

The School of Prayer

Part 5: Hide and Seek?

Matthew 6:9-13

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ February 4, 2024 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church



9 “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” (Matthew 15:21-28, NRSV)

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.” 14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-15)



I realized this week that I haven’t preached since August! Therefore...I have a lot to say, so settle in, this could take a while. At the beginning of that last message, I talked about a game of hide and seek under a sawdust pile at camp. That inspired the title of today’s message – Hide & Seek. We move this morning to the next line of the Lord’s Prayer:

Your will be done.

Four simple words that I hope we’ll see as a new way of understanding God and a new way to understand how we live our lives in Christ. Let me start by connecting some dots from where we left off.

The final words of the last message were a summary of what we mean when we pray *your kingdom come*. When we pray *your kingdom come*...

...we are saying (in Jeff’s words from 1/28/24): “God, we pray you would come back soon and bring your Kingdom, finally and forever, that everything

everywhere would come under the range of your effective will, your good and perfect will...”

In Jesus’ prayer, we are challenged to pray with a radical trust that God, still and forever on the throne and in charge, is constantly bringing about his will. And even though we see overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we can see God’s incredible light shining through the cracks of the broken pieces of our world. It’s a prayer we could repeat as a mantra on the best days and the worst: *Your Kingdom come*.

The goal of prayer is not to change God’s mind because we doubt what he’s doing, but to trust God and to slowly but surely turn *our* eyes and *our* ears and *our* lives toward what God is already doing. Did you notice the quote on the front of the bulletin today?

Tim Keller wrote: “The basic purpose of prayer is not to bend God’s will to mine, but to mold my will into his.”

Your kingdom come is about having a vision and a hope of what the world should look like and praying that our view would look more and more like what is actually coming about.

Because of Jesus’ work on the cross, the kingdom is here now, but the fulfillment of what that started has not yet come. So...we’re waiting...with hints along the way of God’s present work. A friend of mine ended an email this week after sharing a problem that had been resolved: *All is well in the kingdom* – which I thought was perfect after last week’s message. Because, I was thinking, “Didn’t you hear the message? All is not well in the kingdom.” But, to be fair, he was more right than I was. This brings us to the next line in the prayer:

So how is the prayer *Your will be done* different from *Your kingdom come*?

The prayer *Your will be done* builds on and deepens Jesus’ prayer *Your kingdom come*?

First of all, it should be mentioned that this is not a prayer that relieves us of responsibility in God’s kingdom coming. N.T. Wright says:

I used to think of this clause simply as a prayer of resignation. 'Thy will be done', with a shrug of the shoulders: what I want doesn't matter too much; if God really wants to do something I suppose I can put up with it.

But God is not a distant God as he proved in the person of Jesus who lived among us. He cares about our part in this kingdom building. He goes on to say:

No: this is the risky, crazy prayer of submission and commission, a prayer of subversion and conversion.

We join God in seeking his will for our lives and for the world. We are a part of it!

And so, as you consider the connection between these two parts of the prayer, try adding the phrase: *In the meantime.*

Your kingdom come. In the meantime, your will be done. Lord, help us join you in whatever needs to be done right now.

If that's true, the next question is one Christians have asked for centuries:

How do we discover God's will for our lives? When we have decisions to make *in the meantime*, how do we know if we are following God's will? Most of us are standing at a crossroads of some decision we have to make. Most of our lives are lived in a place where we are forced to make decisions both big and small – to choose a path that will lead us where we are supposed to go.

And for centuries, the same fear has plagued people seeking that answer. The fear is: What if I miss it? What if... I get it wrong?

There's a fear, sometimes unspoken, that God is playing a game of hide and seek with our lives and with the world, and is trying to win the game – that God is trying to make it so difficult that we wonder if we'll ever really know we're living in God's will or not.

Will you do something with me? Breathe in deeply, and exhale slowly.

At this point in the Lord's prayer, I think Jesus is giving us an opportunity to take a deep breath and realize...we have nothing to fear.

I grew up with this understanding of God's will that it was so important at every crossroad to seek and find the *right* way. But I read a book at an important

junction in my life that completely changed my mind about that. Many of you know Jerry Sittser by now: professor, writer, and friend to me and to this congregation. His Book is called The Will of God as a Way of Life. It begins by establishing a misunderstanding of the conventional way of looking at God's will and turns it on its head. Essentially, he makes the case that God *wants* his plan to be found, to be known, to be loved, and to be lived. What I didn't know was that at one time, during a revision of the book, Jerry Sittser was going to rename it *Discovering God's Will*, because it seemed that so many were in a place of seeking God's will, perhaps even obsessing over it. But the readers that knew this book were not happy, so they went back to the original title. In the preface he writes:

For the book, as you will see, is not about discovering the will of God we don't know and perhaps should not know, but about doing the will of God we already know.

