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DATE: June 28, 2026
SERIES: The Shape of Prayer
MESSAGE: Your Will Be Done
PASSAGE: Matthew 6:10
SPEAKER: Ryan Harmon

As I have walked this Christian life for now over 40 years, as I've walked as a pastor for coming up upon 20 years, I have found that there is a single issue, a single question, that seems to cause more confusion, and even anxiety, in the life of Christians than any other. And it's this critical topic of God's will.

What is God's will? It's an important topic for us. It's very practical, of course, because this idea of God's will has a deep intersection with our own life. We want to know, are we living our life in alignment with God's will? So it's something that we pour over, something that we think about. In fact, sometimes it's something that, I think I have found, so many people think about so much, it almost has started to cause paralysis for them. They are unsure how to move forward because they want to obey God's will. And that is a good motivation. It's good motivation.

What I find is interesting is as much as we are concerned with the minute details of God's will, as we look at the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, it seems as though he was encouraging them to think differently about this question of God's will than we are prone to think. We're prone to think about all the details. But Jesus, in offering up this prayer, seemed to cut right to the heart, cut right to the core, and leads us to ask a different question.

It's this one: If we were to know, all the details of God's will perfectly, would we submit to it? Would we submit to it? That's a question that cuts right to the core. It's what we need to consider together this morning.

If you have your Bibles, open them with me to Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6, we're going to be at the end of verse 10. I'd also encourage you put your finger in Nehemiah chapter 8. Now, Nehemiah is not a book we're in often. It's just before the Psalms. Nehemiah chapter 8. We'll turn there in just a few moments.

Now in Matthew chapter 6, of course, we've been walking through the Lord's Prayer slowly, methodically, and we just want to review where we've been. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he teaches us to pray, "our Father who is in heaven."



lincolnberean

So critical as we begin to pray that we remember who it is that we are praying to and that the one we're praying to is able is big enough to handle the complexity, the challenges, that we face in life. No matter what your age is, there are challenges you face and you need someone in your life that is big enough that's adequate to the challenge you face.

That's precisely who we learn about as we address God in prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray, "our Father," which tells us two things immediately. Number one, as we give our life to Jesus Christ, we're immediately brought into a community of faith. "My father" is certainly an appropriate way to pray, but Jesus, I think, is helping us remember, we're part of a body now. We're part of a community. We're not in this alone. "Our Father," the one in whom and with whom we now live in eternal relationship, through our faith in Jesus Christ, unending. And our Father is one who provides and he is one who protects. That's who we pray to. That's who we address.

Then Jesus says, "who is in heaven," and that tells us something very important about our Father. That means he is able to handle anything that we bring to him. He's big enough. He's adequate. He is above it all. He sees it all, and he can handle whatever challenge we bring to him. Nothing is impossible for him. So now with this in mind, with this address in mind, with the fullness of who God is in mind, we then are confident and ready to begin to bring requests to God, and that's just what Jesus taught us to do next.

But the request is different than what we're naturally inclined to request. Jesus began his request by saying, "hallowed be your name." Hallowed be your name. The first request is directed towards God, and it's a request that his name, his character, would be magnified and glorified everywhere. That there are places upon the earth where he is not currently magnified, he is not currently glorified, and we long for it to be so. And so we pray, hallowed be your name, Father, because we believe our Father is the greatest. As adoring and somewhat jealous children for our Father's reputation, we say hallowed be your name. May that be so.

And because we think he is the greatest, that leads us then to the next request. "Your kingdom come." Your kingdom come. Because he's the absolute greatest, because he's the one that holds all the power, he is the one that we want to be in charge. We want his rule and reign to be accomplished everywhere, and extend everywhere, upon the earth in all those places where it currently is rejected. So we pray, "your kingdom come." Your kingdom come.

And then we get to this morning's phrase, "your will be done. On earth, as it is in heaven." Your will be done, this complex topic, that is very important to us. And so let's dive right into the deep end here.



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How are we to understand God's will?

And the second question: what exactly are we praying when we are praying as Jesus taught us to pray, "Lord, may your will be done."

