

God's Will for You

Introduction

- What is God's will for my life? Have you ever asked yourself that question before? I'm sure many of us have because we want to know what God wants us to do, right? Maybe who to date or who to marry or what job to take or where to live or whether to do missions or what church to attend.
- As Christians, we want Christ to be glorified in our lives and therefore, it makes sense that we'd ask God about major decisions like these. But sometimes there's not one right answer. You could live in that place or another place and glorify God. Or sometimes the answers to questions like these have a lot more to do with developing wisdom—not just “Do this or do that.”
- The bottom line is that while God does lead us and guide us (very specifically at times), we might not always feel sure of God's will in the particulars of life, but when we **open the Scriptures**, we can be sure of God's will. And it's passages like the one in 1 Thessalonians 5 that are crystal clear about God's will. You might not be sure about this or that decision, but you can be sure of God's will for your life. Let's read the passage:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you

- This is God's will for you, for us. It's not the only thing God says about His will for us, but it is His will that we would be a rejoicing, prayerful, and grateful people.
- Now, you can probably guess what the three points of my sermon are going to be, but before we get there, we need to pause and look carefully at the second part of verse 18.
- “For this is the will of God **in Christ Jesus** for you.” IN CHRIST JESUS. Paul is addressing Christians—those of us who believe in Christ, who are in Christ—united to Him by faith. And it's important to underscore this from the outset because this three-fold command is not self-help. It's not the Bible's version of healthy positivity. **No, it's so much more! This is the Christ-exalting reflex of every sinner saved by grace. It's the fruit of the Spirit's activity in our lives! It's only possible when you know Jesus and only when you know Jesus does it make any sense.**
- So having clarified that, let's look at each of these together:

I. **Rejoice Always**

- What kind of rejoicing does Paul have in mind here? Because it's not “don't worry, be happy, maintain a positive outlook, keep your chin up, look on the bright side.” It's not that!
- No, we just saw that this kind of rejoicing is unique because it takes place in Christ Jesus. **Only Christians can do it.** So the rejoicing Paul has in mind here is very different than the happiness of the world. The rejoicing that he's talking about here comes from a deep, abiding joy and gladness in God. It comes from a satisfaction in and amazement with God's goodness, His character, His works, His ways, His promises, and His Word. Christ is precious to our souls, so the only appropriate response is to praise, to exult, and to worship Him!

Psalm 145:1-3

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. 2 Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. 3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! 2 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, 3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, 4 who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, 5 who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Revelation 5:11-13

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

That's what it looks like to rejoice!

- And Paul says that we don't just do this sometimes, but always! Rejoice always!
- Story about youth pastor. Quoted this verse and said, "I think that's unreasonable."
- So was my youth pastor friend right? Never sad, Paul? No crying ever, Paul? No, that's not what Paul is saying. He's not saying there aren't seasons of sadness or occasions for tears. The same Spirit who inspired these words in our passage also inspired Romans 12:15 where Paul commands us, out of genuine love, to "weep with those who weep." No, as Christians we're acquainted with sorrow; we know what it is to suffer (some of you!), to feel deep sadness.
- How could it be otherwise? There's so much wrong with this world and in our own lives. Sin clings so closely, we see or face horrible evil, cherished relationships fail, our bodies break down, and at some point, we all experience the sadness of death. The Bible says that because of all this, we who have the Spirit (Christians) groan as we wait for Christ to return.
- But here's what we need to remember: Our groaning now is tied to circumstances here; our joy is not. Our groaning sits in this age that is passing away; our joy stands in the next that will never pass away. Our groaning is tied to people and events—things that change—for better or for worse. But our joy is tied to Christ Who never changes, Who is always the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our groaning is a response to sin (whether sin done to us or committed by us), but our joy is a response to the One whose mercy and grace are unfailing and Who never does wrong. Rejoicing always is a settled disposition of the soul, a decision to speak truth about God and to anchor our hope in Him. It is not unreasonable. Because we know Christ, it is absolutely reasonable!
- Friends, we can always rejoice. There's **always** something to rejoice about because we belong to Christ. And that's significant, because God says that He is well pleased with His Son. He loves His Son. And He loves everyone Who belongs to Him (the Father loves us!) In fact, He has blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...blessings like these (these come from Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1):
 - Chosen by the Father from before the foundation of the world to be in Christ
 - Chosen to be holy and blameless before God

- Loved and predestined to be adopted as sons of God (men and women included)
- Forgiven of our many sins through His lavish grace which He poured out on us in the Gospel
- Qualified by grace to share in the inheritance of eternal life with Jesus forever
- Sealed by the Holy Spirit signifying God's ownership and protection, the Spirit having been given to us as a down payment which guarantees our future
- Transferred from the domain of darkness (the world and our old sinful life; the realm of condemnation and no eternal hope) to the Kingdom of His beloved Son!

