



What is God's Will for my life (Part 1)
Headed in the right direction
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are starting a new series today. We are going to spend three weeks talking about *what is God's will for my life?* A really simple, easy question. Today, we are starting with *Headed in the right direction*. Some of you right now are asking big questions like Should I marry this person? Should I break up with this person? Should I take this job? Should I quit this job? Should I start a business? Which college should I go to? What degree path should I choose. Some of you are here today asking the biggest question of them all - should I move to Branson? The answer is yes! Come on, we would love to have you.

But some of you are asking "Should I move to Texas?" "Should I move to Florida?" I love asking people the question – How did you end up in Branson? Have you ever noticed it's not a really easy answer. They want to tell you... a lot of times I'll hear "It's a God thing; it's a God story. And then I'll say tell it to me. They're like I don't have time. There are so many pieces and to be honest with you Ted, I can't really explain it to you, but we just know we have been led here by God.

I love hearing answers like that because this is a verse I come to time and time again as I'm thinking about my future at 52 years old. Proverbs 69 – we can make our plans. You know the Bible is clear.

We're supposed to think about the future, number you days? We're supposed to plan for the future. The Bible even teaches us to save for the future, so we shouldn't be afraid. We should not worry about the future or tomorrow, but we should definitely think about it. So, make your plans, but the Lord determines our steps.

I'm not even supposed to be here right now. I'm supposed to be in Nashville, living out my dreams as a country music star. That's where I was headed as a kid. And you know the difference between a dream and a plan, right? With a plan you actually buy a guitar, a plan is you take lessons, like you're investing in it.

Then I was going to be a photographer. That wasn't just a dream, I bought a camera. I bought a darkroom. I was pursuing it, I was getting education, I was taking classes on photography.

Then I was going to be a Politian. That was a dream. I made very little plans toward that. And here I am.

Honestly, when I think back over my life, I have no idea how I got here, but guess what? I trust that the Lord has directed my steps.

So, as we talk about the will of God, pastors and theologians have always put it in categories. And we are going to look at the categories throughout this series, because we are not going to obsess. We want to make sure we are following God first and foremost, and we are trusting him to direct our step.

Today, we are going to start off with discussing the moral will of God. This is true for all of us in here. Its what we are supposed to do and how we are supposed to live as followers of Jesus. It's how a Christian aught to behave. It comes straight from the scripture.

The other category is the sovereign will of God. This is the will of God that will be thwarted by no human. This is the plan of God that we can trust his sovereignty. We can trust that he is in control and he is in charge. And he is on the throne.

A lot of theologians and many that I trust and respect and stick with stop at these two right here. And they say, "If you are following the moral will of God and trusting the sovereign will of God, choose, decide.

I remember sitting down with a pastor friend years ago that I deeply respect, and he was deciding between continuing to pastor in Chicago or moving to California to pastor. And I said, wow, how did you decide?" he goes, "We prayed and we prayed we prayed, and God said, you can do either. And I said "Yeah, that doesn't work for me. I grew up Baptist and it's very specific. Like he doesn't just call you to be a missionary, he gives you a continent and a city...

He goes, no, Ted, this is where sometimes we miss it. but he says "I'm following the Lord, the Moral will, I'm walking with Jesus. I trust him working out the steps in my life and I have to make choices.

I hope in this series you will align your life with the Word of God, listen to trusted voices, others who are walking with the Lord and have walked with the Lord for a long time, trusting him at work in your life, and then choose, decide, live in freedom, live in peace.

But often, when we ask the question what God's will for my life is? we are really talking about this right here – individual will. I want an answer to the decision I need to make right now. I want God to speak it to me. I want the clouds to part, and I want to hear an audible voice. I've been at those places in my life. I want a direct answer. But what we are going to see in this series, through open doors, through closed

doors, through frustrated plans, is that God is working out his plan for your life and for my life. And we can trust it.

So, in the individual will, the personal, the personal permissive will, you have a choice to make and it's before you, but here's where we're starting today- you'll know you are headed in the right direction when you do what God says, so align your life with the Word of God.

Psalm 1:19 and 105, I love this. ***Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.*** In other words, I may not see five years down the road or 10 years down the road. How many of you love it when people ask you the question, "What's your five-year plan?" anybody ever fumble that question? How many of you have given someone a real, definite answer on your five-to-ten-year plan and then five to ten years later it's nothing like you described.

That's because his word is a lamp, a light, and it gives me what I need to take the next step. And I hope, in this series, for the those of you that need to make a decision, you'll take the step, you'll choose, but there are some things you have to have straight before then.

Emmerson Egrich says this and this is where we are going today because he wrote a book on the four wills of God. Not the categories, but the four times in the New Testament where we specifically read "This is the will of God." Where it's explicitly stated. And we are going to start there today. I love what Emerson says. He says, "How can you miss his will when you're doing his will?" We want to make sure our lives are aligned. Many of you in here have walked have with the Lord for a long time, you can look back on your life and see how he has directed your steps. This series is about you staying the course and finishing well. Don't we all want that? Stay the course, finish well. There are others in here that believe they have been traveling in the wrong direction for far too long. "I don't even need to listen to the rest

of the message because I could answer the first question – am I heading in the right direction? “No, I’m not, but I’ve been traveling in this direction for far too long and I’m way too far gone.” and I want to tell you that is a lie. You are not too far gone and it’s not too late. There is hope for you today. If you are heading in the wrong direction today, we hope you turn around and start heading in the right direction and you can do that when you leave here today.

