

“I Know You Meant Well: It Must Be God’s Will”
James 1:2-3, 13-14 (NIV), 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)
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Our first child was just a few months old. Yes, our Kentucky born son. I couldn’t wait to show him off to my home church in Illinois, 6 hours from where we were in Seminary. He had a birthmark type configuration on his little chubby thigh. It looked more like broken blood vessels. The doctor said it would most likely go away. I remember holding Ben in my arms back in the cry room of my home church and he had one of those outfits on where you could see his entire leg. A dear lady, well meaning, comes up to me and ooh’s and ah’s over our son. But then she sees this birthmark, and in a well-meaning voice says, “Look at that, aren’t you glad that’s not on his face.” ----Yeah, thank you very much lady, just what I need and wanted to hear.

Friends we often say things, well meaning things and may be so use to saying them that we don’t think it through. Today we begin a new sermon series, “I Know You Meant Well.” We are going to be looking at things people say, however, well meaning, and realize that although they may have some Christian roots, they may not be the best theology or the best thing to be saying, no matter how well you meant it.

In the Sundays ahead we will be looking at phrases such as: “It is what it is.” Does that mean your giving up, or settling? Or does that mean you have peace about it. We will look at the phrase, “Let Go and Let God.” Great phrase and even has some theological merit, but how practical is that to be telling people during a crisis. Then there’s the phrase, “Just Forgive and Forget.” Can we really forget? And the well-meaning, “Just trust God.” Again, theologically good, but that is so much easier to say than to do. All well-meaning, but...let’s think through these phrases.

Today, “I know you meant well: It must be God’s will.” When we say that could we be in essence blaming God. As a source I have used the book **(image)** “The Will of God” by Leslie Weatherhead. As you can see it has sold over 1 million copies although it was originally written in 1944. My book from my shelf is the 1972 version and is yellow and a bit musty. It’s a short book, mine less than 70 pages, and it is still in print and I lift it up to you to go deeper with this subject.

Written in 1944 the United States was still very much involved in World War II. Weatherhead was from England and saw the bomb shelters and the effects of war and had difficulty ascribing everything to the will of God. He says we use the phrase “will of God” to loosely. My concern is that although we mean well, we use that phrase as a catch all without dealing with the complexities of our faith, we use the phrase because we don’t know what else to say, we use it because shouldn’t everything be about God’s will?

On the first page of Weatherhead’s book he gives an illustration. He says this, “I have a good friend whose dearly loved wife recently died. When she was dead, he said, “Well, I must just accept it. It is the will of God.” But he himself is a doctor, and for weeks he had been fighting for her life. He had called in the best specialists in London. He had used all the devices of modern

science, all the inventive apparatus by which energies of nature can be used to fight disease. Was he all that time fighting *against* the will of God? If she had recovered, would he have called her recovery the will of God? Yet surely, we cannot have it both ways. The woman's recovery and the woman's death cannot equally be the will of God in the sense of being his intention."

Now we see the dilemma and confusion. And friends let me especially caution us when there is a child's death. People have said, "Well God must have needed that little child that's why He took them." Really people. "It must have been God's will for the child to die now---but if the paramedics would have arrived earlier, they probably could have saved him and then that would have been God's will." Huh...confusion. How can it be both ways?

In Civil War movies you can find commanders on both sides of the battlefield praying for God's will to be done. How does God answer that one?

All well-meaning, but let's think this through even theologically. Weatherhead had 3 categories for The Will of God. I invite you to write these down. I also want to remind you that not only manuscripts, first draft, are out at the Welcome Center as well as Devotional Sheets that correlate with this sermon. You can also find both on our website.

The Will of God **From Leslie D. Weatherhead**

1. God's Intentional Will

God's ideal plan. The desires of God's heart for us flowing out of His goodness.

2. God's Circumstantial (Permissive) Will

God's plan within certain circumstances that take place.

3. God's Ultimate Will

God's final realization of His purposes

You may want to write these down on your sermon note section. We will talk about each of these. But as you are writing these down, let me share with you how Weatherhead applied each of these to Jesus dying on the cross. Now as I share from his book you may not completely agree with everything he says, but I hope you will get the big picture.

He said, The Intentional Will of God was not that Jesus should be crucified, but that He should be followed.

The Circumstantial will of God. God's will in the circumstance which people of evil provided was that Jesus should accept death but accept it in a way of sacrifice and honor and to lead to God's Ultimate Will---the redemption and salvation of all people. Winning people back to God, not in spite of the Cross, but using the cross and sin as an instrument to reach the goal of God's ultimate will.

You see the Intentional Will of God was great for the first 2 chapters of Genesis!!! And then there was the Fall. Death, sickness, murder did not happen in God's intentional will.

However, God gave Adam and Eve, God gives all of us free choice and free will. We live in a fallen world. There is sickness. There is death.

There are times when accidents, even tragic accidents are caused by free will. God didn't make the person high are driving under the influence crash into innocent victims and take their life. Was that God's will? One person's free will can affect other peoples lives. We can get angry at God; we can blame God. But saying, "It must be God's will" is not the complete truth.

