



# LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## Your Will Be Done

St. Matthew 6:10

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So far in Jesus' model prayer we've seen how we are to come before God as our heavenly Father. We've seen that our first petition is that God's name be honoured – not just in our words, but in how we live our lives. Do we honour him in how we live or do we bring shame on his name. Last week we looked at the second petition: that God's kingdom come – that we would humbly submit to his lordship in our lives. That we would acknowledge him as our sovereign in our hearts and lives. You see, that's what it's all about. Mere belief that Jesus saves will never save you. Appropriating him as your *personal* Saviour is what saves you and the New Testament writers tell us over and over again that if you've truly done that, your one great desire will be to make him your Lord. You will desire to follow him. You'll desire to do what is pleasing to him. You'll happily humble yourself and submit to his authority and to what he tells you in his Word. Now, the third petition in the Lord's Prayer follows naturally:

**Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.** (Matthew 6:10b)

Do you notice how each of these first three petitions turns our hearts towards God and away from our natural inclinations? The natural man seeks only his own honour and glory, and yet Jesus tells us to pray that God's name be honoured. The natural man's desire is to be his own king, and yet Jesus tells us to pray that God's kingdom rule over us. And the natural man's biggest desire is to assert his own will, and here Jesus tells us to pray that God's will, not our own, be done.

So let's talk about wills. You see, at the root of sin is the assertion of our own will over God's. Satan was cast out of heaven because he decided that he wanted to be in charge. And think about Adam and Eve. God wanted people who would love and trust him. He created men and women as

finite beings. We're not all-knowing. But God *is* all-knowing. He *is* perfect in every way. And so his expectation was that his creatures would lovingly trust *him* to care for them. When God gave Adam the one rule not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he wasn't trying to keep something good from Adam. He was giving Adam a command based on his perfect knowledge of what was good for him. And yet tricked by Satan, Adam and Eve looked at the fruit of the tree, saw it looked pretty good, and decided to take God's role on themselves. And yet human beings were never created with the capacity to determine morality for themselves. Our view is very limited. We don't have the ability to see that what looks good right now, will do us harm further down the road. But that's what sin is: it's the assertion of our wills over God's. It's us saying that God doesn't know what he's doing or that he doesn't know and desire what's best for us. It's a sign of disloyalty to our Creator. It's cosmic treason.

And that's why the most telling evidence that the Holy Spirit has regenerated a human heart, is that that heart has become willing to pray, "Your will be done." That's the one thing the natural man or woman will *never* do, but turning our wills to conform to God's holy and perfect desires is the very first work of grace that happens in the Christian's heart. It's this desire for what God wants that gradually shapes our new life and renews our mind. It's this desire for what God wants that drives us to his Word, that drives us to seek out his character, that drives us to purge the sin from our lives, and that drives us to conform ourselves to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it has to be said that if you aren't driven in that way, you really need to go back and look at where you are with God. Is the knowledge of Jesus Christ the redeemer just head knowledge for you? Or have you appropriated his promises for yourself? And the big question: Are you still your own lord or have you made Jesus your Lord. Because Scripture tells us that making Jesus our Lord and submitting to his will is the most basic evidence of our faith – it's the most basic fruit of the Spirit.

And yet that begs the big question: "How do I know God's will?" We want to do what God wants, but how do we know what he wants? That's the problem. God

has given us a way to know his will, but too much of the time we try to find shortcuts because we're lazy and don't want to do the work.

When I was a teenager there was a girl at school I really liked. I was too gutless to just ask her out, so every time I walked past her house I'd ask God to give me some kind of sign as to whether or not she liked me. "God, if she likes me, let the sprinklers be running," or something like that. At least once I remember asking God to show me what I should do with the Bible, so I closed my eyes, opened it randomly and dropped my finger on a verse. Well, first, asking God for that kind of sign simply isn't biblical. It's like Gideon putting out his fleece. God had already told him what to do, but he didn't have the faith to believe what God had told him. Doing that sort of thing is trying to force God to follow pagan ideas about divination, and that's sinful. But even still – and more importantly – I wasn't asking the right question to start with. This girl wasn't a Christian. It didn't matter if she liked me or not – she wasn't someone I should have dated anyway – that would have been outside God's will.

