

harmony with the Father's plan, Christ's dying words were: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus was really saying, "My God-planned life is now complete and fulfilled."

As you begin to hear God's voice speaking coherently through His Word, providential circumstances, and direct impressions, you can learn to accept His guidance wholeheartedly. You too can discover the joy of a "well-plotted-out existence," a God-guided life.

Dear Father: Thank You for sending Jesus to this world to defeat Satan. Thank You Jesus for coming willingly to save me from my sins and show me life in all its abundance. My heart is warmed and moved by such love. Father, I want You to guide my life just as You guided Jesus' life. Please come in as Lord of my heart and mind. In Jesus name, Amen.

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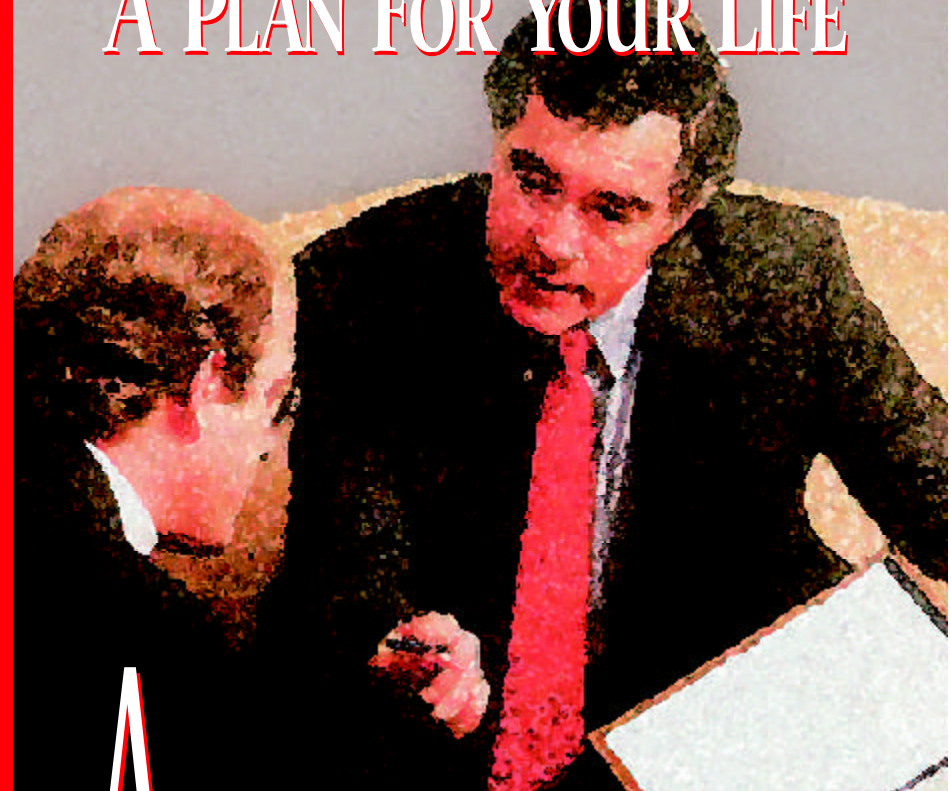
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DISCOVER

A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE



After a minister had spoken on the subject, "Why I Believe in Jesus," a well-dressed young man paid him a visit in his study and remarked, "Your talk tonight was interesting, but everything you said about Jesus Christ came out of your Bible. Tell me, if Jesus ever lived on this earth, why doesn't history tell about Him?"

"That's a fair question," the minister answered as he turned and took down several books. "But as a matter of fact, history does tell about Jesus Christ."

"That I'd like to see for myself," the young man

responded.

“Well here is Letter 97 of Book 10 of *Letters* of Pliny the Younger, Roman proconsul in Bithynia, a province of old Asia Minor. Pliny wrote to the Roman Emperor, Trajan, telling him about events in his province. See, here he is asking counsel on how he should handle a new sect, the Christians. He tells of their rapid growth and of how they sang hymns composed to their leader, Christ. Pliny sent his letter about A.D. 110. The letter by Pliny offers historical evidence of the man, Christ, and of the spread of His faith in the days of His apostles.”

Surprised, the young man said, “Tell me more!”

As the minister thumbed through another book, he added, “Another historian, contemporary with Pliny, was Tacitus. In his *Annals* (Book 15, chapter 44) he tells of Nero’s hatred for, and persecution of, the Christians at the time of the burning of Rome. Tacitus explains that the term ‘Christian’ comes from the name ‘Christ.’ He mentions that Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, had been put to death by Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea, during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. All these details Tacitus gives us match exactly the events, names, and places given in the Bible.”

