



What is God's Will for my life (Part 3)
Did I Miss It?
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we are concluding our series with *Did I Miss It?* Have you ever lived with regret? Have you ever looked back on your life and be like *I wish that never would have happened.* It can be as simple as *I wish we would have bought a house in two thousand eight, when the housing market bottomed out. I wish we would have sold our house in 2020 or 2021. I wish I never would have started that business. I wish we would have taken that opportunity when it came our way. I never should have taken that job. I should have taken that job.* You're hearing the language, right? I should have, I should have, I should have. I should have married that person. I should have never married that person.

This series is not about a detailed or hidden roadmap for your life. This series has been about all of us following the moral will of God, as it's clearly laid out in scripture. Following the moral will of God, how we all ought to live, trusting his sovereign will and what, and what is his sovereign will? It is his plan that cannot be thwarted by any human. But we also know there is a personal will of God and often when we talk about the will of God, that's what people are referring to – What's God's special calling for my life? And yes, follower of Jesus, you were created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for you to do. And he has equipped you; you have a spiritual gift and a

passion or a heart motivation, abilities, even your personality. All of that comes together to live out his calling and will in your life.

There is a permissive will as well. This is our freedom to choose. This is why we can look back and see that *hey that was a bad decision*. That freedom to choose, that permissive will even leads some of us to stray.

But ultimately, God wants us to continually come back to him and learn to trust him and obey him. It's why we grew up singing the song *Trust and Obey, for there is not other way*. Following the moral will of God, trusting the sovereign will of God, making your plans, and knowing and believing and trusting that the Lord is going to direct your steps. That's been the heart of this series. And our prayer is David's prayer in Psalm 40, verse eight. ***I delight to do your will***. That's our desire. I delight to do your will and have your instruction deep within me. I don't see following the moral will and submitting to the sovereign will as this burden to carry, I delight in it. I get up every day trusting in it and I want to know what it is for my life.

So, what do you do though when your life is not aligned with the moral will of God? What do you do if it hasn't been aligned for quite some time? Maybe you're living with regret and thinking about all the decisions and all the relationships that are in your wake that you just think *man, I just wish that never would have happened*. Thinking you you've completely missed the will of God in your life and there is no way back.

Well, today that ends, hopefully for many of you. who here enjoys going to the dentist? I go to the dentist to do that regular cleaning. I know that's very important, but I hate when they go, "alright, hang tight. We are going to have the dentist come in and check." I'm like 'No, I don't need to talk to her. That's okay. You can send her on her way, I'm fine. I don't need her finding stuff.

Is there any worse feeling than that poking and prodding. And then and then when you hear them making sounds, I hate it. A physical is the same thing. they start poking and prodding and they are like Does that feel normal to you?

How many Many have had a home inspection on a home you're trying to sell, and you get that 40-page report back of every single little, tiny problem with your house. You feel very vulnerable.

Some of you are like that's why I don't like coming here to this place, with the poking and the prodding of this place. We understand. Today we are looking at not regret, but repentance because we get to say, "You know that person I was back there? I'm not that person anymore. I'm going in this direction.

You know that jerk I was in my first marriage, I'm not that person anymore. I'm going in this direction. You know the mistakes I made as a parent when my children were young? I'm not that parent anymore. I'm going in this direction.

We live in a culture... and this has kind of happened in the last five or six years where you could be 40 or 50 years old and something you did when you were in your twenties is going to be brought up. At this church, we believe there is always repentance. You can always repent for how you've lived and what you've done and the sins that you've committed.

We believe people can grow and change, so when people bring up your past to you, you get to go, "Oh that's who I was, but that's not who I am. I am moving forward in a different place in life. We believe people can repent, change and grow.

We say it around here all the time. Don't feed your regrets. We are not people of regret. Ask Jesus to redeem your remaining days.

Today is Mother's Day. Any body ever, as a parent, have regret? I told you I've announced this to my adult kids just in joking now. I tell them "I don't really have any regrets and they always give me plenty of examples. Things to hold onto just in case you haven't had regrets as a parent; I like to share some with you. In this room today, we have first time moms and we rejoice with you.

