

Five weeks ago, I kicked off a teaching series on the Lord's Prayer. As someone who loves to teach, I enjoy receiving feedback...both the positive and the constructive comments. Every teacher wants to know if they are connecting, if they are being understood. But every preacher wants to know something a little bit different: they want to know if there is any change taking place.

Five weeks ago, I told you that if I had to choose between you learning more about prayer or you becoming more prayerful, I'd choose the prayerfulness. One of the personal benefits of preaching through this prayer is the change that is taking place in me.

I've found that most mornings I'm waking up with the Lord's Prayer on my mind. I'll be laying in bed thinking: *it's Wednesday...what segment am I praying today? Lord, Your will be done.* Or: *it's Friday...today's the day I pray through forgiveness. Lord, is there any bitterness in my heart towards anyone? Am I holding on to anger against someone who has wronged me? Father, I have sinned against you beyond measure and your grace has been poured out on my life...I do not want to withhold forgiveness from anyone else. Lord I forgive so and so for...*

I trust I am not alone, that together we are becoming more prayerful. That you've been bringing prayer with you throughout your day. We don't finish with praying to get on with living...we pray as we live, we live as we pray. I trust that in these last weeks perhaps there has been a heightened awareness to God, to His Voice, to His promptings.

Maybe He's been speaking to you while you've been at school, or at work, or stuck in traffic. Our Father in heaven loves to speak to us, and He loves to listen as well. So let me encourage you to keep at it...we were made to be in conversation with God.

I want to let you know that we have some more of these prayer cards at the info desk that break up the Lord's Prayer into seven pray-able segments, one for every day of the week. You can pick one up after the service. I also want to remind those of you who have ordered a copy of Darrell Johnson's book, it is ready for purchase and pick up at the info desk following the service.

This morning, we're going to wrap up the first three petitions by taking a look at # 3: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* And to get a head start on understanding what Jesus was teaching us to pray, we're going to take a closer look at the life Jesus lived.

1. Jesus and the "will" of God:

Michael Wilkins once wrote, "Jesus' utmost act of obedience in his earthly ministry was to submit to the will of God the Father."¹ Philippians 2:6 tells us that when Jesus walked among us, fully God and fully human, He did not use His status as God to His own advantage. Instead, He chose humility and obedience.

I said a few weeks ago that Copernicus and Galileo stunned the world by declaring that the earth was not the centre of the universe. We are no less shocked when we make the same discovery about our own lives. But Jesus understood this while He was still young.

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Niv Application: Matthew, 277.*

At the age of 12, Jesus accompanied His parents and His extended family to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover. But when it was time to leave, Jesus stayed behind without His parents knowing it. When they realized that Jesus was missing, Mary and Joseph rushed back to Jerusalem, fearing the worst. They eventually found Jesus in the temple, talking to the teachers and asking them questions. When they found Jesus they scolded him for causing them worry. Jesus responded saying, *“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”*

When Jesus walked the earth, His central preoccupation was not saving people...His central preoccupation was the Father. John 3:34 says, *“My food...is to do the will of **Him** who sent me and to finish **His** work”*. John 5:19 says, *“the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his **Father** doing”*. In John 14:24, Jesus reminded His disciples that even the words He spoke were not His own, they belonged to the Father who sent Him.

All throughout the Gospels we see Jesus going where the Father told Him to go, and doing and saying what the Father told Him to do and say. The writer of the Book of Hebrews uses the words of King David as a description of Jesus’ fundamental posture before God: *“Here I am...I have come to do your will O God.”*²

Now we can take these declarations of Jesus in one of two different ways:

² Hebrews 10:7 (Psalm 40:7-8).

³ William Barclay, *The Lord’s Prayer For Everyman*, 209.

a) We can assume that somewhere along the way, Jesus figured out that He basically had no other choice but to surrender to the Father...He didn’t want to but He was kinda stuck, so He just tried to make the best of things.

Illus: It’s like the story of a dad who wanted to take his daughter on a walk, but she really didn’t want to go. And so “He extolled the virtues of exercise and fresh air, and in the end she came. As they ended their walk, he turned to her and said: ‘Now aren’t you glad that you decided to come?’ [To which] his daughter replied: ‘I didn’t decide. You were just bigger!’”³

Did Jesus accept the will of God because God the Father was just “bigger”? Is that why we accept the will of God? Because we have no other choice?