“Pastor, I never knew things like that were in secular history!” the visitor exclaimed.

“And while we’re talking,” the minister added, “I want you to notice that about A.D. 180 Celsus wrote a book attacking Christians, indicating that Christianity by that time had become a force to reckon with.

“If you are still in doubt, remember that the four Gospels are just as much history as these secular books.”

This young man went away convinced that

Jake the devastating consequences of his affair and that he was mistaking biological urges for divine impressions.

What is the final test for determining a right course of action?

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn [no light in them, KJV].”—Isaiah 8:20.

The Bible, “the law and the testimony,” is our final arbiter, our authoritative guidebook. We must never allow any impression or apparently providential circumstance lead us away from a biblical principle.

6. SUBMITTING TO GOD’S PLAN

When the devil came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, he attacked Jesus on the issue of submission. Would the Saviour try to fulfill His destiny by expediency, by using the world’s methods, or by submitting unconditionally to the Father’s will? The devil suggested, “If you will only forego the painful sacrifices your Father has planned for you, I’ll give you the world in the palm of your hand—with fame, fortune, and a comfortable lifestyle.” Satan even quoted Scripture in an attempt to lead Jesus astray. But each time Jesus fought him off with the words, “It is written” (Matthew 4:1-11).

One powerful lesson we can learn from the life of Jesus is submission to the Father’s will. Even amid the terrible agony of Gethsemane, He cried out, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). After three years of His Ministry, living day by day in

He proclaimed to the believer that the Spirit can enlighten the “eyes of your heart” (Ephesians 1:18). In a later DISCOVER guide on the subject of prayer we will find that prayer enables us to talk directly with God. The more consistently we practice communicating with God, the more He is able to guide us. He molds both our inner impressions and our reasoning and judgment so we can see clearly the next step we need to take.

5. THE GUIDES MUST HARMONIZE

It’s possible, of course, to assume you are living a God-directed life when you are merely following your own inclinations and impulses. The Bible cautions us about just such a trap:

**“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”—
Proverbs 16:25.**

Our feelings must harmonize with Bible teaching. In fact, it’s not safe to conclude that God is leading us unless all three of the guides discussed above harmonize.

Take Jake, for example. He had a lovely wife and two children, but stumbled into an affair with another woman. How was he to reconcile his behavior with the Bible’s strong words about adultery? He told his friends: I’ve prayed about it and I feel it’s God’s will.”

Jake’s emotions and “inner impressions” clearly sent him down the wrong path. He imagined that it was somehow “providential” that he’d met this other woman and didn’t step back to look at this relationship in the light of biblical teaching. Bible commands against adultery, and counsel on how husbands should honor their wives, could have shown

Jesus Christ was a real, historical figure.

Both sacred and secular history agree that Jesus did live as a man on earth. But there’s much more we can know about Him.

Sources for the above historical material and a more detailed history appear in the following books: **Documents of the Christian Church**, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (London, Oxford University Press); Joseph Cullen Ayer, **A Source Book for Ancient Church History** (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931, 1941); **Origen: Contra Celsum**, translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: University Press, 1965); F. F. Bruce, **The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?** 5th edition, revised (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960; and R. T. France, **The Evidence for Jesus** (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986). The last two books come in inexpensive paperback editions and should be available through most religious bookstores. If the first three books are not available in your local library, you can ask the librarian to order them for you through inter-library loan.

1. CHRIST EXISTED FROM ETERNITY

According to the Bible, Jesus was not merely a good man, He was also God. What claim did Jesus Himself make concerning His divinity?

“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”—John 14:7-9.

“I and the Father are one.”—John 10:30. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

If you wish to know the answer to the questions, “Who is God? What is He like?” just look at Jesus. The Father shares the same love and care for each person that Jesus demonstrated during His human life on earth.

What matching claim did John make concerning Jesus’ divinity?

“In the beginning was the Word [Christ], and THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD. He was with God IN THE BEGINNING. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”—John 1:1-3, 14.

Jesus, the Word, is as fully God as is the Father. Jesus was with God “in the beginning.” He was the One who spoke all things into existence.

How long have the Father and the Son existed together?

“But to the Son He [God] says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness



1. THE BIBLE.

According to the psalmist, what is life’s Guidebook?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”—Psalm 119:105.

What does Paul tell us we should learn from the life experiences of Bible characters?

“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”—1 Corinthians 10:11.