We have those in this room who this is your first Mother's Day without mom and we mourn with you. There are those in this room who want to be moms and you're just starting that journey. For some of you, you are being told you are going to be one soon.

For others, it's been infertility and I'm just grateful for Jenea and them and just want to remind you to stop by the cottage on your way out and seek prayer. I'm so glad people did that after the first gathering.

but we often don't talk about the parent, the mom or the dad in the room that lives with regret as they have an adult child who may be straying, not walking with the Lord. We'll get to that in a second, but all of us can have these should have moments.

I should have been more patient with my kids when they were growing up. I should have spent more time with my kids when they were little. It went fast. I should have prioritized time at home and not been so obsessed with my job and building my career. I should have spent less time on my device and more time talking to them. And body here ever have your adult children leave your house and you think to yourself, *why was I even on my phone while they were here?* I should have been less controlling and give them more responsibility at an earlier age.

I should have taken them to church more and prioritized that over all academics and athletics.

We can have these should have, should not have, we can have all of that in our head. They turn into scripts and the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy and we can allow that to rob us of our influence and rob us of our relationships with our kids, so when that narrative pops up and you're like how do you redeem your remaining days. When that script pops up that repeats, *it's too late*. Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, I'm here to tell you. If you are breathing, it's not too late.

We also fall for the lie, *it's my fault*. We are going to see in a second that even good parents have children who stray. We also can fall for this: I'm too far gone. Well, today, as we talk about repentance, turning from the world, turning from sin, turning from that way of life and turning toward the cross... this is something every single one of us can do at every and any single moment.

So, if you are living with this regret, repentance, as we are going to talk about today, keeps us from living that way. We don't have to choose to live that way.

John the Baptist came preaching repentance. In those days, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judah and saying "repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Jesus began to preach, saying repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near. When the apostles were sent out, they were sent out to preach that people should repent.

What is repentance? Sometimes we think repentance is just confession, repentance is saying I'm sorry, but repentance is more than just saying I'm sorry, God, repentance is saying please forgive me. I acknowledge my sin and I'm turning from it. I'm not going to live that

way anymore. I'm not choosing that way of life because many of you in here and across campus and online are on a path that you think is right, but it's your path, you've chosen it. and you think it's right, but it leads to death and destruction and to choose the moral will of God and to trust the sovereign will of God is to say, "I'm repenting of that way of living and I'm turning to go this way.

2 Peter 3: 9 – ***the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some*** understand slowness, Instead, he is patient. This is what I love about repentance and understand about repentance. I don't have to live with regret because the Lord is patient with me and he is kind.

Romans 2: 4 says his kindness leads us to repentance.

2 Peter: ***3 instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. That if you are choosing a way you think is your way, you're going to live the way the world lives and do what you want to do whenever you want to do it and that's a way that leads to death and destruction.*** But we can seek forgiveness and turn from it. You and I, all of us should grieve over our sin and turn from it. we should have sorrow over our sin, the sin that breaks God's heart.

2 Corinthians 7: ***10 godly sorrow brings repentance.*** I don't want regret, I don't want remorse, I want godly sorrow, knowing what my sin does to God. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. I get to say I'm not that person anymore. This is where I'm going. I don't live that way anymore. You see me now as a 40-year-old, 50 year old, sixty year old man or woman and when you see me... we grew up in the same town together, so you know I'm not that person I was in my 20's. I don't live that way anymore. I am following Jesus. But worldly sorrow brings death.

I like how Timothy Keller puts this. Some of us maybe grew up in a church or maybe a system that just taught say you're sorry for your sins and then go on with your life and you just found yourself in this pattern where you were constantly sinning and you couldn't just break out of it, and you really didn't grasp what repentance was.

Or maybe you grew up in a legalistic environment where it was just rules and rules and rules, but you didn't really grasp it and I think Timothy Keller packages this in a way that helped me years ago understand this. He talks about the legalism side of this. Legalistic remorse is not repentance. Legalistic remorse says I broke God's rules. So, as a parent, you've heard... years ago we used to have this in almost every parenting book. Rules without relationship equals rebellion. So if it's just rules all the time at your house and there is no relationship cultivated, it is going to lead to rebellion.

