wants to help a poorer family in her church by making clothes for their children. Which plan follows the strategy suggested in the lesson?

- First Mary tells the family she will make all the clothes their children need. Then she decides how many clothes to make. And then she sees how much cloth she has or can afford to buy.
- First Mary sees how much cloth she has or can afford to buy. Then she decides how many clothes she will be able to make. And then she makes the clothes and gives them to the family.

8 Suppose a new believer were to tell you that now that he has become a Christian he doesn't need to work. He says that the other believers who have more will take care of him. Which response would be the best to make?

- Point out to him that the Bible says in Genesis 2:15 that man has to work because he sinned when he disobeyed God. Tell him that this is why it is true that no man can escape having to work.
- Show him that from the beginning God planned for man to work, as Genesis 2:15 demonstrates. Explain how Ephesians 4:28 shows us that each person should work to help himself and others.

- 13** No. He was given the work of caring for the Garden of Eden.
- 6** b) needed to learn how to carry out His plan.
- 14** c) If I do secular work, I should do it as well as I can, knowing that I am actually working for the Lord.
- 7** a) God's plans for us are His general instructions. We make plans as to the specific way in which we will carry out God's plans.

Your Notes