

PLAIN AND SIMPLE SERIES®

Tomorrow
May Be
Too Late

DISCOVERING OUR DESTINY

CHUCK & NANCY MISSLER



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Tomorrow May be Too Late

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The story line and the characters in this book are fictitious. However, both are based upon a composite of *true* incidents and events, and the characteristics that are common to all of us.

Introduction

He was only 39 years old!

He had his whole life ahead of him. He was creative, adventurous, had a great sense of humor and loved everyone.

God, why?

He had simply gone on a weekend outing with his young wife and their two babies to visit his in-laws up in the wine country. That afternoon, rather than sit around, he decided to go out for a jog. They found his body an hour later, dead of a massive heart attack. It's impossible to comprehend what exactly happened because he had "run" for fun all of his life, in our school P.E. class, in our high school competitions and in any local city marathons he could find. As long as I had known him, he had been in great shape. He hadn't seen a doctor in years.

His name was Skip Miller and I was his best friend. (See photos on Page 150)

I couldn't believe the e-mail that I was reading: "Skip died suddenly last night of a massive heart attack while out jogging. Please come quickly. The funeral is on Saturday. We need you desperately." Signed, Elaine (his wife).

I was in total shock! How on earth could this have happened? And oh, my God, why?

Skip and I had been best friends since we were 10. We were only a few weeks apart in age and had been inseparable since the 5th grade. I still vividly remember the day I met him. It was the first day of school and this big fat kid was threatening to beat me up. He was bullying me and calling me names. Skip stepped in and told the guy, “Hey! Back off; Dave is *my* friend. Beat it.” Since Skip was the most popular kid in the group, the bully backed off. I never forgot that incident. Skip and I instantly became “best friends.”

We finished elementary school, junior high and high school together, taking the same classes and growing closer every day. They used to call the two of us the “Dynamic Duo.”

Skip always loved architecture, so when we graduated he went off to the USC Architectural School. He was brilliant and won many scholarships. His future had been all mapped out for him. After graduation, I left for Alaska, where many of my family still lived, and roamed around for a few years doing what I could. Then I found my calling. After going to Bible School, I became a pastor. I married my childhood sweetheart and we now have four beautiful children.

The e-mail I held in my hand was the most shocking piece of news I had ever received. Skip was so young, he had so much to live for, and so much to give. Why, Lord, would You allow this to happen?

Of course, I would attend the funeral. They couldn’t keep me away. I hadn’t seen Skip’s close-

knit family in years and I wanted to bring them whatever comfort I could. They had been like my “own” family when Skip and I were in school together. I had practically lived with them. I knew them intimately.

I would go to the funeral, but I had no idea of the profound implications that it would lead to, nor the extent of involvement that the Lord would require of me personally.

My name is Dave. Pastor Dave Snow.

The Funeral

The funeral was scheduled for 5 p.m. Saturday.

My wife and I arrived early and sat in the back of the church as we really weren’t “immediate” family members. Skip’s friends, family, cousins and relatives by marriage all paraded in one by one, their brokenhearted and downcast faces expressing exactly how they felt.

During the funeral service, we heard the usual words of encouragement—that Skip was finally at peace and that we should take comfort in the fact that we would one day be reunited with him in heaven, etc. But for the most part, as I looked around the room, the message seemed to be falling on deaf ears. Everyone’s grief was so intense that all anyone could think of was that suddenly Skip was no longer with us.

There was such an atmosphere of confusion and hopelessness that one couldn't help but be weighed down by it. You could, almost audibly, hear the questions on everyone's mind: Is there really another life after this? How are we assured of getting there? Where is Skip now? Will we ever see him again? Is there really a "heaven?" Will we know each other there?

As we face the death of a loved one, our own destiny always comes into question. And, in this state of introspection, many questions will cross our minds and make us feel very uncomfortable, especially if we don't have any ready answers. *Is this all there is to life? Is there really a future and a hope? What is our meaning and purpose here on earth?*

Even the meal after the funeral service seemed empty and meaningless without Skip's contagious smile and effervescent personality. With the time constraints, I was grieved that I couldn't somehow bring more assurance, hope and encouragement to the family members who were present.