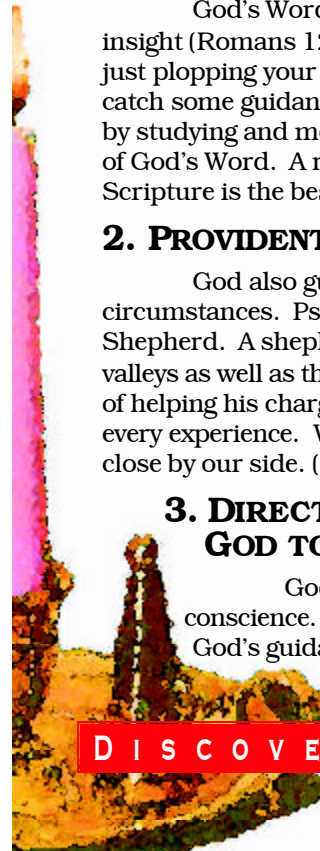
God’s Word renews our minds and gives us insight (Romans 12:2, Psalms 119:99). Instead of just plopping your finger down on a random text to catch some guidance, try to absorb the mind of God—by studying and meditating on many texts, the whole of God’s Word. A regular time of prayerful study in Scripture is the best way to get our priorities straight.

2. PROVIDENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

God also guides us by divinely-directed circumstances. Psalm 23 pictures Him as the Good Shepherd. A shepherd leads his sheep through lush valleys as well as through rocky ravines. He is capable of helping his charges benefit from and learn from every experience. We have a Shepherd who sticks close by our side. (Compare 1 Corinthians 16:8, 9.)

3. DIRECT COMMUNICATION OF GOD TO THE HEART.

God also guides us by speaking to our conscience. Paul affirmed that believers receive God’s guidance through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:10.)



abundant life.

Ray wasn't always so sure He wanted to submit to God's plan. He nursed fears in the back of his mind: "If God is really in control of my life maybe I'll end up in 'darkest Africa.'"

But when Ray faced a big decision about where to go to college, he decided for the first time in his life to seek divine guidance on the subject. He prayed for several days and tried to listen for some answer. After a while he seemed to get very clear reasons on why he should choose Option B: a less expensive, but huge and impersonal university in Western Illinois. So Ray reluctantly registered. Soon after starting classes he got acquainted with some wonderful Christians who belonged to Campus Crusade for Christ. His experience with them during the next two years radically changed his life.

A few years later Ray faced another big decision: whether to remain in Japan a second year on a teaching assignment or return to the States. He decided to ask for specific guidance again and God impressed Him with some clear reasons why he should stay. At the beginning of this second year Ray received a totally unexpected opportunity to produce evangelistic films. This had always been his big dream, his long-term goal, but now, it seemed, God was making it happen—in the place he'd least expected.

When Ray looks back today, he notes that every time he has faced a major decision and sought divine guidance, God "opened up a whole new area of my life." Ray writes: "This kind of well-plotted-out existence makes you want to exclaim, 'Listen Lord, if there's anything at all on your mind, PLEASE let me know.'"

How can you know God's plan for your life? God guides in several ways:

is the scepter of Your kingdom'."—**Hebrews 1:8, NKJV**, (*The Holy Bible, New King James Version, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.*)

God the Father and Jesus the Son have existed together from eternity. There never was a time when Jesus was not one with the Father.

2. CHRIST, THE HEART OF HISTORY AND PROPHECY

One of the things that makes Jesus utterly unique is this: His biography was written before He was born. Christ's life story is a fulfillment of prophecy. Old Testament prophecies present a clear outline of Christ's life in advance. The New Testament is His life story told in fulfillment.

We know the Old Testament was completed, at the very latest, 250 years before Christ's birth; because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was begun about that time. No wonder that in writing the Gospels of the New Testament, Christ's disciples were amazed at how accurately details in their Master's life fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

Anyone who carefully reads the Old Testament discovers that it continually mentions the coming Messiah. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God immediately promised them that He would send someone to our world to defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15). That Person, Scripture further reveals, would be the Messiah. The Hebrew word "Messiah" in the Old Testament, which literally means "Anointed One," corresponds to the Greek word "Christ" in the New Testament (see John 1:41; 4:25). Jesus Christ is the Messiah. That's a central premise of the New Testament.

Living from five hundred to fifteen hundred years before Christ's birth, the Old Testament prophets made scores of very specific predictions about the life of the Messiah. Their prophecies identify the city of Christ's birth, His name, and His lifework. They disclose details of His trial and events connected with His death. The prophecies show that when brought into court He would offer no personal defense, and they actually predict some of the very words He would speak in His dying hours. Even the year, the day, and the hour of His death are foretold. Messianic prophecies also reveal that He would come to life again on the third day.

At the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, as people compared His life with Old Testament prophecies, what did they conclude?

"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."—John 1:45.

At His first public appearance, our Saviour appealed to prophecy to establish His identity. After quoting from an Old Testament passage, He declared:

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."—Luke 4:21.

