

**DAY 15, SERMON TITLE:
THE BRIDE OF CHRIST'S ORGANIATIONAL AND CHURCH GROWTH PROGRAM**

Scriptural Text

Selections from Acts 3 -5

Notes

Application

Week Three Introduction: What is God's Will for Me?

Scripture

Genesis 50:20a *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, ..."*

Exposition

What is God's will for my life? That question will inevitably enter the mind of a Christian at some point during their existence in this fallen world. It may manifest after a traumatic event, after the end of a relationship, in the process of making a weighty decision, or it may simply come to mind during an ordinary day. Whatever the context behind the question the universal reason for asking that question is that we are not all-knowing, but we sure wish we were.

What is God's will for my church? Before we answer that we must first know what is revealed about His will in Scripture. We have all heard the Story of Joseph. When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were worried that he would destroy them because of their past wickedness. His response to their concern gives us a beautiful insight into the will of God. Joseph's brothers willed to do evil against him, they almost killed him. But while they willed to do this evil act God willed it to take place for His glory and the preservation of His people. This shows us two aspects of His one will, often distinguished as the decretive nature of His will, and the Moral nature of His will.

Moral will - "You meant evil against me". The moral will of God is His will regarding how we should act. This is revealed to us in the moral law and summarized by Christ in Matthew 22:37 - 40, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."* The basic answer to, "What is God's will for my life," is that he calls you to obedience and faith. Now, it is imperative to know that God is sovereign and He, as RC Sproul put it, is not in heaven wringing His hands at our sin in despair, unable to do anything about it. Joseph's brother's act was truly evil, and it was their desire to do this evil. They acted against the Law of God and the standard He set for mankind. God, Himself is the standard of holiness and his moral will for His people is that they would be holy as He is holy.

Decretive will - "God meant it for good". The decretive will (sometimes called His hidden will) is His unshakeable will in which he decreed the events that will take place in our time, in eternity (Eph. 1:4). His decretive will comes to pass without variation as He clearly reveals in Isaiah 46:9-10, *"Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'" In the account of Joseph and his brothers, we see God sovereignly use man's evil heart to accomplish His eternal purpose. We see this again 400 years later in Exodus 9:12, "But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses." We don't know every detail of God's decree because it is neither possible nor our position to have such knowledge. But we do know God, and we know His decretive will is perfect and we must trust in that perfection.*

Application

So, what can be said about God's will as changes loom on the horizon? His revealed will for you is to seek His counsel during this season and do all you do to His glory. His plan will unfold in unfathomable beauty. Be faithful, pursue holiness both corporately and individually, practice the means of grace, and see the awesome work of the Spirit. Whatever direction He is to take you will be revealed, and it will be good.



DAY 16, GOD'S WILL IS NOT HIDDEN

Scriptural Text

Acts 16:6-15 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ ... ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ... to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. [Lydia became a key supporter of Paul's missionary work from that day forward.]

Exposition (Rev. Derek Gentle)

"God is not hiding His will from you or your church. To the contrary, God has already taken the initiative and is ready to guide you, but are you willing to follow?"

Our church was growing, but it was landlocked with no room for expansion. Efforts to buy key properties around us had failed. One day, as I prayed, I asked the Lord that if He wanted our church to relocate, that He would have someone offer to sell the church some land. A few weeks later, a member of the church offered to sell the church a piece of property on the main road through town. Within days, the deacons were on the church bus touring possible sites for a new building. Someone on the bus asked about a particular parcel that was not for sale at the time. Inquiries were made of the owner. Within months the church had purchased 25 acres of land on the side of town where growth would come. The judgment ... was that the Lord had closed the door to staying at our present location and that He wanted us to relocate.

This is not to say that you should pray that same prayer or that your church should relocate(/merge). It's to say that if you seek God's guidance He will give it. He promises, —*I will instruct you and show you the way to go; with My eye on you, I will give counsel.* (Psalms 32:8). Once God has revealed His will, you must obey. God does not reveal His will for our intellectual evaluation, but for our ready obedience.

God's guidance will come whether He leads our church(es) to relocate(/merge) or not. If He leads our church(es) to relocate/merge, it will be with a new vision and a new opportunity for mission. If He leads you not to do so, He will renew your vision, perhaps giving you a fresh strategy for reaching and ministering in the community where you are.

Application

Pray for leadership of both churches and thank God that he has a plan for our future work in his name. Also, thank God that he can and will make his plan clear to the leaders and congregations of both churches. Record God's answer below.....

DAY 17, PURSUE GOD UNTIL MATURITY IN CHRIST COMES

Scriptural Text

Hebrews 5:11 - 6:3 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ... ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. ¹ Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, ³ And this we will do if God permits.

Luke 10:20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Exposition

A mature disciple has been trained by “*constant practice*” of the disciplines of a genuine follower of Christ. Often that training comes from a person committed to intentional life-to-life discipleship as God uses all the means of grace to mature us: preaching, teaching, training, community, and more—all in the context of church fellowship. The church is in need of men and women who “*have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*” The discernment that God’s will is good, that our destiny is to be with Jesus in his heaven, and that life with Jesus has already begun is the starting point of seeking his will. These are disciples who can take in solid food from God’s Word.