After the meal was over, my wife and I decided that I should stay for a week or so to give whatever help I could to Skip's family. I put her on the plane home and on the way back to the motel, I had some extra time, so I drove to a local Christian Book Store. I was hoping to find a *little* book I could give to the family members that would concisely tell them: *what God's plan and purpose is for our lives; who it is we can securely put our trust in; and, finally, what our future hope is.* However, I became very frustrated because after going to four different Christian

bookstores, I could not find one such book! There seemed to be plenty of *large*, thick books espousing the theology of Christianity and the reality of God, as well as small tracts on how to be saved and how to witness to people and books on what it means to be a Christian, but none of them simply answered these three basic questions: *What's our purpose in life? In whom can we reliably trust? And, is there a future hope?*

I went back to the motel utterly defeated.

I had planned to see each of the family members the following week, but I was totally unprepared for what the Lord was about ready to do.

***“Let Your unfailing Love surround us, Lord, for our
hope is in You alone!”***

Psalm 33:22

Chapter One

The Plans and Purposes of God

Skip's cousin, Sally, was one of the youngest people at his funeral. At the time, she was only 16 years old. The funeral was a major turning point in her life, because, for the first time, she was forced to face many difficult issues she really hadn't thought about before.

Sally was raised in a very dysfunctional family. Her mom, Leigh, was a full-blown alcoholic with many emotional problems as well. There was even a short period of time when little Sally, (I think she was around six), was removed from her home and placed with a foster family. These were incredibly traumatic years for her. Finally, she was permitted by the state to go back home, but the abuse continued and the problems even got worse. Consequently, Sally has spent most of her young years simply trying to survive and keep herself together.

The funeral obviously brought up things that Sally had never thought about before. Issues such as: What's my purpose here on earth? Is God personal? Can I really know Him? And, finally, is there such a thing as life after death? These are questions that many of us don't really face head on until we're much older, and sometimes ones that we never find answers to.

"Okay, Pastor Dave, you seem to have a handle on these things," Sally blurted out one afternoon.

“I’ve been too busy just staying alive, but I have often wondered why I am here. Is God really involved in my life? And, does He even care?”

“Honestly, I feel like He doesn’t really care, because my life’s been such a mess. I’ve always been on my own and I’ve had to fight for everything. I’ve never seen any evidence that He is real and that He is personal. Of course, I’ve never really looked for Him or taken the time to investigate. I really don’t even know where to begin or where to go to find answers to these things!”

What a perfect opening Sally gave me to explain...

“Sally, everything begins and ends with God.¹ No matter who we are, what experiences we’ve had or how people have used and abused us, we’ll never be able to discover the real meaning of our lives until we know exactly what God’s purpose was in creating us. No matter how you look at it, *God is the source of our lives.*² Even if we don’t believe in Him or see Him working, He’s still the One who created us, the One with whom we have to deal and the One who sets the rules.

“Now, of course, there is much about God, His purposes and eternal Life, that we’ll not be able to fully comprehend this side of heaven, such as Skip’s death. God even confirms this in Isaiah when He says, ‘...My thoughts are not your thoughts. My thoughts are completely different from yours...And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.’ (Isaiah 55:8-9) Thus we must realize at the outset of our discussion, that much of God’s plan *will* be incomprehensible to us until we actually see Him face-to-face. However, the Bible *does* tell us that *if* we diligently search for Him with all our hearts, we will find Him and He will give us the understanding we need.³

“God’s main purpose in creating us is very simple. He wants to reproduce His nature—His Life, His Love—in us. His desire is to do this so that, first of all, we can have a personal, intimate relationship with Him and, secondly, so that we can pass along His Love to others. Now, God won’t force His nature on anyone. He created us with a free will so we can always make our own decisions. In other words, we have the free choice to either accept His plan and purpose for our lives or reject His offer and go our own way.

“If we yield to His directive for our life and receive His new nature, then we’ll be able to reflect *His* Love to the world. And by so doing, others will want what we have. Unfortunately, as we look around the world right now, this obviously is not happening. In fact, it looks like just the opposite. There is more lovelessness, hopelessness and emptiness in the world now than ever before. Outwardly, it looks like Satan has defeated God’s plan and appears to be winning.

