

HOW TO FIND GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

PART ONE: Created for Good Works



Perhaps you've never understood that God has a plan for your life, a plan which comprehends every area of your life, one which makes full provision for all your needs and offers you the fullest possible realization for your total potential as a person, but He has. On the other hand, you may have an inner awareness that God has a claim on your life and a task for you to fulfill but you don't know how to discover what that task is. As a consequence, you feel, in a way, that you cannot clearly define and are frustrated and unfulfilled.

I believe that my talks this week will help you. I believe that I can show you the practical steps that you need to take to discover God's plan for your life and that in finding and walking in God's plan you will experience the satisfaction and a fulfillment you have never hitherto known.

For a starting point I'm going to turn to Ephesians 2:10, which speaks about what God has done for us through our union with Him in Christ. Paul says this, ***"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*** (NAS) That's a marvelous opening statement. *We are His workmanship. God's workmanship.* The Greek word there, *poema* is the one from which we get the English word 'poem.' It suggests a creative masterpiece, the work of a great artist or poet or playwright or sculptor, something outstanding. That's what we are through what God has done for us in Christ. This is the first thing that you need to realize, that if you put your faith in God, through Jesus Christ, God wants to make a *creative masterpiece out of you*. And then He wants to use you to accomplish a unique and special task.

It's always blessed me to think that the great Creator of the universe who created the stars and the seas and the mountains, all the glorious and beautiful things that surround us on earth, that when He wanted to make His masterpiece, He went to the scrap heap for His material. And that's where he found people such as me. I have no doubt where I was when the Lord found me. I was there on the scrap heap. And in His wonderful grace and mercy He reached down and took that unpromising piece of material that was me, in my lost and unregenerate state, and said, *"I'm going to make a masterpiece out of you!"* And that's true, not merely for me. In fact, I'm nothing special and yet, in a sense, I am something special because everybody who comes to God through Jesus Christ is something special. All God's children are special in His sight. But the important word that we have to lay hold of in that verse is the word 'created.' 'Created' in Christ Jesus. If we're ever going to become what God

wants us to be, it has to begin with a creative act of God. We have to let God recreate us out of what we were into what He wants us to be.

Psalms 51 records the prayer of David when he was brought face-to-face with his own terrible sin. In verses 9 and 10, he says this, ***“Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.”*** (NAS) Notice that cry of David’s heart, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God.”* It takes a creative act of God to deal with the effects of sin in the human heart and life. When the sinner comes to God, God does not improve him, reform him, adjust him, tamper with him. God, by His mighty power, *creates him anew!*

Listen to what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17–20, ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors...”*** (NIV) What a glorious statement! *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”* How many times you and I have said, ‘If only I could start all over again. I’ve made a mess of the past, I regret so many things I’ve said and done.’ The good news of the gospel is that you *can* start all over again. If you will come to God and put your faith in Him through Jesus Christ, He will make you a new creation. You will be able to say, ‘The old has gone and the new has come.’ And if you’ve already come to God through Jesus Christ then you need to know and understand what you are. You are a new creation. God intends to make you into a masterpiece.

Let’s look a little more closely at the process of the new creation as Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians and the verses that we just looked at. As I see it, there are three successive phases, First of all, sin must be dealt with. Sin is the great barrier between God and man. As long as sin remains undealt with in our lives we have no access to God. And furthermore, God has no access to us in the way that He needs access to change us from within by that creative act that we’re speaking about. So, first of all, we have to let God deal with sin. We have to turn from our own rebellion and self-will and stubbornness and we have to come to God through Jesus Christ, believing that Christ, on the cross bore the penalty for our sins, that God judged our sin in Christ, and that as we turn to God for mercy and forgiveness through Christ, we are reconciled to God. And in this way sin is taken away. We have access to God, God has access to us.

