

Are we a product of planned obsolescence?

I am sure that we all own one or more of the following, whether it be a microwave, a car, a hairdryer, a washing machine, a tv and the list goes on. What is it about all these items that they have in common? What is the one main attribute they all share?

They all fall into the category of 'planned obsolescence.'

But what is that?

In its briefest definition, planned obsolescence in industrial design is a policy of planning or designing a product with an artificially limited useful life, so it will become obsolete, that is, unfashionable or no longer functional after a certain period of time. The rationale behind the strategy is to generate long-term sales volume by reducing the time between repeat purchases.

Invention of planned obsolescence

The origins of planned obsolescence go as back as 1932, during the Great Depression, with the release of a pamphlet written by Bernard London called 'Ending the Depression through Planned Obsolescence'. The essence of London's plan would have the government impose a legal obsolescence on consumer articles, to stimulate and perpetuate consumption.

Lo and behold – welcome to capitalism!

In less fancy words, and this may come as a bit of shock to some—none of the goods you buy or have bought, be they white goods, electrical, IT equipment or even cars have been designed to last beyond the manufacturer's requirements. By forcing us, the consumer, to either buy spare parts or a new replacement item, helps drive profits up for companies, creates jobs, keeps the economy growing and feeds our ongoing desire to buy, buy, buy.

To understand what life was like in a pre-planned obsolescence world, you can look up on the internet 'the world's oldest light bulb'. There is one humble little light bulb that was first made in the late 1890s and came to be used in 1901 in a fire station in California, it is called the Centennial light. This little light bulb is at least 113 years old and has only been turned off a handful of times but still continues to function even to this day. It so famous even tourists come to see this little wonder.

Of course, it was only possible for this light bulb to last because it was made in the era before planned obsolescence came into effect. After the 1930s, items were rarely made to last and that trend continues to today.

Now, there is something else that is also interesting about earlier list of items that fall into the category of planned obsolescence. If you recall the definition of planned obsolescence was designing a product with limited useful life. What if I were to add one more item to that

list that was not previously mentioned, but you could say fulfils the requirements of planned obsolescence?

What if I added this: “Humans?”

After having read what is defined by planned obsolescence and seen what items fall into this list, how do you feel about it now?

Is it fair to say that we, humans, have also been planned to be obsolete?

Let's look at the facts as they stand today.

Are people a product of planned obsolescence?

Currently, our world population, if I were to round the number down, is approximately 7 billion. And if we believe in the Bible and in Creation, then we'd agree that this earth's age is about 5,000–6,000 years old. Therefore in those 5,000–6,000 years, why is it that our entire population is only 7 billion, when it should really be numbering in the several billions or more since the time of Adam and Eve?

Well, logically, those early human populations that did exist in the beginning are simply all dead. As was the generation that came after Adam and Eve, and the generation after that and after that, until we arrive to today.

So let's be crude and say that based on these facts, Man appears to be a 'designed product.....with a limited useful life'. Is it fair to say that we too had been created with a plan to become obsolete? None of us can lay claim to being like the little light bulb in the US that is over 100 years old.

But let's not stop there. What if the Bible tells us that we were planned to be obsolete?

“My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass” (Psalm 102:11).

“Man is like a breath;
his days are like a passing shadow” (Psalm 144:4).

“The eye of him who sees me will behold me no more;
while your eyes are on me, I shall be gone.
As the cloud fades and vanishes,
so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up;
he returns no more to his house,
nor does his place know him anymore” (Job 7:8–10).

If anyone knew anything what death and pain meant, it had to be Job!

“For we are but of yesterday and know nothing,
for our days on earth are a shadow” (Job 8:9).

“As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand” (Ecclesiastes 5:15).

You can find plenty more verses in the Bible that talk about our limited days on earth.

Based on this, there is no wonder there is a lot of truth to that morbid saying that says, ‘there is nothing more certain than death and taxes’.

But I’m not quite done yet. Let’s take me as the final piece of evidence in my argument that perhaps we were designed to be obsolete. If we were to take me as a case study, I can tell you that in my 40 years of life I’ve changed quite a bit. I’ve gotten older, slower, I’m getting pain in parts of my body that were never there, my metabolism has slowed down, my eyesight has gotten worse and the list goes on. Judging from all this, it doesn’t really look like things are getting any better for me.

Based on that rather graphic list of me, I would say that yes, I have been planned to be obsolete. That one day, a new, younger, better version will come to replace me, even though it is not strictly me.

I have come to accept that I will get older, frailer and slower because from a young age all I’ve been told by this world is that when we die, we make room for the next generation and life goes on. I have colleagues at my work that accept that when they die, nothing will happen to them after death, and that when your time is up, that’s it, you’re dead.

Even in the Bible there are numerous examples of Kings, Queens, prophets, slaves, disciples, whose deaths have been recorded, proving that planned obsolescence was in effect for a long time.

Perhaps, it wasn’t in the 1930s that this theory of planned obsolescence, intended for industrial design, was actually first invented. That maybe, without us ever knowing it, the true originator of planned obsolescence was in fact ... our God.