“Or, so it would seem...”

In the Beginning

Sally interrupted me and said, “My own family certainly has been a part of that loveless and hopeless society. Is it really possible to break the cycle? Can we really experience God’s Love and His involvement in our lives when we’ve already slid so far? In fact, how did we, as a people, get so far off base in the first place?”

“Well, let me take you back in history, Sally, and give you a little background, and then I’ll try to answer those questions.

“I want to start with the Bible narrative because it’s not only God’s inspired Word but it also lays out God’s whole plan and purpose for us. (Next chapter, we’ll try to prove why we should believe what the Bible has to say.)

“The Bible begins with the words, ‘In the beginning God...’ (Genesis 1:1) God existed even before time began: He has always existed. The Psalmist says, ‘Your throne, O Lord, has been established from time immemorial. You Yourself are from the everlasting past.’ (Psalm 93:2) In other words, ‘Before you made the earth and the world, You are God, without beginning or end.’ (Psalm 90:2)

“God is not only eternal, He is also all-powerful and omniscient (i.e., He controls everything and He knows everything).⁴ Indeed, there is no place in the universe where God does not see and know exactly what is going on. Even a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without Him knowing.”⁵

“Okay, if that’s true, then how did the world get so messed up?” Sally asked.

“Well, let me back up a minute and see if I can summarize it.

“It is assumed that *before* God created the universe, He created a vast host of angels to assist Him in the running of the universe. These angels were created in a perfect environment, called ‘heaven.’ They obeyed God and they worshiped Him continually. Since God is a God of perfect order, He organized these angels much as an earthly king might organize a government or an army. He created one angel with striking beauty and power to rule over His kingdom. He even gave him a throne from which to rule. The angel’s name was Lucifer (or Day Star, later named Satan). Lucifer answered only to God. But, as time went on, he began to gaze at himself and wonder why he shouldn’t have just as much authority as God Himself. This is the moment at which sin (or self-will over God’s will) entered the picture.

“Isaiah recounts the story this way: ‘For you [Lucifer] said to yourself, I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and [I will] be like the *Most High*.’” (Isaiah 14:13-14)

“Lucifer’s motive was to glorify (raise up and acknowledge) himself. Always a dangerous plan. It was his declaration of independence that got him into so much trouble. In other words, he set his will over and against the Father’s and, thus, *made himself out*

to be equal to God. (This is the origin of ‘sin.’ It’s simply self-will over and against God’s will. And this is much of what we see in the world around us today.)

“The Bible seems to hint that Satan was so influential among his peers that he convinced a third of the angels to rebel with him.⁶ He then established his own kingdom on earth called the ‘kingdom of darkness.’ In fact, he is called Satan, which means ‘adversary.’ Satan has continued throughout the ages to do everything in his power to defeat God’s kingdom. Now, he doesn’t appear with horns and a long tail as often seen in literature. Instead, he appears as an ‘angel of light’ and, as such, deceives many. He is very cunning, very subtle and very evil.

“When Satan was banished from heaven, *he accused God of being unfair and unjust.* Consequently, he began a vengeful campaign to mar God’s holy Name in whatever way he could. God, on the other hand, set about to reclaim what was rightfully His.

“Thus, the war began...

The Story of Man

“As said before, God created man with a free will and set him in a perfect environment called the Garden of Eden. God, of course, knew that man would eventually blow it by choosing to follow his ‘own’ will over the Lord’s. Thus it came as no surprise when Adam sinned. God knew all along that he would. Nothing takes God by surprise. He knows

all things. He knew full well what would happen in the Garden, even before it occurred. God put man on the earth with Satan running free, knowing what man would choose to do. But, God had a magnificent plan.