And often times, we are like are like these are God's rules, but this is what true repentance does. Real repentance or biblical repentance is I broke God's heart. God sent his son to die on the cross for me, for my forgiveness of sins and when I go against his moral will and don't repent and I don't really understand what it's doing to God's heart.

That's why I love the song we just ended with. And by the way, Thank you to everybody who has put all of this together this morning for the moms of our church. from the artists to the hospitality on campus, to the strings. Moms love strings.

But we ended with come now fount. I just want to tell you the story behind that song and why we chose that for this morning and the message to end out this series.

So bear with me as I share this story.

It was a bright Sunday morning in the 18th century in London. Robert Robinson's mood was anything but sunny. All along the street there were people hurrying to church, but in the midst of the crowd, Robinson was a lonely. The sound of church bells reminded him of years past when his faith in God was strong and the church was an intricate part of his life. It had been years since he set foot in a church, years of wandering and disillusionment and gradual defection from God, the God he once loved. That love for God, once fiery and passionate had slowly burned out within him, leaving him dark and cold inside. Robinson, as he was walking along, heard the clip clop clip clop of a horse drawn cab approaching behind him.

He turned, lifted his hand to hail the driver, but then he saw there was a woman who occupied the cab and he just put his hand down. But the lady in the cab ordered the cab to stop. She said, "Sir, I would be happy to share this carriage with you. Are you going to church?" Robinson wanted to decline, then he paused and he said yes. He said, *at last, I'm going to church.* He stepped into the carriage, sat down beside the young woman. As the carriage rolled forward, Robinson and the woman exchanged introductions.

There was a flash of recognition in her eyes when he stated his name. He said, "That's an interesting coincidence," she said, reaching into her purse, she withdrew a small book of inspirational verses, opened it to a ribbon bookmark page and handed the book to him. "I was just reading a verse by a poet named Robert Robinson. Could it be you?" He took the book nodding and said, "Yes, I wrote these words many years ago." "Oh how wonderful she exclaimed." "Imagine I'm sharing a carriage with the author of these wonderful lines. But Robinson barely heard her. He was absorbed in the words he was reading. They were words that would one day be set to music and become part of one of the greatest hymns of our faith, familiar to generations of Christians.

Come now fount of every blessing tune my heart to sing thy grace.
Streams of mercy never ceasing call for songs of loudest praise.

His eyes slipped to the bottom of the page where he read Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart Lord take and seal it, seal it for the courts above.

I've been practicing all week wander or wonder? I almost have to sing it to say it right. but you know we are all prone to wander. We would use the term in our day as drift. Drifting from the God that we love.

I want to start by showing you how the bible is full of stories and full of ways that show us the power of repentance and that God always gives us a way back.

If you've been here for any length of time, you know I am not a scorched earth guy. I am not for this modern that way that someone sins, someone falls that's attached to a church or an organization or a ministry, burn it to the ground. I've never been that guy. Why? Because I believe there is a path back. and the Bible is full of explaining this to us clearly.

But I want to start today because it's Mother's Day speaking to the mom right now who this is a very difficult day because you have an adult child who has strayed from the faith. You have an adult child who is prone to wander, and you know they are far from the Lord.

We have this book that we use in our church and in our small group ministry and many of you have had it in your small group, we've had classes on it. It's by our friend Jim Burns, who wrote the book *Doing life with your adult children*. The sub title of the book is the best part of the book in my opinion and I t's simply this: If you want to have a great

relationship with your adult child, it really simple – keep your mouth shut and the welcome mat out. How hard is that? Mom and Dad. It's one of the most difficult things we do. But I'm in that season of life now with adult children and I want them... I add one to it. It's keep your mouth shut, the welcome mat out and the refrigerator stocked. Stephany Watson gave me that years ago. I want adult children to be with me.

Jim just released a book; it came out this month. It's a great read. It's a very quick read if you want to grab it today on Amazon. It's called, *When your adult child strays*. I think you will be encouraged by it. In any season or stage of life, wherever your children are, he gives the grace and the comfort in here to how do you do this as a parent if you have an adult child who is straying

He puts straying into three categories. The first one is nomads. This would be like the spiritually disengaged. They are going to come to Christmas, they are going to come to Easter, they are going to be here on Mother's Day. Maybe back on Father's Day. But they are not against coming to church, but there is just no real connection. They just kind of bounce from place to place, church to church. There is no real connection.

