

ChristianityWorks
Personality GPS – Living Life to the Full by Knowing
Who I am
062-2
Taking a Wrong Turn

When we let Him, by His Spirit and by His Word, make things right in our hearts, we'll discover the peace and the plan that God has for us.

Over the Bridge

Most of us have a sense of destiny to our lives. You know, there is a life, somehow, that we are meant to live and a 'me' that we are meant to be. Yet so often in life - maybe this has happened to you - you wake up in the morning and you think, 'Hang on a minute. Life isn't what it's meant to be - look at me - who am I? Am I living my life out to the full?

Well, today's programme is the second in a series of four that I've called exactly that: "Living Life to the Full by Knowing Who I am." Last week we started with Psalm 139. It says that you and I are handcrafted by God, every strand of our DNA was laid down according to His plan - every minute of every day, every up, every down - is a part of His plan before time even began.

Now there are two options for me. I can either see myself as some random collection of atoms evolved from a primeval slime or as someone handcrafted by God. Now for me - I don't know how it is for you - but for me it takes a whole bunch less faith to believe that God created me than to think of myself as some random collection of molecules that just happened to come together and create the complex person that I am.

And as I look around at people and you see how wonderful and beautiful and complex and intricately made they are, with such huge potential; I don't know, I just can't look at a person and think of them as just a random collection of molecules. Psalm 139 is beautiful and is really worth a read and we will look at it again a bit later on the programme.

Today though, I want to come along side and look at where we are in our lives today. See, I know people who believe in Jesus Christ who will say to me, 'Berni, my life, well, it's not how it's meant to be. There's something missing. I mean, I hear people talking about how God wants to bless us but I'm not experiencing that - I feel

empty; I feel life is just drifting by – I feel there must be something more.’ Well that’s because there is – so what’s wrong?

I’d like to share a story with you about the first time I visited one of the most beautiful cities in the world – the city of San Francisco in the United States. It’s absolutely one of my favourite cities on the planet. Anyhow, it was a work trip and I had a couple of clients with me. I was a consultant in the IT industry at the time and these two clients, Vince and Hans, - the three of us had to drive around San Francisco, in fact, the whole Bay area.

We had to go across the Bay Bridge to a little place called Walnut Creek. Now that sounds great but it was a pretty daunting trip. More people live in the Bay area of San Francisco than live in the whole of Australia – so muggins me, I was the consultant; I got to be the driver. Now, it’s not only a huge, daunting, unfamiliar city but remember, they all drive on the wrong side of the road, so making a left hand turn, the three of us would do it together.

You know, the other guys in the front seat and back seat would say, ‘Ok, left hand turn, we have to end up on the other side of the road,’ so we would all talk our way through this left hand turn, making sure that instead of ending up in the gutter, I ended up on the other side of the road.

Anyhow, back to the Bay Bridge. The Bay Bridge is not some small, tiny little bridge – it’s not the Golden Gate Bridge – the Bay Bridge is actually a really long bridge; it goes for four and a half miles; over seven kilometres. Its two stories, it just goes, literally, for miles.

In our travels that first visit to San Francisco, we actually went across the Bay Bridge twice – only once intentionally. I’m not sure what happened, but the second time, we were navigating our way through down town and we wanted to be there for a meeting but before we knew it, we were on some freeway that takes you over the Bay Bridge and there was no way off. I’d made a wrong turn; there was no alternative, we just had to travel miles across the Bay Bridge and we ended up on the other side of the Bay.

It was a beautiful drive – it was a lovely day, the sun was shining; it was fabulous but as nice as it was over there, that’s not where we were meant to be. We had two choices – we could spend the rest of our visit driving around the other side of the Bay – the wrong area or turn back and come home so that we could be where we were meant to be.

We are talking about today living our lives to the full. Being who God made us to be – being on the journey He’s chosen for us. God has a plan but sometimes we take a wrong turn. Let’s go back to Psalm 139 that we looked at last week because it’s such a beautiful Psalm. Here’s God’s plan – the Psalmist says:

“For God you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed substance.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.

When I awake, I am still with you.”

Don’t you love it? It’s the Psalmist saying, ‘God, You created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your work is so wonderful, I know that full well. I wasn’t hidden from You when I was being made in that secret place. When I was woven together there in the depths of the earth, You saw my unformed substance. And all the days that You were going to give me; they’ve been written in Your book already before any of them existed.’ Oh God, that is so awesome – it’s beautiful.

God made us – you and me – who we are. He handcrafted us – He dreamt us up in His heart, before time even began and then ... then He set each day aside for us; every part, every journey, every experience, before any of them existed. That’s huge!! I am who He made me to be; you are who He made you to be and He has a plan for our lives and God is a good and a loving God – He has a good and loving plan.

