

Camelback Bible Church



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## ***CHRIST IN US . . . THE HOPE OF GLORY***

The Plan: Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory (Part 6)  
*Ephesians 1:3-10; 3:14-21; Colossians 1:26-28*

I want to take you this morning to a place you've never been before. Somewhere bigger and better than where you are now.

Just like most of us have never been to the southern extremity of our planet, Antarctica, with its massive sheets of ice and spectacular auroras, neither have most Christians been to the deepest reaches of their faith with full panoply of spiritual blessings in the heavenly places.

So prepare yourself for an exciting journey. We are seeking access into the inexpressible riches of God's Plan – a plan more formidable than the ice sheets of Antarctica, more beautiful than the auroras australis.

As usual, I'm going to let the word of God be our guide. Look with me at the book of Ephesians, one of the last letters ever written by the apostle Paul, composed while he's at the height of his theological powers, when he's had time to reflect carefully about what God's doing in this world, drawing together insights from his study of the Hebrew Scriptures and from his experience of Jesus Christ. Here in the short letter to the church of Ephesus he sums up the biggest wonder of all wonders: The Plan, the plan of God for the world.

Look at chapter one of Ephesians and let's read word for word and ask yourself if you have ever seen anything so wonderful.

### **The Means of The Plan**

*Ephesians 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*

That's a pretty impressive first sentence. It suggests that if you are a Christian, if you are *in Christ*, you've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

How many blessings are there in the heavenly places? Quite a few I imagine. Probably an infinite number of blessings. As a Christian, you have them all: *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Do you see why I say we're going places this morning we've never been

before? You didn't know you had every blessing in the heavenly places, did you? Let's find out about them.

Paul tells us about these blessings in verse 4 – *Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*. If you're a Christian this morning, God chose you before the foundation of the world, chose you specifically by name. Extraordinary.

Why did he do it? Verse 4 – *that we should be holy and blameless before him in love*. That phrase, *in love*, reminds us of last week's installment of The Plan where we focused on the idea of love.

Supernatural self-giving love is what marks relations within the heavenly triune Family of God and is something we humans are called to image in our earthly families. Every spiritual blessing in the heaven places, summed up by the holy and blameless self-giving love of God, is something we Christians, out of all the people of earth, have been chosen, from the beginning of time, to image in our world. How does this work?

Verse 5 – *He predestined us for adoption as sons, through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*. Notice the term *adoption as sons*. God is making a new family, adopting new sons and daughters, and he's doing it through Jesus Christ.

Up to this point, the families of earth failed to image the self-giving love of God. They weren't holy, they weren't blameless. Every family was going its own way, becoming self-grasping. Adam's family was given the vocation of imaging God and they failed to do it. They didn't image self-giving love. Rather, they fell into self-grasping greed. They grasped the fruit for themselves. They were self-centered.

So God started over with a new family. Abraham, I'm going to bless the families of the earth through you, as you reflect my image of self-giving love. But the families of Abraham failed as well.

But God wasn't defeated. It didn't cause him to stumble. No, before the beginning of time, he had us chosen us. Before Abraham, before Adam and Eve, he chose to adopt us, people in Christ, as his sons and his daughters. We are the family he had envisaged all along. These other families demonstrated to us that we couldn't get the image of God right without supernatural assistance.

So God sends supernatural assistance in his own Son, a member of his triune Family, who expressed perfectly on earth and in a human body all the self-giving love of the Godhead, never once stumbling into the sin of self-grasping. And through this heavenly Son, through Jesus Christ, through this first-born of creation, God established the means of adopting us into his heavenly family as newly re-constituted sons and daughters, able to stand before him as holy and blameless *in love*. All, Paul adds in verse 6, *to the praise of his glorious grace*.

Oh yes! What a grace to be refitted through Christ to reproduce the glory of God's own self-giving love *with which he has blessed us in the Beloved*.

The glory of the blessings of heaven are ours. All the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places are ours when we plug in to the Beloved, when his love, the love of Jesus, starts to course into our beings. In love we stand before God, accomplishing what he intended for us from the beginning: to image who he is as the triune God in relation.