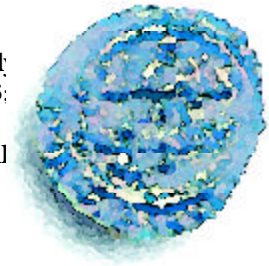
Shortly after His resurrection, in what words did Jesus again remind two of His followers about the fulfillment of the prophecies that pointed forward to Him?

"He said to them, 'How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe that all the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was

down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10¹⁷." (That's 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.) The evidence is strong that Jesus didn't just happen to fit a few predictions. His biography was indeed written beforehand by supernatural means. Truly, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

One of the main reasons the disciples of Jesus, many of whom were at first skeptical of His claims, came to believe so passionately was because they saw Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in every detail of His life. A disciple named Apollos, for example, "vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 18:28).

The eyewitness testimony of Peter, John, and Luke compels us to take serious! Christ's claim to be God's Son (2 Peter 1:16; John 20:30, 31; Luke 1:1-4). After looking at the evidence, we need to make a prayerful decision about who is going to be Lord in our lives. If you have not already done so, will you place your life in Jesus' hands?

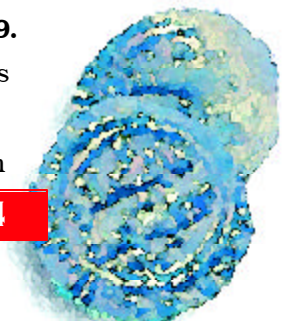


4. A GOD-PLANNED LIFE

Jesus lived a God-planned life, one outlined hundreds of years before His birth. Always conscious of this fact, He remained sensitive to God's leading. Christ said:

"I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.... I always do what pleases him."—John 8:28, 29.

Just as God planned the human life of Jesus before His birth, even so the heart and mind of God has a plan for every human being. He knows how each of us can fulfill our deepest desires and find an



HIS DEATH ON A CROSS

The Old Testament Prophecy:

*“They have **PIERCED MY HANDS and my feet.**”—Psalm 22:16.*

The New Testament Fulfillment:

*“When they came to the place called the Skull, there **THEY CRUCIFIED him.**”—Luke 23:33.*

Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 contain a graphic depiction of the Messiah’s persecution and death at the hands of those whom He came to save.

HIS ESCAPE FROM THE TOMB

The Old Testament Prophecy:

*“Because **YOU WILL NOT ABANDON ME TO THE GRAVE, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.**”—Psalm 16:10.*

The New Testament Fulfillment:

*“Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that **HE WAS NOT ABANDONED TO THE GRAVE, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.**”—Acts 2:31, 32.*

Christ’s life story is a continuous fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Peter Stoner, in the book *Science Speaks*, examined these predictions in the light of probability theory. Of the 60 major Messianic prophecies he selected just eight and calculated this: “The chance that any man might have lived

said in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures concerning himself.”—Luke 24:25-27.

Fulfilled prophecies give convincing evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

3. CHRIST’S LIFE A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Let’s look at a few of these prophetic passages from the Old Testament—and their fulfillment in the New Testament record of Christ’s life.

HIS PLACE OF BIRTH

The Old Testament Prophecy:

*“But you, **BETHLEHEM Ephrathah, . . . out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.**”—Micah 5:2, NKJV.*

The New Testament Fulfillment:

*“Jesus was born in **BETHLEHEM in Judea.**”—Matthew 2:1.*

HIS VIRGIN BIRTH

The Old Testament Prophecy:

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The **VIRGIN** will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him **Immanuel [God with us].**”—Isaiah 7:14.*

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,

because WHAT IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus [the LORD saves].”—Matthew 1:20, 21.

HIS LINEAGE FROM THE TRIBE OF JUDAH

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“THE SCEPTER WILL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs.”—Genesis 49:10.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“For it is clear that OUR LORD DESCENDED FROM JUDAH.”—Hebrews 7:14.

HIS REJECTION

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“He was despised and REJECTED by men.”—Isaiah 53:3.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“He came to that which was his own, but HIS OWN DID NOT RECEIVE HIM.”—John 1:11.



HIS BETRAYAL

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“Even MY CLOSE FRIEND, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”—Psalm 41:9.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Jesus answered, ‘It [the betrayer of Jesus; cf, verse 21] is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to JUDAS ISCARIOT.”—John 13:26.

THE FEE PAID HIS TRAITOR

The Old Testament Prophecy:

“I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER.”—Zechariah 11:12.

The New Testament Fulfillment:

“Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ So they counted out for him THIRTY SILVER COINS.”—Matthew 26:14, 15.