That’s not to say we won’t experience pain or be rejected or go through some bad times. All those things, well, we’d rather we didn’t have them but they do happen. In fact, Jesus said, “Follow Me and you will be rejected. Follow Me and you will experience pain,” but He has a plan, never the less, a rich tapestry with threads of gold and silver and some dark threads in there too. When

you lose someone you love you can be sitting there in pain and tears and yet still, deep inside, know that you are right in the centre of God's plan.

Or on the other hand, everything can be going along fine on the surface but on the inside, somehow you know you're miles away from God's plan. Maybe you've taken a wrong turn – we will talk about that next.

On the Wrong Side of the Bay

Have you ever seriously been lost? I can tell you, it's not a good feeling. There I was in San Francisco; in a foreign land; in an unfamiliar city, driving across this HUGE Bay Bridge and it seemed to go on forever; only to get to the other side and on the other side I was still driving on the wrong side of the road. And there was traffic and there were one way streets and there was no easy way of turning around. I can tell you, as beautiful as San Francisco is and was to me on that day, this was not a good feeling. All because I took that one, stupid, wrong turn – now I was miles away from where I wanted to be.

And that's exactly what happens in our lives – we take this one wrong turn. What does that mean exactly? Well, God made us who we are – He has a plan for our lives; a good and a perfect plan. We saw that earlier in Psalm 139 and when we live out who we are and walk day by day, step by step in the plan that God has for us, there's something right about it; there's something good about it. When we are living out God's plan, there's just a joy about that in our lives.

On the other hand sometimes we don't do that. Sometimes we take a left or a right when God wants us to go straight ahead. Now, I've done both – I've been lost and today I'm being the man I was meant to be – and I can tell you, there is just no comparison between the two. I wouldn't go back to my lost-ness for anything.

Back then on paper I earned so much more than I do now but today I am so much richer than I ever was. I had a sense, way back then that God kind of created me and He probably had a plan for me but I just wanted to do things my way. I was young and I wanted to do it my way and so I turned my back on God and chased wealth and fame and fortune and I actually, pretty much got what I was after, just to discover how empty and unfulfilling and hollow those things really were.

But you know, it doesn't have to be completely walking away from God. For some people taking a wrong turn in life can be seemingly a small thing. Somehow getting out of the habit of spending time in prayer and reading the Bible; somehow just drifting away from God or you still do those things but there's this one person in your life you just can't forgive or you're caught up in something you know is wrong. 'Ah, but what the ... you know, God'll understand.'

Psalm 119 is the longest of all the Psalms and the last verse, verse 176, says this:

"I have strayed like a lost sheep."

Now, sheep aren't stupid, mind you – they are quite bright. The issue is they're very short sighted – they can't really see clearly beyond about fifteen feet and on top of that, they don't have a very good sense of direction. They can't get back home once they're lost.

You know, I think we are like that – we follow this or we follow that – this takes our fancy; that takes our fancy – it can be seemingly harmless. Maybe just a bit of extra money and we buy a new lounge suite, and then we redecorate this room and that room and before you know it, we are so enjoying our possessions that we don't have room for God in our lives. That's how these things happen. It's so easy to wander off; to stray like a lost sheep.

I don't know about you, but I have a naturally tendency towards spiritual myopia (short sightedness). And we need to hang so close to Jesus – in fact, He said, *"Apart from Me you can do nothing."* Jeremiah chapter 50, verse 6, says this:

*"My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray
and caused them to roam on the mountains.
They wandered over the mountain and hill and forgot their
own resting place.
Whoever found them devoured them;"*

Things, people, lead us astray and when we are wandering out there in the wilderness and the mountains we forget our own resting place – we forget how wonderful it is to be living the life that God planned for us – to be in His rest. And so we do get devoured and we do get eaten up because it's terrible out there without Jesus – and that's it for me.

See, God is my resting place – that close and intimate relationship with Him. You know that you can just go to Him and rest in Him in

the cool of the morning and the heat of the day and there's a peace and a joy – just a wonderful knowledge of Him in that. Now this isn't a crutch – I'm as self reliant and outcome focussed person as you'll ever meet. I'm not talking about a crutch, I talking about a knowledge; a certain knowledge that God is in this place with me and I am smack bang in the centre of His plan for me. That's it!

Have a look around? Does this feel like the place you are meant to be? Examine your heart? Do you look like the person you are meant to be or is something wrong – is something missing?

The whole of the Old Testament is about Israel's struggle with their sin. God had this amazing plan to bless them – the Promised Land, peace, plenty of food, more peace – over and over again they took a wrong turn. They turned their backs on Him; sometimes completely; sometimes just in one area of their lives. But the Bible has a name for that; it's called 'sin' – it's taking a wrong turn.

Here we are, made in His image and we let sin creep in and mar that image – it robs us of being the person we are meant to be. It transports us into a wilderness; a lost-ness. Why? Because God is a holy God - it means that He is good and He's perfect and He's wondrous and our sin and our rebellion are our rejection of Him. They separate us from Him.

The question is when we have taken a wrong turn, how ... how do we get back?