Ephesians 1 is thus recapitulating everything we've learned so far.

How do all these blessings happen to us? How do we get to this point? How do we become members of the family of heaven, imaging with the triune Family the love of our heavenly Father?

The answer comes in verse 7 – *In him* [that is to say, in Jesus Christ] *we have redemption through his blood*. By shedding his blood in death on the cross, Jesus redeemed us, purchased us for God's family.

How did his blood purchase us to be members of God's family? Look at the next part of verse 7 – by providing *the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*.

The blood of Jesus forgave our trespasses, paid off our debts – the indebtedness caused by the sins of self-grasping, an indebtedness so massive that we couldn't pay for it at the cost of our own lives. Only Jesus, in his self-giving love, could offer himself, by the riches of his grace, as a sacrifice for our sins. He died instead of us. His death for ours.

Winning for us the forgiveness of our trespasses (verse 7) *according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will*.

The great work God did for us in Christ was something he had planned to do all along, and yet it was hidden for many ages. But now the mystery has been made known in Jesus Christ. Keep reading – *according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a **plan** for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth*.

Here it is. What glory! Paul has just taken us into a fourth dimension, a new frontier, a land few Christians have ever entered, and it is precisely the place where God wants every Christian to reside.

Let me show you what I mean. We have gone from the enormous and astonishing thing God wants to do to us personally: blessing us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, choosing us before the foundation of the world to be members of his family, predestining us for adoption as sons and daughters, redeeming us through the blood of Jesus Christ, forgiving our trespasses according to the riches of his grace – all God has done to restore us to images of himself; putting us into a new family so that we can exercise that image in the holiness and the blamelessness of self-emptying love and be so blessed as a result.

And we think, remarkably, what an uplifting message of personal salvation for our individual lives. Let's preach it. Let's patent it. Let's can it. Let's market it. This will go down well publicly. Let's make a killing off of it.

But in our enthusiasm we miss out on one thing. We haven't gotten to the innermost part of the plan. All we've done so far is read about the means of the plan. We haven't yet got to its end, its purpose. We tend to stop prematurely with our personal salvation and we don't go to the much bigger end in view.

We think God's plan is to forgive us of our sins, and to predestine us to become members of his family, and to bless us with all the blessings of the heavenly places. And Paul says, "There's more." So far, I've just given you the means to the greater end of this big thing called The Plan. Now I want to give you its end, the fulfillment of The Plan.

### The End of The Plan

And that's what we just read it in verse 9 – He has made *known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a **plan** for the fullness of time.*

Do you see this? He's making known his *will*. He's on the threshold of revealing his *purpose*. He's just about to set out his *plan* for the fullness of time. His *will*, his *purpose*, his *plan* – what are these? Blessing us, choosing us, predestining us, redeeming us, forgiving us, lavishing us . . . all the things in verses 3-9 – are these The Plan?

No. Each of them is a means to a much bigger end! Which is what?

Everything in Ephesians 1, this long and complex sentence stretching from verse 3 to verse 10, is driving towards one Greek word, a part of speech called an infinitive, where everything Paul has been saying finds its end. This Greek infinitive is *anakefalaiosasthai*, which means literally "to draw together under one head".

That's The Plan, verse 10 – *The plan for the fullness of time* is to draw together all things under one head, namely under the headship of Jesus Christ.

That's the purpose of The Plan of God.

You mean my forgiveness of sins, and my predestination for adoption as a son and daughter in God's family, and my redemption by the riches of God's grace is not the end of The Plan? Correct . . . it is the means by which God will fulfill the purpose of his plan. Without all these wonderful things happening to you, you would never be prepared for the fulfillment of The Plan. But with them coming to effect in your life, you are now ready for the end of The Plan.

And what is the end?

It's all things drawn together under one head, under the head of Jesus Christ, where the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords is, as head, directing all things.

What are these *all things*? Paul tells us in verse 10 that they are *things in heaven and things on earth*. A parallel passage in Colossians confirms this by saying that *by him (Christ) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him (1:16-17)*.

