



A Six-Week Consideration
of

Finding and Following God's Will for My Life

Week 4

In the Meantime

Where We've Been and Where We Are Going

We are on a journey of discovery and clarification. We have identified some key biblical principles about finding and following the will of God for our lives. Here is what we have seen thus far:

- ◆ There is a lot of confusion among believers about the will of God for our lives.
- ◆ God's will and plans are not the same as mine.
- ◆ Almost everything we need to know about finding and following our heavenly Father's will for our lives, we already learned at home.
- ◆ There is a big difference between wanting the Father in our lives and just wanting him to give us stuff.
- ◆ God really does have a plan for our lives and he has a much better view of it from above.
- ◆ God's plan for his people is much more about developing our character than providing for our comfort.
- ◆ God is always with us, even when we are waiting in the dark.

In this week's lessons we will explore the notion that *God is much more interested in who we are becoming than where we go or what we do.*

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Week Four

Last week, we left our friend Joseph in a dark, difficult place. He had been told God had a plan for his life. But ever since God had spoken to him through a series of dreams, everything in his life started to fall apart. He was always on the wrong end of something: an ugly family feud; vicious false accusations; and a friend's forgetfulness.

Joseph's season of inexplicable abuses lasts thirteen years. That's 4,745 long days and dark nights when he had to wonder why he was in a pit, reduced to being a rich man's personal property, and then placed as an innocent prisoner in Pharaoh's dungeons. That is a long run of discomfort and disappointment.

This week, we focus our attention on the question: "What is God's will for me when I am stuck in a place that seems incongruent with the hope and future God has promised to me?" Maybe God does have a plan for our lives. But if It is not being fulfilled in any visible way right now, what are we to do in the meantime?

We do not like to think about this, but this is the normative experience of God's children throughout most of the biblical narrative. We begin with the promises God makes to Abraham. It was twenty-five years before he had the promised child; four-hundred thirty years before his decedents received their promised land; and a millennium and a half before his promised offspring would bless all the nations of the earth.

We have the landless Patriarch's sojourning. The family of Jacob living as aliens in Egypt. The emancipated Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years. Once they move into the promised land, nearly half the time they are living under the oppressive rule of conquering powers. After Jerusalem is destroyed there is a long exile in Babylon.

Once back in the land, God's people usually lived under the rule of occupation forces from Persia, then Greece, and then Rome. This is the world into which Jesus came and the church began. It is the dominant reality for those who were the original recipients of the writings of the New Testament. And it is our story too. How then are we to live— "In the Meantime?"

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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.

It is our sincere prayer that these resources, the weekly messages, your daily reflections, and your participation in a weekly small group experience will help you as you continue growing to become more like Jesus Christ. That is God's will for you.

This material is available online at:

www.monmouthchurch.org



DAILY DEVOTIONALS

Monday

Read: I Peter 2:11-12, 15-17

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

¹⁵ **For it is God's will** that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Ask Yourself:

1. How do I see the Lord's instruction through Peter relating to the experience of Joseph? What are the parallels?
2. How do I feel about being addressed as a "foreigner and exile"?
3. What are the principle things I am called to do in these several verses?
4. Do I see God's will expressed in this passage? To what end?

Pray

Dear God,

If this is your will for me, for when and where I live right now, open my ears to hear it, and my heart to do it. And help me to recognize your purposes at work in it.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Tuesday

Read: I Peter 2:18-21

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ **To this you were called**, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Ask Yourself:

1. Again I ask, how do I see the Lord's instruction through Peter relating to the experience of Joseph? What are the parallels?
2. How do I feel about being addressed as a "slave"?
3. What are the principle things I am called to do in these several verses?
4. How do I see this passage shedding light on what it means to "become more like Christ?"

Pray

Dear Lord,

I am so thankful that I was born in a time and place where I am free. Free from the indignity of human slavery. Free to make choices about where and how I will live my life. It is easy for me to pass right over passages that speak of slavery and circumstances that are not my reality. Teach me what I need to hear from this word. In Jesus' name, Amen

Wednesday

Read: Jeremiah 29:4-7

⁴This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷Also, **seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.** Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Ask Yourself:

1. When the exiles were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, they became "foreigners and exiles" living in "the meantime". How do I hear them being told to wait?
2. If we are "foreigners and exiles" waiting for the promise of our Lord's return, what can do I hear the Spirit saying to me from this verse about how I should wait?
3. What would it mean for me to live my life seeking the "shalom" of the city to which I am called?
4. How do I see this passage paralleling the story of Joseph?

