THE JESUS PRIORITIES: SEEK GOD’S WILL

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John 12:44-50

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# SETTING THE CONTEXT

Many scholars believe that the Gospel of John was written during the 90’s A.D., about 60 years after Jesus’ death. The infant Jewish-Christian community was in conflict with the traditional Judaism of the synagogue. John Dominic Crossan made the comment once, “In John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks to a defeated community and shows them how to live.”[[1]](#endnote-1) This gospel is different than the others rather than being focused on relating the events and movements of Jesus’ life, John was interested in the ***meaning*** of the events and movements of Jesus’ life- that’s why Jesus gives so many long speeches in John’s Gospel because John is trying to communicate the meaning even more than just what happened. Today’s passage is at the very end of Jesus’ public ministry. Immediately following our passage, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples as he moves into his last days. It is not surprising that John has Jesus end his public ministry with a proclamation, a summary statement, communicating the major themes of Jesus’ ministry. See if you can pick them out as I read

Read John 12:44-50

# THE SERMON

Over the last seven months, I’ve been working on a Vintage Rose quilt. Without a pattern, I would never have even attempted this quilt. There are actually three of us from our congregation making this same pattern. The cool thing is since we each chose different fabrics and colors, although the pattern is the same each quilt looks different, similar and yet unique. For me, what is even better than a pattern is a YouTube video. How many of you have watched a YouTube video to learn how to do something? It’s great because you can actually see it happening in front of you and then mirror what you see**. Jesus is a pattern of a human life lived in perfect communion with God. He shows us or demonstrates for us a God-centered life**.

Once a visitor went into the studio of a great artist and found some fine gems on the easel- a ruby, a sapphire, and an emerald. The painter seeing her astonishment said, “I keep them there to tone up my eyes; when I am working pigments, my sense of color becomes weakened. By refreshing my eyes upon these, I can go on.”[[2]](#endnote-2) **Jesus is like one of those fine gems, that refresh our eyes when our spiritual sight becomes dimmed and that calls us to become the best human beings that we were created to be.** We can return to the stories of his life again and again to see how to live a God-centered life.

Over the last month, we’ve been exploring the Gospel stories to see what Jesus consistently said and did during his public ministry. **We’ve noticed that Jesus’ priorities centered around two categories that are summed up in the great commandment: to love God and love our neighbors**. So far, we’ve seen that Jesus’ priorities related to other people included healing them, loving them, and spreading God’s message of love and grace among them. His priorities related to loving God included praying and, today’s topic, seeking God’s will.

**John’s Gospel in particular stresses this priority of Jesus- to be of one mind with God.** Christopher Maricle found fourteen events recorded sixteen times giving Gospel evidence of Jesus’ commitment to be at-one with God.[[3]](#endnote-3) Jesus’ summary speech that we read today says it plainly, “Whoever believes in me, believes not just in me but in the One who sent me. Whoever looks at me is looking, in fact, at the One who sent me.” (John 12:44-45, Message Bible) This is the central theological claim of Jesus’ ministry: that he makes God known.[[4]](#endnote-4) He comes to make God known not to condemn and judge the world, but to illuminate it; to show us how to live. He is the light that guides us whether through the familiar places of routine or in the midst of raging storms that blind and disorient us. Of course, there are consequences to the choices we make, but judgment is not why he came, guiding us through this life and into eternal life is why he came. **So we have the light to guide us, the pattern for us to follow, the Youtube video in ancient format so why are things so messed up even among Christ followers?**

**Maricle identifies five barriers to discerning God’s will:**

**1) imperfect knowledge,**

**2) lack of urgency,**

**3) daily distractions,**

**4) perceiving the search for God’s will as one among many tasks,**

**5) fear of sacrifice.[[5]](#endnote-5)**

There are a number of places in the Bible where God says, my thoughts are not your thoughts, your ways are not my ways. (Isaiah 55:8-9, see also Luke 16:15) How can we expect to comprehend the God who created quarks and galaxies? Our human minds are limited, and our knowledge is limited. God sent Jesus to span that chasm between God’s infinite wisdom, immensity and mystery and our imperfect knowledge and understanding. Focusing on the teachings and actions of Christ is essential for spiritual growth and why we are doing this sermon series. Jesus is the pattern and model for uniting our will with God’s will. Jesus demonstrated discerning God’s will through prayer and through knowing and understanding his Scriptures. **We overcome our imperfect knowledge by continuously coming back to pattern ourselves after Jesus, through refreshing our spiritual sight by his example.**