The *all things* are everything Christ has created everywhere. And The Plan is to bring all those things under the headship, the leadership, the sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

***The Plan is to reclaim all things, under Christ, for God's glory!!***

Every note of music, every lecture in the schoolroom or university, every word in every family, every minute of every workday, everything, everywhere, brought under the headship of Jesus Christ. The Plan is to reclaim them all, all things, under Christ, for God's glory.

It's a big plan. It's a massive plan. And do you want to hear something that will sound even bigger? God wants to effect his plan through you, a Christian, a member of his spiritual family. You are the means by which God wants to achieve the end of his plan.

### **Paul's Ardent Prayer**

Let me illustrate. A wealthy Jewish art collector was dispossessed of all his masterpieces during the Nazi pogroms of World War II. His magnificent collection was scattered all over the world; some in museums, some in private collections. None of them is cared for with the same compassionate hands of the original owner. And as the Jewish art collector becomes old and infirm he turns to his son and gives him commission. "Here, hold out your hand. I bless you with all my riches. Here is \$50 billion. Go into the galleries of the world and buy back, bring back, my family of artwork, bring it all back to the family home once again."

Brother and sister in the family of God, we have been gifted by our spiritual Father with all the blessings in the heavenly places so that we might go out and draw all things under the one head of Jesus Christ, that we might reclaim all things for the glory of the Father. How do we do that? Don't you see? By using all the blessings he's given us.

For some reason, it's hard for us to see this, and Paul knows it, and it forms the inner core of his most ardent prayer. I'm going to pray for you that, at the depth of your being, you're going to see how blessed you are so that you go out and bring back all things under the headship of Jesus for the glory of God.

Please look with me carefully at Paul's prayer. It's in Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 14 – *For this reason [because you have been so blessed in Jesus Christ] I bow my knees before the Father*. Yes, before the Father, a title carefully chosen by Paul. He does not say he bows before God (although he would have been right to do so), nor Lord, but Father. Because the goal, the great end of The Plan, is to bring the earthly family of God into conformity with the family of the heavenly Father.

I bow my knees before the Father *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named*. They all bear his name because they all bear his likeness, they are all meant to image him, which they can do only as families since they are imaging God as a triune Family.

Verse 16 – *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being*.

This is key. Remember we learned last week how we are all naturally self-grasping and all the problems of our world, from envy to divorce to splintered relationships, all represent some form or other of self-grasping. We just can't seem to get beyond worshipping ourselves and our wants. It's naturally who we are. We said last week that if there's ever going to be any improvement in our world, if we're ever going to become self-giving in our love, someone's got to get into our heart and change us from within. No outward mechanisms, no behavioral edicts, can accomplish what needs to happen in us. We are all naturally self-grasping. We need supernatural assistance, and that assistance must come from within.

Do you see what Paul's praying? That we might be *strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being*, that the Holy Spirit might write on our hearts, according to the riches of God's glory, the self-giving love of the triune God in relation.

How will this happen? The prayer continues in verse 17 – *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*.

Yes, the only way we can be refashioned as sons and daughters of God according to his image is for the son of God to get inside us and do what we've never been able to do by ourselves. And what's that? Unsurprisingly, verse 17b, it is to be *rooted and grounded in love*.

Naturally, we're not loving. We're self-grasping. And for thousands of years we have tried to make ourselves different, but to no avail. Rather, in this respect, we've been tragic failures.

G. K. Chesterton once made the observation that "the one doctrine validated empirically by thirty-five hundred years of recorded human history is the doctrine of original sin." We can't seem to get rid of our self-grasping. It's a defect of the heart. It inheres our innermost being.

Something or someone has got to change our hearts. We can't do it. History has proven that.

Jesus is the only one who can change our hearts because he is perfectly the self-giving one. And when he comes to dwell in us, he stamps us from within by his image, which is the image of God himself.

This is the blessing that God has given us by which we will draw all people to himself through love. He has sent the ultimately loving one – namely, Jesus Christ – into our hearts to reproduce his love within us.