(b) The second option is to assume that Jesus surrendered willingly to the Father and found His life purpose in doing so.

Jesus is a bit of an enigma to us in the West. He is recognized as a wise moral teacher. He is admired for His acts of compassion and non-violence, and those who believe in miracles applaud the way He healed the sick. But many people have no desire to follow Him because our culture places such a high value on independence and autonomy. Self-actualization, or self-fulfillment is seen to be the highest good and the ultimate aim of every upwardly mobile person...what could be better than getting what you want out of life?

Now...a preoccupation with self wasn't foreign in the ancient world, but it was foreign to Jesus...He was preoccupied with His Father in heaven. Independent thinking or acting wasn't a part of His core values; instead, obedience, submission, dependence defined His life.

I have to ask: *what makes us think that independence will lead to a more fulfilling life?* We tend to buck against authority and constraints from the time we can walk. Many of us live with the myth that when we move out on our own, or have enough money, or get to the top of the corporate ladder, then we'll be free, then we'll be happy. That is, until we realize that is always someone or something we cannot control.

We can feed the monster of self day and night for decades, but we find that this monster is never satisfied...it's hunger never diminishes, its thirst is never quenched. It's not freedom from constraints that we need...we need freedom from the tyranny of self.

Thielicke writes, "For no man, no matter if he has tried it a hundred times, has ever yet found happiness in pursuing his own will."⁴ Jesus was preoccupied with listening, obeying, and surrendering to His Father in heaven. Listen to His words again: "*My food...is to do the will of him who sent me*". Thielicke writes, "It is not an 'extra,' a 'dessert,' ...No, it is my food, it is the principle meal of my life to do the will of God."⁵

⁴ Helmut Thielicke, *Our Father In Heaven*, 72.

⁵ Thielicke, 70-71.

This was the fundamental posture of Jesus: it was a **willingness** (hands open) instead of a **willfulness** (arms crossed). A willing spirit says "*Your way, Your will God*", but a willful spirit says "*My way, or no way*".

Illus: Perhaps you've heard people talk about the innocence, the purity of children? I have...and to be honest, I've always wondered if they've ever actually encountered a small child before. They certainly haven't met my children. Anyone who has ever taken care of a toddler knows a thing or two about willfulness.

Now, I don't want to pick on kids...it's not like they suffer from something they will grow out of. There is a willfulness in all of us, it's just that as we age we become so much more sophisticated about it. We can spin our willfulness so that what is best for me, is really what is best for everyone...and if Bill or Betty weren't so narrow minded and unreasonable, they would see things my way. With toddlers, there's no sophistication, their willfulness it's just out there.

You've all been in a public place...maybe a grocery store, maybe a shopping mall, maybe a church, and you've seen a child absolutely melting down: yelling, screaming, tears and snot everywhere...it's not pretty. Every time I witness such an event, I feel such a kinship, a bond, an empathy with the parents.

When Luke was young, he wasn't into the yelling and tears, he was more of the strong, silent type. When we were at a store and he didn't

get what he wanted, he would throw himself down on the ground and would lay down face first in protest. And then he would look up at us as if to say: *Mom and dad, you see this? I can lay here all day.* It would have been funnier if it weren't for the willfulness, and for how dirty most floors were...yikes.

There is a Hebrew word for a posture of willingness before God; one of our elders explained it to me on Thursday. It's the word *hinnehnee*. It carries with it this idea of *here I am God, what do you have for me?* Not a bitter resignation, not a "*I guess I have to*", but a willingness.

To pray for God's will to come on earth as it is in heaven is to indict ourselves...I don't pray it for others as much as I pray it for myself. If God wanted to force everyone to carry out His plans and purposes, He could have done it long ago. For now, God invites, He calls, He beckons, and He waits for our response.