- Christian, you have something to rejoice about. **We know God and we have eternal life!** There is always something to rejoice about and it brings Him glory when we do!

- Also, consider this: Since rejoicing is God's will for us, it means that it's good for us. God's will is always good for us. It does us good to rejoice in Him! And you can rejoice in your mind and in your heart, but God's Word encourages singing (in fact, it commands it). Rejoice in song! Do it often!

- We engage the world, the flesh, and the devil, when we sing praises to God. For example, we battle complaint and anxiety and fear and worry and temptation and condemnation by singing! Think about what we just sang this morning in the song God Over All. "**Your loved has saved me/by your grace I now draw near/your love has set me free to glorify your name/And I, I want to sing of your love!**" Doesn't that cheer your soul? When we are rejoicing in God, it's hard to complain; it's hard to grumble. When we sing to Christ, sin doesn't look all that attractive. When we rejoice in our Savior, we battle false condemnation because genuine praise isn't the sound of the world. It's the sound of Christ's people who have passed from death to life! So rejoice! Rejoice in song!

- Friends, this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus: Rejoice always

II. Pray Without Ceasing

- God's will for us here is a great mercy. Do you know why? Do you know what this really means? It means we can come before God *without ceasing!* What a privilege! We have a Father in Heaven who gives good gifts to His children and knows all our needs even before we ask Him. We have an open audience—at any time—with the King of kings! The King who is reigning and ruling from Heaven right now. The Bible says that "we have boldness and access through our faith in him."

- We can be like the Psalmist in Psalm 73:28 who said, "But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord my refuge, that I may tell of all your works" Let me ask you: Is that what it's like for you? Do you say, "It's good for me to be near God. He has become my refuge that I may tell of all His works." It can be; we can draw near to God like that.

- And yet, for some of us, if we're honest, we know that we don't come to our Heavenly Father like we should. We don't continually come. Too often we try to handle things ourselves or do things in our strength! It's our default setting. But when we do that, we're not thinking about God's glory, and we fail to see how weak and needy we are.

- To get at this, Jesus uses the image of a vine and its branches. A branch only bears fruit as it is *nourished* by the vine.

John 15:4-5

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- Was Jesus serious? He wasn't talking here about some extraordinary ministry or mission. He was talking about obeying the Father's commandments, loving one another, living the Christian life. And by the Christian life, that includes everything that we do as Christians. From the moment you wake up in the morning to when your head hits the pillow at night, your entire life is lived as a Christian and the aim of your life is to bring glory to God and joyfully bear fruit for Him. *And that is impossible apart from daily leaning on, trusting in, and communing with Christ.*
- Friends, we need to feel our weakness, our inability, and our need for God. When this happens, we will start to see why prayer without ceasing makes a lot of sense. And it's a glorious thing because Christ's power is made perfect in our weakness. So we can say with the Apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- It's the praying Christian who is strong! And it's the praying Christian who will bring glory to God because their eyes are fixed on Him and they will bear fruit and experience the joy of Christ. Friends, take hold of the access that Christ has purchased for you. He has brought you near to God by His blood, so He stands ready in Heaven to answer your call and care for your every need. Just consider some of the ways that we need Him in life:
 - We need Him to help us serve Christ at our jobs, whether we enjoy our work or not
 - We need Him in the myriad of decisions we make in life, not just with the seemingly big ones
 - We need Him to love our spouses and our kids. We need His help to encourage and build them up regardless of how we're treated by them
 - We need Him to raise our kids in the fear and instruction of the Lord
 - We need Him when we experience that temptation again and we need to say "No!" by the Spirit and kill that sin!
 - We need Him when we're dealing with sadness and depression and a stubborn darkness that won't lift
 - We need Him when it's Sunday morning and our bodies scream, "Stay in bed!" or our hearts cry "I just don't want to be with people today!"
 - We need Him when walking in the darkness of sin is easier than walking in the light of righteousness
 - We need Him when we're tied up and paralyzed with anxious thoughts and fears
 - We need Him when our bodies don't work as well as they used to. And we need Him when we're young, that we may get a heart of wisdom and spend our energy for Him
 - We need Him when we pray because we need Him to empower our prayers and help us to know what to pray!
 - We need Him when we have an opportunity to share the Gospel
 - We need Him when we serve because we want to do it in His strength so that He may be glorified
 - We need Him to stand against the schemes of the devil and to wield the armor of God
 - We need Him to pursue unity in our church and in the wider Body of Christ because it's not always easy
 - We need Him to always speak the truth, regardless of whether it costs us something
 - We need Him when we look around at our world and our country and it seems like evil and injustice prevail