## Comprehending the Love Within

If you are a Christian, Christ dwells within you. And Paul is praying that you'd have the strength to comprehend that spectacular reality.

Verse 18 – I pray that you *may have the strength to comprehend with all the other saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ . . .* that's already in you.

If Christ is in your heart, your heart is rooted and grounded in love, because Christ is infinitely loving. I want you to be strong enough, says Paul, to comprehend that. To believe it. To understand it. You have a love that well up within you *ad infinitum*. There's no bounds to the love of Christ in your hearts.

Its dimensions are unlimited in every direction; breadth, length, height, depth. This love in you, the love of Christ in you, knows no boundaries. It's capable of endless expansion. There's no place it can't reach and wherever it reaches it – as we learned last week – it never fails and never ends. It is the most powerful shaping agent in the world. It is sufficiently strong to draw all things back under one head and, astonishingly, it is within you. Indeed, the will and the purpose and The Plan of God from before time began was to use that love in you to reclaim all things for his glory.

Oh how I pray, says Paul, that you would know this about divine love – verse 19 – *That you would experience the love of Christ.*

I know it is translated in our English version, that you would 'know' the love of Christ, but the Greek word here comes from the root *ginosko*, which can also be translated that you would 'experience' the love of Christ. I like that translation here.

*That you would experience the love of Christ that surpasses all known experience, so that you may be filled up with all the fullness of God.*

The last line of this verse is so spectacular as to defy all logic – *To be filled up with all the fullness of God*. How full is God? Surely, infinitely full. And with what is he so full? As we have learned, with LOVE. Infinite and eternal self-emptying love, and the more he empties himself of love, the fuller he becomes.

Can we really become as full as God is full? Yes, because God's Son is in us and because he is all the fullness of deity in bodily form (Colossians 1) – if he's in us, we are full of all the fullness of God as well.

Have you ever heard of anything so wonderful as this? And can you believe it . . . that we can be filled up with all the fullness of God?

Here's the rationale. The love of God is both infinite and self-emptying. The more God empties himself of that love, paradoxically the fuller of love he becomes. Christ is inside of you. You have an unlimited capacity of Christ-like love. When you pour out all that capacity, you will be



fuller than you were before you started pouring it out, precisely because that's the way God's love works. The more you pour out, the fuller you become. *Filled up with all the fullness of God.*

An experience of this sort of love transcends all other experiences. The more you give yourself away in love, the fuller you become of God, of love. And then The Plan is running on all cylinders. And when it is, prepare yourself for the unbelievable to start happening in you. When you understand how much supernatural self-emptying love you have to give away because of the one who dwells in you, Jesus Christ who is full of the love of God, things, all things, things subject to your love, will, through you, begin to be reclaimed for God's glory.

I want to *experience* this and I want my people, Paul says, in Ephesus to experience this too. Look at how he closes in verse 20. We often yank this verse out of context, but what a great finale within the context.

Verse 20 – *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work **within us**, to him be glory in the family called the church [the family in which you find this love dwelling in hearts] and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

I pray that you would have the strength to comprehend the power of the endlessly extending and the eternally effective love of Christ already welling up in your hearts. Because when you understand it and let it out, all things will, through Christ's love expressed in and through you, be reclaimed for God's glory. This world will become something beautiful, united under Christ, to God.

### **Examples of Reclaiming All Things for God's Glory**

The message from the apostle Paul is so big. How can we comprehend it? We need to see examples of how this works in practice.

As I was sifting through some of my dad's papers, which is of course the sort of thing you do when your father dies, I came across a letter that was written when my dad was twenty-four years old. He was the Financial Administrator of the College Department at Hollywood Presbyterian Church. Four hundred students, ages 18-25, had, very clearly it seems, been strengthened to comprehend what the endlessly extending love of Christ could accomplish through them. It becomes very clear in the financial letter written by my dad.