So, from simple daily choices to big life decisions, which is what we are going to cover in this series. Many are asking, what does God want for my life? What’s the next step I need to take? “Or am I in the will of God? I just made a big decision.” Was this the right decision to make? Is he pleased with my choices?” We are also going to talk in this series about how God reveals his will to us?

The best way to know you are headed in the right direction is to align your life with God’s word. I love Nautical illustrations. This one comes from Bob Mumford in his book *take another look at guidance*. He talks about a certain harbor in Italy that can only be reached by sailing up a narrow channel between dangerous rock and Choules. And there is only one very specific path you can take in order to make it in safely. And over the years, many ships have been wrecked, they sink, navigation is very hazardous. So, to guide the ship safely into port, they have established three large poles with lights on them. The captain of the ship knows that if I see one light, I can proceed safely. If I see two or three lights, I’m off course. I need to stop and back up and realign.

When these three lights are perfectly lined up and seen as one, the ship can safely proceed up the narrow channel. If the pilot sees more than one light, he knows he’s off course.

God has also provided us the same lights to align our lights with. They are like beacons to guide us. These lights must be lined up for us to

safely proceed. He says, "Together, they assure us that the directions we received are from God and will lead us safely along his way.

Today, we are going to look at four...this is the only four places where it explicitly states this is the will of God. This is not all of the will of God, but it's almost like he gives us these four beacons, these four lights to say, start here, this is where I want you to begin.

So, for all of us in here today, speaking of the moral will of God, we want all four of these lights aligned. And then live at peace and freedom, begin to choose and make choices for your life. These four lights are straight from scripture, they clearly state this is God's will. We know there is more to understanding God's will than just these four, but it's like start here. If you choose to ignore these four and say I'm not going to align them in my life, I can promise you that you are off course, and you are headed in the wrong direction. This is why sometimes people ask big questions about life and decisions they need to make. And the answers are really simple. We can say no, don't do that. Why? Because the scripture is very clear on the next step forward with that.

But if you are heading in the wrong direction, turn it around.

So, I want to give a disclaimer. I always love giving a disclaimer to this because some of you right now are deciding on what school to attend and you're like this series better answer it for me. I always laugh. Gary Thomas always talked about that high school graduate sitting around in the summer before freshman year of college mad that none of these schools were calling him to accept him, until you find out this kid never applied to any colleges. Guess what? If you want something, you have to take steps.

Some of you are like I don't know why I'm not dating anyone.

You haven't asked anybody to go on a date, so don't point at this series like I didn't get any answers." You have to do something; you have to take steps. And the goal of this message today is to make sure these lights are aligned so that you are making good decisions, you're listening to trusted, wise voices in the process.

So, as we look at these four wills of God today, you may come to the conclusion, I feel like I do have these four aligned in my life. I could check the box on all four and I'm seeing one light, not four. And I'm still not getting answers for next steps. I'm just going to say it again. If you are following his moral will and you have these aligned, you've searched the scripture, you've poured over the scripture, seeking the Lord's will in the decision that you're making, you're praying fervently, about this decision, you're seeking wise voices, hear me clearly. Walk in freedom and peace and choose. Make a decision, take a step.

Let's look at the first light today. the first light today is believe in Jesus.

Look what it says in John 6: 40 ***For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the son, Jesus, and believes in him, shall have eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day.***

Let me lay this out clearly. You can participate as we go, but I'm going to ask some questions and here's how you can see if this first light is aligned in your life. ***We believe that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We believe every human being is conceived in iniquity, born in sin and on that is that is the penalty of sin. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

Romans 6: 23 – ***for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

I wan to make this as clear as possible for those of you this is the first time you've ever considered what it means to know the will of God in

your life. Feel free to answer this to yourself, just between you and the Lord, but I didn't mean this in the first gathering... People started shouting out the answers I was like let's go Pentecostal, let's do it. Some of you are going to turn to your neighbor and give the answers and that's fine too. Do you believe that Jesus is the son of God? Do you believe he lived a sinless life and died on the cross for your sins? Is Jesus your savior and the Lord of your life? Do you believe he rose from the dead? We are aligning these lights. We ask those questions every time someone steps into the baptismal, which is just a couple of weeks away. Memorial Day weekend. We start our family reunion series every year now with a baptism. Some of you are going to sign up, planned and, and for some, it's going to be spontaneous. In past years, we've had more spontaneous baptism on that day than we had planned or scheduled baptisms on that day.