My Story

This week, like most weeks, as I've been preparing to preach, I've been asking God to align my thoughts with His. In a typical week of study, I end up with pages and pages of notes and then comes the prayerful process of discerning what God wants me to share with all of you. On Thursday as I was praying about what to say, I sensed the Lord say to me: *Mark, tell them about your journey through willfulness, to willingness and surrender.*

So that's what I'm going to do over the next 10-15 minutes. But let me begin with a quote I came across while I was in Germany this past March. While I was visiting the Shareski's, I had the opportunity

to visit the house of Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer. And on one of his walls was the following saying: "*Where Christ is, there He always goes against the flow.*"

I've found this to be true in my life again and again...Jesus is always swimming upstream in my life and asking me to reorient around Him.

I first learned about willingness before God from my parents. For them, Jesus wasn't confined to Sundays...He was central to life, and by extension, to our home. It was with them that I first learned to pray; it was with them that I first began to read the Scriptures; it was with them that I learned about surrendering to God's will.

Often when we talk about the will of God, we have a very narrow focus in view. What we are after is discerning the specific plans God has for our own solitary life. We want to know which career path we should choose, which spouse God intends for us, where we should live, etc.

Well, long before I was old enough to worry about any of these things, I was learning what it meant to embrace the general will of God for all people. God wants all of us to know Him, to worship Him, to prioritize His place in our lives, to be obedient to Him, to follow Him. I have to say, that unless we are willing to surrender to the will of God in these things, what makes us think we will be found willing when He lays out the specifics? The one always proceeds and leads to the other.

It's not always easy to prioritize Jesus in our lives; Jesus has a lot of competition vying for our affection and devotion...growing up, sports

was a big one for me. I grew up playing on soccer teams and I absolutely loved the sport. In our area, 14 was the magic age where you went from playing soccer on Saturday to playing on Sundays. It's the first time I can clearly remember something presenting itself as a rival to Jesus.

When I turned 14, my parents and I talked about it...playing on Sundays would mean missing a lot of church. And while going to church doesn't equal devotion to Jesus, gathering weekly with the people of God, being taught, worshipping, encouraging one another...this was important.

I don't recall my parents giving me an ultimatum, telling me that my soccer playing days were done, but I knew that they were done. Giving priority to Jesus, and to gathering with His people was more important...and so I stopped playing on weekends. It wasn't a pain-free decision, but it was the right one.

At 15, I jumped on a bus with 40 other kids and headed off to Youth Conference at Canadian Bible College, now Ambrose University in Calgary. And there I encountered Jesus in a life changing way. A young Brian Buhler was preaching to about 700 high school students, and he told us that we needed to plant our flag for Jesus. It was time to stand up and be counted as a follower of Jesus, to be baptized and publicly declare that we would follow wherever Jesus led. That night I surrendered and took my stand; two months later I was baptized.

At 19, I can remember sitting at my kitchen table, with the house empty. Worship music was playing in the background, my Bible was open to Isaiah 40 and my head was swimming. I had finished my first year at Kwantlen College in a Bachelor of Science track: chemistry,

physics, biology and math...I was going to be a doctor. When I went back to register for my second year, all the courses I needed were full. Things were not proceeding according to my plans. I ended up working for the year and I applied to UBC.

But there, at my kitchen table, Jesus began to swim upstream in my life. Here's what I was reading, Isaiah 40:12-13, *Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?*

I was struck with the immensity of God and I knew Jesus was asking for more...more of me. And unprompted, a prayer began to rise in my heart, a prayer I had never prayed before: *Jesus wherever you ask me to go, I will go. Whatever You ask me to do, I'll do.* Six months later I was in Bible School studying to be a pastor.

But...and this is an important "but"...at the time I didn't connect the two. When I was praying at the kitchen table, I didn't know the plans God had for me. In that moment, Jesus wasn't asking me to set aside my dreams of becoming a doctor. What He was saying was: *More of you...Mark, I want more of you...don't hold anything back...You know Me...You can trust Me.* And so I prayed: *whenever, whatever...Jesus.*

I experienced it then and it remains true today: whenever we surrender to God, what we give up is so much smaller than what He gives us in return. We are never impoverished by surrendering to Him, to His will, we are always enlarged, always blessed.

It's hard to tell my story without making it sound like my life has been a series of non-stop grandiose events. My life has certainly been very "normal"...with big and small opportunities to practice willingness or willfulness before God.

