

Our Father: The Necessity and Wonder of Prayer
Part Five – Your Will Be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

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I. What is God's Will?

The very basic answer is laid out throughout the Bible. Here are some foundational points of what God's Will entails (this is not an exhaustive list):

1. **To Be Your Loving Father:** In this prayer Jesus is teaching us to pray "Our Father." First and foremost, God, from the very first day He created humans, has wanted to be in fellowship with us. He wants to know you, walk with you and be a part of your life. It is God's Will that you talk with Him in prayer, that you grow in your faith, that you delve into the richness of scripture and grow. God wants you as part of His family.
2. **Your Character Formation:** God wants you to be formed day-by-day into the image of Christ - becoming more like Jesus in how you love and in how you serve the world around you.
3. **To Love Others:** The Scriptures are full of one another's: love one another, care for the needs of others, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another. All of these are God's Will for you.
4. **To Use Your Gifts:** God created you in a specific and amazing way; and it is His Will that you use your talents, possessions, passions and opportunities to glorify Him and serve others.

II. Struggling with God's Will

1. We Resist It

The word "will" in the New Testament refers to what God sees as good. It is found in passages such as: Matthew 18:14 – *"It is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."*

The concept of what God sees as good takes us back to the very beginning of the Bible, where God created things and pronounced "It is good." In this story of beginnings, God planted a garden. In that garden He put the man and woman and told them to care for it. He also plants a tree – a tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; and He says, 'don't eat from it.' He clearly made His will known, and yet they did eat from it.

From that moment on, man is sent out of the garden and starts to decide what is good for himself: I'm mad at my brother - I'm going to kill him. These women are great – I'm going to own several of them. We need more land – Let's arm our boys and men and send them out to fight. The entire book of Judges states over and over, "They did what was right in their own eyes."

It's reminiscent of our own lives, right? Romans 7:15 says, "*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*"

The good we ought to do, we don't do. We struggle. I struggle to accept that what God says is good, is actually good.

Our first struggle leads us to a **Prayer of Commitment**. It's often the first prayer we ever pray when we first encounter Jesus – "Jesus, I give You my life. I accept your will over mine." If you haven't done that, it is the first step in living out God's Will for your life. "Jesus, I give You my life," and it's a prayer we can't stop praying, as it requires daily surrender.

2. **What Does He Want Me to do Anyways?**

There is a myth that God's Will is a tight-rope you need to maneuver. One misstep can land you in an unredeemable free-fall. This may be true if you are choosing a life of sinful disobedience with no repentance. If we are referring to times in our life when we are presented with two choices, we can trust that God will be faithful to guide us. If that guidance seems silent, you are free to use the wisdom of the godly people in your world and your own resources to make the best decision possible. You can be confident that if you are open to Him, he will direct your path (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Light metaphors can be helpful. There are different types of lights, and not every light is good for every application.

- A. *Lazer*: The most powerful of lights, but it has limited uses e.g. surgery, surveying. It has very specific applications but for general purposes in everyday life it's not that useful. There are times and places where God's Will is like a lazer. He sometimes directs people in very specific ways for a very specific time period. Short-term missions are often lazer moments – Focused, Intense, Powerful. People often come home from short-term missions and wish they could experience that level of power every day, but lazars aren't for every day.
- B. *Lightbulb*: For everyday living, the most helpful light is the lightbulb – a consistent, predictable, broad ranging light that helps you clearly see a larger area. With general light, you are free to make choices according to what you see.
- C. *Flashlight*: Often it seems we are in the dark with only a flashlight - just enough light for the next step. You take that next step trusting there will be enough light to see the next one.

In everyone's life there will be times of clear lazer light direction, broad areas of decisions you make as you see best, and times of wrestling, hoping and praying for more light.

This struggle can be captured in a **Prayer of Surrender**. If you have surrendered your life, you can rest in the promise of this well-loved verse: Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,*

and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and He will make your paths straight.” Commit to working with the light you have been given.

3. **Struggle to Surrender my Own Plans**

Abraham was called by God. He heard exactly what God wanted from him. It was a lazier moment of clear direction: Genesis 12:2,3 – to leave his country, and God would make him a great nation. Abraham initially followed. But as he and his wife were aging out of childbearing years, they got worried that this promise wasn't going to come true. He ends up taking his wife's servant and sleeping with her to make his own offspring. He ends up in conversation with God asking God to instead bless what he has already done. God bless my Ishmael (Genesis 12:15-18).

God bless *my* Ishmael! God bless *my* plan. Our prayer often becomes, “May *my* kingdom come, May *my* will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Abraham couldn't see that God was in it for the long game. God had a greater plan. He had a plan to make Abraham a great nation, but what Abraham didn't know was that that great nation would bear a son; and that son would be God with us - Jesus the Messiah. He would redeem us from our sins and restore all that separates us from God.

The answer to this struggle is to pray God's Will be done as Jesus did in Gethsemane. On the night of his death Jesus prayed in anguish, “*Your will be done.*” Jesus fell to the ground, wrestling with God's will. Three times He prayed, “*Let this cup pass from me.*” But then He submitted with the words of this prayer, “*Not my will but thine be done.*” Jesus was so distressed it says His sweat was like drops of blood. If Jesus, who knew he was going to die, struggled with doing the Will of the Father, why do we think we would be exempt from that struggle? Why did Jesus go through with that? For us - for our salvation and redemption.