“In addition to God being all powerful and omniscient, God has an infinite capacity for unconditional Love. Therefore, even though man would continue to blow it over and over again, God, in His unfathomable Love, *conceived a plan by which those who would heed His call would be rescued from their predicament.*

“Isaiah gives us a small glimpse of the depth of God’s Love for us: ‘When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God...*you are precious to Me. You are honored, and I love you.*’ (Isaiah 43:2-4)⁷

“This kind of unconditional Love is the only answer to the hopelessness, the loneliness and the emptiness that plague our world today.

God’s Ultimate Purpose

“You see, Sally, we can’t discover the meaning to our lives by looking *inward*, but only by looking *upward*. Many people have spent their entire existence looking for meaning in others, in themselves or in their accomplishments and have ended up more confused and more hopeless than ever. Our lives take

on meaning *only* when we align ourselves with God's purpose in creating us in the first place.⁸

“God not only has a purpose for us, He wants more than anything else to reveal that purpose to us. In Jeremiah 29, God tells us, ‘For I know the plans I have for you...plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’ (Verse 11)

“His plan is very simple: He wants to have a personal, loving relationship with us so that we can learn to pass along His Love (His Life) to others.⁹ This is what the First and Second Commandments tell us. ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.¹⁰ A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself.’¹¹ The Bible tells us that God's whole plan is summed up in these two commandments.

“Once we understand *why He created us* and *what He wants from us*, our lives will take on a whole new meaning, which ultimately will give us the hope we need to go on.¹²

“God is a just and loving God who not only yearns for fellowship with us, He longs for us to reflect His character back to the world. The ultimate example of His Love is that He, the Creator of the Universe, became a man, dwelt among us and died a cruel death in order that we might have and experience His Life. There is no greater expression of unconditional Love anywhere.

“C.S. Lewis once said, ‘The Son of God became a man, so that men might become the sons of God.’¹³

In simpler terms, God became a man, so that one day man could reflect God. Thus, God has taken the initiative. He has reached out to us. All He is waiting for is for us to reach up and take hold of His hand.

“Satan, however, won't let this happen without a tremendous fight...

Satan's Strategies

“Have you ever heard of Job in the Bible? Well, Job was considered one of the most righteous men who ever lived, yet the enemy tried viciously to impugn Job's character in order get God to move against him. The following excerpt gives us a glimpse into how viciously the enemy works:

“One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan the Accuser came with them. ‘Where have you come from?’ the LORD asked Satan. And Satan answered the LORD, ‘I have been going back and forth across the earth, watching everything that's going on.’ Then the LORD asked Satan, ‘Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and will have nothing to do with evil.’ Satan replied to the LORD, ‘Yes, Job fears God, but not without good reason! You have always protected him and his home and his property from harm. You have made him prosperous in everything he does. Look how rich he is! *But take away everything he has*, and he will surely curse you to your face!’ (Job 1:6-11)

“Now this event took place long ago, but it gives us some insight into Satan’s current attitude. He will do anything he can to get us to trip and fall, through disobedience, rebellion or pride, just as he did with Job.

“God, however, knew in advance that Satan would try to thwart his plans. Remember, God is omniscient. He knows all things! He knew that man would fall for the devil’s lies and that He, Himself, would have to come to earth in human form and nothing less than shedding His own blood would suffice to bring man back to Himself. This act alone should forever silence any accusations that God is unjust, unfair or unloving. The one thing that Satan didn’t count on, was that God’s Love would be so strong and so compelling that, in spite of the devil’s continuing opposition, many would be persuaded to embrace God’s program of redemption.

“What a slap in the face it must have been to Satan, when Job after all his trials said, ‘Though He [God] slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’ (Job. 13:15a)

“This is the kind of trust that God seeks from every one of us. And, this is the kind of trust that will destroy the works of Satan and, ultimately, reclaim God’s usurped kingdom.”

Drawing off the Chaff

At this point, Sally interrupted me and asked a very good question: “Pastor Dave, why didn’t God just destroy the devil when He obviously knew what harm he would cause?”