He said the second group is what he calls exiles. These are those who are hurt, disconnected or, disillusioned these. are the ones that something happened and they want nothing to do with their parent's faith, they want nothing to do with the church. We obviously have an example that we will look at in a second in this third category, the prodigals. These are the openly rebellious. These are the ones that look to mom and dad and say, "Not only do I know want your faith, but I'm going to show you what the opposite of living the way you live looks like.

So, what do you do if you have child who is a nomad, or an exile, or a prodigal?

I think Jim gives us so many helpful encouragements of how to do this with grace, but without compromise. So, we can be parents of adult children straying and offer plenty of grace, but not compromise anything about our convictions because we want conviction without condemnation. How do you do that. I'm not saying anything I'm about to share with you is easy, but you hear us say this a lot. This is part of Jim's ministry as well. I'm going to give you four things today how to do that if you have a child who strays.

Number 1 Lead with influence, not control. By the way, just to remind you, if you have adult children and that's all you have left, influence is all you've got. You don't have control anymore. And if you want to squander your influence, be controlling. Tell them when to come over to your house, tell them when not to go the in-laws house but to be at your home and a certain time. Be controlling and see how much your adult children want to warm up to you. I am in that season right now and I do not want to squander my influence.

Number 2 – listen more than lecture. This is a tough one for me. I communicate for a living. And I got some good things to say. If you kids would sit down and shut up, you would learn something. How effective is that?

I think it was Alex Himya that said this years ago.

Don't listen to everything he says

Both of us struggle with this. I know almost every parent of adult children can have this strong tendency. You have to guard against turning every moment into a life lesson. You have to guard against

spending every minute like okay, you just shared something that I don't agree with 100% and I'm going to just share with your really quick...

Number 3 – avoid becoming a one topic parent. We know the elephant in the room. We know the thing that's really causing the tension in the family, but we don't need to discuss it every single minute of every single gathering that we are together as a family.

Number 4 - talk about normal life. Not only spiritual conflict. If you think your child is living in sinful disobedience, I promise you they already know what you're thinking. You've shared it. and talking about normal, it doesn't mean you are validating sinful choices. You have to be able to talk about other things in the midst because I want to be a parent that offers grace, but no compromise of my conviction. And then I want to offer conviction with no condemnation.

The Bible teaches us... I love this story. It's one of my favorite stories. If you're like, What do I pray for my adult child who is straying? How do I pray for an adult child who is not walking with the Lord? There is a man. We have the story in scripture. Who divided his estate between his two sons, the younger son took his share and left his dad and the Bible says squandered his wealth in wild living. That's a good phrase, but this phrase is even better even more. When he was at his lowest point, the Bible says and I quote, "he came to his senses." I love that. if you have an adult child who is straying, you never stop praying and you pray every day for that adult child to come to their senses. That one day they have that moment.

This is what we read in the story in Luke 15: 18 – I will set out and go back to my father and say to him... repentance this repentance. I have sinned against heaven and against you. the way I was living was wrong, that's the wild living, that's where I was that's who I was,

I'm not that way now, I'm going to return to the father. "I've come to my senses." What a great line for those who are ready to repent.

So, he got up, the Bible says, and went to his Father. But while he was a long way off, his father saw him, was filled with compassion for him, ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

And your church family will pray for that moment for you, that your child will return to their Heavenly Father and to you as their mother and Father.

But it's not just adult children who are prone to wander. Churches are prone to wander. I just want to remind our church as we are talking about this. I'm grateful, I hope you are grateful that you are not part of a pastor-led church. We believe in a plurality of elders and I'm here and I will never serve at a church that doesn't have a plurality of elders, why? It is scary to be part of a church, especially a church this size where one guy calls all the shots. You should be scared to death of that type of church.

Why? Because that guy can go cooco for coco puffs pretty quick. Have you seen that? Do you have any stories on that? You need a plurality of leaders, a plurality of elders that are able to step up, Why? Because churches, pastors, are prone to wander. They can get off course. Church members are prone to wander. And it's the job of the church to bring us back. If we're not diligent, church services can turn into concerts, where you come and observe worship rather than participating in it.