So God's will. I need to acknowledge from the outset that this is a deep and complex topic. It's one that we could spend weeks on, certainly multiple hours on. In fact, the most popular book on this topic is a 600 page book. Now, if I were to go through everything that that book says, we would be here a very long time. So I'm going to acknowledge, it is a complex topic. I'm going to seek this morning to try to define it simply and then help us understand the implications of praying this.

So, When we think of God's will, I want to encourage you to think of two different ways, two different ways of thinking of God's will that are related, but are different, okay? First, God's will can refer to *that which he will do*. That which he will do. The second way we can think of God's will is *that which he wants done*. Okay, those ideas are related but they're different. What God will do, that's one sense of God's will. And what God wants done, this is an expression of his desires, his intentions, his purposes in the world. Slightly different.

The first sense of God's will, what he will do, is something that we can absolutely count on. It is unchanging. It is guaranteed to occur. It absolutely will come to pass. We can count on it, and the reason that we can count on it is because God, in his wisdom and his sovereignty, has determined that he will do it. He has the power to do it, and because of those two things, it will occur. It certainly will happen.

Some theologians refer to this aspect of God's will as either his *sovereign* will, or we could also call it his *hidden* will. His hidden will. And ultimately it's hidden because this is something that is in the mind of God, and it is not something that we can perfectly grasp. His hidden will. I want to point to one passage of scripture that I think captures this idea, this meaning of his will, very well for us. Go to Isaiah chapter 46, beginning at the end of verse 9. We're gonna put it up on the screen for you.

So God speaking in Isaiah chapter 46, and he says, I am God, and there's no other. I'm God, and there's no one like me. Now here's what God does. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, things which have not been done. Saying, my purpose will be established and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.

Now, this sense of God's will—this hidden will, his sovereign will, what he will absolutely do—we can admit, is a deep mystery to us. Deep mystery. I think often much of our confusion, much of our anxiety, in fact, is related to the desire that we have to understand this. This is what we so deeply want to know. We want to



lincolnberean

know, how's it all gonna work out? How's this decision that I am making gonna lead to the fulfillment of God's ultimate plan and purposes? We want some insight. God, will you show us the map? Show us exactly how it's all gonna play out. Let us see how the end is going to come and how the beginning began. Show us everything. That causes us anxiety, and ultimately, it causes us anxiety because that is something we cannot know. We strive to know it. We wish we could know it.

It's a little bit like, I was just thinking this morning about how there are times when I am watching a sporting event where I am passionately involved. And there are times where it is so anxiety-inducing for me that I wish I could just watch it recorded and already know the outcome. That'd make it much easier. No worries. I know what's gonna happen. That's what we wish we could know.

But that's not something that we're allowed to know. First two lines of the passage I just read highlight the fact that this is not something that we can know. We are different than God. We are much more frail than God. Of course, we're his creatures. And so he says, I'm God, there's no other. I'm God, there is no one like me. This is God's domain, not ours. So this is something that we ultimately can't know, but we can find courage and confidence and hope in the fact that we have a God that knows the end from the beginning. We have a God who has a sovereign hidden will that is unknown to us, but ultimately he will bring it to pass. We can absolutely count on it, and because of that, although we don't know all the details, we do know the one who's in charge of the details. We can be at peace, knowing that he is able. He will accomplish that which he purposes. It brings comfort to us. Brings comfort to us when we come to realize that.

God will accomplish, that passage in Isaiah said, not some of his good pleasure—all of his good pleasure. Now that's a point of, that's a point of hope. As much as we're caught up in feeling anxious about that, as much as we get frustrated that we can't see all that, the intention of the Bible speaking to this aspect of God's will is to stir up courage for us, that we have a God that will work it out. Therefore, we can rest secure.

This leads to a question. Now, when we think about the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, teaches us to pray, when Jesus says, "your will be done," is he speaking about this way of understanding God's will? This hidden will of God? And I think the simplest answer is, he is not. This is not what he has in mind when he tells us to pray this phrase to make this request to God.

Now, the reason I don't think he's talking about this aspect of his will is because this aspect of his will, we can count on it. It is going to come to pass. So therefore, I think Jesus is helping us pray about this second understanding of God's will. The second understanding is what God wants done.



lincolnberean

Now, theologians often refer to this as not his hidden will, but his revealed will. God's revealed will. And the reason it's revealed is because he has not kept it hidden. He stated it plainly. He's made it abundantly clear, but this is important for us to know. Unlike his hidden will, it is possible that this aspect of God's will, what he once done. It can be rejected. It can be refused. It may not come to pass. That's why we pray, your will be done.

