

## **“God’s Plan for Your Life”**

*Ephesians 1:3-14*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • April 15, 2018

Human beings are capable of accomplishing some amazing things. Consider the technology and the medical knowledge that is available today that wasn’t available five years ago. As humans, we have a built-in curiosity and a drive to get things done. This was the same drive and determination that sent explorers sailing off into the unknown 500 years ago.

As Americans, I think we have an extra dose of that “get-it-done” gene. It was this drive to accomplish that led us westward across the continent in the 1800s. It sent us to the moon and led us to develop amazing technology.

As individuals we have that same drive to do things on our own. We learn how to do something by watching it on TV, on channels like Home and Garden Television or the DIY channel, which stands for Do-It-Yourself. Then we head out to Lowes or Home Depot, where the motto is “you can do it, we can help.” They let you get your own materials from the warehouse and then they let you load your own car or truck. You’re doing it on your own.

Some of us actually find that we are able to do a lot of things on our own. We get pretty good at it. We say, “I don’t need a plumber, I can do it myself.” But there are some things that we aren’t able to do on our own. Some things we can’t do because we don’t have the necessary skills, like brain surgery. But even something like brain surgery is done by *somebody*. So it’s not impossible, it’s just something that most of us haven’t learned to do because it’s so specialized.

On the other hand, though, there are some things that we are completely unable to do. For example, this is the church’s automated external defibrillator or AED. This device can be a true lifesaver if someone is having a heart attack. By the way, this AED hangs on the wall outside the chapel. Everyone should know where it is.

The reason I brought this in to show you is because as I understand it, this device has

sensors that will detect any sort of pulse and will not operate unless the person has no pulse. What that means is that it is impossible for you to use this device on yourself. It’s not that you don’t have the necessary skills or desire, it’s that it can’t be done. It’s impossible. Someone else can use it on you, but you can’t use it on yourself.

That’s where you and I are spiritually. Because of our sinful nature we are separated from God. In fact, it’s worse than that. As Romans 6 tells us, “the wages of sin is death.” Spiritually, apart from Jesus Christ, we are spiritually dead. To push the analogy a little farther, it’s like our heart has stopped and we’ve fallen right next to the defibrillator. But it’s of no use to us. What we need is for someone else to use it on us. Because of sin, we are unable to save ourselves.

But God loves you and has a plan for your life. Thankfully, God has taken the initiative to save us and we find his plan spelled out for us in our passage this morning from Ephesians 1. In Reformed theology we call this the Doctrine of Election, which simply means that even though you have given Him no reason to do so, God has chosen you and adopted you. As verse 5 says, “In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

A lot of people have trouble with this idea of predestination. They’ll ask, “what about free will?” My answer is always, “what about it? What does that have to do with predestination?” Some of you have heard this before but it wasn’t until I had kids that I finally began to understand the idea of predestination. For example, if I tell my young child to go brush his teeth you could say he’s been predestined to brush his teeth. Does he have free will? Of course. He has a choice. He can go directly to brush his teeth and hear me say, “well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.” OR he can choose to do

something else besides brush his teeth. That's free will. And it comes with consequences. But in the end his teeth will be brushed, just as he was predestined. John Calvin reminds us that because of our sinful nature we will always use our free will to sin.

So here's the amazing thing. God knows this and chooses us anyway. His decision is not based on anything about us. This is where our American individualism gets us in trouble. We want to earn our way into heaven. We think that if we will do certain things, including saying the right prayer, that God will have to let us in.

But that's not what we find in Scripture. God chose us before the foundation of the world. That means that we didn't even exist yet so how could we have done anything worthy of being saved? The fact is that we don't deserve to be saved. We deserve to be punished. God's mercy means we don't get what we deserve. But he doesn't stop there. We receive grace, which is getting what we don't deserve – new life in Christ. Verse 7 says, "In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." It also means, as verse 3 says, that he has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

If we are so sinful and undeserving, why would God go to all the effort to save us? This is a more difficult question to deal with and a dangerous area of theology. John Calvin said, "Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination...very confusing and even dangerous." He goes on to say that trying to find out the "why" of predestination can become "a labyrinth from which we can find no exit." The truth is that everything we need to know about why God saves us is found in our Scripture passage.

Listen to verse 5 again. "In *love* he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, *according to the purpose of his will*. The best we can hope to say is that God saves us because he chooses to out of love. Verse 9 calls this "the mystery of his will, according to his purpose." God has a divine purpose in everything. When we try too hard to discover that secret purpose we can get lost in all sorts of speculation about God.

So what does this mean for us today? Does this mean that it doesn't matter what we do in life because we're saved no matter what? The answer is a big NO. Verse 4 tells us that God chose us "that we should be holy and blameless before him." Everything we do in life, all the choices we make, should be based on what God has done for us already in Jesus. So what should our response be? Three times in these eleven verses Paul uses the phrase "*to the praise of his glory*." The result of God's work in our lives is that we have been set apart for God in order to bring him glory. But here's the key. It's not what we do that brings God glory but by what he has done for us. This is what real love looks like. Love always involves personal sacrifice. God's love for you involved sacrificing His Son on the cross. Verse 7 says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he *lavished* upon us, in all wisdom and insight."

We should strive to live holy and blameless lives, of course. But our response should also be humble gratitude for what God has done. When people get to know us, they should sense that something is different and that difference is humility. Because we know that there is no reason why God should choose us. But He did. In love He forgave us. We should do the same for others, to the praise of his glory.

*Amen.*