Psalm 50:15

Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

- Friends, the invitation to pray without ceasing isn't complicated. You just need to have a needy heart that loves the glory of Christ. Pray before that conversation; talk to Jesus about what's making your worry. Speak to the Lord when temptation strikes. God is ready to meet you with grace.

Hebrews 4:15-16

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- It's God's will that we draw near all the time because we are always in that time of need. And He promises to meet us there with grace and mercy.

III. Give Thanks in Every Circumstance

- This is where rejoicing and praying lead—to giving thanks. Friends, thanksgiving is a mark of the Spirit's activity in our lives. In fact, giving thanks is inextricably tied to being filled with the Spirit. Listen to Ephesians 5:17-20:

Ephesians 5:17-20

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

So what's it look like to be filled with the Spirit? Addressing one another (other believers) in psalms and hymns, singing and making melody to the Lord (rejoicing!) and giving thanks. When we're filled with the Spirit, grateful words come out of our mouths and we build others up with grace.

- Let's hang out here for a second because this is very, very important and I'm afraid it could be a blind spot for some of us. What this means is that complaining and grumbling and accusation are not marks of the Spirit's activity.
- In my Bible reading plan, I've almost finished the book of Numbers. And do you know what stands out in that book? The grumbling of God's people. God mightily delivered them from slavery in Egypt, miraculously destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army, provided food and water in the wilderness, He gave them His good laws, and He promised to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey to be their God. And what was their response? "God, we're sick of this food." "God, you only brought us out of Egypt to kill us." "Hey, let's ditch Moses and go back to Egypt." Though He did show mercy, God did not take kindly to their unbelief.
- Friends, we don't want to be like this. If we fear God, we want to be far away from this. So we have to ask ourselves: Am I a complainer? Do I grumble about stuff? Am I never content? I always something wrong? Or am I a fault-finder? Do I think I have the spiritual gift of criticism—always seeing things that others don't? It's not a spiritual gift. It doesn't take any grace. It's not from the Holy Spirit.

James 5:9

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold the Judge is standing at the door.

Matthew 7:1 (nothing to do with judging right from wrong, but does have to do with how we treat others)
Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

- Let's put complaint and grumbling and biting and accusation far from us as Christians. Christ has died for our sins and justified us freely by His grace. We stand in Christ's righteousness before God. There is no condemnation in Christ! So if God will not condemn us, why should we condemn each other?
- Friends, where appropriate, let's repent (remember 1 John 1:9!). And let's commit to season our speech with thanksgiving and gratefulness for our brothers and sisters. It's a mark of the Spirit's activity, it's a main ingredient in godliness, and it's derived from the Gospel.
- This is why gratefulness is one of the values of our Gospel culture at Living Hope. What do I mean by that? Well, if you've been gripped by the grace of God in the Gospel, you can't help but be grateful. Think about it. You have received incomparable mercy and grace and you don't deserve any of it. God has forgiven all your sins and it's because Jesus came for you and willingly took your sin upon Himself on the cross.
- And none of that was your idea or my idea! No, you and me—we stand with the crowds and scream "Crucify Him!" That's who we are. But God shows His love us for in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That's Good News! ***And it should make us the most grateful people in the entire world!***
- Are you grateful? Are you grateful for what God has done for you? Does it melt your heart? I hope it does, because God's desire is that it would and that, as a result, we would lead lives marked by gratefulness.
- Now there's more here to what Paul says in our passage. It's not just about giving thanks generally or giving thanks sometimes or in the best circumstances, but Paul says in all circumstances. All the time!
- In fact, in the related passage from Ephesians we just read, Paul says that we should be "*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" So, here comes that question again that my youth pastor friend raised many years ago. Isn't that unreasonable? For everything? In ***all*** circumstances? It's easy to give thanks in the good times (and we should!) But how are we expected to give thanks when a child dies? Or in the circumstance of an unfaithful spouse? Or in an accident that claims the life of a loved one? Or in the murder of millions of babies in this country?
- Well, first, this is not a command to give thanks for evil as evil. That is not God's will. God does not tempt us to sin and He is not the author of sin or evil. He hates sin and evil; He triumphed over it in the cross and resurrection, and He will one day eradicate it completely.
- No, what Paul is saying is this: We give thanks to God in all circumstances because God is sovereign over every circumstance no matter how evil or painful or difficult. And as our loving Father in Heaven, He is working all things to His eternal glory and to our eternal good as hard as it may be to see this now. Friends, Romans 8:28 is true and we should be grateful that it is:

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

- If you're a Christian, you're called according to His purpose. And that means there is no such thing as purposeless suffering for you.
 - We give thanks, because through suffering, the Bible says, God produces endurance and character and hope in our lives

- We gave thanks, because through trials, God is committed to teach us obedience and bring us to maturity in His Son
- We give thanks, because through hardship, God fashions us into those who can comfort and help others in their affliction
- We give thanks, because we are God's children now and no evil circumstance, not tribulation, or persecution, or distress, or pain, or hunger, or loss, or death separates us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord. He does not forsake us and His love for us does not fade or fail
- And we give thanks because one day Christ will make all things new, He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more crying or pain or sin or evil or death ever again (no more enemies!).
- Giving thanks in every circumstance (especially when we can't see any pathway to good) requires a spiritual perspective; it requires spiritual eyes that see through the lens of trusting God.
- Consider Joseph in the book of Genesis:
 - Hated by his brothers who sold him to foreign slave traders to get rid of him
 - Falsely accused of attempted rape, thrown into an Egyptian prison as a result, and forgotten about
 - But the whole time God was at work both in Joseph and in his circumstances, and he hadn't abandoned him.
 - Eventually Joseph is elevated to the second in command in Egypt next to Pharaoh. And through Joseph's actions, Egypt and his brothers are saved from a devastating famine.
 - Years later after, after Joseph reconciles with his brothers, this is his perspective on all of it:

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today

- Joseph had God's perspective on his suffering. He trusted God. Mark Howell in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians writes the following:

Only God could take the thousands of details of a person's life (some good and some bad) and weave them into the beautiful tapestry of His perfect plan. From the human perspective, many of life's occurrences—especially the painful ones—appear to have little intrinsic value. However, if we had God's perspective, we would be able to view each of these details in a different way.

- The apostle Paul also took this perspective in relation to his own sufferings, as he was no stranger to it.

2 Corinthians 4:8-9; 17-18

8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

- Do you share this perspective? Maybe you're walking through a circumstance right now in which you can't imagine giving thanks to God. I want to encourage you to ask God to help you. Ask Him to help you look at the things that are unseen. Ask Him to help you grasp the reality of that eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Ask Him to help you look at your circumstances through the lens of His promises to you in Christ. His promises won't fail, He's at work, and knowing that helps us trust Him and live in a continual state of thanksgiving.

Conclusion

- Let me conclude this way. Maybe you hear all of this and think, "This just isn't me!" And I understand. Part of the reason I chose this passage is because the Lord had been putting it in front of me for months. These verses challenge me because, if you're like me, it's easy to follow our feelings and my feelings don't naturally flow in a positive, upbeat direction.
- But I need to change and you need to change and we can change because God will help us. Not for the sake of change of itself, but because we want to do the will of God. We want to bear fruit for God. We want to bring glory and honor to Christ who is worthy of all the rejoicing our hearts can muster, who is glorified by our needy, but faith-filled cries for help, and to whom we owe continual thanksgiving for all things at all times. He's been so good to us; He's poured out grace and mercy on our lives, and He will continue to do so for all eternity. That makes me want to change.
- This passage helps me put to death and I trust it will help you put to death irritability, bitterness, fear, complaint, grumbling, unbelief, ungratefulness, and self-sufficiency, so that we can be joyful, grateful saints. And let me commend you Living Hope. There are so many good examples of this in our church. When I think about what it looks like to rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in every circumstance (even the really hard ones), I think of specific people in this church who possess an unbridled joy in God and are quick to run to the throne of grace (and take others with them!). It's a wonderful activity of the Spirit among us and I trust it's one you want to experience more and more. So, we're going to ask God to do that among us and then we're going to sing and rejoice.

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