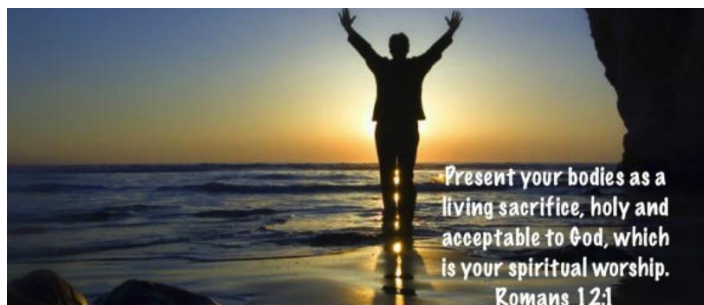
The next phase is the creative act of God. God recreates us from within. Solomon, the wisest of all men, said, ***“Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.”*** In other words, everything that’s going to happen in your life originates from your heart. And that’s where God starts with the new creation, in the heart. He creates you anew. The light of Christ shines into your heart. All the dark shadows from the past are dispelled. Guilt and fear and loneliness and unforgiveness are dispelled by that glorious light. And then God works outward from your heart into every area of your life. And you begin to realize that you are changing in so many ways, *other people* begin to realize that you’re hanging. It’s a creative work of God but it starts *from within*.

And then, as this creative work of God proceeds, the third phase is that God commits to *us*, in turn, the ministry of reconciliation. I express it this way: We are *reconciled reconcilers*. Paul says that we are Christ’s ambassadors. That’s an exciting statement. Have you ever thought what an ambassador is? He’s the official representative of a government in the

territory of another government. He's not just a private individual. He's a very important person because of his position. As long as he operates in accordance with the directions that he receives from his government, he has tremendous authority. In fact, an insult to an ambassador is treated as an insult to the government that he represents. And when he speaks, he does not speak merely as a private individual, but he speaks with the authority of his government behind him. And that's what God intends us to be in this world. We are Christ's ambassadors. We are the official representatives of the government of heaven on earth and as long as we operate in full accordance with the directions that we receive from our heavenly government, then all the authority of heaven is behind us. And, any insult or mistreatment we receive is treated by heaven as an insult or mistreatment of that whole heavenly government. You remember what Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus in that encounter on the Damascus road. He said, ***"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*** Saul didn't realize that when he attacked those Christians *he was attacking Jesus Himself!* What Saul did against the Christians was reckoned as being against Jesus because the Christians were God's ambassadors. And you and I today are God's ambassadors in this present corrupt and evil world. We represent the government of heaven.

Just one more Scripture: Matthew 4:19. As Jesus called the first disciples, He said to them, ***"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*** (NAS) That's what comes after the new creation. First, we commit our lives to God through Christ. We yield ourselves to Him. Then Jesus said, *"Now follow Me. I've a new plan for you. I've got something for you that you would never have thought of yourself."* He said to those first humble fishermen at the Sea of Galilee, *"I'll make you something different. Not just ordinary fishers but fishers of men."* That's another way of speaking about the ministry of reconciliation. Bringing men to God through Jesus Christ. What I want to say is this, It's not what we *are* that matters, it's what Jesus will *make* of us.

PART TWO - Present Your Body



I'll turn first to Romans 12:1. This chapter of Romans begins the practical outworking of all the theological truths that Paul has been unfolding in the first 11 chapters of Romans. It takes the theory of the first 11 chapters and applies it in practice to the way that we live. It begins with a 'therefore' and I've said many times, "When you find a 'therefore' in the Bible, you need to ask what it's there for." This 'therefore' is there because it's the practical application of all the theology that's gone before. Paul says, ***"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship"*** (NAS) What impresses me about the Bible is that it's so practical, so down-to-earth. It's not super-spiritual. We've been confronted with all this tremendous theology of the preceding chapters. Where does the application start? It starts with our *body*. The first thing that God asks is that we present this body of ours to Him, a living sacrifice. You might say, "Well, I thought the body wasn't so important, that it was really the soul that was important. But God is very practical. You see, if there's a glass of water standing on the table and I'd say to you, "Please hand me that glass." What am I getting? I'm getting the vessel *and its contents*. How could you ever give me the water without the glass? And that's what God is saying to you, He wants the vessel, the body, *and its contents*. And, as a matter of fact, you really can't give God the contents unless you give Him the vessel. So God wants you, the vessel, and its contents.

God says it's to be a *"living sacrifice."* What does that mean? It's contrasted with the sacrifices of the Old Testament, where animals were offered in sacrifice, killed and placed as dead bodies on the altar of God. God says, "I want your body just as much, just as completely, on My altar as that Old Testament sacrifice. But there's one difference. I don't want your body *dead*. I want it a *living sacrifice*." You see how very down-to-earth God is. He says, "It's your body I want. And when I have your body, I have you."