“Dear Collegian,

I am sure we rejoice together as we look back over the twelve months of 1949 and consider them the way the Lord has blessed and used our college department. During this past year, he has given us an abundant spiritual growth. He has also enabled us to reach a large percentage of L.A.'s college students, hundreds of German orphans, many California churches, numerous jails, a plethora of radio audiences, and several other groups. This, in addition to the fact, that our group as a whole has grown both in the scope of its ministry and benevolences.”



Kids 18-25 years old. No adult oversight, reaching their community with the love of Christ. God going far beyond anything they could ask or think to the praise of his glory as Christ's love in them, with its unlimited scope and reach, is reaching out farther and farther and farther.

“All these things are happening in a day when the need for a dynamic Christianity is more urgent than ever before. Many of our greatest leaders of government, business, armed forces, and the sciences are demanding that our country's most pressing need is not the halt of inflation, the unification of the armed services (which was a big debate of the day), or even the control of atomic proliferation, but rather a better understanding of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. As the need becomes more desperate, we of the College Department feel compelled to shoulder this responsibility.”

I love it. Dad, go for it! This is good.

“He has given us the vision, the personnel, and the spiritual equipment to reach out much further for him this year. Yet this greater influence cannot be realized unless we are found responsible in our stewardship in the gift of our time, our talent, and our treasure. Now that plans are in the making for the coming year, we are being asked to indicate just what financial contribution we as individuals intend to make for his kingdom work. We must consider this manner seriously. And as our decisions now determine in a very real way the extent of our influence in this city for Jesus Christ, just as an automobile (remember he was in the automobile business) regardless of the engine's potential power, the driver's willingness to operate the vehicle can only go so far as its fuel supply will allow.”

What my dad is saying to his fellow-collegians is this: “You've got a fuel supply, brothers and sisters, that is unlimited. You don't know the height, width, depth, or breadth of the love of Christ that is in you. If you let it out, it's going to change Hollywood and it's going to change California and it's going to change the country and the world. That's why I am praying that you would have the strength to comprehend what's in you.”

Well, if God can use 400 young adults, ages 18-25, to change things in our nation – drawing people and what people do under the headship of Christ – just imagine what he can do through Camelback Bible Church.

I have never been in a more precious family than this family at Camelback. One of the most loving, most gifted, most theologically enlightened families I've ever known. Some people in this body are self-giving beyond anything I could have ever have imagined or dreamed. I've got a stack at home of letters of sympathy and profound theological encouragement from you over the last two months that have really kept me going in one of the most difficult periods of my life. God has really used them to lift me up. The wisdom and the Christ that you have spoken into my life could be published to great effect in many lives – they're that good.

When we see how much there is of the love of Christ in us and are ready to unleash it, there's no telling what God might do through us in our community and world. How he could work his plan of reclaiming all things for his glory through us!

Another example. Back to the College Department (that's what they called it) at Hollywood Presbyterian Church, where my dad met another guy named Bill, and they became best friends. Each of them was best man in the other's wedding.

This other Bill had a dream of reaching every college student in America for Jesus Christ, a vision which, even in that College Department where most visions were very big, this one was so big that people laughed at him. There were no college ministries in those days. There was no Christian witness on college campuses. Right now we've got 400 ministries on college campuses. Not then. There was nothing. This was a brand new idea from a guy named Bill.

My dad said, "Well, I'll meet with you every Saturday morning and we'll pray about this vision to reach the college campuses for Jesus Christ." So the two of them met and prayed, and another young man joined them. They started with UCLA and USC, and soon thereafter a large percentage of L.A.'s college students were hearing the proclamation and demonstration of Christ's love.

In time, the other Bill founded a little group called Campus Crusade for Christ. Yes, his last name was Bright, Bill Bright. In the last few weeks, I've come across all sorts of letters from Bill Bright to my dad. Bright was a gifted visionary.

Like Paul, who says, I just pray that you have the strength to comprehend the love of Christ which dwells within you, since once it escapes from you, it can go far beyond all you ask or think in terms of reclaiming this world for God's glory. You're the means by which I want to accomplish my big plan of bringing all things under the headship of Jesus Christ.