The two men who had the most profound impact on my Christian growth were both the sorts of people everyone would always go to if they were seeking to know God's will. They always gave wise counsel. But in both cases, I figured out, the reason they were always so able to give wise and godly counsel was because they were both *deeply and profoundly steeped in Holy Scripture*. And I realised that if I ever wanted to be even an ounce like them, the only way to get there was to steep myself in Scripture too. And that's the hard part. That's why so many people are always seeking out that sort of Christian for advice. But you know, those two men didn't start out that way. Both of them had done the hard work and it had taken their entire lives. Our problem is that we live in a fast food, instant gratification culture. We want what we want and we want it now – even when it's something good like a knowledge of God's will. And so we look for a sign, or we look for a word from God or some kind of prophetic direct revelation, or instead of doing the work ourselves we constantly seek the advice of someone who has. And it's not to say that sometimes God doesn't give a sign, or a word, or counsel us through a wiser brother or sister, but ultimately what we need to understand is that if we want to

know God and to know his will, we have to know the Scriptures. We have to devote ourselves to God's revealed Word.

If you're married, think about when you first met your husband or your wife. You wanted to get to know them. Did you ignore them, or did you spend time with them to learn what they like and dislike, to know what drives them and what they love? We need to do the same thing with God. We need to spend time with him and most importantly we need to spend prayerful time in his Word. We also need to understand that God doesn't play hide and seek with us. He isn't into playing games. He doesn't hide his will from us. He wants us to know it and to live it. That's why he gave us the Bible. It's his direct revelation to men and women so that we can know him and follow him. There's nothing hidden here. God put it all in plain black and white *because he wants us to know it!*

Do you want to know God's will for you? If you're a Christian that should be your greatest desire. Turn to 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and look at what St. Paul writes:

**But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.**

The first thing Paul says there is that God gave us the Scriptures for *to teach us*. The Bible offers us lessons and instructions for life, so that we can develop skills, knowledge, and insight that will help us live in ways that are pleasing to him.

But that's not all. St. Paul also tells us that the Scriptures were given to *rebuken* us. God loves us and that's why he never hesitates to reprimand his people when they stray or turn away from him. The Bible shows us when and where we've strayed from God's path of truth and warns us when we're headed in the wrong direction. That word "rebuken" literally means "to force back," and that's what

Scripture does when it forces us to face God's truth.

The third thing Paul says is that the Scriptures were given to *correct* us. Correction changes something from wrong to right. Remember when your teacher would mark your test up with a red pen, showing you where you were wrong and what the right answers were. God's Word shows us where we're wrong and shows us what's right. God never just reprimands or scolds us. He always gives us correction so that we won't make the same mistake again. Scripture puts us back on the right path and back into a right relationship with God.

Finally, Paul tells us that Scripture was given for *training in righteousness*, so that we will conform our lives to God's standard. The Bible helps us to grow and mature. It shows us what God's goals are for us and shows us how to get there.

But here's the thing (and this is important) you'll never reap these benefits if you don't read and study God's Word. *Holy Scripture is God's immediate tool for shaping your life.* I don't know how to make this point strongly enough. If you are a Christian, it is absolutely critical that you spend time in God's Word each and every day. If you don't, you will never come to truly know God. The work of the Holy Spirit in your life will be stunted. The Bible is how God chose to reveal himself and his will to us, and there's no better way – no substitute – to know and experience God than through his living Word. If you pray, "Your will be done," but find yourself asking what God's will is, look at 1 Thessalonians 5:15-18:

**See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Do you want to know what God's will is? It's that you would rejoice, pray, give thanks, and seek after that which is good for everyone. God wants you to be a mature man or woman of God. He wants to see your character develop. He wants you to draw close to him and be changed. And he's given each of us the indwelling Holy Spirit to teach and to guide us in all of that. But *there aren't any shortcuts.*

God's way is to build our character through his Word and through the Holy Spirit in order to make us like Christ.

Still wondering what God's will for you is? Turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4:

**For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.**

Or how about 1 Peter 2:13-15:

**Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.**

That's God's will: your sanctification, that each of us, maturing in our faith and submitting to God's authority and commandments, practising the fruit of the Spirit (like self-control) and being pure and spotless in our actions will be witnesses of Jesus Christ to the world. Are you maturing in righteousness? By your life and actions do you draw unbelievers to the Cross, wanting to know what you have? Or by your actions do you bring shame on Christ and make his Body a laughing stock? Jesus Christ has given us an example of how we are to live our lives. The way we can come to know him better and follow his example is to read about him in our Bibles.

And yet we struggle to do that. We live in an age of books. Our bookstores are full of good and helpful books on the Christian life, but the downside is that too often we end up reading all *about* the Bible, but we never read the Bible itself. We read the latest books on God or on the Church or on the Family, but we forget to pick up the Bible and read what *it* has to say. And yet the Bible is the only book that is God's direct message to us. If you want to know his will for you, you have to spend time reading and studying it. If you don't you will never mature in the faith.

If you struggle in your walk with God, if you struggle to overcome sin in your life, or if you struggle to know what God's will for you is, I ask, "How much time do you

spend reading God's Word?" To know what pleases God and to grow in godly character you have to know his heart. And to know his heart, you have to draw close to him. Reading his personal message to his people is the way to know him. If you're serious about your walk with God you *will* spend time listening to his message.