I want to get, in just a moment, and in a few moments, I want to get into why it doesn't come to pass. But before we do that, let me just ask a question that should be very obvious to us at this point. Where exactly has God revealed what he wants done with crystal clarity? Absolutely clear? The answer, of course, is it's in your hands right now. If you're holding your Bible, it's in your hands. If you aren't holding a Bible, but you're holding your phone and it has the Bible app open, it's in your hands. God's word.

The scriptures are an expression of what he wants done. His commands are an expression of what he wants done. His precepts, an outline of what he wants done, how things are supposed to work, what his desires and intentions are for this world and for his people, his instruction on how to live, how to live in a way that leads to flourishing, all of it revealed in his word.

So very concretely, when we say, Lord, may your will be done, I think it's perfectly acceptable for us to think, Lord, may people come to cherish your word. May they come to cherish the scriptures. May they come to see them for what they are, the expression of your will, what you want done. And may they learn to love them, and may they learn to obey what you have said. Lord, may that be so. May that be so in the world at large. May that start right here in my life. When I pray, Lord, may your will be done in my life, in my heart. That prayer is ultimately a plea to God to help me grow in my capacity to submit to his will. To obey that which he wants. That's what he, that which he, has revealed. That which he desires.

Now, the question, of course, is, why would anyone refuse to submit? And all of us just by knowing our own hearts know the answer to that question. The reason is because we think we know better. It's what it comes down to.

It's a little bit like last week when we were talking about God's kingdom, and that God, in his kingdom, and in his patience, in his compassion, allows people to reject his rule. And so sometimes we're inclined to walk up to the throne of God and say, hey, scooch over for a second. I'd like to be in charge. It's the same heart that drives us to say, Lord, I know what you said, but in this case, my will be done, not your will be done. That's what drives us to reject his will, his desires, what God wants done.



lincolnberean

So as we pray this prayer, as we say to the Lord, with a heartfelt honesty, Lord, may your will be done, accompanying that prayer should be an honest, heartfelt willingness to let the Spirit of God examine us. And expose ways that we are not yet willing to submit. And I will admit to you, that is a challenging thing to open up yourself to, to say, Lord, expose within me ways that I want my will more than I want your will. But if we're willing to do that, we're willing to confidently take that step...

Let's say we do, and God then exposes, hey, here's a place where you continue, you continue to refuse my will and enforce your will—in that moment, what are we to do? My hope is first that this will be a community, our small groups will be places, that will not bring about shame, but that will be a moment of great hope. Because now, in that moment when I recognize that, I am ready to repent. I'm ready to say, Lord, it's hard. I want to do what I want, but I'm going to submit to you. Help me. It's a moment that is ripe for celebration, because that's a moment of turning.

But practically, what would be a first step? And I want to suggest to you that a first step would actually be to go back and remember that in God's word, what we have is his revealed will, and it is astounding when we truly comprehend that. Do we value, do we know the treasure that we have in our hands? Do we know that the eternal God—we call it his word, that means he has spoken. He has communicated. He has said, this is what I want. This is how life is supposed to work.

Do we know and do we cherish the fact that God has given us his will, his desires, his intentions for the world? He's made it abundantly clear. I think so often when we refuse to submit, it's because we have forgotten that God, the living God, who knows all things, has spoken about how life is supposed to work best because he designed it that way. We have to go back to the beginning. We have to remember the value, the treasure that we have in his word.