In Matthew 23 Jesus was talking to the Pharisees and He's explaining to them the things that really mattered in their religion because they'd got their values wrong. They were saying that the offering was more important than the altar on which it was offered. Jesus says, ***"You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?"*** (NAS) That last phrase is very significant. It's the altar that sanctifies the offering that's placed upon it. What makes that offering holy is its being placed upon God's altar. And that's how it is with your body. When you place your body on God's altar, it *becomes* holy. It's sanctified. It's set apart to God. But that is an act that you have to make. It must be your decision to make your body *totally* available to God.

What does that mean in practical terms? It means that you'll go anywhere that God sends you, you'll do anything. It may be a desert, it may be a city, it may be a mountain. You may be washing dishes, you may be preaching, you may have a salary, you may have no salary. You've renounced all those decisions to God. You've simply handed over your body to Him and said, "Here it is, God. I trust You to do what You desire and please with my body." That's presenting your body to God.

Then there's a result that follows in the mind. In the next verse of Romans 12, that's verse 2, Paul says this, ***"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove [find out and experience] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect"*** (NAS) When you present your body, strange though it may seem, a change takes place in your mind. You begin to *think* in a different way. God says your mind is renewed. And then, when your mind is renewed, you prove (you find out for yourself) what the will of God is. And Paul uses three words to describe the will of God, all of which are beautiful and exciting. He says it's *good*, it's *acceptable*, and it's *perfect*. You'll notice there's a progression. As you begin to discover God's will, you discover it's good. God always wants what's good for His children, never what's evil. The further you go, you discover it's acceptable. It's what you really want, too. And then you come into full understanding, it's perfect, it covers every area of your life. It meets every need. There's nothing that isn't provided for, for your good in the perfect will of God. But bear in mind, it's *only as your mind is renewed that you can find out the will of God*. You see, typically, religion works from without. It starts trying to change man from outside. But God works from within. He says, "When I can begin to change your mind, then you'll change. Your whole way of life will change, and I'll be able to reveal to you My will which is good, acceptable and perfect."

Now I want to explain to you why God can only reveal His will to our mind *after it's been renewed*. Before God makes this change in our mind, the mind that we have by our old fleshly nature is not something that can receive the will of God. In Romans 8:7, Paul says this, ***"... the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God..."*** (NAS). Or, in the King James Version it says, ***"...the carnal is enmity against God."*** I think it becomes obvious that a mind that's at war with God cannot receive the revelation of the will of God. That warring attitude of our mind which is hostile to God must be changed by the transforming of our mind, by the renewing of our mind. And then that renewed mind, and *only* that renewed mind, can receive the revelation of the will of God.

Now, the carnal mind is the product of impressions from man's rebellious soul, a soul that has been in rebellion against God. And it covers three main areas, the *will*, the *intellect* and the *emotions*. Essentially, the carnal mind is self-centered. It revolves around that little word "I." It's ego-centered. It's expressed in certain simple verbs. The carnal will says, "I want." The carnal intellect says, "I think." The carnal emotions say, "I feel." And in his unregenerate or carnal condition man is controlled by those three verbs, "I want," "I think," "I feel." His whole life revolves around them and in that condition he is not open to the revelation of the will of God. There has to be a significant and ongoing change. These attitudes that are expressed in the words, "I want," "I think," "I feel," have to be renounced. We have to let something go before we can receive the will of God.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 16:25, ***“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.”*** (NAS) Now in the original Greek, the word that’s translated ‘life’ is the word for ‘soul.’ So if you wish to save (to keep) your soul-life, you lose it, but if you’re willing to let your soul-life go, then you’ll find a new life, a life that God has for you. What does it mean, to lose that old soul-life? It means to renounce self. It means to say to self, *“You’re no longer going to dictate to me. I’m not going to be ruled any longer by the things that you want and you think and you feel. I’m going to live by different standards. I’m going to get my direction from a different source. I’m going to turn my back on all that selfishness and self-centeredness. I’m not going to be the plaything of my emotions and my own impressions. I’m going to lay down that old soul-life, that ego-centered way of living and thinking, which has dictated to me all these years and I’m going to find a new life, a life that God has planned for me.”* You remember what I said yesterday as I quoted Ephesians 2:10. We’re God’s workmanship when we come to Him in Christ, created for good works that He’s prepared for us, a unique and special task that God has for each one of us to fulfill. But as long as we go on thinking along the old lines, as long as we let that old ego-centered life control us, as long as we’re motivated in those old ways, we cannot find and walk in those good works which God has prepared for us. So there’s a life to lose and then a life to find. And if you’re really going to find the fullness of God’s plan for your life, you have to ask yourself, *“Am I willing to let that old soul-life go? Am I willing to stop thinking in those old ways, ‘I want,’ ‘I think,’ ‘I feel’? Am I willing to let God change me from within by renewing my mind?”* That’s a decision you have to make.

