



LIFE

THE MISSING DIMENSION IN DISCIPLESHIP

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PROLOGUE

“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life”.

Questions immediately spring to mind. Does He have a step by step checklist for me to work through as the years go by? Does He have a life task for me to accomplish that no one else can do? And does it mean that if I have a bad day, then I have strayed from that plan?

Whole books could be written on these questions alone but let us steer clear of questions concerning a specific step by step plan for the three score years and ten of life and think more in terms of His eternal plan for us all.

Let’s ask ourselves the question,

“WHAT IS THIS PLAN?”

Before you answer, let me impose a constraint. Your answer must consist of no more than “one” word. That’s right, one word to describe the whole of God’s Plan for mankind! If I allow you more than one word you may start to expound complex theological concepts that would leave the simple-minded reader of our gospel tract gasping in your learned wake, and sinking deeper into their own sinful state.

No, we want to keep this simple, so just one word please.

Many of you, I sense, would choose the word, “salvation”. It is a good choice though somewhat obscure to the uninitiated. Yet it does communicate that God wants to rescue us from sin’s consequence as well as its power.

Others of you might answer “peace”. The Hebrews used the word “Shalom” which denoted more than an absence of war. It was a blessing that conferred general well being. The Gospel is certainly all about peace. Peace between God and man, and peace with one another.

Others, I am sure, would answer “love”. Faith and hope will end, but love continues right on into eternity! The essence of the gospel is surely that God loves us and our response is to love Him and to love our neighbour.

These are good words. I would not take issue with anyone who saw them as summing up God’s Plan for mankind. Yet I want to suggest another.

I do not anticipate too many of you will have chosen it, yet not only does it sum up God’s purpose and Plan for us but provides us with the key to seeing that the Plan becomes a reality.

That word is “Life”!

Life with a capital “L”, because it is Life lived in another dimension: one more real than the physical dimension in which we live physical life (with a small “l”).

It is Lived in the dimension of the spirit. Only in this dimension can the spiritual Life, or the Christian Life, be Lived. It cannot be lived in the physical dimension.

But how do we Live a Life in a dimension so different to the one we have grown accustomed to? How do we Live Life in a dimension outside the realm of our physical senses?

By developing our spiritual senses: those senses that operate in this other dimension.

Join me as we journey through the pages that follow, and I will help you to learn...



SECTION I

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE

A Study of Life

in

THE BEGINNING





1

THE GOD OF LIFE

Genesis 1:1-2:7

“God is Dead!” read the headlines in the 1960’s. Yet if we were to say anything about God, it would certainly not be that He is dead. God, in fact, is very much Alive and what’s more, He always has been!

Suppose you were to meet this God who is very much Alive. We read in the Bible that the glory of His presence is so great that it is impossible to see Him and live, yet for the sake of this illustration, let us suppose that you meet Him face to face.

The first thing you would notice is that there is only one of Him. That would come as a shock if you had been a part of the many civilisations down through the ages who have believed that “God” was many. Instead of One God you would have believed in many gods, each of whom had control over a certain sphere of life.

But even if you had been accustomed to the idea of One God you may have been intrigued to discover that the more you talked with God, three distinct Beings seemed to be talking back. In the same way that a man can be father, son, and brother all at once, there seemed to be three Beings woven together in perfect Unity.

Still another surprise awaits you. As you talk with this One God in three Beings you become aware that God is talking with Himself. There is dialogue between three Beings; more than that, there is relationship, fellowship, and yes, love!

God is most certainly Alive and His Life is characterised by love.

And God has extended an invitation to you to join Him in this family.



2

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

Genesis 1:1-2:7

Starting at the beginning is usually a good place to begin to start. If we want to discover God's purpose for Mankind we need to wind back the clock to a time in which there were no clocks ... To a time, in fact, when there was no time. I don't mean "no time to do this" or "no time to do that" but just "no time ...". And what's more, it didn't matter because there was no matter either. No time and no matter.

Only God.

It was in this timeless, matterless state that God set His plan in motion.

When we turn to the first verse in the Bible we immediately learn something about God. The very first verb attributed to Him in His own Word is the verb, "created". Straight away we learn that God is a Creator. It was not in His nature to sit around in eternity past and do nothing.

So we read that God created the heavens and the earth, but the next thing we learn is that the earth was "without form and empty."

Suppose a potter set out to create. After much digging he produces a piece of clay, dug from out of the ground. That's all. In front of him sits a vessel "without form and empty".

