

# God's Will for My Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, in our sermon series right now, we're talking about prayer and how we should be praying all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people.

Last Sunday, we heard from the Apostle John about how we should be, we can have confidence in prayer.

Or we were reminded that we can have confidence that we will receive what we ask for when we ask according to God's will, according to what God desires.

And I encouraged us last Sunday to be asking that question as we pray for people, for ourselves. Lord, what is it that you want in this situation?

What do you desire? What do you will? What is your will? That's a question that we often find ourselves asking.

[ 1 : 07 ] God, what is your will for my life? Especially when it comes time to make big decisions, whether that's career-related or family-related or related to the business, the family farm.

God, what is your will? We know that God knows the future. We know that he knows which of the choices in front of us is best, that he desires what's best for us.

Wouldn't it be nice if God just simply told us what his will is, what he wants us to do?

Well, there is a place in the scriptures where he does, very pointedly, very clearly. And we're going to be looking at that this morning in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

So if you have your Bible with you, please open it up to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

[ 2 : 22 ] We'll start in verse 1. Paul writes this to the Thessalonians. It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality.

That each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans who do not know God.

And that in this matter, no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins as we told you and warned you before.

For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being, but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

So there it is stated for us so clearly. Verse 3. It is God's will that you should be sanctified.

[ 3 : 57 ] Are you disappointed? How are you hoping that that thought was going to go? It is God's will that... As important as career and family and whether to move and what to do with the family business are, those things matter to God.

But far more important than those things is our sanctification, says Paul.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified. Sanctification is not a word that we use very much outside of the church, outside of the Bible even.

Sanctification would be okay if our modern translations picked a different word that we use more frequently, so that we understand that.

What does sanctification mean? So, since it's used by all the translations, we better figure that out. We better understand it.

[ 5 : 06 ] The word sanctification comes from the Latin word sanctus, which means holy. And that's actually the word that Paul uses here in the original language.

It's the word for holy or the word holiness. In all the other places Paul uses, not all of them, but most of them, it's simply translated as holy or holiness.

But here, it's translated sanctify. Because in English, we can't just turn the word holy into a verb.

You know, if I'm going to talk about making something holy, I would never say, I holified that thing.

But in the original language, the same word does double duty. It works as a verb and a noun. And so, in English, we have another word. We say, I sanctified that. Another way that we could say it in English is maybe I consecrated that.

I made it holy. But however we translate it or paraphrase it, the meaning is essentially the same. It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should be set apart, that you should be made holy.

[ 6 : 17 ] It's helpful to think of the word sanctuary. It kind of has the same idea. Whether we're talking about our church sanctuary or a wildlife sanctuary, a sanctuary is a place that is set apart for a special purpose or in a special way.

This room in our church building is set apart for a special purpose, for us to gather and to worship God. A wildlife sanctuary is a place that is set apart so that in that area, wildlife can flourish, not like in other areas where hunters and ATVs and everything can rip it to shreds.

So we can kind of ask that question here. What does Paul really mean by sanctify? It is God's will that you should be sanctified.

What's he talking about here? And we do have to be careful here. If we're not careful, we can kind of get ourselves tied up in theological knots because this word holy or holiness, sanctified, sanctification, it's used in other places.

In some of those places, it's used to refer to how we are in the process of being set apart by God. In some places, it's used to describe how we are at the end of the process, set apart by God.

[ 7 : 44 ] And in some places, it's used to refer to the whole thing without discrimination. God has set us apart. And so how do we wade through this?

Well, there's one question that we can just really simply ask here. Paul has said it is God's will that you should be sanctified. In what way does God want us to be set apart, to be different from others, from the rest?

There's more than one true possible answer here, but this morning we're only looking at Paul's answer in this specific case. He actually tells us the kind of holiness that he's referring to.

He says this, It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans who do not know God.

And so we can see from the way Paul is using it, what he is talking about. What does it mean for us to be sanctified? Paul's saying it's God's will that you live differently from the rest, from others who don't know God.

[ 9 : 12 ] God desires for there to be a difference between his people and the rest who don't know him.

He desires that there be a distinction in your life and how you live it from the rest of our world who doesn't know him and doesn't believe in him.

Well, what is that distinction supposed to be? Paul is writing very specifically to the Thessalonian church. He's thinking through what are they going through in that city from what he's heard about the news of them, from what he knows about their church in that city.

And so top of his mind in this situation is sexuality. He's thinking about their sexual conduct.

As a church, what should your sexual conduct look like as you're surrounded there in Thessalonica by people who don't know God?

[ 10 : 22 ] Paul says it is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid or be far from sexual immorality. The word that he uses to describe sexual immorality is porneia.

We get the word pornography from it. It's used to refer to all kinds of sexual immorality, adultery, cheating on your spouse, fornication, sex with someone that you're not married to.

It's used to refer to homosexuality. It's used to refer to taking advantage of another person sexually.

It's actually just kind of a cover-all reference to any kind of sexual conduct or behavior that is outside of God's good design and intention for human sexuality.

Right from the beginning of the Bible all the way through to the end, we see that God's design and intention for human sexuality is that it is something that is to be enjoyed between a man and a woman who are covenanted, committed to one another in marriage.

Everything outside of that is porneia, is sexual immorality against his design, against his intention.

[ 12 : 02 ] Paul actually gives us a bit of a glimpse into our world's attitude when it comes to sexuality. In verses 4 and 5, he describes how the Thessalonians should behave.

He says that you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans who do not know God.

As a general principle, those who do not know God have a different sexual ethic than we do. They are characterized by a lack of self-control and by passionate lust, says Paul.

Selfish sexual desire. I have what I want. I have my sexual needs. And I want you to meet my needs, to bring pleasure to me.

That's the mindset generally, Paul points to, of people in our world. You even see a hint of that down in verse 6, where he says, and that in this matter, sexuality, no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

[13:27] Here we are as the family of God, but don't even think about using the closeness that we enjoy with one another as the family of God, the church, to cozy up to someone else's wife or someone else's husband.

Our world's attitude is indulge sexually as far as you can, as much as you can, without running into the big problems, the big consequences.

But of course, there's always consequences when we live contrary and outside of God's design. We could talk about the damage that sexual immorality does to a person's marriage.

We could talk about the feelings of guilt, of having betrayed a trust between you and your spouse.

We could talk about families that are ripped apart, children that grow up without a mother or father because their family was destroyed as a trust was broken.

We could talk about sexual addiction and pornography use. There are always consequences when we live outside of God's intended design for sexuality.

[15:04] Sexuality, sexual intimacy was made to be enjoyed between a man and a woman who are married to one another. And everything outside of that God has said is off limits.

That's the specific way that Paul encourages them to be sanctified, to be set apart, to live differently than the people around them who don't know God.

But what I want us to see here this morning is that this is about more than sexuality. That's Paul's specific point, his specific application. But actually, God wants us to be different, to be set apart, sanctified, not just when it comes to our sexuality, but when it comes to every area of our life.

He wants to touch and affect every area of our life. Being a follower of Jesus should affect every area of our life, not just this area.

Whether it's eating, or drinking, or work, how we talk to one another, how we engage in relationships, God's desire is that we would be set apart, that we would be distinct in every way.

[16:39] And the rest of the New Testament letters are full and Jesus' teaching, full of how that affects other areas of our life. Paul's just focusing on sexual immorality here.

But the principle is much bigger than that. God wants there to be a difference between how we live and how other people who don't know him live.

When we hear that, when we hear the word holiness, it can be easy for a little bit of a grumbling to rise in our hearts.

Oh, Pastor Josh, stop telling me about all the things that I can't do. Why does religion have to be so restrictive? My answer is that it's not.

And as soon as we start thinking that it is, it's because we're not seeing clearly. We're not thinking straight. We've bought into the lie that it really is all about me and what I desire.

[17:53] Holiness is not just a list of do's and don'ts. It's not just a bunch of rules, rules to keep. It's so much more than that. Look at how Paul uses that word holiness just a couple verses prior to this one.

Go back up to chapter 3, verse 13. Here we kind of catch Paul in the middle of a prayer for the Thessalonians.

In my Bible it starts as a new sentence but it's not. It's actually a continuation. So that he may establish your hearts in blamelessness and holiness.

That's what Paul wants to see. He wants to see the Thessalonians hearts established in holiness. There it is again. God desires a holy people.

A people that are different. That are set apart. And so what does Paul ask God to do so that they will be holy. Look in verse 12.

[19:01] He says, May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else so that he may establish your heart in holiness.

holiness. The defining feature of a holy life is overflowing love for each other and for everyone. It's not just a list of do's and don'ts, right and wrong. The defining characteristic of a holy person is someone who truly loves others and everyone who is overflowing with love.

Now we look back at what Paul has said about sexual immorality and it all kind of makes sense. Sexual immorality is not about love. It's about lust.

That's what Paul has said. Passionate lust. He said, don't take advantage of a brother or sister. that selfish sexual desire.

[ 20 : 16 ] We were not made for relationships that are characterized by lust and selfishness. I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine.

We were made for relationships characterized by love, self-sacrifice, service of the other, bringing joy and pleasure to the other, not mainly to ourselves.

God desires that his people be different and the defining feature of that difference is overflowing with love.

That's what holiness looks like and this is how it plays out specifically in sexuality. It means sexual intimacy happens in the context of marriage.

loyalty and commitment to one another. I'm going to be there for you in sickness and in health for richer or for poorer for better or for worse.

[ 21 : 25 ] Passionate lust doesn't give a rip about the other. It's all about what can I get out of this. spouse. And if you're not going to give it to me spouse then I'm going to go find it somewhere else.

And if I'm not married I'm going to go online. I'm going to find it wherever I can get it and I'll take as much of it as I can get without running into those consequences that I mentioned earlier.

STIs, unwanted pregnancies, emotional weight of guilt, broken family. God's saying I want to see a difference between you, my people.

That's what I desire. That you should be set apart, different from those who don't know me. Not just in sexuality but as a whole, in general.

A people overflowing with love. And that translating out into every area of our lives. How we work, how we play, how we relate to people, how we talk to people, what we say about others when they're not listening.

[ 22 : 49 ] All of this leads us to a question. How do we achieve this? How do we become sanctified? How do we be separated and set apart and made holy?

Is that something that we do? Or is that something that God does? Well, first we have to admit there's no way that we can live this kind of holiness, this kind of overflowing with love for everyone without God's help.

love. We need God's power inside of us, working, enabling us to live like this because we're hardwired, we're bent towards selfishness and sin, towards just feeling like we want this and then taking it.

We can't do this on our own. We need God to do this in us and for us. He is the one who sets us apart, who makes us holy.

But notice that it doesn't say it is God's will that you should be sanctified, so just sit there and relax and wait for Him to set you apart to do it.

[ 24 : 10 ] He doesn't say that. Immediately following that, He says it's God's will that you should be sanctified and so avoid sexual immorality. learn to control your own body.

We have responsibility in it too. It's not just something that we just sit back and God does it to us. It's something that He works in us and we participate with Him and live it out with His enabling.

I like the way that He says it to the church in Philippi. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

It's both. It's not just God. It's not just me. And it's not 50-50. Not God does His half and we do our half. God gets the credit for all of it and our part we can only do with His help.

But it's both. Us being set apart is both God's work and ours. we actually have to make those choices to live a holy life.

[ 25 : 23 ] To say no to temptation. We're talking about prayer. So what does all this have to do with prayer?

We're to pray according to God's will. prayer. And here in this passage we see at least one thing that God desires for us, that He wills for us.

If you're honest, what is it that you want for your life? As you think of your life, the days ahead, the years ahead, what is it that you want for your life?

how does that compare to what God has said here that He wants and that He wills for your life?

God desires that we live differently, that we live lives of overflowing love towards one another, that there's a distinction between us and those who don't know Him.

[ 26 : 36 ] is that what you have been asking God to do as you pray? Is that what you've been asking God to do for other people as you think of them and the situations they're going through?

God cares about what I'm going to call the smaller things, which career I have, what job I'm doing, what to do with the family farm, family relationships and decisions.

God cares about those things. But even more than that, He desires that you live differently, that you be holy compared to those who don't know God.

Are you asking God to do that for yourself? are you desiring that for yourself? Are you asking God to do that for others?

It's great to pray that somebody who lost their job gets a job, but are you praying that God would use that situation to set them apart for His purpose, for what He wants to do in their life?

[ 27 : 59 ] God is in the business of taking for Himself a people, setting them apart for a special purpose in a special way.

Let's not forget to make that part of what we ask God to do as we pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, we thank You for Your Word. It doesn't always say what we expect or want it to say, but we trust that You have told us exactly what we need to hear.

Lord, even as we've thought about this this morning a little bit, together we invite You to be doing that work in us, setting us apart.

We don't want to be the same as everybody in this community who doesn't know You. We want to be seen as different because of Your work in us.

[ 29 : 13 ] And so we ask that You would come, that You would change our hearts, that You would fill us with a love for people, that You would give us the courage to say no, to things that are wrong.

We desire to please You more than ourselves. You are our God, You are our Savior, and so come and work in us as a church. Enable us and empower us to live the different life that You have called us to.

We ask this in Christ's name, Amen.