#### **Four Ways We Can Reclaim All Things for God's Glory**

What could we be doing for Jesus Christ with all his love dwelling in our hearts, welling up within us to explode outwardly, endlessly, eternally, drawing all things back under the life-giving headship of our Lord? What sort of inroads could we be making into our community? What are the identity of the all things that we are especially burdened to draw back under the headship of Jesus Christ? There are four things that come to my mind.

The first thing that comes to my mind is *families*.

We love families at Camelback, and so does God. He loves above all his spiritual family and the triune love we express one to another at CBC. Families of the world don't know much about that love and they are withering, wasting away because of it.

I think of families that are struggling, leaving each other, broken in their relationships. How do we reach into the families of our community – husbands and wives, parents and children, singles, divorced – and flood them with the love of Christ, bringing things in their lives back under Jesus Christ? Using our Community Groups, Marital Seminars, Singles Weekends to bring families under Christ.

The second thing that comes to my mind is the *workplace*.

We love the workplace at Camelback and so does God. He loves our work as a magnificent thing we do to bring him glory. But so many in our world don't have a clue how to work for the glory of God. The workplace is very confused right now. We have 25 million Americans who are looking for full time work.

They did a poll of middle-class women shoppers at Walmart in Orlando and Memphis and, I think, Denver. They were asked to describe in a word how things are going in the workplaces of our country right now. And the words they used in answer were the words "depressing, different, discouraged." Are there any positive words to describe the workplaces in our country? Their response was silence.

How do you see the economic troubles in your life? "Two weeks ago my company put up a posting for a position and 250 applicants responded, all overqualified." "Most houses in my neighborhood are under foreclosure or for sale." "We're all trying to save money however we can; juggling credit cards, saving coupons, not eating out, no vacations, changing where we shop, buying food in bulk." "I was teaching my boys to prepare themselves for college, but now I'm teaching them how to collect aluminum cans."

How do we bring the love of Christ to bear on the economy, unemployment, work, interest rates, inflation, debt? God has told us what a beautiful thing work can be and how to understand our economy. Isn't it time for Christians to step forward with the love of Christ, encouraging people in their work?

The third thing that comes to my mind is *education*.

Christianity has always been the enemy of ignorance. Our faith is word-based. We love books. We aspire to feed minds, to build the mind of Christ. We are not anti-intellectual. We are not lowest-denominator pragmatists.

Harvard University was founded by Christians. This was their preamble in 1643: "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed, to consider well that the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." Build character, make a contribution for good, refine manners, instill discipline.

We have a high school close to us where only half the students are graduating. This is a damning social statistic and ought to be a burden to us as Christians. Many of us are mentoring students there and hoping that in the name of Jesus Christ we can bring some things back and under him.

The fourth thing that comes to my mind is the *arts*.

The arts celebrate what it means to be human by giving all glory to God. Music, drawing, painting, dancing, film.

But, today, the arts are being governed by self-grasping impulses and, as a result, are becoming more superficial and banal. There's a lot of ugliness in our music and in our painting and in our storytelling. The arts have become a place of despair when they were always meant by God to be a source of celebration, celebrating our humanity to his glory. Indeed, when the arts are governed by the impulse of self-giving, human spirits begin to soar. Couldn't we help our community artistically? Couldn't the arts be a part of the 'all things' we bring back under the headship of Jesus Christ?

Just a few ideas: family, workplace, education, and the arts. Professions where we have special gifts that, if unleashed, the Lord would use in magnificent ways.

Camelback Bible Church is a family on a mission for the glory of God, extending the *love of Christ* to all people for the renewal of all things.

I pray, says Paul, that you would have the strength to comprehend the height, the width, the depth, and the breadth of the love of Christ within you, and that as you pour it out you would be filled even fuller with all the fullness of God.

**[PRAYER]**

Father, that is our prayer. Make us increasingly what you have planned for us to be as a church body. And any of us, Father, who have never received the love of Christ into our hearts, may this morning be the beginning of a grand infusion of your love. Adopt us as sons and daughters into your family and then may we go out and pour into others the love of Christ. This is your plan, The Plan, and it's all for your glory and we love it. In Jesus' name, amen.