Abraham prayed, “God bless my Ishmael;” but he couldn't see God's long range better plan, and neither can we. We must surrender our own plans.

4. **We Struggle to Live in a World Where God's Will is not Done**

If you choose to pray, “Your will be done,” you will find you are praying a counter-cultural prayer. We live in a world where a governing ideology is: We are our own authority. It is in the very cultural air we breathe, so we may no longer even question it. The rejection of all authority - having the source of what is good and what should be done as coming from each individual person flies in the face of the prayer, “*Your kingdom come, Your will be done.*” Praying this prayer, you are going against the flow. You are accepting you are NOT your own authority and committing to your plans to God's higher authority.

We are keenly aware that God's Will is not being done in the world around us. If we lift our eyes for one moment above our own struggles, we feel the ache of the weight of this in the world – Homelessness, Drugs, Human Trafficking, Cartels, Middle East Conflicts, Wars, Ukraine, Chaos, Confusion. There is no app or AI that can bring us a solution. God's Will is not being done on earth as it is in heaven, and it hurts.

For that, there is a **Prayer of Lament** - praying your tears.

Messy prayers in the Bible are more common than beautiful, composed prayers. Lament is a type of prayer that means to express deep sorrow, grief or regret. Over half of the Psalms are dedicated to negative human experiences and emotions. The authors cry out at the injustices of life, and they echo and model for us a way to pray that shows us what to do with this inner turmoil (Examples: Psalms 13, 44, 88).

These Psalms fly in the face of modern positive psychology. In a world of 'just be positive,' these lament prayers remind us that life is hard, and we don't just fly from success to success.

Sometimes when we pray and it feels like God is silent, maybe it's because God is sitting holding the same pain you are. The late Rachel Held Evans in her book Inspired stated:

To hold space for someone is simply to sit with them in their pain without judgment or solutions and remain present and attentive no matter the outcome. The Psalms are in a sense, God's way of holding space for us. They invite us to rejoice, wrestle, cry, complain, offer thanks and shout obscenities before our maker without self-consciousness and fear. Life is full of the sorts of joys and sorrows that don't resolve neatly in a major key. God knows that. The Bible knows that. Why don't we?

Roman 6:26-28, *"We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit; but the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."* If the Holy Spirit doesn't have words for these situations and prays in groans, it's appropriate that you do too.

"The Bible not only gives us permission but models for us how to express ourselves honestly before God even when that honesty involves confusion, pain and disappointment with God himself" (Barry Jones, Dwell).

God is a big boy - you don't have to sugarcoat things for Him. Like a mature, healthy adult you can rail at Him and that doesn't dysregulate him. He can handle your ugly, your raw and your honesty. In fact, I kind of think those are the kids God really likes.

Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jesus Himself are all known to have shed tears as they prayed. Jesus cried over Jerusalem. He carried the weight of world so heavy that He was referred to as a 'Man of Sorrows.'

III. Conclusion

From the beginning of the story God wanted to fellowship with His children. He wanted to walk in the garden with them and ask about their day. He still does. If you are struggling to accept His authority – He wants to hear about it. If you are struggling to do the good, He wants you to do – He wants to hear about it. If you are hurting because this world is just plain hard – He wants to hear about it.

Praying Lament is acknowledging God's Will isn't being done -taking our pain, not to the internet but to God, and saying, 'God – you promised me good; this is not good. Be who you promised to be. I'm wrestling with why you are allowing this to happen.'

Lament doesn't solve the problem, but it gives us a place to take our complaints and our pain. There is a difference between complaining to your neighbour and taking those complaints to God. Feeling it, Going through it and Expressing it to God is modelled for us.

The book of Psalms is full of lament, but the entire book has a trajectory. It starts with a couple Psalms that orient us. Psalms 1, lets us know we have choices. Psalms 2 offers the reader a perspective that God is in control. After that, remember over half of the prayers are lament. The trajectory goes into dark places, but at the end of the book the heaviness lifts. The last few Psalms are joyous, almost over the top celebrations of praise and worship. It parallels our life. If you are in a Psalms 88 moment - it's okay. There's room for you here but know if you hang on – the ending is absolutely glorious. It won't always be like this. His kingdom will come. His Will, will be done on earth as it in in heaven.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there a time in your life when you really experienced "the light" of God's guidance? What form was it like - a laser, a lightbulb, or a flashlight?
2. Which of the struggles mentioned - resisting, wanting more specifics, doing your own thing, or living in a world where His Will isn't being doing - do you most relate to?
3. Review **Genesis 12:1-3 and 15-18**: If God had answered Abraham's prayer to, "Bless Ishmael instead," how might this have changed things? Are there times God didn't answer a prayer you prayed in the way you wanted? Has time given a different perspective?
4. What are your thoughts on lament? Has there been times in your life when you lamented? What was that like? How can we incorporate lament into our lives?

Pray

Pray about the areas in your life where you may have resisted or wrestled with the Will of God and ask for grace in the waiting and continued strength in trusting His Will for your life.