I think this is a particular, particular challenge for us in America right now. I think this is a danger that we easily could fall into. This is something that is a threat to us, and we need to be careful about it, and the reason for it may not be what you think. I believe the reason that it's possible for us to start to neglect God's word is because it is so prevalent and it is so available to us. See, God's word is so available to us, and when that is the case, it becomes very easy to begin to take it for granted. That's true in all of life. When something's very available, what happens is people do not clamor for it. They don't seek it out as much as they once did. They start to take it for granted. That happens whenever we start to have something readily available.



lincolnberean

I was thinking about this this week. As I was studying, I was looking in my office, I turned to my left, and I counted six different physical versions of the Bible. Now, I am aware that I'm a pastor. And that comes with the job description, right? But even if we're not talking about physical Bibles, if you can't count a lot of physical Bibles at your house, in your phone, on your phone, currently, I am betting that most of you have a Bible app of one form or another. And in the one that I have, by a simple free download, and the touch of a finger, I have access to over 100 different English versions or editions of the Bible. Right there at my hand. Readily available. And a principle that runs true in all of life is when something is readily available, it becomes easier to take it for granted.

I have firsthand experience with this, because I was a Husker fan in the '90s. You take it for granted. It just comes so easy. You just think this is easy, this is what it's going to—it's always going to be this way. And then you learn as time goes by, this is really hard. This is really hard. I'm still a crazy fan. I just want to make that clear if any Husker football players are here. I love Husker football. It's not about what's happening now. It's about how hard that was and how much I took it for granted. That is what we do in life.

And so, if there is any encouragement for us, when we pray, Lord, may your will be done, perhaps the first point of application for us is that we would become people that would again learn to more deeply cherish and love and treasure God's word, his revealed word for us. He has told us what he wants done. Do we cherish it? Do we cling to it? Do we listen to it? Do we seek to be, as James says, not only hearers of the word, but doers of the word?

One of the most emotional scenes concerning God's word and a reacquaintance with God's word in the Bible comes in Nehemiah chapter 8. If you have your finger in that part of the Bible, turn with me there now. Nehemiah chapter 8, of course, takes place in the middle of great turmoil. It's a moment that is a very low moment for Israel. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are ultimately about the fact that the people who were in exile, they were in exile in Babylon because of their disobedience. But God worked in the heart of the Babylonian king, and he then made it possible for some people, a remnant, to return to Israel to rebuild Jerusalem, which was utterly decimated, utterly destroyed.

And so there is a story, in Ezra and Nehemiah, about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, that it might be secure and a rebuilding of God's temple. Now, after that work was done—it was a number of years—but after it was done, what we read in Nehemiah 8 is that Ezra gathers the people together to read to them once again, the word of God that was given to them, to their ancestors. And that's what we find. Chapter 8, verse 1. I'm going to skip a few verses here and there. I'll let you know when I do.



lincolnberean

Nehemiah 8, verse 1. It says, "And all the people gathered as one man at the square, which was in front of the water gate, and they asked Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. On the 1st day of the 7th month, he read from it before the square, which was in front of the water gate from early morning until midday." Now that's 6 hours of reading. Early morning until midday. "In the presence of men and women, those who could understand. And all the people were attentive to the book of the law."

Verse 5, "Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. For he was standing above all the people, and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, amen, amen. While lifting up their hands, Then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

Continuing in verse 8. "They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. Then Nehemiah, who was governor and Ezra, the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people, said to all the people, this day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, send portions to him who has nothing prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, be still. For the day is holy. Do not be grieved. All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival because they understood the words which had been made known to them."

How does a community that is famished for the word of God, that has had to live in exile, that hasn't been able to worship the way they once did, that longs to hear God's word spoken to them—his ways, his intentions, what God wants done—how do they respond when they finally are reacquainted with God's word? Let's stand at attention. They come together with eagerness, standing up when it's read, a symbol of reverence and awe, they understood what they were hearing. This is the living God, and he had spoken. They worshiped. They said, amen. They bowed down. They put their faces on the ground. They knew this was holy. They mourned. They mourned because they realized there were ways that they had veered away from what God wants done. But their mourning quickly was turned to joy because the Levites, the leaders, those who spoke the word to them, said, do not grieve. This day is holy. The joy of the Lord is your strength, which means God rejoices over you. And in that, you can be confident. Hungry for God's word, they understood when those words were spoken, they understood they were hearing the words, the wishes, the will of the living God.



lincolnberean

And so my question is, do we cherish God's word? He's made his will abundantly clear to us. Do we know the treasure that we have in his word? Of course, there are moments today that are similar, of course—not exactly the same to what happened with the people of Israel, but there are moments today that are just as emotional when people are first able to encounter God's word.

