



A Six-Week Consideration
of

Finding and Following God's Will for My Life

Week 6

In Tension / Intention

We Grapple With This Tension

In Romans chapter 9, the Apostle Paul presents this perspective on the sovereignty of God:

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses,

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. ¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹ One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

I don’t know why this is how things are. There is tension and paradox regarding divine intentions and human reactions. But I know we cannot truly grasp the will of God with out grappling with this tension.

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Week Six

There is considerable tension between believers regarding the will of God for our lives. The notion of God's "perfect will" emphasizes one collection of passages and one approach to interpreting those passages. Those who hold to the concept of the "general will" of God have their own set of preferred texts and filters for understanding them.

As is usually the case, I've tried to understand and balance both perspectives. That is simply my default orientation to just about everything.

*As we come to the conclusion of our series on **Finding and Following the Will of God**—there is considerable pressure to lean one way or the other.*

In the case of Joseph, there is compelling evidence for the absolute sovereignty of God. You read the story and feel pushed towards the fixed conclusion that all the characters in the story were powerless to alter the script. It was going to play out exactly as the Creator/Director intended. Every nuance and gesture was predetermined from the start. It certainly looks that way in hindsight.

But if that is the case, we have to wonder what we can possibly learn from Joseph's steadfast faith and uncompromising faithfulness. Do they even count for anything in the end?

There's not much navigation involved in getting a train from point A to point B. The track has already be laid. Someone else controls the switch points. Just toot the whistle as the train keeps rolling along.

That is simply not the case if one is walking from point A to point B. There is an infinite number of navigational decisions to be made at every step along the journey.

There is a reason Scripture speaks of our "walk" with God, not our ride on the fixed rail of destiny. We have a huge determinative role.

This week's reflections expose us to passages that are often chosen on an either/or basis. I take a both/and approach. There is a tension. That tension, I believe, is best held taunt between the sovereignty of God and the free-will of man.



Some General Observations

There have been study resources produced each week during this series. You may still download a copy of the materials from our website after we are no longer distributing them on Sundays.

For each week you will find:

- A recorded message to listen to at your convenience.
- An outline designed to aid in taking notes to help you grasp the main points of the message.
- 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 and more like Jesus Christ. That is God’s will for you.

This material is available online at:

<http://monmouthchurch.org/small-groups>



DAILY DEVOTIONALS

Monday

Read: Genesis 45:4-8 and 50:19-21

³⁸So ⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that **God sent me ahead of you.** ⁶For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.

¹⁹But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?²⁰ **You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good** to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Ask Yourself:

1. After all the pain in Joseph’s story, how do I feel about these two interchanges with his brothers?
2. Is Joseph dismissing the cruelty of his brothers actions?
3. Is there anyone in my life whose intentions to harm me I have never been willing to let go of?
4. Honestly, how do I feel about Joseph’s perspective?

Pray

Dear God,

It is amazing to me that Joseph had the grace and courage to let go of a past injustice. A gross injustice. I invite you to work in my heart to bring me to the place where by your Spirit, I can do so too.

In Jesus’ name, Amen

Tuesday

Read: Psalm 105:16-22

He called down famine on the land
and destroyed all their supplies of food;
¹⁷ and **he sent** a man before them—
Joseph, sold as a slave.
¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles,
his neck was put in irons,
¹⁹ till what he foretold came to pass,
till the word of the LORD proved him true.
²⁰ The king sent and released him,
the ruler of peoples set him free.
²¹ He made him master of his household,
ruler over all he possessed,
²² to instruct his princes as he pleased
and teach his elders wisdom.

Ask Yourself:

1. This Psalm affirms that God was firmly in control of many of the critical events in the Joseph story. Do I really believe that?
2. What things in the text do I see being attributed to God? To man?
3. What new information about Joseph's mistreatment can I discover in this passage?
4. How do I feel about the time marker, "*till the word of the Lord proved him true?*"

Pray

Dear Lord,

It is one thing to see your mighty hand at work in a historical story. It is quite another thing to trace your hand in my own situation. I pray you'd help me see enough to remain faithful where I am.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Wednesday

Read: Isaiah 46:9-11

⁹Remember the former things, those of long ago;
I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me.