He goes on to say that so much of life is simply doing what is obvious. He says, "I've discovered life is lived best when it is lived for God right where I am."

As I looked more deeply into these few words this week, I was reminded that God is really clear where he needs to be about the decisions we need to make right now. He is only mysterious about the decisions where we are meant to simply put our trust in him.

In heaven, it's all trust. It's all about the present moment. So, the follow up phrase *on earth as it is in heaven* is well spoken.

I want to draw our attention to Scripture that reinforces this for us. You'll notice I added a couple of passages to the Lord's Prayer scripture in Matthew 6. These are just a couple places among many in the whole story of God that simplifies for us what God's will is all about.

Even in the early church, James has apparently been confronted with people who are agonizing over their decisions. You can see, this is not a new problem! He tells them to stop worrying about those decisions. He says to his readers who are worried, "That sounds like a tomorrow problem." Let's just do this or that, the things we already know, and trust in what the Lord wants.

We love to focus on the big decisions, don't we? Where will I go to college? What relationship will I begin or should I end? What career will I pursue? What city or country will I choose to live in? All of these are

important, but I think God is less concerned with getting those decisions right than about all of the little decisions everyday that make us who we are.

How will you honor those you love with your free time?

How much time will you spend watching Netflix or consuming social media?

What will you do with some unexpected money you receive?

With what attitude will you complete a mundane task in your work?

How will you treat the customer service person on the phone that can't seem to help you?

Some of these hit a little too close to home. But for most of these daily questions, how God wants us to respond is pretty clear. At one point, I was asked to do a series of five talks about listening to God. In the spirit of simplifying what God may be trying to say to us, I came up with what I thought were five undeniable messages that God is always offering to every one of us if we listen. When we hear these messages, we know God is speaking. When we want to hear God's voice in our lives, these are good places to start:

1. *You are my beloved child.*
2. *Be strong and courageous.*
3. *Hope in God.*
4. *Follow me.*
5. *Love.*

Sometimes the answer to what we should do is as simple as remembering one of these messages that God is always speaking.

also included the passage in I Thessalonians as Paul's definition of living in God's will. Three things that are always the next right thing to do: *Rejoice. Pray. Give thanks. This is God's will for you.* It doesn't get more clear or simpler than that. Problem is, that doesn't mean it's easy. Paul has to say it because we're wired to make it so much more complicated. We naturally lean in to worry and fear when we're trying to do the right thing. Jesus knew this, too. Just take a look at the rest of his words in Chapter 6 after this prayer:

*Give to others but don't tell anyone you're doing it
Pray but don't do it to put on a show*

Put your treasures in heaven, not on earthly things

And lastly, don't worry about tomorrow, the birds and flowers don't!

It's whole context of trust in God. It's the will of God AS a way of life.

I recently had some time at Zephyr Point for reflection and study. Jeff (and others) know that I was spending far too much energy trying to figure out how to spend

that time away. I didn't have a really clear direction of what to focus on and it was driving me a little crazy.

Not knowing what the time would look like, I knew I could read the scriptures of the day as a start. It was Psalm 37. Sometimes, when I have time, I've been reading or listening to the Psalm in Spanish. Not that I understand much of it yet, but sometimes when I break down the words it offers a nuance that gives it more meaning. Here's the third verse, which I posted in my cabin as a reminder. Forgive my accent:

Confía en el Señor y haz el bien.

Establecete in la tierra y mantante fiel.

That's all I needed to know about how to spend the time.

In case you need a translation:

Trust in the Lord and do good.

Stay where you are (in the land) and remain faithful.

God wants us to ask him what road we should take. He wants to be a part of every decision we make. To pray *Your will be done on earth as it in heaven* puts trust in God, but also invites us into a life of adventure, of trust, of listening, and community as we ask for the advice and prayers of others that love Jesus and know us best.

Here's how I would sum all of this up:

There is joy in the seeking of God's will. But it's not hidden. It's right there for us to find it.

Amen.

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Questions to Consider...

1. Read Matthew 6:9-13 again. When you pray, "Your will be done," how is this the same as or different from praying, "Your kingdom come?"
2. How do you usually go about discovering God's will in your life?
3. How does Jesus' prayer for God's will challenge a conventional approach to discovering God's will?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Does this view of God's will for us seem too simplistic? Why or not?

5. Read James 4:13-15. What is James trying to caution his readers about in the way they follow Jesus? Does this seem consistent with Jesus' teaching about making decisions?
6. Do you agree with the five messages God has for all of us? (You are my beloved; Be strong and courageous; Hope in God; Follow me; Love) Do you think there are any messages missing from this list?
7. Do you agree that God's will tends to move *through* suffering? How have you seen suffering as a part of God's will in your life or in the world?
8. When you pray, "Your will be done," what do you want to keep in mind or explore further about our stance before God in these words?