And by way of specific application, I want to suggest three things that you keep in mind as you read and study Scripture:

First: *Pray*. If you want to know the mind of God, *pray through his Word*. Pray as you read that God would enlighten your heart and mind, so that you may know him. That's why he gave us the Holy Spirit – to lead us into truth.

One of the driest spiritual times I can remember was when I was in seminary working on my master's thesis. I was spending more hours than I could count immersed in Scripture, but the problem was that it was I had made it a strictly academic exercise. I'd lost sight of the real purpose of what I was doing. And then my advisor told me about a Bible scholar he knew who had had the same problem. And he said that that man had decided to begin approaching Scripture prayerfully, asking God to open his eyes and his heart, asking "Lord, speak to me through your Word." And after several weeks he started finding an amazing change and his soul started to burn for God and to desire more. God heard his prayer and started speaking through his Word.

In his introduction to Colossians, St. Paul prayed this for the Christians in that Church. He knew that the people needed a vibrant experience with Scripture if they were to be "filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding." *He knew that the result of meeting God in this way would be spiritual maturity. You need to immerse yourself in Scripture every day, but before you do so, you need to pray for the Lord to speak directly to you through his Word. Ask the Spirit to enlighten you. There's nothing mystical about it; it means having God's Spirit teach you. You can never separate prayer from God's Word.*

Second: *Memorise and meditate*. If you really want to know God's Word, not only will you read it, but you should also

memorise it and meditate on it. That way the Word can speak to you, counsel you, and guide you. When you face decisions or temptations in life, it's the Scripture reservoir that you've built up that you can draw on to know God's heart. If you don't have that reservoir, you're going to come up empty. David wrote in Psalm 1:1-3:

**Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.**

**He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.**

This is what Solomon tells us to do when he writes about God's commandments, "Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you" (Proverbs 6:21-22). He's not talking about the legalistic and Pharisaical practice of some modern Jews who literally wear God's Word on a necklace or tied to their foreheads. He's saying that *God's Word needs to be committed to our hearts and minds if it's going to do us any good.*

Think of learning to ride a bike. You see a tree ahead and everything in you wants to not hit it, but you do anyway, because your attention is so focused on it. The same thing happens in our spiritual life too. If we focus on temptation, we always seem to run smack into it. But Jesus teaches us a little lesson here. Remember when he was fasting in the desert for forty days? Satan came to tempt him three times, but in each case, Jesus turned him away and rebuked him using Scripture. You and I can do the same thing. If you struggle with sin, no matter what it is, commit Scriptures to memory that deal with that sin so that you can put your focus on God's Word instead of the temptation. When the world, the flesh, and the devil assault you, do what Jesus did.

Finally: *Humbly Obey*. It's not enough just to hear God's Word. You have to humbly obey it. In our culture we think of someone who is a fool as being

uneducated, but in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, he's not an ignorant person; he's a person who has the truth, but does nothing with it. St. James says,

**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.** (James 1:22-25)

He's saying that only a fool gets up in the morning, checks the mirror and sees that he needs a wash and a shave, then walks away from the mirror and forgets all about it.

The wise man or woman reads Scripture, meditates on it, memorises it, and puts it into practice. Most of the time what Scripture tells us is the opposite of what the natural and sinful man wants to hear. But that's the whole point. By his Word and the working of his Spirit, God humbles sinners and changes their desires to be in line with his own. That's what God desires from each of us. He wants us exposed to his thoughts, thinking his thoughts, so that he can change us. That's why St. Paul tells us:

**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** (Philippians 4:8-9)

When we pray, "Your will be done," we're asking for God to develop in each of us a heart for himself. When he was asked about what it meant to do God's will, John Calvin said, "Love God and do what you please." That's the key. If we truly love God, our great desire will be to know him and to know his will and ways, and the more we come to know him, the more our desires (our will and our way) will conform to his desires as we give up our whole selves as living sacrifices to him.

And so I urge you to cultivate that love for God – read, study, pray through, memorise, and obey his Holy Word – then do what you please, because God will have given you desires that are in accord with his own.

Please pray with me: Our Father in heaven, we give you thanks that you are working out your perfect will for your creation. But Father, we confess that too much of the time we fail to conform our wills to yours. We call you Lord, but we continue to do our own thing. We confess that it's often through ignorance, because we've failed to seek your will by knowing your Word. Forgive us Father, we ask, and give us new hearts that hunger to know your will and your ways. Give us a passion, we ask, for your Word that we might come to know you better and to humbly submit to your will and obey. We ask this through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.