Did God plan our obsolescence?

Did God deliberately create us to get old, to suffer the infirmities of old age and eventually succumb to death?

Now, I have presented overwhelming evidence that humans are obsolescent, and are permanently breaking down. Can we say that God planned us this way? Is that a fair assessment of our Father?

My answer as to whether it is a fair assessment of Father is simply, “Yes!” ... and also, “No!”

Let’s forget about the fridges, TVs, cars, radios, mobile phones that we all own and let’s just focus on us.

To get a better picture of God’s intentions and plan for us, we need to go to the beginning. I won’t revisit the entire act of Creation in Genesis, except to point out a few key characteristics, which gives us an insight into God’s mind at that time.

If you cast your eye down chapter one of Genesis, there is a little phrase that gets repeated throughout and yet gives us enough detail to know in what state God intended us and this earth to be in. It first appears in verse 4, then in verse 10, verse 12, verse 18, verse 21, verse 25, and finally in verse 31.

That little, yet important, phrase was “and God saw that it was good.” In fact, upon reflecting on all that our Creator did, once He had finished creating the entire world in verse 31 it says,

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Not just good, but very good.

This also includes perhaps one of His most important creations – not the light, the trees, the birds, fish, animals or anything else was as important to the Father, as creating us. So much so, that in verse 26 and 27 of chapter 1 in Genesis we see the place that He gave and intended for us.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26, 27).

We were made in His own image. What a privilege and honour that all of us, no matter how different we are, we all share one common trait – we were made in the image of our Creator. But then God does something else as remarkable as creating us in His image. In verse 28 it says that He blessed us, instructed us to be fruitful and multiply, and to have dominion over the land and sea and all in it.

Up until this point, I would have to say that I can’t find anything here that suggests God had intentionally created us to become ‘obsolete’. That is, until we get to chapter 3 of Genesis.

We all know the story of what happens following the Creation, i.e. Eve encounters the serpent, the serpent deceives Eve into eating the forbidden fruit and so on. But then at chapter 3 from verses 17 to 19, everything changes and what was God’s original plan for us takes a new path.

Take note in particular of the key verse at number 19. We had lost the privilege of being created sinless in His image, as from that moment on something had changed, permanently. Now we bear the image of Adam, after the fall, carrying the stain and burden of being born with a sinful nature.

Two fundamental things occurred on that day God made His declaration against man in these verses.

First, we had forced God's hand to undo His original plan, which was to create us so that we can live with Him on this perfect planet forever, to a life that now would bring certain death.

Second point, not only did God's judgment come down upon us, but as a consequence of our disobedience, the earth and all that is in it paid the price and from that day on this world began slowly dying.

So, in answering my first assumption about God that I alluded to earlier on—was God the originator of this planned obsolescence? Did He intentionally create us just so that one day we would simply live harsh lives, always working, grow old and then die? To return to the dust, for dust we are?

My answer to that is an emphatic No! A definite no.

What was God's plan?

It was never God's original plan nor His intention that we should live lives burdened by our sins, when He gave us the greatest gift of all. To be made in His image.

John nails it perfectly, when he writes,

“We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

And God who loves us and continues to love us, never planned for us to become obsolete but rather, as someone else called His plan, meant to be God's permanence. However, God was forced to alter His plan to suit the environment we had chosen for ourselves—our own sin brought about our own undoing.

If we accuse God of supporting this notion of planned obsolescence when it comes to the human race, we need only look at how, where, why and when it all started. Then it becomes clear.

It was not God who sealed our fate to live shortened lives, to have pain all our lives, to work by the sweat of our brow, to suffer with thorns and thistles in the field – when in fact, it was us who decided to dictate our own future rather than allow our Father.

We are the authors of our own obsolescence!

In other words, whereas once God had created us with the intention of living in a world filled with all the trees, plants and animals that He also made and then said ‘it was all good’, it was intended to be a perpetual and perfect plan. God's plan was always that we coexist with Him infinitely and never intended that we ultimately break down after living for a limited time.

How can I be sure of this? Simple – there are two dead giveaways. First, prior to sin entering this world, it was impossible that God had made us and this world to decay and be corrupt as there was nothing in it or us that could allow for that to happen. Up until that point there was no such thing as getting old or even death – these two outcomes were foreign in a world made to last forever.

Second point, when God first passed judgment on the serpent, Eve and then Adam, it was – and I just gave you a big clue – the first time ever He had to pass judgment on His creation. Therefore, it was the first time He had to directly interfere with His perfect creation and change this plan of infinite coexistence with Him in a world that was sinless, to now have us live with corrupted and decaying bodies in an equally corrupt and decaying world.

And as if once was not enough, yet again we forced God's hand to further undo His perfect Creation. Read Gen chapter 6 verses 3, 5 and 6.

“Then the Lord said, ‘My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.’ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Genesis 6:3, 5, 6).

Now before we get into an interesting doctrinal debate on what exactly God meant in these verses, I will say this.

