

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Join the Conversation Part 2
TITLE: God's Will
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PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

We are in our series called Join the Conversation: Part 2. The first installment was aimed at engaging with those who may have some strong skepticism towards Christianity, people who might get frazzled at how some Christians think about hell, homosexuality, science, and so on. We encourage you to go listen to, watch, and share those previous sermons at our web site.

This installment has a slightly different focus: Christians in dialogue with other Christians over 'tougher questions' that are often misunderstood or interpreted differently. The purpose of this series is not to answer every single question, but to help you see the value of these discussions and then take part in them.

In this message, we ask ourselves, "How do we discern God's will when making a decision?" The Book of Ruth helps us to see that in the midst of normal, everyday circumstances, God is moving his "big picture story" forward to accomplish his work of salvation for the whole world. Ruth's story gives us a pattern to live by in making decisions, and when we live our lives with open hands of trust and obedience to God, we can't make a mistake.

Set-up:

- **For a believer, there's nothing more important than understanding and following God's will for your life.**
- When we have choices to make, we tend to think selfishly. We want God to show us the decision to make that will lead to a more comfortable, more risk-free and convenient life. It's easy to live more concerned with what we want than what God wants.
- The truth is, if you're a believer, you already live inside the will of God every day: *for his Kingdom to come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
- God's "big picture" story is moving history toward a predetermined future, when all wrongs will be set right and all things will be made new. If you've trusted Christ for salvation, you will be a part of that world made new.
- But what about the daily decisions of life? The Bible does help us understand how people who followed God made decisions that enabled them to live *into* God's will and it gives us principles to help us make wise decisions.

Summary of the Book of Ruth:

- You can view an overview of the Book of Ruth, created by The Bible Project, at jointhebibleproject.com
- Tim Mackie, part of the Bible Project team, summarizes the Book of Ruth like this: *“This story brilliantly explores the interplay between God’s purposes and will with human decisions and will...and we see how these seemingly mundane events in this story are woven into God’s grand story of redemption for the whole world.*

And so the book of Ruth invites us to consider how God might be at work in the very ordinary, mundane details of our daily lives as well. That’s what the book of Ruth is all about.”

- In this book, we see how God is moving his purposes and will forward in the world. At the same time, we also see how the seemingly insignificant personal decisions people make fit into all that God is doing.
- The historical setting for this book is during a time of no king, and the judges ruled.

Ruth 1:1 “In the days when the judges ruled..”

Judges 21:25 “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

Doing what’s right in your own eyes means doing what I want, when I want, how I want, with whom I want, and nobody can tell me different.

- In the middle of a godless culture, Ruth makes a decision to take the God of Israel as her God. She chooses to love God above all else and to love Naomi as she loves herself.

Ruth 1:16 “Where you go I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.”

- Ruth’s behavior and choosing to live into God’s will reveals the pattern: **When it comes to discerning God’s will in decision-making, if you are living in God’s will today, you can’t miss it tomorrow.**
- “It just so happened...” that Ruth came to a part of the field belonging to a man who *just so happened* to be a relative who will end up marrying Ruth and reversing the tragedy in the lives of Ruth and Naomi and we end up seeing how it *just so happens* that all these seemingly insignificant decisions fit into God’s plan of redemption for the whole world.

It just so happens, when you live in God’s will today, you can’t miss it tomorrow.

Application:

The Book of Ruth reveals a pattern for how we should seek to live our daily lives inside of God's will. This pattern includes 5 questions to help us flesh out what it means to live into God's will today when we have to make a decision that will impact our tomorrow.

1. **Am I making plans with an open hand?**

Proverbs 16:9 "In their hearts, people plan their way, but the Lord directs their steps."

We have to learn to hold our plans, goals, desires, and dreams with an open hand, because, ultimately, God is sovereign and in control. He is orchestrating our steps so that *it just so happens* we end up where God wants us to be. Sometimes, that's different than where we wanted to be or thought we would be, but God doesn't make mistakes.

James 4:13-15 "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you don't even know will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a *mist* that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If it is Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'"

James is reminding us that, ultimately, God's will prevails.

2. **Am I trusting God in this decision?**

Proverbs 3:5-8 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones."

We can't see everything that God sees. We need to live with an open-handed trust, meaning that we're almost *indifferent* to the outcome, wanting what God wants more than anything else. The Hebrew word for "trust" here is the word *batach*, which expresses the idea of well-being and security, which results in having something or someone in whom you place your confidence.

3. **Am I obeying the moral will of God?**

Proverbs 3:7 "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear God and turn away from evil."

The idea of *batach* (trust) means taking God seriously all the time, fearing the Lord and turning away from evil.

The Apostle Paul said the same thing to a group of Christians in Thessalonica, a culture where *everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes*:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality: that each one of you know how to control his own body in a way

that's holy and honorable, not in the passion of lust like people who do not know God."

When we face major decisions and want to know what God wants us to do, we must be living in the will of God as revealed in the Word of God in order to know God's will in that specific situation. **You can't know God's will if you refuse to do God's will.**

4. **Am I obeying the two greatest commandments?**

Matthew 22:34-40 "But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

As we make decisions, we must ask ourselves, *Am I demonstrating love for God and love for others?*

5. **Am I seeking wise counsel?**

Proverbs 15:22 "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."

When you are making a decision, do you seek the wisdom of other people? Good decisions are made with many different kind of counselors.

For a Christian, there's nothing more important than understanding and following God's will for your life. If you're living a life with an open hand of trust and obedience to God, when you make big decisions, you can rest in the fact that you won't make a mistake.

For Discussion:

1. Can you think of a time where you had to make a decision, seeking God's will. Did you make plans with open hands?
2. As you live your life and make decisions, how can you demonstrate love for God and love for others above all else?
3. Do you have people in life that you seek out for counsel who push back, who don't just tell you what you need to hear?