PART THREE - Be Renewed in Your Mind



Today I'm going to explain to you more fully the nature of the renewed mind. Yesterday we looked at what Paul had to say in Romans 12:1 and 2, and in verse 2 he spoke about being *renewed in our mind*. Now I'm going to read the next verse, Romans 12:3, for this explains what happens when our mind becomes renewed, ***"For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith"*** (NAS) I want to show you today four marks of the renewed mind and, as I go through these marks you'd find it helpful to check on your own mind. Try to see how far your mind has been renewed and are there areas perhaps where it still needs to be renewed.

First of all, the renewed mind is not self-centered but *God-centered*. It's not motivated any longer by those three verbs, "I want, I think, I feel." Instead it's motivated by God's values, God's purposes, God's objectives. These now become more important to us than our own.

Let me give you just a few examples of what I mean. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul says, ***"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"*** (NAS) Notice that last phrase, ***"do all to the glory of God."*** That's the motivation of the renewed mind. Its desire and purpose is to do only that which glorifies God. It does not ask, "Will this help me? What will I get out of this?" It asks, "Will God get glory out of this?"

And then, again, in Matthew 6:10, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray this way, ***"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."*** (NAS) When we pray that prayer, we are actually renouncing our own will. We're saying, in effect, "If my will crosses with God's will, then let God's will be done, not mine." That's a mark of the renewed mind. And then the renewed mind associates itself by a decision with the ultimate purpose of God for this earth. What is that? ***"Thy kingdom come."*** The renewed mind is always directed toward the establishing of God's kingdom on earth. Its ultimate purpose is God's will and God's kingdom.

The second mark of a renewed mind is that it is not proud or self-seeking. Paul said in that verse we've already quoted in Romans 12:3 that we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. I'd like to give you there some words of Jesus to His disciples in Matthew 20:25–28, ***"But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come***

to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (NAS) That’s another distinctive mark of the renewed mind. It’s not looking for opportunities to rule but to serve. It’s not looking for opportunities to get but to give. It patterns life on the example of Jesus who did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life.

Today, in our modern culture, the idea of being a servant is pretty unpopular. Everybody wants to be his own boss. Everybody wants his own rights. Everybody wants to steer his own course and look after his own interests. But that’s not the renewed mind. The renewed mind doesn’t say, “What can I get?” It says, “What can I give?” It doesn’t seek to exalt itself but to humble itself. The great evangelist Moody said this about himself. He said, “When I was a young man, I used to think that God had His gifts arranged out on shelves and that the best gifts were on the top shelves. But,” he said, “now I’ve learned it’s the opposite. The best gifts are on the bottom shelves. You don’t reach up for them, you stoop down for them.”

The third mark of a renewed mind is that it’s sober and realistic. Paul says again in Romans 12:3 we are to think so as to have sound judgment. Another translation uses the word “sober.” I like that word “sober.” The renewed mind is sober and realistic. It avoids two extremes. On the one hand, fantasy and wishful thinking and the other hand self-depreciation and depression. Those of us who have or have had teen-aged children will quickly recognize that one of the problems of the teenage mind is that it easily indulges in fantasy, daydreaming, wishful thinking. It’s hard for a teenager to stay in touch with reality, face the objective facts of life, even objective facts about his or her own person. Now we understand that in teenagers and God, I trust, gives us grace to be patient with them. But we have to recognize that nevertheless it’s not a mark of maturity. A mature mind does not indulge in fantasy and wishful thinking and the process of daydreaming and imagining things. On the other hand, another common feature of a teenage mind is that it tends to get easily depressed and often a teenager will isolate himself or herself or shut himself or herself off, sit in a room alone, and go lower and lower in his estimate of himself as a person. And often, there’s a kind of moodiness and a depression that results from this. Again, these are not consistent with the renewed mind.