Some scholars argue that God could have meant one of two possible scenarios in these verses. The first was His pronouncement that within 120 years all of mankind would be completely wiped out. To confirm this look at chapter 5 verse 32 of Genesis, it says Noah was 500 years old, then compare it to chapter 7 verse 6 when the Flood did arrive, and Noah is now 600 years. That's not 120 years, as it states in verse 3 of chapter 6.

However, if we go back to chapter 5 verse 32, it's only telling us Noah's age when he had his sons NOT when God made His prophecy of destroying the whole earth.

The second possible explanation to Gen chapter 6 verse 3 is that man would have his years of life reduced to around 120 years, but not immediately dropping from being centuries old to 120 years but rather a gradual decline in years in age. For instance, before God said these words most people like Adam, Methuselah or even Noah lived beyond 700 years.

Yet when God spoke these words and following the Flood, very few people mentioned in the Bible lived more than 500 years. In fact, Joshua was the last person mentioned in the Bible to live beyond 100 years old.

However, when you read chapter 6 of Genesis, one thing is clear and cannot be disputed. We no longer live in a perfect world, free of sin and we definitely no longer live for hundreds and hundreds of years.

The Bible yet again reminds us of how the situation is for all of us today as it does in Psalms 90: 10.

There is no doubt in my mind that as a direct consequence of our disobedience against God way back in Creation, we called upon our own judgment and forced both our years to be shortened and our bodies to decay. A healthy long lasting body and mind cannot flourish where sin has entered it. It is just not possible.

Even the healthiest and smartest person on earth is still susceptible to disease, illness or mistakes!

We are just meant to get old, breakdown and eventually die ... but that is totally different to saying that God had originally planned this for us from the beginning. Let me pause here for a minute to clarify something.

Acts of God?

Now that we have arrived at this point and I hope that we can all agree our Father intended to create us to live lives perfect in His eyes, I get deeply saddened and equally annoyed when I hear people often speak ill of our Lord. "What do you mean?" you may ask.

Have you ever heard someone say after a natural disaster that has claimed many lives, or after a massacre, a famine that has killed thousands or even when a loved one has died and they'll say something like, 'Why did God ever let this happen?', or 'He/she was only a child, why would God take the life of this innocent child?'

I don't know about you?, but when I hear it, and I have heard it from other Christians too, it drives me so mad.

Now that we have come to understand that our planned obsolescence has nothing to do with God and everything to do with our decision to break God's law, how is it possible we still blame God for any disaster that occurs, especially if it results in the death of one of His children?

It is as if I worship a God who is sitting above us, looking down, wringing His hands and manipulating events just so bad things can happen to us, solely for His amusement!! We dare blame our Lord but nothing is ever said about how it is we really arrived to the situation we find ourselves in today.

Take comfort from the following verses in what He has to say about losing His children to death, be they believers or unbelievers:

"The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

"God our Saviour desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17).

Planned obsolescence has nothing to do with God's plan of permanence originally intended for us.

Where does that leave us today?

We have discovered that God's first plan for us was to live with Him in a perfect world, free from the knowledge and consequences of sin. But when sin entered this world, we forced God to change that plan and our lives began to be impacted by sin both in this world and in our bodies.

If then we are born with a sinful nature and we live sinful lives, then logically we are bound to die in sin and that is the end of us, right?

Do you remember when I quoted 1 John 4:19. It said, "We love, because He first loved us." That has never changed, not from the beginning, the present and nor the future. And since God loves us so much, He had to change His original plan and come up with a new plan that suited the circumstances that we now find ourselves in. A plan that while it may not seem obvious to some, still has the same outcome had nothing changed from the beginning. A plan that still guarantees us the same promise to live with Him, free from sin, free from old age and suffering, to live in a perfect world, a plan where our Father can be finally satisfied that indeed 'it was very good'.

There are few verses that better sum up His ultimate plan to save us, to redeem us, to stop us believing that we are doomed to become obsolete, and it's a verse we all know very well.

Please open your Bibles and read John 3:16.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The key part in this verse is "so that we should not perish" He never wanted nor wishes us to perish, which is why this plan, through the blood of His Son, came into effect.

Read Romans chapter 5 verses 8 and 9.

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:8, 9).

Your body and mine will break down and slowly decay. Pain and suffering will cloak our form til the day we die. That is unavoidable. But it is far from the end.

Read 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 49 then verses 51 to 55, it gives us an insight to how it will be and what we all have to look forward to in the future.

"And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man ... Behold, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:49, 51–55).

It makes all the pain associated with getting old worthwhile doesn't it? The promise of something new and better to come. And while most may fear death as being inevitable, and accept that both death and taxes are just part of life, we as believers know better. Our certainty lies not in death, since Christ had victory over death, since He gave us this promise of Eternal life ... freely. We have paid nothing for it!

What else is there to say?

Stop living your life like it has been planned to be obsolete!

Start living like it is part of God's permanence!

And in conclusion, please read the final verses that really puts into perspective His promise to us concerning our future:

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed—that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:1–5, 17).