

Discovering God's Will: For Your Family.
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Introduction:

Last week we said that our individual lives are made up primarily of all the decisions we've made in life. Our decisions, and the results of those decisions have directed our path. And we said that many of us, if we're honest, have made some bad choices along the way. We regret some of our decisions, and we wish there were some way we could avoid making bad decisions in the future.

And we ended up saying that God is even more concerned about the decisions we make than we are. He cares about our decisions, and he wants to provide direction for our lives. The same is true of families.

All of us grow up with a family of some kind and size and structure. And then many of us have grown up, and left those families to start our own families. And the point is, the family we are in greatly affects the kind of decisions we make and how we make them. Most of the major decisions we make in life are not made on our own, they're made together with our families.

The problem is this: when you add more people to the equation, decision making gets even more difficult, doesn't it. Because not everyone agrees on what to do.

Let me give you just a couple examples.

1. Families have different schedules.

Studies show that children who eat dinner together with their families are less likely to use drugs, alcohol, or develop behavior disorders. But statistics also show that many families don't make it to the dinner table together. If mom works outside the home, and dad does, too, and kids have afternoon activities, schedules get strained, and dinner together at the table becomes a fairy tale.

2. Parents don't always agree.

When I worked for a church in Louisville, Kentucky, one of my jobs was answering emails to the church. If people had a Bible question, or a difficult decision, I would do my best to advise them based on God's word.

I got an email one time from a mom with a difficult decision. Should she let her daughter go to prom? It seemed an easy-enough question, but she went on. The mom and her daughter were white, the boy who would be her date was black. The mom saw no problem with that, but her husband was openly prejudiced, and he refused to allow his daughter to go out with the young black man. The mom and her daughter were Christians, and the young man had met the daughter at church. The husband was not a Christian. Should the daughter go to prom with her mom's blessing, but not her father's? Should the mom honor her husband's racist belief, and in the process teach their daughter it was okay to judge based on race?

How do you begin to answer those questions? And more importantly, how do you determine God's will for YOUR family? How can you know the plans God has for you and your spouse, and your children, and your grandchildren?

Well, last week as we talked about discovering God's will, we identified three aspects to God's will.

1. Providential Will – all those things that God going to do in the world regardless.
2. Moral Will – all those things God has revealed for us to do or not do.
3. Personal Will – the specific decisions and plans in our lives.

And we said that the more we get to know God's Providential Will, and the more obedient we become to God's moral will, the more clearly we will be able to identify God's personal will. And just like God cares about the decisions we make in our lives, God cares just as much about the decisions we make in our families.

So this morning, can we spend a few minutes learning about God's will for our families? And in order for you and me to know what God wants to do in the specific areas and decisions of our families, we need to begin to understand God's providential will and moral will our families.

Let's talk some about God's providential will:

God has given you life, and he's given life to everyone in your family. Next Sunday is the National "Sanctity of Life Sunday". It is a day that Christians remember that life comes from God. God gave you the life that you have.

God has provided for you and your family, and even when we have sinned, even when we haven't cared about God, he has sought us out. He has reached out to us, telling us about himself in His word, showing us his love through his Son Jesus, and sacrificing him in our place.

But the most important thing I notice from Scripture about families is that, from the beginning of time, God has used families to shape and influence the world.

- We mentioned Abraham last week. God called Abraham to leave his home and travel to another land that God would show him. And God promised to bless the world through Abraham's FAMILY.
- The Patriarchs of the bible were from Abraham's family.
- Moses was one of Abraham's descendants.
- The Law including the 10 Commandments was given first to Abraham's descendants.
- The kings of Israel were Abraham's lineage.
- Jesus was one of Abraham's descendants.
- The Apostles were all descendants of Abraham.

That's just one family in history. And just like God had a plan for Abraham's family, He has a plan for your family and my family. Now, it may be an entirely different plan, but he has one. So God will use your family to influence the world. That's part of his providential will.

Your family will leave a legacy. That's promise of God for every family. One place where that promise was made was in the listing of the ten commandments.

In Exodus 20:5-6, "for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments."

God has promised that the decisions of the parents will affect the lives of their children and descendants. If parents make bad choices, if they don't have a relationship with God, if they don't provide for their children, then the consequences of those choices will have a negative impact for generations. But God also promises that for those parents who love God and obey God's word, God will bless even more generations.