"Not much of a Creator", I hear you say. Yet the creativity within Him pushes Him beyond the mere production of matter to create a vessel of worth and beauty.

So it is with God. Not only is He Creator but He is also creative. In the first three days that which was without form took shape: the heavens, the waters and finally the land. And in

the three days which followed, that which was empty became full: the heavens, the waters and finally the land.

But look again at these verses. There is a more significant progression apparent as we move through the days of creation. There is a purpose unfolding through the week that finds its fulfilment on the last day. Ask yourself: Why did God create land? Just because it looked good? No. Try again. Why did God create land? Answer: "To eventually hold life." Correct. And why did He create the sun and seasons? Answer: "To eventually nurture life." Correct again.

The skies, the land and the sea were marvellous creations in their own right but they were only a means to an end. That end was the sustaining of life!

Through His creativity, the Creator had created creatures. Creatures that had life inherent within themselves; breathing, moving, talking (or squawking) creatures. Not cardboard cutouts propped up in paddocks. Not paper mache mobiles with wings, dangling from coat hangers in the sky. Not even stuffed animals with fluffy fur and button eyes, but real living beings.

Batteries included.

Independent life forces.

To have created a creation without life would have been totally foreign to the very nature of God. He Himself is life. He both possesses life and has the ability to impart life to others.

And so we see Him, on His knees, breathing life into the very pinnacle of His creative endeavour.

Adam.

Man.



3

THE BREATH OF LIFE

Genesis 2:7,18-20

Imagine what it would have been like to have been Adam. There you lie on the ground (with which you seem to have a strange affinity). As your eyelids flutter open you find yourself face to face with Someone whose eyes are full of love. Someone who seems so familiar yet Someone whom you have never met before.

Your chest is raised; your lungs are full of the breath of the Spirit of life. Your heart beats its first beat and blood courses through your arteries taking oxygen from lungs which are full of their first breath. A warm flush comes over the clay that shrouds your body as fingers and toes begin to twitch.

This Someone who has breathed this first breath into you now stands. But as He does, you find, to your horror, that an odd dizziness comes over you, and your lungs begin to empty. Life-giving air was draining out, yet this Someone, your Life Giver, simply stood and smiled. In alarm you begin to cry out, yet as you do you are startled to find that you yourself, quite independent of your Life Giver, draw a second breath!

What has happened here is remarkably significant and has important implications for us as we discover God's Plan for our lives.

God breathed air into Adam's lungs. Oxygen was transformed into carbon dioxide and was exhaled. Yet although the first breath of air had gone, something remained. That something was life.

Adam had been reliant upon his Creator for that first breath and the impartation of life. Yet inherent within the gift of life was a degree of self sufficiency. Breath and life gave Adam the ability to breathe and live. While this life would always ultimately be in the

hand of his Creator, he need not be hooked up to God as though he was on some sort of life support system.

Note this point carefully. Adam received life and so operated very naturally in such a way as to sustain life. He did not have to keep asking God, "How do I breathe?" There were no seminars to attend on "How to Breathe a Victorious Creature Life", and no manuals written on "The Secret of the Breathing Life". It came very naturally to him for the ability to breathe was inherent in the life that was given.

God helped Adam to his feet, for he was to walk upright amongst the four-legged creatures over which he was to have dominion. And it was these creatures that caught his attention, for like him they too were breathing. In and out ... In and out ... Inhaling and exhaling air as they roamed the land. They reminded him of himself yet at the same time they seemed to lack a certain something he knew instinctively he possessed ... something that bonded him to his Creator. It was true that they had life, yet they seemed oblivious to their Creator with whom he felt such an affinity.

As he pondered this he noticed something else. This time it was something the animals had that he lacked. All of the animals had a friend. A partner who looked the same yet different.

For the first time he felt an emotion he was later to call loneliness.



4

THE CHAIN OF LIFE

Genesis 2:21-25

Sleep did not come easy as Adam lay awake and brooded over his loneliness. It was true he had a Creator with whom he shared a strange closeness, yet still there was a longing for someone to love.

Flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.

When sleep finally came, it arrived suddenly as though brought upon him by another. As he slept, his side was opened, and out from him came life.

Eve. A bride. A partner to share life with.

Life had given rise to life in a way which Adam's biology teacher could hardly have imagined, let alone explained. But if this confused his biology teacher imagine how Adam himself must have felt!

As Eve stood before him, it was time for Adam to be given some much needed knowledge. Yet where could he go. There were no schools to employ biology teachers and no books written by biology teachers (and even if there had been there was no reading teachers to teach him to read!). For knowledge he would have to rely on the one source made available to him: God Himself. (Not a bad option, I'm sure you'll agree).