You might know that the missionary world, the missionary enterprise, a number of agencies are aimed at helping God's Word come to people that do not have God's word written in their native language. There are tribes, there are people groups, that are so small that we haven't even, or they haven't, ever written down their language. And so there are entire mission agencies and their entire work is to bring the word of God to people around the world that do not have it so that they might know it. They might know what God wants, his will, and they might submit to it.

Eight years ago in 2018, the work was finally completed for translating the New Testament into the native tongue of a small tribe in Kenya. For 37 years translators had labored, labored to first write down this language, and then labored to translate it into this tongue, this native tongue of these people in Kenya. When they received this word, they celebrated. For just a moment, I want you to watch briefly. [video]

Their response when they finally received God's will, God's Word, in their native tongue, the Rendille people, they celebrated. Overwhelming, overwhelming joy. Essentially, their hearts are crying out, "we have God's word!" Now, do I, when I stumble out of bed in the morning, when I go to open God's word, do I have even a fraction of the joy? Not as much that I'd like, to be honest with you.

So my question is, as we seek to pray, Lord, may your will be done, may part of that prayer be a request to the Lord that he would help me understand he has spoken his will in his word. And I as his child have it revealed to me. May I also ask, Lord, help me to do your will, but along with that, Lord, help me to cherish that I have it spoken. Help me to cherish that it's so available. Help me to never take it for granted. Help me to celebrate that it's so easily accessible. May we be people that understand the treasure that we have.

We call this series in the Lord's Prayer "the shape of prayer," and of course, that's because we don't believe this prayer is something that we're supposed to memorize and just repeat verbatim mindlessly—not that at all. But it can give shape to our prayer. But over these past three weeks, as we've been talking about these first three requests, all aimed at God—hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done—I thought, you know, we could have also called this series, "the prayer that shapes us." Because the interesting thing about each one of these requests, although they are directed towards God and are ultimately about his



lincolnberean

fame and his kingdom and his will, the first place that the change might start to occur in our world is actually in the life of the one who prays.

Lord, hallowed be your name. And I pray that I place myself humbly before God, and he starts to shape me in to someone who worships him more regularly.

Lord, may your kingdom come, let it be so. And what happens is God starts to reveal ways that I'm still trying to get on the throne. And I surrender. I say, I want you on the throne, your kingdom come right here in my life.

Lord, may your will be done. I pray that, and I pray that it would happen all over the earth. But then quickly God reveals there are places in my life, there are places in my life where I have yet to surrender. I am still holding on. I'm trying to control.

And so I pray, as I offer up that prayer, I say, Lord, make it so in me. That's really essentially what we're praying when we add that last phrase "on earth" as it is in heaven. On earth begins with me. And what I want in me and in my world is that what happens in heaven would invade and start to take over my life because in heaven, God is perfectly obeyed. But I long for it to be so in my world. And that starts with me. This prayer, these prayers, shape us.

I heard a preacher once say, jokingly, if you want to go to heaven, just go now. And here's what he meant. Of course, he knew the only way we will step into the reality of heaven is either Jesus returns or we go to be with him. But what he meant was that through faith in Jesus Christ, the reality of heaven can begin to invade my life right now. The worship of heaven, the submission of heaven, the longing that God's will be done as it perfectly is in heaven—as I surrender, as I seek after Jesus, as I'm formed by his spirit—it can start to invade and shape my life to be in conformity to what he wants.

If you want to go to heaven, go now. Seek the realities of heaven, seek that they be real more and more in my life. We'll never get there, oh, but we could want more. Lord, let more of what is true in heaven, let that be real in my life. Let that start today. With me. And so we pray, our Father who's in heaven, your will be done. On earth, right here in my life, in Lincoln Berean, just as it is in heaven. Let's pray it together now.

Our Father, we do come to you and we thank you that you, in your wisdom, in your grace, in your mercy, you've revealed your will to us. You've given us your very word. You have spoken. We know what you desire. We know what you want. So we pray, Lord, that you will help us to be people that not only hear your word, but do your word motivated by a love for you.



lincolnberean

And we pray that you will stir up in our hearts a cherishing of your word, a deep love of your word. May we say with the psalmist, it is sweeter than honey on our lips. Lord, may that be true of us. We pray these things in Jesus's name. Amen.

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