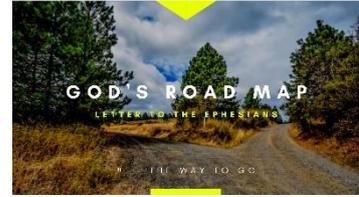


# Ephesians – God’s Road Map

#1 The way to go – Ephesians 1:3-14



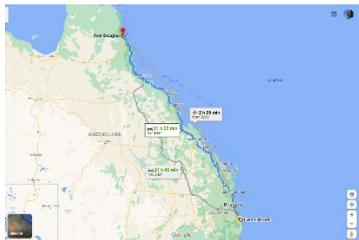
## Intro

Does God have a perfect plan for your life?

That’s what I was told when I was a young Christian by some well-meaning preachers and authors – “There’s a divine course or road map for your life, if only you’ll listen for God’s voice at each fork in the road”, they said.

I was digging through some old shopping bags in the shed and found a real live paper fold out road map.

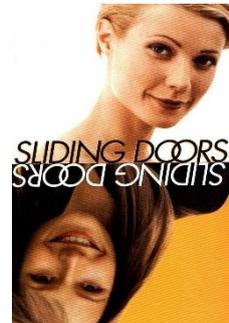
This one is to that place many Victorians would like to be right now – anywhere in Queensland!



I realised that if I put my preferred destination my Google map it invariably gives me that one best route to take. It then offers a second-best route. And it struck me how unhelpful that advice given to me as a young Christian really was.

Just as in that Gwyneth Paltrow movie, the implication was that I might screw up and live a “second-best” life, missing out on God’s perfect plan.

The idea that God has a perfect plan for your life seems attractive at first. After all, the most popular verse in the Bible today is Jeremiah 29:11 where God says, “For I know the plans I have for you... plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”



But we know that life is more like the fold out road map than the Google maps assistant. There never was one, perfect, efficient course in the Christian life. Christ’s apostles knew this. Instead, life is a myriad of forks in the road, twists and turns, border closures, surprising detours - stunning vistas and dark alleys included.

The idea of a divine road map for individuals fits better with fatalist cults, fundamentalist religions, and superstition, but not with Christianity.

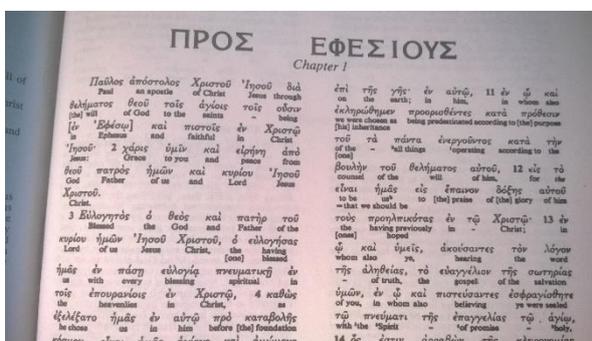
In the first chapter of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, there is certainly a plan of God for our lives, but it’s one that is Good News for the unpredictable journey of life – for those on peaceful paths, and for those on hard roads alike.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:9...

“God has now revealed to us His mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill His own good plan.”

Let’s look at the sort of plan God has for us in Christ...

In Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 – 14 we have 12 verses punctuated into 8 sentences in English. Yet, in the original ancient Greek, the whole passage is one uninterrupted sentence!



Now, I got criticized heavily in college for sentences that were more than 15 words long, but Paul got published in the best-seller of all time with no regard for grammar at all! What’s that about?

Well, some scholars suggest that Paul’s heart of emotion is here spilling over with uninterrupted praise, word upon word:

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ...” (Eph. 1:3)

Scholars recognise this form of blessing as akin to a Hebrew *Berakah*... (no, not a Berocca, a “*Berakah*”, although it’s message is a tonic for life!). *Berakoth* were expressions of blessing to God. They were sometimes used in the synagogue liturgy, or sometimes in a family home. These songs of blessing began with the word *Barukh*, meaning “bless-ed” – and the common first line

of the hymn would read: “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe”<sup>1</sup>, going on to bless God for all the blessings God has given to us.

Today we’ll step back to look at Ephesians 1:3-14 as a hymn of praise. Let me highlight three great themes for our journey of life and faith in Paul’s hymn of blessing...

**1. God has blessed us for our journey** – Paul believes God has provided everything we need for the journey of faith in Christ, by way of the Holy Spirit, irrespective of the type of journey we are on (the literal translation of verse 3 can be “blessings from the Holy Spirit”).

Look with me at verses 3, 6, 8, and 13 ...

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.

8 (God) has showered kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

13 And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

Notice that Paul’s praise is not because God has shown us the perfect, divinely ordained route for your life (as if it’s already mapped out for us and only needs insight to be discovered). Instead, God has provided the perfect spiritual provision for any and every journey of faith.

For Paul, God is neither like a Google map assistant, nor a divine roadside assist service.

I once took on the role as a caddy for a professional golfer on the European circuit. Most of time walking from tee to green around the course in Rome, my golfer took no notice that I was even present. Occasionally, she would consult me for advice on a club selection or



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<sup>1</sup> *Barukh Attah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam* (Hebrew)

wind direction. But then she would turn away from me and proceed as if I was nowhere in sight. I had permission to interrupt her for one reason only – if I noticed she was waning in energy or concentration I was to intervene and urge her to stop and eat and drink from her provisions in the golf bag.