God taught him two things. The first came by way of an instruction: "Be fruitful and multiply". Now as we shall see very shortly there was no shortage of fruit trees but no arithmetic teacher and so further clarification was sought.

Therefore a second word of instruction was given: "A man shall leave his father and mother

and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh”. Now he had no idea what a father (or for that matter a mother) was, but deep within him stirred the desire to be one.

Later, (in fact about nine months later), he was to discover that the sharing of life produces life. Life could be transmitted!

Inherent within life is the desire for intimacy with those who share the same life. Out of this intimacy comes further life. New life from old!

A chain was beginning. A chain of life in which Adam was the first link.

What a revelation for him and what an important principle for us to grasp! Life produces a desire for intimacy with others. It does not naturally seek permanent solitude and isolation. True life quite naturally desires to spawn new life.

Note this, because it too is another truth we must return to later.



5

THE TREE OF LIFE

Genesis 2:8-17

Imagine it. A garden with fruit all year round. And best of all - no weeds! It all must have seemed too good to be true to Adam (who didn't know what a weed was anyway), as he set up home in this botanic paradise with his new wife Eve.

There were more lessons to be learnt and God alone was the Teacher.

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Die! The word had a solemn ring of finality about it. It seemed so foreign to the environment about him that teemed with life. When told its meaning a chill ran down his spine.

"Separation from life."

But why? The question lingered no matter how much Adam tried to ignore it. In fact, the more he played with it in his mind the more it seemed to gain a foothold, entwining its tentacles around his curiosity.

"Surely knowledge of good and evil is a good thing. Something to be sought after. Why would God place such a beautiful and valuable fruit in such easy reach and then prohibit its consumption?"

Surrounding this tree in the midst of the Garden was an array of gorgeous lush growth. Green trees dripped with juicy tropical fruit, all of it perfectly ripe and ready to be eaten. Every tree was different from the one next to it, yet there was a sense of order and unity about the whole paradise. Surely this represented the creativity of the Creator at its best! Yet the most beautiful of all the trees and certainly the most appealing was out of bounds

to Adam and Eve and somehow its presence took away something of the pleasure he derived from the fruit he was permitted to eat.

How do you stop a child enjoying his second favourite ice cream? Place his favourite ice cream nearby and tell him he is not allowed any!

This surely was Adam's dilemma as the forbidden fruit seemed to beckon him, appealing to his pride of wanting to increase in knowledge.

Much later he would find out that there was another significant Tree in the Garden, but He could not have found it by looking through physical eyes for it did not appear any different from any of the other trees.

Its significance lay in its position. It was not impressive to look at, not when compared to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but it grew straight and true beside a River that flowed through the Garden, and out to the ends of the earth. From this Life-giving River, the Tree drew nourishment, causing it to grow and bear fruit.

Yet in a dimension beyond that apparent to Adam, in the spiritual realm, this Tree stood by a Door that led to The Other Side.

"The Other Side of what?" you ask?

Simply "The Other Side". The Heavens. The place where the Life Giver dwells.

This Tree had a name. It was called "The Tree of Life". Life with capital "L" because it was Life from another dimension. A spiritual dimension. (The Other Side.)

Now remember, Adam did not know about this Tree. It was there for him to see, but God had not chosen to reveal its identity just yet. Even if He had, it is unlikely that Adam would have grasped its significance and value. He would quite likely have reasoned, "I already have life. I'm a breathing, thinking, choosing feeling (and by this stage, talking) being who is able to reproduce life."

But what Adam could not have understood what this was the Tree represented a form of Life beyond what he had yet experienced.

He had received from God the gift of biological life. It was a valuable gift to be sure, but it was no different from the biological life given to the creatures around about him. Yet he himself was different. He had a dimension within him that the animals didn't have, with a label on it that said, "In the image of God". It produced within him a strange affinity with his Creator.

Biological life is spelt with a small "l". Life from the Tree of Life is spelt with a capital "L". It is quite different because its flow of Life comes from The Other Side You see, the Tree was planted by a second River, quite invisible to Adam. Its source was found on The Other Side, for it flowed from the Throne of God through a city called New Jerusalem and came to an end at the roots of the Tree.

This New Jerusalem was to become more than Adam's destination.

It was to become his Destiny.



6

THE VALUE OF LIFE

Genesis 3

“You don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone!” Or so the saying goes.