The Way Home

When we talk about taking a wrong turn, it's one thing to admit that this is what we've done and it's an important first step but the question is how do we get back? I was sharing before with you the story of when I was lost in San Francisco and ended up over the Bay Bridge with this long, big four and a half mile – seven kilometre bridge - just because I took one little wrong turn. And we headed over that bridge and we ended up on the other side of the Bay, miles away from where we were meant to be, down town, for our meeting. Way on the other side!

And you might say, 'Berni, well, it's obvious, to get back, just turn around and go back on the same bridge.' Well, maybe in theory it's obvious, but remember, we were driving on the wrong side of the road; on the opposite side to what I'm used to driving. You get to the other side of the Bay and there's traffic and there are roads and there are signs – I'm not really familiar with the road rules. Can you do a U-turn at a traffic light or not in the U.S.A.? I don't know

because in Australia, in one state, you are allowed to and in another state, you're not.

It's years ago now but I remember the sense ... the sense of panic and confusion. The way back may have been obvious in theory but on the ground, it was far from obvious. Isn't that exactly what it's like when we take a wrong turn in our lives? You may slip up; one silly wrong turn and you end up miles away from God and His plan and who you are meant to be. And it's like being on the other side of the Bay in San Francisco – it's a long way away. You can't swim back; you can't get back there in your own strength, so on the ground, it's confusing and scary.

Would He have me back? I mean, look at what I've done! Besides, it's not as simple as that – I have to give this up or that up – that wouldn't work out in my life ... on and on we go. We make so many excuses; we make it so complicated; we run around in ever decreasing circles: 'Aw, my life isn't what it's meant to be; something's missing; I'm not being the 'me' I was meant to be.' And vaguely, away out in the distance, we sense the God who created us; who planned our lives for us; who wants to bless us, but how do we get back?

I wonder if you can relate to that! I think we've all been there and maybe you're in that place today. Now I thank God for Jesus' disciples because they kind of went ahead and made all the mistakes that we make and particularly Thomas. Jesus said,

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God – trust in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms. If it wasn't so I wouldn't have told you that. I am going to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you with me so that you are also where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going and Thomas said to him, "We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way?"

And Jesus answered them, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him because you have seen me."

See, Jesus is going to be crucified, and then He's going to rise again and He's going to ascend to heaven – they don't really understand that yet. And Thomas, what's he expecting? He wants a road map! He was on the other side of the Bay, on the wrong side of the road and he's saying to Jesus, 'How do I get back across the bridge?' and

Jesus said, 'Don't you get it? Thomas, I'm the way; I am the bridge.' You don't cross that huge gulf from lost-ness to God unless you go on the bridge, 'And that bridge,' said Jesus, 'is Me.'

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus told them this parable:

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety nine and go to the open country to go after the lost sheep until he finds it? Then he calls out to his friends and his neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent."

When we take a wrong turn; when we rebel against God, we kind of think He will never want me back! I don't know how to go back; it's just not working. Here is Jesus; He's got a shepherds heart; He goes out looking for one lost sheep and He said:

"I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired hand is not the good shepherd who owns the sheep, when the wolves come, he runs away but I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep."

He comes out to get us; He has compassion on us. And you know something? Maybe that's what He is doing right now. Do you think it's a coincidence that we are together right now? Or is Jesus reaching out through His Word calling you home? Have you ever been wandering out there in the wilderness wondering, how do I get close to God again?' Have you taken a wrong turn? Are you ready to admit it and say to God, 'God, forgive me through Jesus Christ, Your Son, forgive me.'

The way home is when we trust that in Jesus we are forgiven. When we let Him lead us home, because we can't get there on our own, we'll discover where home is. When we let Him, by His Spirit and by His Word, make things right in our hearts, we'll discover the peace and the plan that God has for us. Paul writes in Romans chapter 5 and verse 1:

"Therefore since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us."

Being the person God made us to be; living the life He planned for us, to the full – we can't do those things when we take a wrong turn. And when we do take a wrong turn, it's not a surprise to Him – He knows – He understands. He wants us back with Him; He wants to get us close ... really close to Him and the only way that you and I can do that is to be forgiven through Jesus Christ; through what He did on the cross.

And then, can I tell you something? Set aside some time each day and pray and read His Word and just rest in His presence. Instead of panicking and running around in ever decreasing circles, today; right now; this very minute, you can turn to Jesus Christ and say, "Father, I'm on the wrong side of the Bay and I'm lost and I know I can't get back to You in my own strength and that's why I need Jesus."

Then and only then, we discover that the 'me' each one of us is meant to be and the plan that God has for our lives is so awesome. See, God made us to be with Him. Jesus prayer before He went to the cross was this: *"Father, I want them to be with Me; I want them to be one with Me, just like you and I are one, I want them to be with me where I am so that they can behold my glory."*

Jesus went to the cross and purchased this one thing with His life for you and me. Have you taken a wrong turn? There's a road sign; there's a sign home and it says, 'Jesus'. The shepherd has come out to bring you home!