If we are not careful, we will wander and sermons become self-help talks seeking to improve your life rather than change it from the inside out as only Jesus can do. Or worse, we tell people what they want to hear so the church will accommodate everyone. No... not doing that.

We stop preaching the gospel of Jesus to try to start making everyone happy. We seek to be served rather than to serve. Churches form social clubs to a point where the lost are no longer welcome. That's just a few ways the church can stray or wander. We have to be diligent and I'm grateful for our leaders who keep us on task with this.

But, again I've, known plenty of churches that have been through very difficult times. I've had friends call me and say, "Hey, I'm being asked to consider this church, should I consider it? You know what they've been through, well, you know I'm not a scorched earth guy, I'm not a burn it to the ground guy, you go in there, you are going to take some licks, it's going to be beat out of you. it's going to be bad. Stand your ground. The Bible says that Jesus says the gates of hell will not prevail against the church.

There is even a way back for the church. We read this in revelation. Ephesus got off course. They were doing a lot of great stuff and a church can do a lot of great stuff and still wander, still drift from their first love.

I hold this against you, Jesus said. You have forsaken the love you had at first, consider how far you've fallen.

This is getting the home inspection report. This is sitting in the dentist chair prodding around going this is an area we need to look at and deal with immediately.

So, we need to consider as a church. Leaders should always be considering how's the church doing here? how we are doing on purposes, how are we handling money. We should always be considering so we can be faithful and good stewards. Then, if you find areas that you are off course, it's really simple. Repent. As a church,

repent and then go back and do the things you did at first. You got off course and maybe you weren't going this way and now you need to go this way. Turn and go back.

Adult children are prone to wander, churches are prone to wander, and in light of our 250th anniversary as a nation, guess what? Nations are prone to wander. A nation can be founded and rooted on the gospel of Jesus and still drift, still stray. Sometimes I wonder if the same is true of our nation. Some of you have asked this question so let's just talk about it. Is America too far gone? Have we allowed our wealth, our comfort to lead us away from God. Have we allowed the American dream to lull us into thinking we are in charge and we had something to do with this. Everyone in our culture today is screaming so loud about their personal rights and freedom that I don't know if we can hear the voice of God anymore because it's about us and what we want and what we demand and I'm going to get my way. We mock the image of God in men and women by saying we'll redefine it, we'll say what it is, we don't need God's Word on this. We mock the image of God in the sacred covenant of marriage that says we will redefine that as well. We remove God from our schools and the public square for fear of offending other Gods, religion, and people. It's very easy for a nation to drift.

We have this example in scripture as well. Israel, God's chosen people drifted. And it wasn't hey, too far gone, too late, no hope for you, no. when Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord, the Lord appeared to him at night and says... We read this in Second Chronicles 7: 13 and 14 when I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain or command the locust to devour the land or send a plague among my people... here's your way back.

It's everywhere. I hope when you read your Bible this week, you see the way back to the Lord. It begins with repentance, acknowledging your ways that lead to death and destruction and turning to the Lord.

Here's what it says: if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves...

Do you know what it takes to sit in a dentist chair and listen to the dentist? Humility. Do you know what it takes to read a 40 or 50 page report about the house that you raised your kids in that you loved.

That takes some humility

Do you know what it takes to consider your ways before the Lord? It takes humility. So, humble yourselves. Pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways. Turn from the ways that seem right to them and turn to the moral will of God. Then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.

Father, I pray for the one in here who has strayed from you. they once had it. They were in youth group and on fire for you. they graduated, left home, and the fire is gone, that today they would recognize that, acknowledge that, come to their senses, and turn to you, repent of their sins, turn to you, believe Jesus is Lord who has been raised from the dead. I pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that are living life their own way, that today would be the day of their salvation.

I pray for the Moms in here who have adult children who are straying that today will be a day they commit to praying for that adult child with as simple a prayer as "Father, that they would come to their senses and turn to you"

Keep this church on track. Keep us healthy that we would always be considering our ways before you that the members of this church would seek to serve and not just be served. That they would give and not seek just to be given to. Guard us in that.

I pray for this nation, this nation that I love, that we would return in all of our ways to you, that we would seek your face above all.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen