July 26/27, 2014

Embracing God's Will

1 Samuel 16:14-23; 18:5-30

Pastor Matt Meyer

Well, good morning. My name is Matt Meyer and I am one of the college pastors here at Lincoln Berean. I've been on staff for about 11 years, but I've actually been around the church and the college ministry for the last 25 years, which is kind of hard for me to believe it's been that long. But I started attending college in 1989. I went to Nebraska Wesleyan University and that same year I began attending the college ministry here and I just never left. I love college students. I love the college stage of life. I love everything about it. I love being on campus with them; I love drinking lots of coffee with them; I love having them over to our house. I just love this stage of life because it's such an important time in life for so many of them. Some of them, it's the first time they've been out on their own and they have to decide, "Am I going to follow the beliefs that my parents taught me, that they live, or not?" And for some of them, the answer needs to be, "Yes," and some of them the answer needs to be, "No." It just kind of depends on where they're coming from and what they were taught. I love helping them discern that, and I love helping them discover how their faith can become their own and I love helping them discover how the Holy Spirit can lead them in their lives. And I love most importantly helping them understand what it means to embrace God's will for them.

As I've looked back over my life, I've realized embracing God's will is kind of a theme of my life. I believe it's one of the keys to walking with Jesus for a lifetime. And when Bryan asked if I'd be willing to teach this weekend, he suggested I tell you a little bit about my story and what God has done in my life, and I am deeply humbled to be able to tell you that today. And since I didn't get to do that last summer when a lot of the other pastors were doing that, he said I could pick any passage I wanted, so I picked one of my favorite Old Testament stories. We're going to take a break from the Psalms today and we're going to talk about this idea and think together about this idea of embracing God's will. If you have a Bible, I'd invite you to turn to 1 Samuel, Chapter 16, and while you're turning there, I'm going to give you a little background of my story.

I became a Christian when I was a freshman in high school. I went to an FCA Weekend of Champions in Kearney, met at Kearney High School, and that was the first place I ever heard the gospel, heard that I was a sinner. I knew that. I understood that intuitively but I didn't really understand how all that worked. But I realized that weekend that I needed forgiveness, and I prayed a prayer and I began to step into and learn to walk with Jesus. But, it was when I was in college that I really began to understand what it means to embrace God's will for my life because, as I began to finish up my senior year and graduate, I was looking for jobs and I was looking for jobs in Lincoln and in Omaha—two different places for two different reasons. I was looking in Omaha because I had been dating a girl for about two years. Her name was Julie, and we were dating pretty seriously. We had talked about marriage, possibly in the future, and things like that. So this was a serious relationship and that's why I was looking in Omaha. We had dated for two years—Lincoln to Omaha—never had been in the same town together except for one summer and so that was an important thing to me. But I was also looking in Lincoln because, over the course of the last two years, I started sensing a desire in myself to possibly pursue fulltime ministry, and I knew that if I stayed here, I had the opportunity to intern here with the college ministry at Berean. So that was important to me as well. And so you can—I'm guessing you're ahead of me here—and you can tell there's going to be a struggle. And the struggle was, Julie had told me, in no uncertain terms, she would *never* want to live in Lincoln. (*Laughter*) She had good reasons for that and I knew that and

so I really wanted to make the right decision, and I prayed and I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. And I said, "God, what do you want me to do? What should I do here? What's Your will?" And guess what? I didn't get a specific answer. I felt like God was saying to me, "You choose. You choose, Matt."

Now, how many of you here this morning have ever been at a place like that in your life where you really wanted to know what God wanted you to do? You wanted to know what would be His will, His answer, but it just seemed impossible. I mean, maybe the more you prayed about a situation like mine, the more you thought about it, the more confusing it just became. Or maybe for you it was like this: maybe you actually made a decision; you thought God was leading you in it, and so you took some steps and you moved or you did whatever it was and then all of a sudden, it didn't turn out the way you thought it was going to. And now you're asking yourself, "Did I make the right decision? God, I thought this was what you wanted me to do. Am I supposed to be here?" And maybe you asked yourself, "Did I step outside of God's will?" See, I think we struggle with those thoughts and I think we struggle with decisions and I think we struggle with knowing what God wants from us, and I think the people in the Bible like David struggled with those things as well.

David is described as "a man after God's own heart". That's probably the phrase almost everybody knows about David. He's described as that prior to where we actually encounter him in 1 Samuel. But that doesn't actually mean that David always understood what God wanted from him. I think sometimes we look at the lives of characters in the Bible and we look at people like David and we think that they're just kind of on auto-pilot sometimes—that they just kind of know what to do. They know how to obey; they know what God desires and they just kind of do it, and it's easy, and there's no emotional turmoil involved with it—there's no struggle. But I really don't think that's how it worked for them, and as we step into 1 Samuel today, I want to set the scene for you just real quickly.

Saul is the King of Israel at this time and he was the first king God chose to be king because the people said, "God, we don't want You to be King anymore. We want a human king like the rest of the nations." And so God chose Saul and He thought Saul would be a good king, but it turns out Saul wasn't a very good king. He wouldn't follow God's orders; he didn't do what God commanded. Sometimes he would just decide, "Oh, we're just going to do it this way. Eh, we don't have to be that tight to do exactly what God said." And so God decided to choose another king, and He chose David. And where we're going to step into the story in chapter 16, Samuel is about to anoint David as the next king. Saul's still around—we're going to see that. But for the most part, David's not really even known—in fact, his father Jesse forgets about him when Samuel shows up and he has him go through all six other sons and then the Lord tells Samuel, "No, it's none of these." So Samuel looks at Jesse and says, "You got any more sons?" and he goes, "Oh, yeah. The youngest, he's out with the flock." So they call him in and that's where we pick up the story in verse 13 of 1 Samuel 16. It says,

> **Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him** [David] **in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play *the harp* with his hand, and you will be well." So Saul said**

to his servants, "Provide for me now a man who can play well, and bring *him* to me." Then one of the young men said, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him. (*NASB, 1 Samuel 16:13-18)

The first thing that we see in 1 Samuel here is this contrast between Saul and David. We're told that **the Spirit of the LORD** has come upon David and it's departed from Saul, and we're told that the LORD is with David, and there's an evil spirit sent by the LORD, terrorizing Saul. And this contrast between Saul and David will continue for the rest of the book of 1 Samuel. Sometimes David and Saul's lives will intertwine and sometimes they'll separate, but the rest of the book of 1 Samuel is about how this saga plays out—that there are now two anointed ones to rule Israel.

The next thing we notice in the text is something that we have a problem with, at least I do. We don't like it. But there's an evil spirit tormenting Saul and worse yet, it was sent by the LORD. Now there's a lot of discussion among Bible scholars as to what exactly was this evil spirit. Some think it was maybe just a psychological problem; others think it had nothing to do with that and it was just an actual supernatural being bothering Saul; and we can't really know. Regardless of what it is, there's no doubt it was put upon him, or sent by the LORD. We're told that three times in three straight verses and that presents a problem because we don't like to think of evil things, or bad things, as coming from God. But, see, the Old Testament authors, they do not hesitate to name God as the origin of calamity or trouble and they don't seek to answer the questions, "Why does evil exist?" or, "Where does evil come from?" Instead, they attempt to expose the nature of human sin as the ultimate origin of pain and suffering in the world. Let me say that for you again: their aim is to expose the nature of human sin, which is the ultimate origin of pain and suffering in the world. And in that context the issue of Saul's illness, his struggle with this evil spirit, appears only after his confrontation with Samuel in 1 Samuel 15 where his disobedience is exposed, and Samuel tells him, "God has taken the kingdom away from you and he's going to give it to another." See, we tend to want to resist this idea of the evil spirit as coming from God, but the point the author's trying to make is that Saul's problems stem from his own rebellion against God.

The other thing that we notice in this text, verse 18 tells us that David has become known now. He was kind of unknown, forgotten by his dad even, forgotten by his brothers, but now he's known in many ways. He's known as a musician; he's known as a warrior; he's known as a mighty man of valor; he's known as one who is prudent in speech, one who is handsome, and most importantly, he's known as one with whom the LORD resides—**the LORD is with him**. So Saul needs a harpist to possibly help him through the periods when he's tormented with the evil spirit, and one of his servants suggests David. We'll read on in verse 19 and see what happens.

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the flock. [...which is an interesting place for David to be considering the anointing. He's back out in to the place of lowly service with the flock.] **Jesse took a donkey *loaded with* bread and a jug of wine and a young goat, and sent *them* to Saul by David his son. Then David came to Saul and attended him, and Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armor bearer** [one of the most trusted positions in the King's court]. **Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David now stand before me; for he has found favor in my sight."** [What he means by that is, "Let him stay here permanently."] **So it came about whenever the *evil spirit* from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play *it* with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.** (Vs. 19-23)

Now the main thrust of this entire passage is the sovereignty of God—this idea that God is in control. In this text it's shown as God mysteriously and covertly working behind the scenes to make His will happen. See, God does not act overtly in miraculous ways like a burning bush or fire coming down from heaven in any way in this text. Our impulse is to examine all historical events in a cause and effect relationship but the Israelites preferred to skip intermediary causes altogether. They chose to focus on ultimate causes. The point in the text is to link the happenings with God's involvement. We're told the Spirit of the LORD has come upon David; we're told the spirit has departed from Saul. We're told that the LORD is with David; we're told that there's an evil spirit from the Lord tormenting Saul. And as we move through the story, it's clear, especially because we know the end, that God is working behind the scenes to position David in the king's court, to fulfill his anointing from Samuel.

Saul needs a musician. One of Saul's servants just happens to know David is a good musician—among his other qualities—and in a sense of irony, Saul brings his own replacement into his own court. He loves him greatly, so much so that he makes him one of his trusted positions—his armor bearer, so much so that he says, "Let him stay here permanently, please." But here's the mysterious part, and this is beautiful to me and, when I began to understand this ten years ago in my life, it rocked my world. While God is doing all of this behind the scenes, right, the individuals in the story are making choices. Saul's making choices; his servants are making choices; David's making choices; Jesse is making choices, and God's sovereign hand does not violate their free will. It does not invalidate their choices and it does not remove their responsibility to make choices. David still has a responsibility to follow his dad's instructions, whether that be about tending the flock or going to see Saul. Saul has to make a choice, whether he's going to accept his servant's advice or not. David has to choose whether he's going to do what Saul wants of him, or not. And as all these choices are being made, God's still working behind the scenes and, through their choices, and sometimes in spite of their choices, to accomplish His will. That's mysterious. That's amazing! That's an awesome God! I mean, somehow God controls all things. He's sovereign; He causes all things to work according to His will without violating our free will and our responsibility to make choices. That is an amazingly powerful God.

Don't ask me to explain any better than that how it works, because I can't. I just know I see it in my Bible all over the place. It's in the story of Esther; it's in the story of Joseph; it's in the story of Jacob; it's in the story of Elijah in some places, and it's all over the place in Acts in the followers of Jesus—after Jesus has left and gone back to heaven—in their lives. And it's one of the key differences between David and Saul. Saul's problems stem from his rebellion against God, and from this point on they are a result of his refusal to embrace God's authority structures. He just refuses to embrace God's will, but David embraces the Lord's will and he makes choices to follow and be obedient.

Now this all sounds nice and good in a compact statement like that and it's pretty easy for us to see because we look at David's life from the bird's-eye view, right, from way up. We know somewhere down the road he's going to become the king but we're not sure when, and we don't know that David knew all that—in fact, most likely he didn't. We're not told what Samuel said when he anointed him and, if he was supposed to be the next king, why would Jesse send him back to the flock? So we don't really know what happened. And if you put yourself in David's place for a minute, he's not all that different from us.

Let me see if I can kind of tell you the story again, maybe from David's perspective: David remembered well the prophet Samuel, when he showed up and anointed him. That was a strange

day. He had been tending the flock when someone called him in and the whole family was gathered together and Samuel anointed him and rejoiced that he had found him. But then Samuel took off and David went back to the flock and he's wondering, "What did that mean?" because Samuel had been the one to anoint Saul as the King of Israel and everyone knew that Jonathan, his son, was a worthy successor to the throne. David knew that better than anybody else; he's best friends with Jonathan. And David's family is not from the priestly tribe, so it can't have anything to do with that. But still, here was this prophet with this oil. Yahweh must have something special in store, but what? David's certainly willing to serve God in whatever capacity needed, but after the anointing, surely there must be more than tending the flock? If that was what Yahweh wanted, then he'd be content, but there's gotta be something more. He's just restless. Finally, after what seems like a long time, he gets word from his father that he's wanted in King Saul's court. The king is ill, needs someone to minister to him. And so he takes the gifts from Jesse and heads out for Saul's court. And as he walks he wonders some more, "What does this mean? What does being a musician for the king have to do with God's anointing? Is this God's big plan?" Well, for now, he will remind himself that even the smallest tasks are fulfilling if done for Yahweh. But what if the prophet and the anointing—maybe it was just a big mistake. Maybe Samuel just made a mistake. Or maybe, by entering the king's service now, David would be making a mistake and forfeiting his chance at some greater calling in life. But things seem to work out well. David plays the harp and it seems to help the king and the king is pleased with him and that makes David feel good because it's good to know that his service is useful. But, in light of what's happened, now that he's in the King's service permanently, that strange day back at home when the prophet arrived and suddenly appeared in Bethlehem, it's even more confusing. Perhaps David thinks to himself, "Maybe I'll understand it better when I'm older."

Now keep in mind, we're not told specifically any of what I just walked you through. It just helps us though maybe to get inside David's skin a little bit, inside of his head as he's walking through day-to- day life and trying to sort out, "What does all of this mean?" And I think it's really important that we remember: David is not just some robot who automatically does the will of God. Sometimes that's how we think about Bible characters. This was not just cut-and-dried. There was struggle and there was confusion and there were choices being made.

Speaking of choices, remember the choice I was trying to make, between two jobs, right? I actually got offered two jobs—one in Omaha and one in Lincoln—and I really didn't want to make this choice. But I sensed in my heart God said, "No, you choose, and know that I'll go with you whatever choice you make. Just embrace My will that comes your way on whatever path you take." And so I chose, and I chose the job in Lincoln. Julie wasn't very happy, and in fact, we almost broke up over it. We dated for another year, kind of long distance, Lincoln to Omaha, and then she actually went to Tampa. She was a nurse and did travel nursing, and she actually went to Tampa for about six months, and we dated during that time. But, over the course of that time, there was a lot of wondering for us, for me. It felt like she kept talking about traveling; it felt like God's just taking us on different paths. I felt like this is where God has me. I love being here; I love interning; I love the job. I got a better job actually over the course of that time that allowed me more freedom to serve at the church here. And I felt like, we're just going different directions. We actually had a conversation about that, long distance, over the phone—the worst way to have that conversation. (*Laughter*.) But eventually God changed Julie's heart and she moved to Lincoln. I was shocked. I mean, she showed up at my work one day and she was supposed to be in Tampa. We were married in 1995, and we both enjoyed serving in the college ministry here at Lincoln Berean when we weren't working our jobs. And that again sounds neat and tidy and it's a happy ending. But like I said, there were a lot of days of wondering and sorting out and praying and saying, "God, what are

you doing? What are we doing? Should we be moving this direction? I don't see a way through this that's not without pain." And we had a lot of days of wondering in front of us too.

In the year 2000, five years into our marriage, my son Luke was born. And right before his first birthday, in February of 2001, Julie was diagnosed with breast cancer, and we had a choice in front of us again, as to whether we would embrace God's will. Now you might look at that and say, "Yeah, you really didn't have a choice." I disagree. We *always* have a choice about whether we embrace God's will. We can either embrace it and begin to seek Him in it, because He is always in it, or we can reject it and turn away from God which just leads to bitterness and despair. We chose to embrace it, and it was a daily choice of embracing, because with cancer there are all kinds of little deaths that you have to accept and battle and work through, like the idea that we would probably never have any more children because she would be on medication for five more years after this, and she's pretty close to not being able to have kids after that age-wise. And we didn't even know if that would be possible considering all the medication and all that. We fought the cancer with surgery and chemo and radiation, and we fought irrational fears, and we fought accusations from the enemy that God didn't love us. We learned to encourage ourselves in the Lord and in the promises of His Word, the way David did so often in the Psalms—the way Bryan talked about two weeks ago in Psalm 27, the same day Bryan Olesen read some verses from Psalm 56—two psalms that are extremely powerful for me, and I'll come back to that. And we began to grow, to know God in ways we had never known Him before as we embraced His will for our lives in those days.

Now we're going to see David continue to embrace God's will. If you flip over to chapter 18, we see a few more of his interactions with Saul. When we get to chapter 18, David's been serving in Saul's court for some time now. The battle with Goliath has already happened; that happens in chapter 17, and actually where we're picking it up is they're kind of on their way back, telling us about when they were on their way back. Verse 5 of chapter 18:

> **So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and* prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing,** [This would have been a normal occurrence when the men came back victorious.] **to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. The women sang as they played, and said,**
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> **"Saul has slain his thousands,**
> **And David his ten thousands."**
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> **Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?"** (1 Samuel 18: 5-8)

So David is prospering. We're told everyone is pleased with him; the servants are pleased; Saul's pleased; he sets him over the men of war. But then things take a turn for the worse, at least for Saul, because the women sing, and they say, "**Saul has slain his thousands, and David has slain his ten thousands,**" and Saul becomes very angry and he begins to fear for his kingdom, and he moves and progresses from anger and jealousy to suspicion and murder and irrational fears. Read on with me in verse 9:

> **Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on. Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing *the harp* with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand. Saul hurled the spear for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David escaped from his presence twice** [Which means he actually attacked him twice.] **Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. Therefore Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him. When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them.** (Vs.9-16)

So we're told again that the LORD is with David and we're told that the LORD has departed from Saul, and we're introduced to the evil spirit one more time, just to remind us again—it's the writer's way of saying—"God is still in this." It might not look like it, but He's still working. And multiple times we're told in this passage that David is prospering, that's he liked or loved by those around him, and even as things continue to get worse for David—he gets attacked—he continues to rise in the sight of the people. We're not going to read the rest of the chapter because of time but I'll summarize it for you. It's crazy.

Saul offers his oldest daughter to David in marriage, which would have been the expected reward for the warrior who killed Goliath, but when the day of marriage comes, Saul takes her and gives her to another man in marriage. Then he finds out that his younger daughter loves David, so he offers her, and David accepts, but in both of these Saul is just trying to use his daughters as a snare. He's trying to put David in a position to be killed by the Philistines. He says, "The dowry, if you want to marry my daughter, is 100 Philistine foreskins. David, you gotta go and kill 100 Philistines; bring back their foreskins; then you can marry my daughter." And through all of that, David just embraces what comes his way. I don't think it was easy. I think there was a lot of confusion and turmoil. It's a simple little statement that he says, "Okay." When David finds out that the younger daughter loves him, he says, "Okay."

Now think about it from David's perspective though. He's entered the King's service as a musician, and now as a commander in the army. Then Saul tries to kill him twice, but he escapes. Then he removes him from his presence. Then he offers his oldest daughter to him in marriage; then he takes her and gives her to another man. Then he offers his younger daughter. Just try to imagine how confusing that turn of events would have been. If that were you, would you have married the second daughter? I'd have been gone after the first spear- throw. David had done nothing wrong; he had done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment. On the contrary, he had served God; he had killed a giant. He had submitted himself to Saul and through all of that, he just embraces what comes his way.

The writer is trying to make the point that what comes his way is the will of God. It is God working out his plan. Three times in chapter 18, twice in chapter 16, we're specifically told, "The LORD is with David." Also, three times in chapter 18 we're told David is **prospering**. He's succeeding in all his ways. The Hebrew word for prosper literally means *to act wisely*. See, I think and I think we tend to think, when we heard the word 'prosper' we think it's something that's happening *to* David. I think he's getting rich; that's the first thing comes to my mind. But it's actually a term describing how David is responding to his circumstances. He's acting wisely; God is working behind the

scenes and in the middle of the everyday occurrences to accomplish His will. And the difference between David and Saul is that David embraces God's will and Saul rejects it.

Again, I don't think it's easy. It wasn't easy for David. It's not easy for us because we live in a fallen world. It's tainted with sin and tainted with disease, and people can be selfish and hurtful and cruel. Life rarely turns out the way we plan. We make our plans and we prepare and we work hard to achieve our goals, and sometimes we enjoy a measure of success. But then disaster strikes. And the person you thought you were going to spend the rest of your life with no longer wants to be with you, or a long time, lifelong friendship is destroyed over a misunderstanding and a stab in the back. You don't get the job you're hoping for or someone close to you is diagnosed with cancer or multiple sclerosis or some other debilitating disease, or worse yet, a friend or a family member unexpectedly dies. And when things like that come into our lives, we realize again, we're not in control of our lives. As much as we like to think that we are, we're not. But the good news this morning is: God is. He is in total control, sovereignly working out His plan in our lives and that is good news. But sometimes it's a little disturbing, especially when He allows things like death and disease and disappointment into our lives. That's what disturbs us about the idea that the evil spirit is sent by God.

And that's what was so hard to embrace for us about Julie's cancer because God could have prevented it, but He didn't. Instead He chose to use it for His purposes. Julie recovered from chemo and radiation and surgery and she was doing really well. About two years later, in April of 2003, she began to have crazy pain in her back, a debilitating pain, and so we had an MRI done thinking it was a disc or a vertebrae or something. But the MRI showed us that the cancer had returned in the bone marrow in her spine, and we thought: round two—another choice to make. So we fought cancer again—different types of chemo—and about two weeks into that regime, Julie wasn't responding correctly; she wasn't responding well. She would fall asleep, like that sometimes. She would drop things and she wouldn't respond to my questions. And so I took her into the clinic in Omaha, and they got her on an IV and she was all of a sudden herself again. She had been dehydrated and her liver had been overwhelmed. They kept her for a while and wanted to know what's going on here. They began to find other problems. She had blood in her stools and they wanted to know why and they couldn't figure out why. We did a battery of tests and over the course of a week, to make a long story short, things continued to progress from bad to worse inside her body. Her blood wouldn't clot and, in the process of trying to get a cut in her mouth to clot by holding pressure on it, they adjusted how they were doing that and the clot dropped onto her voice box. It occluded her airway and she couldn't breathe. She began to code. They immediately put a trachea tube in. They couldn't get that to stop bleeding then because her blood won't clot. So, they took her into surgery, and they cauterized that which stabilized her. And the next morning they did another surgery to try to fix other things that were going wrong and then the doctor sat down with me and he said, "We just can't keep doing surgery. She's not getting better and every time we go in, it gets worse. It just causes more problems." And he wanted to know, "If she codes again, should we keep her alive? Should we revive her?" And so I had a choice to make. It was an easy ethical choice. Julie was a nurse. She had told me, "Don't ever let me be kept alive on machines." But it was a tremendously hard, emotional choice.

And so I went outside by myself, and I prayed and I talked to God and I asked, "Why?" and I didn't get an answer. And I cried for about twenty minutes and then I said to God, "Okay. I'll walk this road if you'll walk it with me." I went back inside and I told the doctors I wanted them to keep her alive long enough for the family to return. Some of them had gone home after being there for a week. Each of them had a time to say goodbye to her; they all had their chances. And then that

night, with the immediate family in the room, we turned off the ventilator for a little bit. She breathed on her own for a little bit, and then I released her and she passed into the presence of Jesus, and I began to embrace God's will for me as a single dad.

Over the last ten years of my life, the things God has taught me about embracing His will He just continued to use to lead me, to walk with Him, and so we're left with this question today to kind of close us out. What do we do with what we've seen in the text, knowing that God is sovereign and all things that come into our lives, including the hard things, are according to His will? How do I become a person who begins to embrace God's will?

I see two things in David's life that have been very helpful for me. The first one is this: being positive and wise is the best way to respond to an enemy or a negative situation. We talked about how the word 'prosper' means 'to act wisely' so in response to all that Saul was doing to persecute David, in response to all the confusing circumstances around him, David doesn't give up. He doesn't fight back against Saul. He just continues to prosper. He just continues to act wisely. He just keeps embracing.

But the struggle is, "How can you do that?" Because when life hits you hard, we just tend to go down with it. My thinking tends to go negative. The only way I know to counteract that is to go back to the Word of God and remind myself who God is and what He has said is true— that He loves me, that He is for me, that He is with me despite what my circumstances show, that He sent Jesus to die for me, that this world is not my home and that I have heaven waiting for me. That's the only way I know. Julie and I learned how to do this together when we were fighting cancer, day in and day out, and right after Julie died I read Psalm 27 and Psalm 56 out loud to myself when I got up and when I went to bed, every day for a month, to tell myself, "God is with me. He's for me. He sees everywhere I've gone. All of my tears are in His bottle. He knows." That's the first thing.

The second thing is this: live one day at a time. Not knowing the future forces us to live one day at a time, and it's the essence of a walk of faith. All God desires of us is for us to do this day with the tasks that are in front of us this day. This principle becomes particularly useful when you're in a struggle, when you're in a confusing circumstance, because on those days you don't want to get up and get out of bed, and you don't want to face the tasks that you have to do that day, the people you'll have to interact with. You don't want to face the debilitating thoughts, the negative thoughts that you have to fight against over and over and again. I know what it's like to be in that place. But if you will get up and you will go about your day, He will meet you in it because He's always in it. And He will give you the grace to get through it. You know why you have to get up and go about your day? Because just like David, God's sovereignty has not removed our responsibility to make choices, and we have to choose to believe that God is working all things for our good.

This idea of living one day at a time has defined the last ten years of my life because at some point I had to figure out if I was going to date again, and how any of that should work. I mean, you want to talk about an unknown situation. There is no book; there is no manual; there is no guide on how you start dating when you're 34, with a four year old son and, by this time I was on staff and my daily life consisted of being around 18 to 24 year olds—and they're all too young. Where am I going to meet somebody? And even if they weren't, every year I get a year older and they just stay the same age. (*Laughter*) I didn't do it perfectly. I messed up. But eventually I did begin dating. 'Dating' is a relative term because the woman I dated—we only went out on four dates because she lived in College Station. We only were in the same town four times prior to getting married. Eventually we were married and she moved here to Lincoln. Her name is Renee and in Renee, God has given me

everything and more I could have asked for or needed in my situation. The fact that she would become a mom right away; she was okay that I had been married before; she wasn't going to struggle with comparison. We live in the same house I lived in with Julie. She's strong enough to know who God had made her to be, and if you were to hear her story, you would see so many ways that God had prepared her for this unique situation.

He has used all things for our good, and God gave us Tobin, our second son in 2007, and in 2011 God led us one day at a time through international adoption to bring home our little five year old Ugandan boy named Micah John. If you're going to enter into international adoption, there is no other way to do it than one day at a time because there's so much uncertainty. And we're still very much connected to Julie's family. They come to our house for birthdays—they only live two hours away from here. We spend holidays with them, and people ask us, "How does all that work?" And in my opinion, the answer is, "It works because we embrace God's will by living one day at a time, and by being positive and wise, and reminding ourselves: this is what's true, according to God's Word."

I don't know where this strikes you this morning, and I don't know where this lands. I don't know your circumstances that you're sitting in, but I do know this: God is in it. He's always in it, and if you will embrace it and you'll begin to seek God in it, He will meet you in it. He will give you the grace to get through it. In these next moments, the worship team is going to sing a song, and I want you to just listen to the words because God knows your situation and He wants to speak into it this morning in a far more personal way than I can. So listen, and hear what God has to say.

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