

Toward the Cross

The First Week of Lent

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

Before you got out of bed this morning, God had a plan. Before you got married or didn't, before you moved out from your parents' home, before you went to elementary school, God had a plan. He had a plan when you celebrated a long-awaited birth or mourned the loss of someone dear to you. He had a plan when you got a job you loved or when you were made redundant. When you received a distressing report from your doctor, when you got the all-clear—or didn't—God had a plan. God had a plan before you or your grandparents or their grandparents were born.

And God definitely had a plan when He sent His son to earth.

Because God had a plan, Jesus' journey toward the cross didn't begin in the weeks before his crucifixion or when He started His public ministry or even when he was born. Jesus began walking toward the cross in the garden, when mankind fell from grace and God spoke prophetic words to the serpent. God told the serpent that the woman's offspring (Jesus) would crush its head, and Jesus began moving toward the cross.

It's hard to imagine a plan that requires thousands of years to come to fruition, a plan that spans time and space and involves millions of people all living out their lives toward one moment in time. But God plays the long game. His plans take millennia to spool out. If all those people hadn't done the things they did over all those years, Jesus wouldn't have gone to the cross. He wouldn't have provided the salvation we need.

And that's just one way God's plans are better than our plans. He knows what's going to happen. He knows who will do what, and His plans include that foreknowledge. There's no need for a Plan B because there are no surprises, nothing that God didn't see coming.

Being made in God's image, we like to plan, too. We have bucket lists and five-year plans and annual goals. Nevertheless, as we go through life, it's not uncommon to get blindsided by events. As much as we plot out our future, our lives are unpredictable. We make plans, and when they go off the rails, we panic and scramble. Even when life moves along as expected, we want to look way down the road to see what's coming. We want the whole map, not just the next step. But really, do we need to know the whole plan? And if we knew it, how likely would we be to balk (like Jonah) or try to manipulate (like Moses) or try to take shortcuts (like Abraham)?

When God's plan set His son on the road to Calvary, His people had no idea how their lives would weave together to change the world. In the same way, we have no idea how our lives fit into God's post-Calvary plan. Because make no mistake, God *still* has a plan. And unlike our plans, God's plans are 100 percent guaranteed.



How have you seen God working in your life over the past week?

When your plans have gone south, how have you reacted?

Exercise:

1. Lift this exercise up to the Lord, asking Him to highlight what He wants you to notice.
2. Read the passage to the right, stopping at any words or phrases that catch your attention. Sit with the word or phrase, meditating on it and asking God to show you why this word or phrase caught your attention. After you've meditated on the thing that caught your attention, continue reading the passage, stopping at any other words or phrases that strike you, and discussing with the Lord what you've noticed.
3. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
4. Slowly read the passage a second time, again pausing when something catches your attention. This time ask God to show you what He wants you to know or do in light of the word or phrase that you've noticed. Wait to hear what the Lord may put into your heart or mind. (You may sense a strong impression or just what seems to be a fleeting thought. Don't dismiss anything.)
5. Take a few moments to sit quietly before moving on to the next step.
6. Slowly read the passage a third time, just letting God's Word soak into you.
7. Finally, sit quietly for a bit, and allow God to continue to work in you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts.
Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have
mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.
“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.
“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and
bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.
Instead of the thornbush will grow the
juniper,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the Lord's renown,
for an everlasting sign,
that will endure forever.”

Isaiah 55:6-13 (NIV)