

Knowing God's Will
Romans 8:26-28
(The Message Bible)
August 29, 2011

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Introduction: Recently there have been some stories in the news that ignite the questions about where is God when life hurts and innocent people suffer. One such story occurred about two weeks ago at the Indiana State Fair when a quick moving storm blew down the stage canopy at a concert and 7 people died. Questions will arise from a tragedy like that. Questions like, how can an all powerful and loving God allow people like that to suffer? Perhaps, some who were at the fair will give God thanks that their lives were spared when that stage came crashing down. Others will say that it must have been God's will for the seven that died, their time was up?

We as Christians have one of the greatest opportunities to make an impact on the lives of others and share Christ if we can speak truthfully about God's will especially in the midst of suffering and tragedy. 1 Peter 3:15 states, **"But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands an accounting for the hope that lies within you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence."** When people are hurting that is when they really want to know why they should trust God. We need to have more than a blanket answer that whatever happens is God's will. Because very quickly an answer like that makes God out to be distant, inconsistent and anything but loving.

A couple weeks ago, one of our members mentioned a book entitled "The Will of God," written by Dr. Leslie Weatherhead. I have read that book more than once, and for me, that little book that is only 86 pages long, first written in 1944 is still one of the

best most simple explanations for understanding how we can know God's will at work in life; especially in times of suffering and hurt. I want to use scripture and principles from that book, *The Will of God* this morning to look at the subject of knowing God's will. But in order to get into the message, we want to ask you to watch a video piece that is a little longer than what we like to use; but I think it will be beneficial to what we are focusing on today.

Show clip

The bold and encouraging truth scripture teaches is that God's will is ultimately at work in the world even in times like what Erik experienced. But I believe based on scripture there is a way we can see God's will even when we hear and experience stories like the one we just saw. We can see God show up and see God's will at work in three ways.

The Intentional Will of God: Genesis 1:27-31/ John 1:10-13

First there can be seen in scripture what Dr. Weatherhead called the intentional will of God. God's will is that life be good. We see this truth from the very beginning in the book of Genesis when we read Genesis 1. **Especially in verse 28 God blesses and says be fruitful multiply, fill the earth, take good care of the earth, and in verse 31 "God saw everything and said it was good."** The very first story from sacred scripture has God intending good not harm.

But lets even go to the life of Jesus. When Jesus came on the scene I believe God intended that to people which God gave the freedom to choose right from wrong, they did not have to reject Jesus. John's gospel chapter 1:9 describes Jesus as the true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. Verse 12 tells us that all who received Jesus he gave power to become children of God. It was God's intention that there be nothing but good in the world even for Jesus. I don't believe God set Jesus up

for rejection on the cross. I know it can seem that way. I believe God ultimately knew Jesus would be rejected, **but God's first intention was to give people a chance to accept Jesus; not reject him.** God's initial intention was for Jesus to be received and not suffer. Just as God's intention was the human race he created would enjoy this world and use it wisely and not rebel.

Scripture from both Old and New Testaments teach that God is not behind canopies at state fairs collapsing on innocent people or the pregnant wife of that man die in a car wreck. **God's intentional will is that life be good and most of all the goodness of life would be centered in Jesus Christ.**

The Circumstantial Will of God: Genesis:2:16-17, 3:6-9/ Matthew 23:37

However that brings us to facing the question then why is there suffering and evil of the innocent? Where is God's will when life is unfair like the story from Associated Press about the 70 year old boy scout leader in Indiana who was stabbed in the neck as he led a group of scouts on a trail. A young adult male came out of the woods and randomly stabbed and killed the man. It turns out the killer lived near by the woods where the boys scouts were hiking. He had gone into a rage at his home, assaulted his own mother, ran into the woods and came upon the boy scout troop as they were hiking.

The best answer is what Dr. Weatherhead identifies as **the circumstantial will of God. Our circumstances are that we live and exist within the boundaries and laws of God's creation. People and nature have freedom to act within the boundaries God has created.** God has created our world to be governed by natural laws like gravity. What goes up must come down. We like gravity as were walking down the street because we don't have to worry about floating away. We want the law of gravity to be in

effect as we arrange the furniture in our homes. We trust our stuff stays in the same place we put it so when we come home from work our house is in order. But when the laws of gravity that God put in place are tested and broken there can be danger, suffering and death.

- Did you hear recently about the 4 New Jersey high school football players who were driving to a meal after practiced and unexpectedly approached stopped traffic? The driver of their car hit his brakes, swerved and his SUV rolled according the circumstance of the laws of gravity, physical dynamics and four young men were killed.
- Or did you read this past week about the man who was an airplane stunt performer and while he was performing at an air show by walking on the wing of airplane, he fell to his death. He attempted a stunt of climbing onto a helicopter that hovered above the plane. The stunt man made a mistake or one of the aircraft operators did and the stunt man was killed. The circumstances of law of gravity which God gave us came into play.

God has given nature a certain amount of freedom including in our bodies and sometimes the freedom of bodily cells turns into cancer or other diseases. One of the members from the Mt. Carmel church called this week and asked prayer for his sister. She was rushed to the hospital and suddenly placed on ventilator and the family called into because the prognosis didn't look good. Her body contained high amounts of ammonia than it normally should not maintain.

God's circumstantial will has given all of creation freedom. Sometimes people like that young man in the video misuse freedom in driving and someone gets hurt. Sometimes that freedom will have a man attempt a dangerous stunt. Sometimes nature which has freedom to produce storms and freedom to reproduce bodily cells gets out of control and suffering occurs.

Jesus himself had to face this reality. Matthew 23:37 describes where Jesus weeps and expresses regret that the very people he came to reach were rejecting him. God didn't remove Jesus from the circumstances that allowed people the freedom to accept or reject him. **Suffering happens when forces that have the freedom to act in all circumstance oppose God's intentional will.** God has built freedom into people and nature, yes sometimes the circumstances of life will be in conflict with the intentional will of God and that when we suffer.

The Ultimate Will of God: Romans 8:28

But the final understanding of how God's will plays out is through **the ultimate will of God.** Ultimately, God's will is about His hope being the final answer to all that we experience in this life. God's will gets expressed in such a way that **he is sovereign even over suffering.**

Like the pastor in the video said, we look at our lives like a snap shot one at a time and we decide life is good or not, fair or life unfair, God cares or doesn't. But when God looks at what is going on he sees more than just that one scene, **God sees the entire movie of our existence that he has created and knows how it will end with his hope having the final victory.**

Romans 8:28 states that we can be sure in every circumstance God ultimately is seeking to bring about His good. Even though we suffer and die, God's hope can have the final word. **God's hope reminds us that there is the ultimate will of God.**

- The ultimate will of God is that nothing can separate us from his love even while we go through the trials of suffering.
- The ultimate will of God is that he can bring good out of any tragedy whether it is man made or an act of nature. Did you hear how Erik said in the video, **"I am what I am today because of what God has done for me through these**

circumstances.” And he also said, “When our little bit of faith intersects with God’s faithfulness, God shows up big.”

The ultimate will of God is that we surrender our will to his and use this life as dress rehearsal to spend eternity with him; not avoid and reject him and be lost for eternity.

Today we can face life assured God wants the best for us.

We can question and with a little faith trust that God is not the cause of our painful circumstances.

We can live and encourage one another to see how God is at work in our hearts to ultimately bring about His will.