Parents, Grandparents, you are leaving a legacy for your children and for several generations. What kind of legacy are you leaving? What kind of legacy do you want it to be?

All of those things are part of God's providential will for our families. And he's invited us to participate in His will for the world. God wants the whole world to know Him, and yet most people

in the world don't have a relationship with Christ. I wonder how God is using YOUR family to influence the world...

Let's move on to God's Moral Will.

What sort of things has God already said he wants our families to do or not do? Let's look at a few of those passages.

- One is from the Ten Commandments we referenced earlier. Do you remember what it is? "Honor your father and your mother," Exodus 20:12, NIV

God has already revealed that he wants children to bring honor to their parents. They should not only obey their parents, but they should strive to live their lives in such a way that it pleases their parents. And they should care for and show affection to their parents.

Notice, that commandment isn't limited to just young children, but it applies to older children, even adult children.

And let me just point out that this would have been very rare in the ancient world. The command is not just to honor your father, but to honor your mother, too. No other ancient religion at that time placed that kind of value on women and mothers. But the God of the Bible has always honored women, and treated them with dignity and equality.

Let's look at another passage

- Ephesians 6:1-4 "1Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2"Honor your father and mother"—there it is again...which is the first commandment with a promise— 3"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."^a 4Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

In the previous chapter, the Bible has said that wives should submit to their husbands, and that husbands should love their wives the way Christ loved the church and gave up his life for the church. And now it continues by telling children to obey their parents, and for parents not to exasperate their kids.

Now, let me ask you a question: doesn't every argument in your family happen because one or more of those commands is disobeyed? Every family argument you've ever had, either Mom & dad are fighting, or the kids are fighting with mom or dad or both, right!? If we would all stop for a minute, read these verses, and then do what they say, can you imagine how peaceful our homes would be?

But just like any commandment, it can be hard to keep that. And if you want your family to have peace, and to get along, and to honor God, come back to these verses. And let me suggest that if you want a home like that, you need the power of the Holy Spirit on your side. You see, just like any commandment in the Bible, it is easier to obey God's commands when the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts. And for the couples and families who have conflict, and arguments, and unrest, and unresolved issues, the solution starts with every family member having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Because when we give our lives over to Jesus Christ, and we're baptized into Him, and we're filled with His Holy Spirit, then Jesus changes us from the inside out.

You may be grown and living apart from your parents, and the thought of resolving family issues with your parents or your children or your siblings may seem distant. But if you have a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, then it becomes possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look again at the last part of that passage: 4Fathers, (parents) do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

- Parents, your responsibility is a big one. To raise your children to know Jesus Christ, and to live for Him.

When you think about all the things you want your children to be, and all the achievements you want them to make, and all the success you want them to have, and the kind of lives you want them to live – where does the training and instruction of the Lord fit?

Where does it fit? Think about the minutes and hours you spend with your children for a minute, regardless of how old they are. How much of your time is spend talking about your faith and trust in Jesus Christ?

- How much is spent watching TV?
- How much is spent in the car on the way to one event or another?
- How much is spent on homework?
- How much time is spent having fun together?

Parents, just do an inventory of the time you spend with your children. And how that time is spent. And you will start to have an idea of where this fits in your list of priorities.

When we spend time with our families, God needs to be the center of that time. Not that we have to do a devotion every time the family gets together, but we should talk about our faith and share our thoughts about spiritual issues. We should have time to discuss biblical things and God's attitude about things. This was so important that God commanded His people to take time with the family to focus on these things.

Who gets to teach your children? Their school teachers? Their coaches? The youth leader or Sunday School teacher who sees them for an hour or two a week? Their preacher who sees them even less? Or you? Who is going to teach them about God? Whose responsibility is it to tell them how they can be saved from their sin and spend eternity in heaven?

God has put YOU in charge. He's given you the responsibility to train them. And while ultimately, your children have the free will to accept or reject Christ, the Bible teaches that Christian parents who teach their children about the Lord are more likely to have children who grow up to accept and serve the Lord, too.

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6, NIV

- Grandparents, your role is similar.

I think older adults whose children are all grown wrestle with Spiritual Retirement. By spiritual retirement, I mean the temptation to back off from church involvement and spiritual responsibilities when we get to retirement age.

The Bible relates that Eli, the High Priest, got complacent in his old age. He had two sons who were desecrating the temple of God. Eli was old, yet he knew everything his sons were doing, and he didn't stop them. So God punished Eli and his sons for their behavior.