Many, many years I struggled with a problem of depression in my own life and eventually God showed me, amongst other things, that I was in charge of my own mind. I didn’t have to give way to negative thoughts. He showed me that I’d have to re-discipline my own mind and change many of my patterns of thinking. And as I did this, I was delivered from that awful problem of depression. So that’s the third mark of the renewed mind: sober, realistic.

The fourth mark of the renewed mind is something that’s not always easy for us to understand. We go back again to the words of Paul in Romans 12:3. He says we are ***“to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”*** The renewed mind stays within the proportion or the measure of God-given faith. It doesn’t make unrealistic boasts and claims. It doesn’t claim to have a faith that isn’t real. One of the big problems I’ve encountered in people, as a minister, is that they think they have much more faith than they have. And they say, “I believe God is going to do this and that,” and it doesn’t happen and then they’re cast down and depressed and sometimes they almost blame God. The problem is they went far beyond the proportion of God-given faith. I’m going to show you in my next talk that there’s a reason why God gives us a certain proportion of faith. If we understand God’s reasoning and we’re in line with His purposes, we’ll find that the proportion of faith He’s given

us is that which we actually need. We don't need more faith than God Himself has allotted to us. He allotted to each one of us the proportion of faith that we need but it's a very common thing with religious people, people who fancy themselves to be spiritual, to try and believe for more than they really can believe. And it leads to many kinds of problems. Sometimes people who could legitimately have medical help go without it because they believe they have faith for healing but they don't get healed. You see, faith is always humble. That's something we need to remember. Habbakuk 2:4, the key verse on justification by faith, says this, ***"Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him, "But the righteous will live by his faith."*** (NAS) The King James Version says, *"Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."* (KJV) Whichever version we follow, you see that the soul that exalts itself, that's puffed up, that makes claims that are not justified, is not in faith. Faith is humble. Faith does not have a big "I" and a small "god." Faith has a big "GOD" and a small "i," and we have to move within the proportion of God-given faith.

PART FOUR - Find Your Place in the Body



The further you progress in discovering God's will, the better it becomes. In its first stage, it is *good*. In its second stage, it is *acceptable*. But in its third stage, it is *perfect*, it's complete, entire, provides for every need, covers *every situation*.

Today I'm going to explain to you the fourth step which follows on from the three steps I've already outlined. The fourth step is *finding your place in the body of Christ*. That is, the corporate, committed fellowship of all true believers. We go back to Romans 12:3, the verse that we were looking at yesterday in connection with the renewed mind, and we'll read on from there the next two verses and see what follows immediately from the renewed mind, ***"For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."*** (NAS) So the renewed mind directs us to our right place in the body. We come to realize that we're just one member, incomplete on our own, incapable of functioning on our own as God intends us to function and that in order to be complete and to function in accordance with God's purpose and God's plan, we *have to become a member in a body*. We have to be joined to other members by a kind of commitment that enables us to work together and not just as isolated individuals.

I've often marveled, as I've been in a plane and as the radar of the plane zeroes in on the particular airport and the beam that comes to it from the airport's radar and how, as the two lock in to one another, that plane comes down in exactly the right place at exactly the right speed and makes a safe and perfect landing. I want to suggest to you that you can think of your *renewed mind* like the radar in the plane. When you lock in with the Spirit of God, then that renewed mind of yours brings you down into *exactly the right place in the body* and you become a member of God's body, of Christ's body, the church.

Compare what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, ***"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where***

would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (NAS)

There are three things we need to see in that statement of Paul there:

1. The choice of where we are to be in the body and what we are to be is *not ours but God's*. God has placed the members. It's not something we decide, it's something that God has decided and reveals to us.
2. As this comes to pass in our lives, we merge our life in a larger entity, the body. And yet, we still retain our individuality.

It's like a little finger that finds its place on a hand, side by side with four other fingers and is thus connected to the total life of an energy and purpose of a complete body. On the other hand, it is not like a drop of water that falls into the sea and loses its individual identity. As Christians, we *never lose our individual identity* but we become part of a larger corporate group still retaining our own individual identity, still being the particular member that God ordained for us to be. This is really a contrast between the message that the Christian faith and the Oriental cults and philosophies which are so prevalent today. I studied those for a while before I became a committed Christian and those Oriental cults, basically, treat man like a little drop that falls into the sea and loses its identity. But that's not an attractive proposition. For me, I don't want to do that. I want to retain my identity but still become part of a larger body and that's what God has provided for us in Christ.