Pray

Dear God,

This was a hard word for your ancient people. They wanted to be in their own city, with their own rights and rules. But they weren't. In your sovereignty and wisdom you put them in a "meantime" situation. Help me faithfully apply your instruction to my time.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Thursday

Read: Micah 6:8 and Galatians 6:9-10

⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To **act justly** and to **love mercy**
and to **walk humbly with your God**.

⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. ¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to all people**, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Ask Yourself:

1. What do I think of the simplicity and clarity of Micah's expression of the will of God for my life?
2. What part of Micah's instruction do I think only applies when I am in the full receipt of the promised blessing of God?
3. Based on what I have been hearing from God this week, what do I understand Paul to mean by "doing good?"
4. How do I respond to the teaching that the blessings from God come "at the proper time...if I don't give up"?

Pray

Dear Lord,

We've been doing a lot of bouncing back and forth from the Old Testament to the New. Help me to discern if your Words are being separated from your intentions for me. Speak to me through your word and by your Holy Spirit. Speak and I will do what you ask.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Friday

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Ask Yourself:

1. Joseph never heard these words from Paul. How do I see him living out this instruction in his "meantime" experiences?
2. What role did sexual integrity play in the Joseph story?
3. What do I think it would mean for me to find and follow God's will for my life in relation to sexual integrity?
4. Do I find myself more drawn to the ethics and values of "the pagans who do not know God" than the will of God on the matter? Why do I think that is the case?

Pray

Dear Father,

This is a very clear word about your will. But a hard word. This kind of thing would be easier in a world where everyone does your will on earth as it is in heaven. But I don't live in that world, not yet. In the "meantime," help me to allow your Spirit to help me.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Saturday

Read: Matthew 5:14-16 and Philippians 2:14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Ask Yourself:

1. Joseph never heard these words from Jesus. How do I see him living out this instruction in his “meantime” experiences?
2. Have I ever done anything to let my light shine in the dark in a ... way that caused others to give praise to God?
3. What kinds of things do I think God might be calling me to do in my “meantime” sojourn that would cause his light to shine through me?
4. Why do I think Paul added “without grumbling and arguing?”

Pray

Dear Father,

Jesus’ picture of his followers living like a conspicuous city on a hill is a bit intimidating. So too a lamp on a lampstand. But shining like stars in the universe is really a big ask. Especially against the black backdrop of our fallen world. But if this brings you glory, I want to want to live this way. Lead me. Help me. Enable me. In Jesus’ name, Amen

Prep for Sunday

Read – Romans 12:1-2 (The Message)

¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Some ABC's to Prepare for Sunday

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

Be still and make room for God to speak into your life.

Confess any known sins that might harden your heart.

Don't be listening for the sake of judging others.

Eagerly welcome the convicting and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Find some specific thing to immediately apply to your life.

Go and do it!

Pray

Dear Lord,

This is such a clear and practical expression of your will for me, right here, right now, "in the meantime." It gives me guidance for everyday, and everything in my day.

It is admittedly uncomfortable to live in a culture whose values are not your values. Help me to live purposefully, respectfully, lovingly, and sacrificially in this place without allowing myself to get squeezed into the mold of the dominant culture.

Lord, I long for you to be the potter shaping me into exactly what you have in mind for me to be. Thank you for doing that.

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 person to become more like Jesus.

Let's protect one another with confidentiality.

Share Something –

Tell the group something about your week that will give them a glimpse inside your life.

Listen carefully and prayerfully to what others share.

- Most people hate to wait. Tell the group about one of your “pet peeves” regarding waiting.
- Joseph’s story has a lot of waiting in it. Thirteen years, remember. The thing that makes his story different is what he did *“in the meantime”* while he was waiting for God’s plans to unfold. What would be the least likely thing for you to do if you were in his story.
- What role do you think Joseph’s “theology” played in the story.

- What impact did the message this week have on how you think about living life in God's will "*in the meantime*"?
- Which of this week's readings was most helpful in beginning to reshape your thinking about God's will for you right here, right now? Pick one and share what it meant to you.
- How "normal" do you think it is, both in Scripture, and in history, for God's dearly loved people, for whom he has good plans, to end up living as "*aliens and strangers,*" "*slaves,*" or as a maligned minority amidst a dominant culture that does not know God?
- What is something you have learned during this series that you know the Spirit is prompting you to put into your life as you become more like Jesus?

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