“Worldliness is not the trap that most endangers us as Christian workers; nor is it sin. The trap we fall into is extravagantly desiring spiritual success; that is, success measured by, and patterned after, the form set by this religious age in which we now live. Never seek after anything other than the approval of God, and always be willing to go “*outside the camp, bearing His reproach*” (Hebrews 13:13). In Luke 10:20, Jesus told the disciples not to rejoice (only) in successful service, and yet this seems to be the one thing in which most of us do rejoice. We have a commercialized view—we count how many souls have been saved and sanctified, we thank God, and then we think everything is all right. Yet our work only begins where God’s grace has laid the foundation. Our work is not to save souls, but to disciple them. Salvation and sanctification are the work of God’s sovereign grace, and our work as His disciples is to disciple others’ lives until they are totally yielded to God. ... As workers for God, we must reproduce our own kind spiritually, and those lives will be God’s testimony to us as His workers. God brings us up to a standard of life through His grace, and we are responsible for reproducing that same standard in others.

...Whenever our Lord talked about discipleship, He always prefaced His words with an “if,” never with the forceful or dogmatic statement— “You must.” Discipleship carries with it an option. Men pour themselves into their creeds, and God has to blast them out of their prejudices before they can become devoted to Jesus Christ.” Oswald Chambers

Application

Start small: Begin daily time with Christ. **Run Deep:** Learn sound doctrine. **Plan Big:** Expect much from God as you pursue him earnestly toward maturity.

DAY 18, HOW TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD

Scriptural Text

Romans 11:33 - 12:2 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? ... ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Philippians 2:12-13 ¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Hebrews 5:14 ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Exposition

How do you recognize the will of God when you see it? We may be committed to obeying God, but often we are not exactly clear on what God wants us to do. Here are a few reasons we get confused about God's will:

1. Our life experiences, traditions, and emotions unduly affect our view of God's will. It is true, Philippians tells us God works his will into us, but we may wrongly assume that God's will must be that one thing that we don't want to do, especially if it does not 'fit' with our past experiences or comfort!
2. We make decisions based on extra biblical ideas. Asking for or looking for a sign after God has given us direction from his Word is to test Him, or to delve into spiritualism that is contrary to God's revealed will and ways.
3. We forget to consider whether a decision aligns with God's calling on our life. God has prepared and gifted us to serve in his church in particular ways. There is a niche we each fill as an individual and together as a church.
4. We only seek God in 'emergencies'. If we are walking in the Spirit and in a pattern of obedience in a consistent manner, God's desires can actually become our desires. But this does not usually happen by casually approaching God as a 'last resort'. It is the result of being trained by his Word through "constant practice".
5. We choose logic, planning, and opinion over simple obedience. God is a God of logic and strategic planning (he invented it), but he is not bound by our thinking, he does not consider our plans as a requisite for his plans, and he does not lead according to the latest opinion polls. We must remember that Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh; "Jesus prayed —*If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me*"; and Ananias did not want to go see Paul (Acts 9:10-17). It may be so with us. Obedience is our first guide to finding God's will.

Application

Today, be a 'living sacrifice' and walk in that part of God's will that you do know as you seek more time with God in his Word. Expect God to increasingly work his will into your life, revealing that part of his will that you do not yet know. Sacrificially living for Jesus is our true, spiritual worship.

DAY 19, THE LORD'S WILL FOR MAN'S TALENTS

Scriptural Text

Matthew 25:14-30 "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' ²⁶ But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Exposition

If you read this passage as a child you may have thought that it was about money and the goods that the Father has given you in your life, and in some ways, it is, but it is about so much more. The Father has given you everything that you have and made you who you are. He has given you your earthly possessions to glorify Him and to enjoy while we are here. But it is not just earthly things that He has given you. He has also given you your talents/spiritual gifts. Even though the parable uses the word "talents" to describe the current money system it can also be used to describe your own talents or blessings that the Father has given you. Also, the rest of the Bible shows that how much money a person makes does not get them into heaven or to a closer relationship with the Lord. So it should be clear that this passage is not talking about money specifically but what the Father has given you.

Have you ever noticed in the church that it seems like it is the minority that does the majority of the work? Especially when it comes to Sunday and Wednesday night services? This is actually a normal thing and not bad since as it says in 1 Corinthians 12 " ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." So you see that minority in the church is there because they have those gifts from the Spirit. You may be part of that minority or you may have different gifts. But we are all called to use, and multiply, those gifts for God's glory. This is why it seems like a minority does the majority of the work, but in a thriving church the majority are using their gifts in ways that don't call as much attention to themselves.