3. Corporately we are able to represent Christ in His fullness to the world.

No one of us can adequately and fully represent Christ as an individual, but, when we're united to a body, then that body can totally and corporately and fully represent Jesus Christ to our world.

I want to go further with this picture of a people finding their places as members in a body. I want to take a picture from the Old Testament, the 37th chapter of Ezekiel, a prophetic vision of God's people at the close of this age, a vision which I believe is finding fulfillment in the church today. Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw God's people as dry, scattered bones, but as God began to move by His Spirit, something happened to those bones. Life came into them. They began to move. And they were brought together as members of a body. Let's read this passage, Ezekiel 37:1, ***"The hand of the Lord was upon me and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry. And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest.' Again He said to me, 'Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.' 'Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you that you may come to life. 'And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.'"*** So I

prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. (NAS)

That's a picture of individuals who have been scattered on their own without proper relationships, coming by the work of God's Spirit into a right and proper relationship with one another. I do believe that in many, many ways many sections of the church have been like those dry bones, just scattered lying around, cut off, not really finding the life of the body, not really in a right relationship with one another. But I believe that one of the great things God is doing by His Spirit today for His people is to bring life to those bones and to bring the bones together and build the bones up into a structure that will form the basis for a complete body.

Think about, for instance, your arm. The basic structure of your arm consists of three bones. Their medical names are humerus, radius and ulna. Picture each of those bones on its own. A strong, firm bone. And, in a certain sense, it can move around and rattle together against the other bones, but that is all it's capable of. It can't perform any really useful or effective function. Before it becomes a functioning arm it has to be united with two other bones and then, out of the union of those three bones in effective function, there comes forth an arm. Well, that's like you and me. We can lie around on our own, we can rattle around against other bones in a meeting or a conference, but we'll never be useful and effective in the kingdom of God until we allow ourselves to be united with the other bones and then we can become a functioning arm and the arm can become part of a functioning body. I believe that's what God is saying to His people today. I believe that as our minds are renewed, that radar is going to take us to the very place and function in the body that God has appointed for us.

Let's look at one final picture of the body in Ephesians 4:15 and 16, ***"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ..."*** (NAS) Notice the purpose of God is that we grow up, that we don't remain always little spiritual infants. And the process of growing up leads us into the completed body. The next verse says, ***"...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*** (NAS) So God's purpose is not just isolated bones or isolated members but a complete, functioning body in which the members are united to one another in such a way that each receives, from its union with the others, that which it supplies.

Bear that in mind, that it's only in the completed body that all the needs are met. And as you find your place in that completed body, you'll find that God has given you the proportion of faith that you need to fulfill your God-appointed function.

Remember, faith and function go together. When you find your function, you'll have the faith that you need.

PART FIVE - Be Suitably Equipped



Today I'm going to explain to you the fifth and final step in this process of finding God's plan for you. It is to be *suitably equipped to fulfill the function in the body for which God has appointed you*. So my theme today is being suitably equipped to fill your place in the body.

I'm going back once more, to Romans 12. I'm going to read the three verses that I read yesterday and then I'm going to go on beyond them and show you the next step in Paul's thinking. Beginning then, in Romans 12:3–5, ***“For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”***

I pointed out yesterday that a renewed mind, like the radar of the airplane, directs us to our appointed place as a member in a corporate body. Now in what follows Paul begins to speak about equipment. The word he uses here is gifts. So I'm going to read now Romans 12:6–8, the three verses that follow on after those I've just read, ***“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”*** (NIV) We see therefore, that these gifts of God are our equipment. And they follow logically from our function. We need to get the order right. First function, then equipment. Some people are all stirred up and excited about spiritual gifts but their excitement is often rather out of order because they don't know what member they ought to be and therefore they don't know what gifts they need to function as that member.