Talk about Life after death to your average person on the street and be prepared to be dismissed as some religious fanatic. Most will simply remain indifferent to your impassioned explanation of the Life that is made freely available to all.

Would Adam have been any different? We shall never know, but it seems likely that when the time had come for God to reveal the presence of the Tree of Life that Adam would have, in that moment, grasped its significance and reached out to receive it.

This gives us a clue as to why God chose not to reveal the presence of the Tree straight away. No father gives his 18 month old child an expensive computer. (He hides it in his study and brings it out to play when his child is asleep!) A child would not realise the value of the computer at such a young age. In the same way, Adam needed to walk a pathway called the Way of Obedience, before he could be trusted with Life. (More on this pathway later.)

But Adam would never get that far. The first hurdle proved too great a temptation. Like a child who is told, “Don’t touch!”, all he could think of was “Touch”.

The snake used the age old tactic of reasoning to trick him. It was of course faulty reasoning, but it did seem true that the fruit looked good, and just maybe God was holding back.

For the first time knowledge came, not from the hand of God but from the hand of Adam’s other helper, Eve.

Did Adam die that day? Some say no, and so God's warning was proved wrong. But Adam did indeed Die that day. Death, remember is separation from life. Adam saw the sunset that day without being separated from life. He still breathed. He still had within him the power to reproduce life.

Yet that day Adam became separated from Life. He was removed from the Garden and lost access to the Tree of Life and the River of Life that flowed to New Jerusalem and the very throne of God. Although he had not actually possessed this Life, Adam Died, (with a capital "D") through being eternally separated from it.

Judgement was passed. The Creator became the Judge. Life (with a capital "L") was forfeited but life remained, (but in a temporary state).

But even this life was to be forever different. Adam and Eve were outside of the Garden paradise and there were to be changes, to forever remind them of this banishment.

First the woman. Life would continue but it would lose much of its joy, through sorrow and subjection. The ability to bear new life would remain, but the process would bring increased pain and trauma.

Then the man. He would have to cultivate life in order to sustain life. Yet the toil would be hard and the ground unco-operative. For him, life now meant work, with little guarantee of success.

So life was kept, albeit with greater trial. But Life was lost and the Door to The Other Side was nailed shut.



7

KNOWLEDGE vs LIFE

In the months that followed, Adam thought a lot about those two trees. The moment his teeth sunk into the juicy fullness of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, innocence was lost.

To say Adam was innocent means more than just saying he hadn't done anything wrong. He himself was not "wrong"... Yet neither was he "right". You could not say that he was inherently sinful, as the Bible teaches we are today. Nor could you say he was inherently good, as some psychologists would have us believe about ourselves.

He was neutral. Innocent.

Yet with that bite came a knowledge that would forever trap him and all his descendants in bondage.

The knowledge was good in itself but it brought with it two things that have plagued the human race ever since. The first was sin – the realisation that he was doing something that was contrary to God's will; and the second was its resulting emotion: guilt. And what did Adam and Eve do with this guilt? They did what every self-respecting sinner has done ever since.

They hid. And once they were found they blamed someone else!

And this leads us to our next important discovery. Read the following very carefully because it could conceivably save your Life. We all have a tendency to want to grow in knowledge. Yet knowledge of God's moral truth makes us conscious of how far short of it we fall and how inadequate we are to right this deficiency. The natural consequence of this is judgement

and guilt, all of which leads us away from Life. Yet knowledge need not have this effect providing it comes from God's hand and according to His timing, and provided it is received with the gift of Life.

This knowledge does not bring condemnation, but conviction.

Instead of despair, it brings hope.

There is another vital point that must be emphasised before we bring this part to a close. Adam and Eve had been given a choice involving two quite different paths. They were the paths of knowledge and of Life.

The path of knowledge is the way of independence. It gives to the one who walks along it self sufficiency, and removes the need to rely on God. The path of Life is the way of dependence. It places us in a position in which we rely upon God for our daily walk, drawing Life and knowledge from Him every step of the way.

Many openly choose the way of independence and consciously block God out of their lives. But many others are like Adam and Eve. They start out wanting to enjoy a relationship with God and have every intention of following Him. But before long they come face to face with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the lure of independent knowledge proves too great.

You'll recognise them on their religious journeys seeking Life. Armed with their manuals on "How to ..." and "10 Easy Steps to ..." they carry God around in their little boxes, confident that He will jump when they open the lids.

But God is not a God of formulas and equations. He is not a God of the knowledge of good and evil.

He is a God of Life.