The second barrier to keeping God’s will at the center of our lives is a lack of urgency. It’s kind of like me and my low-carb diet, “I’ll ease into it slowly. I’ll start it for real tomorrow or I’ll work on it after the holiday.” If there is one thing that has been reinforced this year, it’s that we never know how much time we have on this earth. My sister-in-law who just died earlier this month had no indications of illness. She was 57 and died in her sleep. Jesus told several parables with the same message, “Be prepared for we don’t know the day or the time.” **The time to live the fullness of God’s goodness is now.**

**The third barrier to staying in tune with God’s will are daily distractions.** We get busy with life, so we may not think about God’s will in our daily routines. My mother’s name is Martha and she has always talked about her kinship with Martha in the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was busy doing all the tasks needed to host Jesus in her home, while her sister was goofing off sitting at the feet of Jesus. Martha asked Jesus to tell her sister to get busy, but his response was that Mary had made the better choice. While some hospitality was appropriate, Martha allowed her focus on the tasks to take precedence over learning from Jesus. Man, do I struggle with this barrier! As we go through the day, how often do we ask, “What is God’s will for me right now? What is God’s will for me in this situation?”

The fourth barrier is perceiving the search for God’s will as one task among many. **Seeking God’s will is a way of life, not a task we do at certain times.** Maricle says, “We create the illusion that doing the will of God is separate from the other tasks of life, but this is not so.”[[6]](#endnote-6) **The core of living the will of God is love. It is the task of life.** I like this thought, “The most insignificant task performed with love is a tribute to God, and every act of charity or service done for self-gain or with disdain- or worse, indifference- is a hollow offering to God.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

The final barrier to discerning the will of God comes when it conflicts with our own will. **The fear of sacrifice, of God asking us to give up something we value hampers our ability to seek and do the will of God**. After all, if God asked God’s own son to sacrifice his life, what might be asked of us? Today is Mother’s Day, you can’t become a mother without some sacrifice. Some of us sacrifice our health, morning sickness can be awful. We sacrifice our waistlines and gain stretch marks. We sacrifice comfort. Good mothers (and fathers) sacrifice a lot more for their children’s welfare, but it is sacrifice that leads to such a greater good. I had a wealthy man in my congregation a very long time ago who had the ability to be so compassionate and caring around children. He had so much to offer God, but he just wouldn’t give himself fully to God because he was afraid. He had read the parable of the rich young ruler and he was afraid that God would ask him to give away his wealth, so he didn’t risk seeking God’s will. I understand that fear, I ran from God’s calling on my life for years because of fear. **The thing about the sacrifice that Jesus talked about and showed through his life was giving up something of value in order to obtain something of even greater value.** Jesus shared this paradox, “All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them.” (Matthew 16:25) Seeking God’s will may involve sacrifice, but that sacrifice leads to life in communion with God and with God’s purposes, something of immense value.

**Like any kind of spiritual growth, there are practices that help you seek God’s will. They are: 1) know God through Jesus, 2) maintain a sense of urgency (every day is a gift), 3) focus daily on God’s will, 4) see everything as a task of love and 5) accept that sacrifice can lead to gain.** There is more homework below, some questions to consider.[[8]](#endnote-8) **The way God’s will is embodied in our lives is going to look different in each of us. We are similar yet unique**. May we have the courage to constantly seek God’s will following the pattern Jesus shows us. Amen.

1. .John Dominic Crossan. “Why Christians must search for the Historical Jesus”, *Bible Review*, Apr 1996. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Gladys C. Murrell. *Doorways to Devotion: Worship Services for Women*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1938) p. 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Christopher Maricle. *The Jesus Priorities: 8 Essential Habits*. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2007) p. 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John” *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Vol. IX* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) p. 717. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Maricle, p. 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Maricle, p. 92. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Maricle, p. 93. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. ## HOMEWORK Practices for the 6th essential habit: Seek God's will

   * know God through Jesus
   * maintain a sense of urgency
   * focus daily on God's will
   * see everything as a task of love
   * accept sacrifice as gain

   ## Reflect on the Gospel

   I and the Father are one. —John 10:30

   ## Reflect on Your Priorities

   In what areas of life do you find your will in conflict with your understanding of God's will?

   Is God's will an urgent concern for you? If not, what does feel "urgent" to you and why do think it claims your energy?

   What part of yourself do you think you need to sacrifice? How could you seek God's guidance in letting go of whatever hinders living out God's will?

   ## Prayer

   Abba, bring me closer to you. Help me follow the example of your Son, to make your will the center of my life and a daily concern. Teach me that this life is a task of love. Grant me the wisdom and strength to see your love as the pearl for which all sacrifice is worthwhile. Amen [↑](#endnote-ref-8)