Let me give you a simple example: the foot and the hand in the human body. What is the responsibility of the foot? Very simply, it is to bear weight and to maintain balance. What's the responsibility of the hand? To lift weight and to grasp. We find that each of these members is ideally suited to its particular function. But how silly it would be for them to try to trade functions with one another! How silly it is when the hand seeks to bear weight and maintain balance. We know how difficult that is, it takes a gymnast to do it. And how foolish it is when the foot seeks to lift weight and to grasp. You almost have to be a monkey to do that. And yet there are, I'm afraid, a number of believers who are just like that. God ordained them to be a

foot and they're trying to be a hand. And they're all out of order. They don't have the needed faith because the proportion of faith God gave them was for the function they were to fulfill and they don't have the needed gifts because the gifts were also related to the function.

Notice how various the gifts can be. Paul here gives us some examples and I think they're just examples, not a complete list. He lists seven different kinds of equipment:

1. Prophesying
2. Serving
3. Teaching
4. Encouraging
5. Contributing (bear in mind that's a gift)
6. Leadership
7. Showing mercy.

A lot of people get all excited about prophesying. It sounds so dramatic and, in a certain sense, it is. But you might be all worked up about prophesying and God might be speaking to you about a ministry of showing mercy. Visiting the sick and the shut-ins, doing something that's rather quiet and unseen to the public eye. And yet, that's your particular place and function in the body. See how important it is that you don't try to be something different from what God has appointed you to be? That you find your right place? You fulfill your right function? You accept the right equipment from God and you *operate* in the proportion of faith which God has given you? Because that proportion of faith is directly related to your function.

In 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul says: ***"But eagerly desire the greater gifts"*** (NIV). But it's very significant he doesn't tell us which the greater gifts are. I've looked many times through the Bible but I don't find any list that states exactly which are the greatest and which are the least gifts. And I've come to this conclusion, for me, the greater gifts are those which enable me to function to the optimum in the particular place in the body in which God has set me. Therefore, what might be a greater gift for me might not be so great a gift for you. Never divorce gifts, which are equipment, from function, which is what God wants you to be and to do in the body of Christ.

I've been speaking to you about the need of spiritual equipment to function in the body. I want to go on just a little further and show you how much importance the New Testament attaches to being properly equipped. I want to turn to the words with which Jesus directed His disciples as to how they were to go out into their ministry. Just before He left them He said in effect, *"Don't go out now and start to minister because you don't have the equipment. Wait in Jerusalem. When you receive the equipment, then you can begin to minister."* Now, if that was true for the apostles who had been together with Jesus for 3 1/2 years, heard all His teaching, witnessed all His miracles; don't you think it's at least equally true for you and me? That we are *not fit to go out and minister until we've received the appointed equipment*.

Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 24:46–49, ***"and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 'You are witnesses of these things. [How important to be His witnesses. But listen to what He says next:] 'And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'"*** (NAS) That's the equipment, the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

The same is said in Acts 1:8, just before He was taken up to heaven and they saw Him no longer with their natural eyes there on the Mount of Olives. His last words to them were, ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*** (NAS) Notice, they were *not to go out* even though they had the story to tell. They were not to go out and tell it until they also had the equipment that was needed to go with their ministry.

In Hebrews 2:3–4, the writer of this epistle again speaks about the equipment that God has provided for His people, ***“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”*** (NAS) Notice it’s the will of God that the testimony of Jesus and the message of the gospel be accompanied by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *This is God’s will.* We are not to think of spiritual gifts as toys but rather as tools. And, without the tools, we’re not equipped to do our job, to fulfill our function.

Another point, and this is my last, in order to be equipped we need the help of God-given ministries. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 4:11–12, ***“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service...”*** (NAS) Notice again, it’s God’s will that His people be equipped for the job that they have to do but has put in the body certain main ministries whose responsibility it is to equip God’s people. That’s *another* reason why it’s so important to be in the body because only in the body can you receive the benefit of these ministries which are to equip you for your work of service. So we need equipment.

Now, at the close of my message I’m just going to recapitulate the five steps that you need to take to find God’s plan for your life:

1. You need to become a ***new creation in Jesus Christ.***
2. You need to ***present your body as a living sacrifice on God’s altar.***
3. You have to be ***renewed in your mind.*** You have to *think differently, have different values, standards, purposes, objectives.* The old, unrenewed mind is at war with God and can never find the will of God.
4. Your renewed mind will ***lead you to your place in the body.*** Just like radar brings the airplane down on the runway.
5. When you find your place in the body, ***you have to be suitably equipped with the supernatural equipment that the Holy Spirit makes available to us.***

And this equipment also comes to us through the ministries that God has set in His body.