There is a temptation, like Eli, to become self-indulgent and spiritually passive when you become a senior. Don't be. You can still influence your children and your grandchildren to know the Lord.

My brother and I heard Bible stories and old hymns from our grandmother every time we went to stay with her. And even though our grandmother didn't personally lead either of us to Christ, she

planted a seed of faith which became her legacy. And today my brother and I know Jesus Christ as Lord.

Paul reminds the young minister Timothy, that it was the faith of his mother and grandmother that planted the seed of faith in him. And the legacy of those faithful women was to have a son that served the Lord, and led countless others to Christ. (2 Timothy 1:5).

- (Fathers) There's one more thing I want to mention, and this is to the men in the audience.

No one holds more influence in your family than you do. I believe it is the parents' responsibility together to raise and train their children, but the verse specifically says, "Fathers, train your children," and I believe it specifies fathers for a reason.

In the book Why Men Hate Going to Church the author researched and found that if a child in a non-Christian family accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, then there is a 7% chance that the rest of their family will become Christians. If a wife and mother is the first in her family to accept Jesus Christ as Savior, then there is a 15% chance that her husband and the rest of her family will accept Christ. But understand this: If the Husband and Father of a family accepts Jesus Christ as Lord, then there is a 93% chance that the rest of his family will become a part of God's family. I cannot think of a better reason for men to get serious about their faith. And I cannot think of a better reason for the church to do everything we can to reach out to men in our community who don't know Jesus Christ. Because if fathers and husbands will set the standard, then their families are sure to follow.

- It should be husbands who sit down with their wives to have a devotion.
- It should be dads urging the family out the door to get to church on time.
- It should be fathers who read Bible stories and pray with their children at bedtime.
- Men, there is nothing more manly or heroic that you can do than to answer God's challenge on your life to be the spiritual leader in your family.

There's a story from the Old Testament that is a great example of this. The Israelites had entered the territory that God promised to give them. And God had helped them defeat all their enemies. And all the Hebrew people were about to settle down into the land, in an extended time of peace.

Their leader Joshua spoke to the whole nation and reminded them of how God had led them out of Egypt, and how He had conquered their enemies. And because of God, they were about to settle down and enjoy peace. But some of the people had begun to worship other gods, and they had gotten caught up in all the worldliness they had seen among the people they had conquered. So Joshua tells them this:

Joshua 24:14, 15, "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

He told them to choose. It was the most important choice a family could make. Would they serve the Lord completely, or not? And then Joshua says, "As for me and my house, we are going to serve the Lord." Joshua was saying, "You know what, even if no one else here decides they are going to commit themselves 100% to God, my family will." He was going to make sure that His family served God.

Today is a day for you to make a decision. Make a covenant today with God that you and your family are going to be completely committed to God and His will for your life. Especially for you

fathers and mothers, it means making a commitment together, that you will obey the Lord, and that your family will be committed to the Lord.

I'm going to invite you to go home today and talk with your family. Talk about your individual relationships with the Lord. Talk about whether you've been serving Him with your whole heart. Talk about whether your family has made the Lord not just a priority, but THE priority for your time and your money and your plans together.

And then if you have the courage, I want you to make a covenant together, and agreement on paper that as for you and your family, you will serve the Lord. Write it out on paper, and sign your names to it.

How would you like your family to be?

Do you all want to be in heaven some day?

Do you want to share the same love for God, prayer, Bible knowledge, commitment to God's values.

Do you want to spend time actually caring about your kids.

Do you want to raise children who are respectful both in public and in private.

As a family, how will God use you to accomplish His will in the world?

Many of you know the missionaries we support, Johnny and Helen Scott. Well, they have a daughter who serves the Lord full time in Korea. She's also a missionary. And Johnny and Helen will be traveling somewhere else in the world, because they want to spread the gospel, too. As you can imagine, their family has made some sacrifices. But if they were here this morning, they would tell you it's worth it because of their commitment to serve the Lord.

Do you want to know God's Specific will for your family? It starts with making a commitment like Joshua's.

It starts with joining God's family. You can do that today. If you've never given your life to Christ, and been buried in Christian baptism, then you can do that today. OR if you're ready to make a commitment to this congregation and say, "this is WHERE we will serve the Lord." then you come as we stand and sing.

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