In my first month in Bible School, some of the students put on a worship event on a Sunday night; a couple hundred of us crammed into the venue. As the worship began, some of the people around me began to raise their hands in worship, and I can remember saying to myself: *I'm never going to do that...it's too weird, it's too showy, it's too needy.* All night I kept my hands very firmly by my side or in my pockets.

But resisting Jesus is not something I'd recommend to any of you. He's so loving, and persistent, and insistent...He doesn't let things go. *More of you Mark, I want more of you. I want your pride, I want your self-sufficiency, I want your independence. In exchange, I'll give you more of Me, more of My life: more joy, less fear of what others think, and more peace... all of this will come from dependence on Me.*

I wonder...how many times has my willfulness, or yours, prevented God from giving us the "more" that we don't even know we need? When we pray for God's will to be done, we are asking for a divine exchange; we're praying: your way instead of my way, your will not mine, Father, I want to hand over more of me in exchange for more of You.

Now, I want to be careful not to glamorize surrender, as though the more we surrender the easier life becomes. Jesus never said, *"In this world you will have utopia."* What He said was, *"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*⁶

In the most crucial moment of Jesus own life, surrendering to the will of God meant embracing suffering. In the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood, Jesus agonized over what lay before Him: taking on the sin of the world, separation from the Father, enduring the pain of the cross.

Mark 14:34 tells us that Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Multiple times He prayed and said, *"Abba Father...anything is possible for You. Take this cup from me. But not what I will, but what You will."*⁷ We're told in Luke's account that an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Jesus so that He could continue to contend for, and embrace, God's will.

And remember, this was not a matter of Jesus having no choice in the matter. In John 10:18, Jesus said: *"No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."* Father I will align my life with Your purposes in both blessing and suffering.

When my nephew died a few days after he was born, and my brother-in-law died six weeks later, I was once again brought to a crossroads. Following Jesus does not mean being spared from pain, it means we can lean on Him for comfort and strength while facing pain. As

⁶ John 16:33.

⁷ Mark 14:36.

strange as it sounds, it is the Lord's goodness that enables us to persevere in embracing His will, especially in the face suffering.

Now...is it God's will for small babies and young men to die? Is it God's will for the poor to be exploited, or for Aids to ravage countries, or for nations to exterminate one another? No...what God has allowed and what He wills are not the same thing. When He created the world, He did not greet sin, pain, or death as welcome guests. They are unwelcome squatters in God's world...we welcomed them when we rejected God's will in favour of following our own.

When we pray for God's name to be hallowed and honoured, when we pray for His kingdom to come, when we pray for God's will to be done, capital "W", in essence we are praying for one thing: we're urging God to hasten the day when He will set everything right again.⁸

Where His name is being hallowed, where His kingdom rule is being embraced, where His will is being done, there we have order, beauty, peace, unity, love, creativity, joy, and life to the full.

One of the oldest Christian prayers consists of a single Aramaic word: *Marantha...Come Lord Jesus. Come to reclaim us, come to establish Your name, Your rule, and Your will upon the earth.*

Conclusion:

This morning, I trust that there is at least some small part in every one of us that longs to pray this prayer: *Maranatha...Come Lord*

Jesus and establish Your will on the earth. Come Lord Jesus and establish Your will in my life. Come and conquer my heart, rescue me from the tyranny of self, come to reign and rule over my mind...set a path before me and enable my feet to follow in your footsteps.

The Lord loves us so much...there is so much He wants to say to us, so much much He wants to give us...He's just waiting for us to open our hands.

I've asked Linda and the team to come and lead us in some worship as we conclude, but I don't want any of us to put our minds and hearts on auto-pilot. Maybe the Holy Spirit has been speaking to you this morning about your willingness or willfulness quotient. Maybe there is more of you to surrender in order to make room for more of God...more of His life, more of His love, more of His will.

While we are worshipping let me encourage you to be listening to God...whatever He puts His finger on in your life, surrender it to Him. Make the place you're standing a place of prayer. And if you want to mark the moment, and have someone pray with you this morning, while the worship is happening, let me invite you to come forward and some of our staff and elders will be honoured to pray with you.

Worship

⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 220.