



A Six-Week Consideration
of

Finding and Following God's Will for My Life

Week 2
Children

Forward

This week's emphasis takes a bit of a shift. We began the series by acknowledging the frustrating variety of opinions about what God's will is, how detailed and personal it is, and how we find and follow it. This week we address a very practical cause for a lot of that conflict.

Everyone who has ever been part of a family knows something of the reality of sibling rivalry. We've heard and held claims of parental unfairness. Parents do not treat all their children exactly the same.

As children we may feel some discomfort, even displeasure, about the difference. As a middle child, I thought it was perfectly reasonable that I was allowed to stay up later than my little brother. But I rarely understood why I couldn't be afforded just as much freedom as my "slightly" older sister. "That's unfair!" I protested.

Parents understand that the difference of how we communicate and enforce our desires for our children does not in any way alter the love we have for each of them, or the ultimate, unchangeable objectives we are aiming at. A loving father can roll on the floor and play with their toddler or play tennis with their teen. It's not so easy for those same children to play with each other.

Our differing levels of spiritual maturity need to be recognized and respected. Not doing so beats down the little ones or unfairly limits the maturing ones. Our Fathers' desire for both is that we continue to grow and mature in an environment where we are secure in his love.

As we mature, we are granted an increasingly wider range of personal discretion in our decision making. We've each experienced that.

*God's ultimate plan for each of his dearly loved children is – **to make us more and more like Jesus**. How he communicates his desired next steps for us will entirely depend on where we are at the moment.*

We are glad to have you along with us on this journey of discovery.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Reagan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Some General Observations

There will be study resources produced each week during this series. You may download a copy of the materials from our website or pick up printed copies on Sundays.

Each week's resources will include three components:

- An outline designed to aid in taking notes to help you grasp the main points of the message. (If you miss a Sunday, we encourage you to listen to the message online.)
- A daily devotional guide for your personal reflections on some of the key passages presented in the Sunday message
- A discussion prompt to help prepare you to share your experiences in small group interactions.

The author of Hebrews wrote: *"We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because **you no longer try to understand.**"* We all learn in different ways. But the desire to "try to understand" is a key element in our growth and progress.

The value of the exercise for you will be in direct proportion to the time and effort that you put into it. Just going through the motions is not likely to be of any benefit to anyone. Opening your heart to allow God to speak to you, through His Word, by His Spirit, and in the honest sharing with other believers promises a significant return on the investment of your time and attention.

This material is available online at:

www.monmouthchurch.org



DAILY DEVOTIONALS

Monday

Read – I John 3:1-3

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Ask Yourself:

1. Do I really believe I am regarded by God as his dearly loved child?
2. On what basis do I claim that relationship?
3. Do I really want to be transformed to be like Christ?
4. Do I have this hope? What impact is that hope having on my life right now?

Pray

Dear God,

I love that it was your will, your choice, your plan to love me and call me your child. It does give me hope and encouragement. Help me to live into this identity and hope no matter what the world may think of me.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Tuesday

Read – Matthew 7:9-12

⁹Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? ¹²So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Ask Yourself

1. What do I know personally of the parental desire to bless?
2. Do I think this word means that God promises to give his children anything and everything they ask for?
3. How do I think these words relate to the subject of finding and following the will of God?
4. What are the implications of verse 12?

Pray

Dear Lord,

You are the giver of every good and perfect gift. Work in my heart today, by your Spirit who you have given as your gift to me, to help me trust you enough for me to be able to treat others like I want to be treated.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

Wednesday

Read – Hebrews 12:9-11

⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!
¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Ask Yourself

1. What has been my experience with parental discipline?
2. Do I think of discipline as involving something more than punishment?
3. Is discipline by its very nature always uncomfortable?
4. Can I trust my heavenly Father to be working only for my good even when it doesn't feel very good?

Pray

Dear Father,

I don't like facing the consequences of my falling short of your will. And I don't like the discomfort of doing the uncomfortable things you tell me are your will for me. But I want to trust you. I want to believe that you know what you are doing. I trust that you see the gain even when I am only caught up in the pain.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Thursday

Read – James 1:2-5

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Ask Yourself:

1. “Consider it all joy...” How can I do that given the hardships I face and the troubles I encounter?
2. God has a purpose and an end result in mind for what I go through. What would keep me from achieving that?
3. How does this passage suggest that we get the wisdom we need but do not have?
4. What might God do to give you the wisdom you lack?