¹⁰I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, 'My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.'

¹¹From the east I summon a bird of prey;
from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose.
What I have said, that I will bring about;
what I have planned, that I will do.

Ask Yourself:

1. What do I hear God claiming in this prophetic text?
2. How would I react to hearing a person I know make such a claim as this. How about God saying it?
3. Do I draw comfort and assurance from hearing these words? How does it make me feel?
4. What are some things that God has said that I am holding on to until he brings it about?

Pray

Dear God,

I confess that my attention and focus is on what is right in front of me, right now. Sometimes I don't have the discipline to look back and review what you've already done, or the faith to look ahead and see what you have yet promised to do. But I want to do both.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Thursday

Read: Romans 8:26-29

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people **in accordance with the will of God.**

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Ask Yourself:

1. How does this passage take on new meaning for me in the light of the Joseph story?
2. Am I really willing to allow God's Spirit to intercede for me?
3. What do I understand this passage to be saying about God's involvement in "all things"?
4. Do I ever wonder if this passage is even talking about me?

Pray

Dear Lord,

This is a great passage. I love it. But I also sometimes wonder. Do I love you? Am I called according to your purposes? Am I one who is predestined? I want to know. Help me I pray,

In Jesus' name, Amen

Friday

Read: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

¹⁹This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. **Now choose life**, so that you and your children may live ²⁰and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Ask Yourself:

1. After reading passages emphasizing the sovereignty of God, how does this passage strike your ears?
2. Does this passage, representing the conditional, cause and effect, covenant blessings of God for Israel nullify grace?
3. Do the actions of self-willed people keep a sovereign God from being able to fulfill his promises and accomplish his plans?
4. The passage says, “*choose life*.” Do I believe it is in my power to do so? If so, how do I do it?

Pray

Dear Father,

I want to love you, listen to your voice, and obey you. I want to live my life choosing life and living in your peace. Help me, I pray,

In Jesus' name, Amen

Saturday

Read: 2 Thesalonians 2:13-16

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

¹⁶ May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Ask Yourself:

1. What does this passage teach me about whether or not I am loved of God, chosen by him, and called to him?
2. What role does the Spirit of God have in this processes? And belief in the truth?
3. What is the role of my “*standing firm and holding on*”?
4. So, is it up to me and my choices, or up to a sovereign God?

Pray

Dear Father,

Help me to hold to the necessary tension between what you want to do in my life and what you ask me to do in response. I do want the assurance that only you can give, to know that I am loved, chosen, called, and destined for glory. Help me, by your Spirit, to hold on.

In Jesus' name, Amen

Preparing for Easter Sunday

Acts 3:13-15 and Hebrews 13:20-21

¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

²⁰ Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.,
²¹ **equip you with everything good for doing his will**, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Some ABC's to Prepare for Sunday

Ask God to give you a genuine 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! Give God the glory!

Happy Easter! Hold on to hope!

Pray

Dear Lord,

It has been good for me to have this focused season of preparation to hear the gloriously good news of this day. I do not want to simply rejoice in Jesus' victory over the grave. I want to participate in his death, burial, and victorious resurrection living. Lord, knowing your purpose and plan to bless all mankind and restore all things to yourself in Jesus, at just the right time, makes me want to patiently persevere as I wait in expectant hope and grateful, dependent living. May your will always be done in me.

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 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.

- Can you think of an instance in your life when someone intended to harm you but God used it to bless you?

- If you were to collapse the tension between the sovereignty of God and the free-will of man, which side would you tend to lean towards?

- What do you imagine the brothers of Joseph were thinking when they first heard the good news that Joseph was alive and well?

- What impact did the message this week have on how you think about being “In Tension” and/or the “Intention” of God for your life?
- Which of this week’s daily readings or prayers spoke most clearly to you about what God promises to do for you?
- How has this series shaped your understanding of the plans (will) God has for your life, and what you need to do to find and follow it?
- As we come to the end of this series, and to Resurrection Sunday, what is the Spirit prompting you to put into your life to become more and more like Jesus?

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