“Well, Sally, I believe God is using Satan like ‘a tool’ or ‘an instrument’ *to show us that the real cause of sin, (self-will over God’s will), is the wickedness of our own hearts, not just Satan’s temptations.*¹⁴

“Let me read a passage from a great book by Dr. Stanley Ellisen called *Three Worlds in Conflict*. He answers your question even a little more clearly. He says, ‘Part of the answer [as to why God didn’t destroy Satan in the beginning] is to intensify man’s spiritual choice and remove it from the arena of mere morality or aesthetics...The net effect is that Satan’s kingdom serves as a giant magnet to attract the superficial. *He draws off both the chaff and the counterfeit wheat.* This polarizing service of Satan is demonstrated in Revelation 20 where he is released to gather the wicked for their final assembly. This strikingly illustrates the reason for his continued existence.’¹⁵

“In other words, God will use everything and anything to show us the truth about ourselves—including the enemy.

God’s Plan, Man’s Failure

“So even though Satan has tried throughout history to thwart God’s plan of redemption for man, God has prevailed every time. He began His redemption program by *creating man in a perfect environment* called Eden. Even though man failed the test, God was gracious and for the next thousand years, appealed to him through *his conscience*. Again, man refused to obey. His free will took over. This period ended in the now famous worldwide

flood, where only Noah and his family were saved to repopulate the earth. In subsequent generations, man was trusted with the responsibility of *human government*, but this, too, ended in disaster when men began to stand together *against* God (i.e., at the Tower of Babel).¹⁶

“Two thousand years passed and God called Abraham, one of the greatest men of faith who ever lived. Through Abraham, God brought the nation Israel to Himself and entrusted them with *His laws and His eternal covenants*. Abraham continued to remain faithful, but the generations that followed him did not and they wound up in Egypt as slaves. After four hundred years God called forth another God-fearing man, Moses, who led the Israelites from Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey, ‘the promised land’ of Israel. Moses worked mighty miracles in Israel’s presence and yet, even after all of this, they rebelled. Finally, in spite of Israel’s continued resistance, God brought forth *His Son, Jesus Christ* of Nazareth, who would sacrifice His life, not only for Israel but for the whole world.

“Even after all of this, however, we see man today turning further and further away from God. The Bible tells us that soon this age will end with two important events: not only the ‘Rapture’ of the Church, (which we will explore in detail in Chapter 6), but also with a period called ‘the Great Tribulation,’ the most catastrophic period of time the world will ever see. After this, we are told that Jesus, Himself, will return to the earth to reign for a thousand years, while Satan is bound in chains in the abyss. Time will show, however, that even under

these ideal conditions of Christ reigning and Satan bound, many—unbelievably—will still rebel against God when given the opportunity.

“Throughout history, the one fact that God categorically proves over and over again is that He remains just and fair, loving and wise in all His dealings with man.¹⁷ He *does* have a plan and He *does* have a purpose. And that plan and that purpose includes us!”

Sally and I talked about these things many times over the next several days. The more she began to understand God’s overall purpose in creating her, the more her life began to take on new meaning. One morning she told me, “You know Dave, God could even be using Skip’s death to bring me closer to Him. And, if He can do that, maybe He can even use my past in some way to help others.” It’s been exquisite for me to see the changes in her, even in this short period of time, and to watch this beautiful young woman develop a real hunger and thirst to know more about her God, her life and her future. Her focus has been re-directed from her crushing personal history to a future that seems new and exciting. Sally’s new enthusiasm reminded me of Skip’s excitement and love for his girls. He spoke about them every time we talked. He even sent me a picture so I could see how fast they were growing. (See photos on page 150) I still can’t hardly believe he is gone. He was so young...

Endnotes:

- 1 Colossians 1:16
- 2 Ephesians 1:11
- 3 Jeremiah 29:13
- 4 John 6:64; Matthew 17:22-27
- 5 Matthew 10:29
- 6 See Revelation 12:1-9
- 7 See also Jeremiah 31:3; Isaiah 49:16
- 8 Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. See also 1 Corinthians 2:7
- 9 1 Timothy 2:4
- 10 Deuteronomy 6:5
- 11 Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-40
- 12 Psalm 138:8
- 13 Greg Laurie, *How to live forever*, Tyndale House, Wheaton, Ill 1999
- 14 Jeremiah 17:9
- 15 Page 21
- 16 Genesis 11:4
- 17 John 3:17