It is possible for us to temporarily defeat God's plan and purpose by our stubbornness, bad choices, and sinful behavior. Think of a little newborn born with an addiction to heroin or cocaine. Is that God's will? Is that the baby's fault? The choices, free choices the mother made affected her child.

God's circumstantial will is another of Weatherheads categories. It is often called permissive will. This is when due to circumstances or situations things happen. There are circumstances where illness takes place. God's will?? Mass shootings where innocents are killed. God's will?? Certainly not!!!

Our scripture this morning **James 1:2-3 New International Version (NIV) ² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.**

They say that confession is good for the soul. I don't consider it joy when I'm going through trials. Yep, I know it produces perseverance, but I want to get in the Sun Pass lane, the fast drive through and not go through those trials. In these circumstances that are bad how can we depend on God. God may not have caused the circumstance, but how can we find God and even His will in the circumstance.

James 1:13-14 New International Version (NIV) ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

So, let's stop blaming God. I put out there that we may mean well, but say, "It must be the will of God," could we be in part blaming God. Might be better to say nothing.

But in these circumstances why doesn't God do something. Isn't he omnipotent, all powerful? Weatherhead says this, "When we say, then, that God is omnipotent, we do not mean that nothing can happen unless it is God's will. We mean that nothing can happen which can finally defeat him." (page 39, The Will of God, Leslie D. Weatherhead, 1972, Abingdon)

So, God does allow things to happen. It is quite complex and to be honest troubling. For years I have been familiar with the book, a classic that I would recommend as well, from 1981 (**image**) **When Bad Things Happen to Good People**, by Rabbi Harold Kushner. It is Biblical that bad things happen to good people. We only have to look at the Biblical example of Job to realize that.

And yet with all that happened to him He still believed that God was all powerful. In the last chapter of Job, he says this: **Job 42:2 New Living Translation (NLT)² “I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you.**

Then why does God allow these things to happen. Get ready for my heavy theological interpretation. Ready. “I don’t know.” I don’t understand it either.

Rev. Cathy and I were talking about the sermon subject topic and we talked about Kushner’s book, “When Bad Things Happen to Good People.” She mentioned another book, I’m not sure she had read it, but the title was captivating. I’ve not read it but it was written in 2009 by Marin H. Levinson, with a title that was a take off on Kushner’s book. **(image)** “When Good Things Happen to Bad People.”

Life is unfair, and yes just as bad things happen to good people; good things happen to bad people. And yet in the middle of all this we try to find God. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 New International Version (NIV) ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

What is God’s will...rejoice always, pray continually----do both of those ongoing. Always, continually. And then the Apostle Paul says “give thanks in all circumstances---for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Please, please note it does not say give thanks FOR all circumstances. And to give thanks IN all circumstances sometimes not only does not immediately happen, but may require a divine work and intervention.

I know you meant well, but saying “It is God’s will” may not be the right thing or even the best Biblical and theological thing to say at the time.

Real and raw. A friend of mine has a special needs child. My friend is a fully devoted follower of Jesus. I asked him if when his special needs child was born if anyone said something that was well meaning but completely wrong. My friend said as a matter of fact: A well meaning church member told my friend, “It was God’s will to give you a special child and for you to be his parent because He knew you could handle it.”

I asked what he thought about that. His authentic response to me that he said in his head at the time was, “Then your God must be a monster. In fact, is there even a God? How could God let this happen. If this is God’s will then you mean God intentionally let this happen?”

I know you meant well---but..... I asked my friend what would have been helpful rather than hurtful. He said, to simply say, “I’m praying.” You see we don’t have to try to explain and rationalize and justify a circumstance or illness, or tragedy. I believe that God cries along with us when bad things happen due to our fallen world, due to circumstances, due to free choice, free will.

Oh, but let's not forget God's Ultimate Will. God's final realization of His purposes. I can set my aim on rejoicing always, praying continually and giving thanks because I know that in the midst of whatever circumstance I know several things are true about God's will.

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I may not see this at the time the event happens, but I know several Biblical facts about God's will in the midst of hard times.

God has said He is always going to be with us.

God desires all to be redeemed and saved.

There will be a day when there will be a newness.

Revelation 21:4 Contemporary English Version (CEV) ⁴He will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there will be no more death, suffering, crying, or pain. These things of the past are gone forever.

I know He goes before me.

I know who stands behind.

I know He always by my side.

He can give a peace that no one else can give. A peace that goes far beyond anyone's understanding.

He can bring the ultimate delivery.

He will give the ultimate victory. Friends, I've read the end of the book---It's going to be okay!!! I know who wins!!!!

Oh, His promise still stands...great is His faithfulness.

Even in situations that seems like failures He has never failed me yet.

He made a way when there was no way.

He will do it again...resurrection, healing, comfort, compassion.

Oh friends, oh friends---please, please know God is with you, even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even though you go through circumstances and situations that are bad---my prayer is that you will not only know, but in due time feel God's presence, comfort, and guidance.