Some Christians think of God this way on the journey of life – like an amateur golf caddy. They know by faith that God is with them, but they expect to do fine on their own. Only when too challenged or perplexed do they turn to God for emergency provisions help. They even give God permission to intervene when life is at stake, and then they are critical if God fails to do so.

For Paul, God’s provision is not like Google maps, nor like a mere roadside assist, nor is God to be regarded as a kind of amateur caddy for life.

What, then, does God’s provision and blessing to us look like?

A second big theme in Ephesians 1:3-14 gives us a clue. Paul says...

**2. We live “in Christ” on this journey of faith** – Paul doesn’t say, you have a well-stocked backpack now, so off you go. Instead, he repeats the phrase “in Christ” no less than 11 times in chapter 1 of Ephesians to express what is our new status as Christians. Here are 5 of those references to Christians being “in Christ”. Paul says God...

- Has blessed us in Christ (3)
- Chose us in Christ (4)
- Grace freely given to us in the One God loves (6)
- In Christ we have redemption (7)
- God fulfils His purposes in Christ (9)

Paul pictures the Christian on the journey of life and faith as at the same time being enveloped in the very life of God. While we take our steps forward feet firmly on the earth, we are comprehensively connected to the “heavenlies” (vs. 3).

Paul often writes of what we receive “through” Christ. For example, in verses 5 and 7 he looks back to the cross of Christ, saying it is “through” the death of Christ for sin that we have been redeemed – bought with a price, as in the image of an ancient slave ransomed to a new life of freedom.

Elsewhere Paul described us as formerly being in Adam<sup>2</sup>, meaning we were once part of a lost and wandering humanity, separated from God by our sin. Now, by faith, God has blessed us to be “in Christ” – that is, part of the new humanity of grace and peace that God is redeeming for His purposes.

Being “in Christ” has the sense of being united with the risen and ascended Lord by way of the Spirit. Yet, it also has a horizontal dimension. Paul’s own isolation as he writes Ephesians from prison (probably in Rome) and his reaching out to the churches by letter reminds us of the critical role being part of God’s people, the Church, plays in the experience of being “in Christ”. Andrew Lincoln in his commentary says that Paul’s view of us as being in Christ is “one that is deeply rooted in the Church’s worship... profoundly aware of the splendour of God.”<sup>3</sup> Paul will later in Ephesians write of the “body of Christ” expressing that very truth.

God’s great provision for life’s journey, then, can be thought of as something quite sacramental. We commune with God “in Christ” in the ordinary journey of life and faith, in the company of God’s people, as God’s Spirit bestows God’s heavenly blessings upon us wherever we go.

Whatever earthly path we are on, then, we should also see ourselves as “in Christ”.

The third theme I wish to highlight in verses 3-14 is that...

### **3. God’s saving plan is for the whole Cosmos**

In verses 9 and 10 we read...

<sup>9</sup>...God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Many Christians today view their faith as a personal and private matter. Christianity is, for them a quiet assurance that they will go to some place called “heaven”.

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 5:12-14 implies this

<sup>3</sup> Word Commentary no. 42, Dr. Andrew T Lincoln p 227

But this narrow focus is found nowhere in Scripture. Instead, our lives are caught up in the much grander plan of God's Gospel.

Notice in verse 10 that God, in Christ, is bringing all things in the heavens and the earth back into peaceful harmony with Himself. In Colossians chapter 1 Paul speaks of God "reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven." The two letters have close correlation. Paul's cosmic description of the risen and ascended Christ in Colossians 1:15-20 points to a redemptive vision much greater than mere assurance of heaven for individuals.

Our lives, it seems, are invited into a bigger scheme in history. We are adopted into God's purposes to be bearers of Christ's grace and peace in all we do and say. As it turns out, life's quest is not about finding the perfect road, route or storyline. Instead, our true self is best discovered when set amidst the life and purposes of God, in Christ, by the power of His Spirit, no matter what path we are on.

## Conclusion

Maybe your life's journey has not turned out as you'd hoped. Remember, Paul was writing these words in Ephesians 1 while in chains, most likely in a prison in Rome. Yet, his understanding of life in Christ moved him, even there, to reach out with grace and peace to encourage and strengthen others.

Perhaps you're an architect designing a building, or an actor learning lines, or a parent home-schooling a child, or someone on Jobseeker looking for work. No matter who you are, the choices you make tomorrow are best shaped with the confidence in God that Paul's great hymn of blessing supplies.

- Let's see ourselves, not as random travellers looking for the best life we can get, but as caught up in the very life and purposes of God.
- Let's see ourselves as adopted into God's family business of sharing grace and peace, and wisdom and kindness with others, just as these things have been gifted to us by God.

## Ephesians 1:3-14

<sup>3</sup> All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. <sup>4</sup> Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. <sup>5</sup> God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. <sup>6</sup> So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.<sup>Ⓜ</sup> <sup>7</sup> He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. <sup>8</sup> He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

<sup>9</sup> God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. <sup>10</sup> And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. <sup>11</sup> Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God,<sup>Ⓜ</sup> for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan.

<sup>12</sup> God's purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God. <sup>13</sup> And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own<sup>Ⓜ</sup> by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. <sup>14</sup> The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.