“The Will of God for You”

November 15, 2026 First Christian Church

Scripture Text: 1 Thessalonians 5: 14-18

What is God’s will for your life? That is a big question, and not just one we should contemplate when we are young and trying to choose a career. What is God’s will for your life? Normally when we think about that question, it is a very individual thing. What is God’s will for **my** life? Why am I here? Specifically me and my life? Why? And that is a valid question worth asking again and again. Scriptures like Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 affirm that we are not the same – the Spirit gives each of us different gifts in different portions so that we can use those gifts to honor God and further God’s Kingdom. There are things only you can do. There are people only you can reach. But other Scriptures let us know there are things God expects of all of us – God’s will for each and every one of us as individuals and as a community.

One of those is Micah 6:8 which boldly states, “What does the Lord require of you? To do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” I love that. When justice is defined as each person getting what they need to thrive, the passage sounds a whole lot like the great commandment. “Love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength” – walking humbly with God – “and love you neighbor as yourself” – loving them with justice and kindness. This is God’s will for you every day. Walk humbly with God in a loving way, and love your neighbor with justice and kindness. God’s will in your life is not some long journey of trials and training that both prepare you and lead you into the climactic scene where you slay the dragon and save the neighboring town from the devil’s clutches. God’s will for your life is not a moment. It is every moment. There is a person God wants you to be every moment of your life. Loving God and loving neighbor. And that is God’s will for your life. Not a moment, but every moment.

This morning’s Scripture lesson from 1 Thessalonians shares some behind the scenes practices that help make that possible. It starts out calling us to care for those around us in the church – to encourage the fainthearted, help the weak and be patient. Then moves to reminding us never repay evil for evil, but seek to do good. Then the last sentence is the doozy. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” “The will of God in Christ Jesus for you” is to rejoice all the time, pray all the time, and give thanks all the time. Regardless of circumstances, always rejoicing, praying and giving thanks.

Before you say, yeah right! Whatever. Get real. Remember who’s writing these words. As Paul went from city to city telling people the good news about Jesus, he was imprisoned on countless occasions, received forty lashes with a whip on five different occasions, shipwrecked

at least three times, beaten with rods three times, stoned and left for dead, (2 Cor. 11:23-26). Yet he never wavered on this. Near the end of his ministry, Paul was in prison, waiting to be executed when he wrote to the church in Philippi saying again, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." (Phil. 4:4) Also, remember who Paul is writing to. In this morning's passage, it is the people of Thessalonica who were being harassed and persecuted by the Jews who did not choose to believe Jesus was the Messiah. We know this from Acts 17 which tells the story of Paul's visit to Thessalonica as well as from chapter 1 which talks about the peoples' "severe suffering".

Yet Paul still says "The will of God in Christ Jesus for you" is to rejoice all the time, pray all the time, and give thanks all the time. Regardless of circumstances, always rejoicing, praying and giving thanks. To do this, we first need to recognize that he says to do these things **in** all circumstances, not **for** all circumstances. We do not rejoice and give thanks to God because we didn't get the raise or were in a car wreck, or because our loved one has cancer. Though God can use those pains and bring good from them, God did not cause them, so we don't thank God for them. But we are thankful God is still with us in them. Anybody can rejoice and be thankful when circumstances are good. But even when they are not, God's will for our life is to be a people of thanksgiving and gratitude, because we know how our story ends. Even if we are in pain, (physical, emotional, spiritual pain); and even if there is no sign of the pain letting up, we know it is only temporary. We know how our story ends. It ends in resurrection. It ends with Jesus escorting us into the presence of the giver of life. It ends with you and I, free from the bounds of pain and time, freely worshipping God from the deepest part of my being. It ends with life – not death, not suffering, not anxiety – but life as it was supposed to be from the beginning. A new life defined by love, defined by worship, defined by doing it God's way, defined by joy, defined by light and peace and wholeness and contentment and what is right. We know how our story ends, and everything that is not right between now and then is just temporary. And for that, we can give thanks. For that we rejoice. No matter the circumstance we give thanks that our God is bigger. We give thanks that in Jesus, death and suffering do not get her last word. We give thanks that the weather does not define our mood, our aches and pains do not define our attitude, and our situation does not define our gratitude. God is bigger than them all, and God has shared with us the good news of Jesus, the good news of the way home, the good news of life after death, the good news that no matter what is happening, it is only temporary, and that God and God's promises are forever.

I know I should end there on that high note, but I can't. Because for many of us, life is pretty good right now. And though it seems like a no brainer to rejoice and give thanks to God when things are good, we fail to do it. There is this whole history section of the Old Testament from Joshua to Esther that also bleeds into the prophets that shares how God's people repeatedly fail to do it. When things got really bad and they had nowhere else to turn, they turned to God and prayed for God's help and started doing what God asked and trusting God's ways. And

things got better. Their crops grew, their economy grew, their influence in the world around them grew, and they became prosperous and powerful. And they said, “Look how good we are. Look at all we have accomplished. We are such wise people.” They failed to rejoice and give thanks to God, and started to rejoice and give thanks to themselves. Since they were so smart, they started to do things their own way. And before very long the whole kingdom came crashing down. Then they had nowhere else to turn, so they turned to God and prayed for God’s help and started doing what God asked and trusted God’s ways. And things got better, and they became prosperous and powerful. And they said, “Look at us. Look how smart and wise we are.” And the invaders came and the kingdom came crashing down. And they had nowhere else to turn, so they turned to God. And the cycle continued over and over and over again, because though it seems like a no brainer, we fail to rejoice and give God thanks when things are good. We start to thank God for our circumstances as opposed to being in our circumstances. And when we lose God in our circumstances, in our way of doing things, in our definitions of right and wrong, in our moral decision making, in the way we see and treat others; we are getting ready for a crash.

Paul, who knew the highs and the lows of life, writes to the Thessalonians who knew the highs and lows of life, and says, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” The will of God for you is to keep God, keep following God, keep thanking and rejoicing in God, keep praying to God; in all circumstances. To keep God in all circumstances. And then, you can’t help but be thankful.

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