But there is a caution in the parable as well. Are you using the spiritual gifts/talents that God has given you? In this passage the caution is that your gift might be stripped from you and given to someone else. This is clearly visible in today's church. It is not a coincidence that when there is a need, a person that does not feel called to fulfill that need, can thrive in that position and realize that God is actually calling

them to it. To say this always happens due to some else's unused gifts is silly, for who can know God's plans for each of us, but to say it does not happen is clearly wrong as well. It is also wrong to think "since I don't have a Sunday or Wednesday gift then the Lord has not given me any talents to use." This is almost exactly what the 3rd man in the parable did. He assumed that it would be better not to use his "talent" and make a mistake than to displease God.

Application

So what gifts do you have? Are you called to a leading or teaching position? Called to help the poor? To be a prayer warrior? To welcome people into your house? To love your neighbors? To serve and shine in your community? There are so many gifts that the Lord gives us and He also calls us to expand them in our ministry for Him. So the ultimate application for this is "are you using your gifts for the Father? Or are you hiding them under a rock until the Lord decides to take them away and give them to someone else?"

DAY 20, STAY CONNECTED TO YOUR HEAD

Scriptural Text

Colossians 2:18-19 *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”*

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Romans 12:2b *...be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Philippians 2:5-7 *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,*

Exposition

The metaphor used over thirty times in the New Testament is that of The Body of Christ (the Church) as compared to the human body. Christians are the individual members in a universal Body in which Jesus Christ serves as the Head. A likeness does exist between the human body and the Spiritual Body – a likeness that derives from common authorship: God – The Creator of both.

“...many nervous disorders – cerebral palsy for example – occur when synaptic channels below the level of the brain somehow clog up. Poisons, such as cocaine, botulinus, and atropine can also jam the chemical transmission across synapses. We have a theological word for poisons that affect the Body of Christ; sin. Sin steals into the intimate channel between the Head (Christ) and the members, interrupting communication and separating the cell from the higher authority that directs and coordinates its actions. The usefulness of a single cell requires unimpeded communication from above and an obedient response from below. Once severed, new pathways linking the mind and body do not establish themselves easily.” (Brand)

Spiritually, we can lose connection with the Head (Christ). Likewise, once a member of the Church loses connection with the Head, re-connecting with the Head and the Body spiritually can be a challenging process. Our own mind naturally dreads and rejects repentance of sin. The separation from our spiritual Head debilitates and discourages us spiritually, and the struggle is on! We need constant ‘therapy’. “In neurophysiology as well as in spirituality - repeated acts of obedience strengthen the connections” (Brand).

Application

We are *new creatures* in constant need of *renewal of the mind*. We must train ourselves to consistently seek much time with Jesus through his Word so that we *may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*. Be assured, you are not alone. We have the three-stranded cord of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to help and strengthen us, and we have the fellowship of the church to give us perspective and help us stay connected to the Head.

DAY 21 WHY ARE YOU ANGRY?

Scriptural Text

Genesis 4:6 *The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?"*

James 1:19-20 *Know this, ...for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

Exposition – Rev. Derek Gentle

"A typical, perhaps normal reaction of church members to the subject of relocation/merger is anger. Someone not connected to the church would wonder why. The motive of those making the recommendation involves those things the church members value, such as greater opportunity for evangelism and growth. So why be angry?

Often, a reason for anger is that many of the members' memories are associated with the building. One hears comments like: "My father was on the committee that built this building", "We had my mother's funeral here", "Both of our daughters were married in this sanctuary", or they may recall sweet times with God there. It is very much like the experience of a family when the last patriarch or matriarch in a family passes away — they grieve not only the passing of the loved one, but also the loss of the house. That place, for them, is layered in memories. The same is true for our church buildings. No wonder such strong emotions bubble up!

Others may be angry that other church members oppose relocation/merger. They see them as standing in the way of progress and their dream of a whole new adventure with God. They may see anyone standing between them and that vision as the enemy — and they tend to treat them that way.

"Why are you angry?" is the question God asked Cain. Cain had offered a sacrifice of fruit to the Lord and the Lord had rejected his sacrifice. Cain had worked hard for the fruit. It was quality fruit and he felt good about it! While Cain's sacrifice was rejected, his herdsman brother Abel's sacrifice was pleasing to the Lord. This made Cain furious! So, God came to reason with him. *"If you do right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must master it."* (Genesis 4:7). In times of strong emotions, we too must master our anger.

You won't treat people with whom you disagree in a Christ-like way when you are mad. It's hard to make a wise decision when your judgment is impaired by anger. It is ungodly to attack a person whose motive is to help the church succeed, even if they see it differently than you. Nether loudly arguing not to move or to move based on headstrong desire, preference, or sentimentality is a godly approach. Instead, be careful to look for God's leading in it. Be patient with those who see things differently. Pray and trust God to work things out in his way and in his time.

Application

There is no reason to be upset or defensive. The one truth we have to come to terms with is this: All we have to do is obey God. Whether or not relocation/merger is the right thing, there's nothing to be upset about. If it is God's will - you will not be betraying your grandfather who was on the building committee or your daughter who was married in the sanctuary, and you won't be cut off from more sweet times with God. Instead, you will be obeying God. If it is not His will, God will give you a renewed vision for your church for its current location and a new love for one another. So, relax, all we must do is obey.