Pray

Dear God,

You know how “joy-challenged” I can be when trouble comes. I really don’t like going through hard things. Teach me to trust you and to know you are bringing something to maturity in me when I persevere through trials. I am asking you for the wisdom I need to hang in there.

In Jesus’ name, Amen

Friday

Read – John 5:19 and Ephesians 5:1-2

¹⁹Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son does.

¹Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ask Yourself:

1. When Jesus was challenged by the religious “authorities” for doing something that broke their rules, he gave this answer. Could I defend my actions as just being like God?
2. What would it mean for me to follow my heavenly Father’s example as I live my life?
3. Can I differentiate between following the Father’s example and following Christ’s example?
4. Could I tell my child to follow my example in relation to the way I walk?

Pray

Dear Lord,

*It sounds too simple to think that all you want me to do is just what I see you doing. What does that even look like in this finite world? Is that perhaps what you were trying to show us when Jesus entered our world? He me see and do.
In Jesus’ name, Amen*

Saturday

Read – Ephesians 5:15-18

¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Ask Yourself

1. Why should I choose to be “very careful” about how I live?
2. Do I believe a person can confidently understand what God’s will for our lives is?
3. If I could choose, would I rather lose the personal power of control over my life to a bottle, or let go of control and let the Spirit fill me and control me?
4. Honestly, how do you feel about coming under the “intoxicating” influence of the Spirit of God?

Pray

Dear Lord,

It is considerably outside my comfort zone to find myself surrendering active control of my life to you. I know that sometimes I relinquish control and just go with the flow of what others are wanting and doing. Help me to learn to be confident in intentionally following and trusting your lead.

In Jesus’ name, Amen

Prep for Sunday

Read – Genesis 37

Today's reading is longer than the others, but it will serve an important purpose in this series. This chapter will introduce us to the story of Joseph. Joseph's life and experiences provide a wonderfully helpful backdrop against which we can see God at work in the real-life circumstances of a person for whom God definitely had a plan. Grab your Bible and read Genesis 37

Some ABC's to Prepare for Sunday

Ask God to give you a desire to do his will.

Be still and meditate on what you have already heard.

Confess any known sins to God.

Don't be listening to judge others.

Eagerly welcome the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Find some specific thing to immediately apply to your life.

Go and do it!

Pray

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the hope and encouragement your word has been giving to my life. But honestly, this chapter about Joseph seems to raise more questions than answers. From dreams to disaster. How does this teach me anything about your plan for my life? Open my heart. I am ready to learn, willing to see, but maybe a little reluctant to commit.

In Jesus' name, Amen

My Small Group Experience

Remember: The purpose of this small group experience is to build community.

- We do this as we seek to encourage and build each other up
- We undermine this when we only talk ourselves up and when we put others down.
- Our aim is for each to become more like Jesus.
- Let's protect one another with confidentiality.

Share Something –

Tell the group something about the context in which you live your life that will help them understand your struggles.

Listen carefully and prayerfully to what others share.

Share Something –

Tell the group something about your childhood experience of being a part of the family you found yourself in.

Listen carefully and prayerfully to what others share.

1. If you could change just one thing about your family of origin, what might that be?
2. When Scripture affirms our status as the dearly loved children of God, how do you respond to that?
3. How does using our physical families as a model help us to understand something about finding and following the will of God?

4. Last week we read Jeremiah 29. What did you discover as you read the whole context not just verse 11?

5. Was there anything in this week's message that was a particularly helpful insight for you?

6. How have the devotional reflections gone for you? Have you experienced anything you want to share?

7. What are some of the hard questions you are asking yourself right now?

Share one way the Group can pray for you this week?

Sometimes, those who claim to follow God can be seeking his hand, not his face. We want to use him to satisfy our desires rather than to be used by him to advance his eternal purposes.

During this Lenten season we are using the Word of God to re-examine our expectations and perceptions regarding the will of God.

God has a plan. It is much bigger than me and my wants and desires. So, we pray, *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* But do we even know what we are asking?

Of focus this week we will be grounded in the comforting affirmation that we are the dearly loved children of God.

Children. Jesus said that the only people who will enter his kingdom are those who change to become like children. Elsewhere, believers are admonished to stop acting like children, grow up, and do the Father's will.

Welcome to the paradox of children.

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