In Romans 10: 9, the bible says ***if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.***

Now, you can say, yes, I know I have a sin problem, yes, I know I'm going in the wrong direction, but I'm working some things out in my life. That's not how you get salvation. Jesus is the only name. So, you are not going to fix it, you're not going to work it out yourself. you are not going to promise to be good, you're not going to try to be more loving, you're not going to say, I'm going to attend church more often... All of that is good, but it's overflow. It is not the source of your salvation. Jesus is the source of salvation. So, hear it clearly today with this first light, this first will of God. You are not good enough to save yourself and you're not too far gone for Jesus you. all your goodness effort, attendance, kindness, and love, have absolutely nothing to do with your salvation. It's the overflow. Jesus alone saves.

I want to share... I'm sharing it at all our gatherings for many of you, this is going to be the first time hearing the news, especially this side of the Castle today.

Last week, when you walked in, many of you were given a seat by a gentleman named Al Voyer. Glenda was back there today. Al served last Sunday and last Sunday night went to be with the Lord.

I received a phone call that he was unresponsive at his home and by the time I got over there, he was with the Lord. Let me tell you, I think Glenda is probably stepped out by now.

We say it all the time around here. Joy and sorrow are travel companions. And in the first five minutes of hugging Glenda we were crying and we were laughing. You had to know Al. Al not only believed in Jesus and not only did he leave it all the on court, he served the last day he was alive on earth. Dave was back there trying to greet and seat some of you and I was like Dave; you're not cutting it. You are too nice. Al was the gruff one going move over. If that ain't your purse, It's mine now. That was Al. We loved Al. Al would only comment on the message or say something nice about the message if he felt it was not strong enough.

There were times I would walk back, and he'd look at me and go, "You held back on that one point! He wanted me to get at it every time, with every point. My last conversation with him, Al said "You know why I'm not a preacher?? I said, I have a couple reasons... He said, "I can't edit. Al studied his Bible for hours a day. Not only did he serve, I'll show you a picture of AL there is Al at Starting Point, and we took him off of meat.

But Al was at every Starting Point serving. He studied his Bible for hours so he could teach at his bible study at his home groups or small groups.

Cathy Jensen told him a couple of years ago she had heard from people in his group that they had spent three years studying the Book of Revelation and we had to break it to AL that he was going to have to study something else. Just for a little bit. You have to take a break from Revelation. Al said, "Fine, we'll study Daniel"

You'd find AL all over this campus, praying with people. He not only believed in Jesus, he not only served the church, but he always said he longed for heaven. He longed for heaven. I lost count of the number of times AL told me I'm ready to be with Jesus. Wess Hartly was telling me after the last gathering, he said, Lane McCandless on our teaching team, preached AL funeral and Wess goes, You'll never get an easier funeral in all of your life to preach. It's like we handed you the greatest gift because I told you multiple times I don't want to get to your funeral and have people going was he a believer? There was nothing in their life that showed the fruit of it, but it was not a question with AL. He believed in Jesus and he loved Jesus.

You can play a lot of basketball in the last 60 seconds and All was playing in the last 60 seconds. Align this light in your life

The second light we have to align as we move from justification, to being declared righteous, now we talk sanctification. It's very clear, Paul points it out in First Thessalonians 4: 3 to pursue sexual purity. It is God's will that you should be sanctified. Now this is what we call the scope of salvation. When you are saved, when you place faith alone in Christ alone, when you acknowledge that you are a sinner, you confess, repent of your sin, declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord, Believe in your heart he has been raised from the dead, you are saved, your are justified, you are declared righteous and you are freed from the penalty of sin, which is death But now believers were being sanctified and what does it mean to be sanctified?

We are being freed from the power of sin. And one day, we are going to be freed from the very presence of sin.

On Sunday night, AL fought his final war with pain. And that was it and he now is with the Lord. But the Bible says you should be sanctified and that you should avoid sexual immorality. And when we talk about sexual purity, this is a conversation not just for students or singles, but for all of us to pursue sexual purity. These instructions are clear for all of God's people. The Pagan culture that the Thessalonians found themselves in made sexual immorality part of everyday life and even included it in worship. But we are called to flee from it.

believers are called to abstain from all sexual perversion – adultery, premarital, extramarital, fornication. It means stop sleeping with your boyfriend, stop sleeping with your girlfriend. Again, a lot of people hear the bible teach this and say “Well, that’s for the young people.” Let me tell you, my senior adult friends, when your spouse passes away, don’t invite your new boyfriend or girlfriend on a cruise. That I even have to say this blows my mind with people who have walked with the Lord for a long time. The Bible is clear. Hebrew 13:4 ***Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.***

When we get to the membership covenant at starting point and talk about what it means to live a godly life, what it means to live a holy life I simply make this statement that if you are here tonight at starting point, wanting to join Woodland Hills, but you are living with your boyfriend or girlfriend, I want to sign your marriage license long before I ever sign a membership covenant.

I’m going to make that same thing to everyone, everyone watching across campus, everybody watching online. If you are living with your boyfriend or girlfriend, bring me a marriage license next Sunday and I

will marry you between services right here. We will do the fastest premarital counselling you've ever seen in your life and I will ask you if you believe in Jesus. I will ask you all the questions we just asked, but you're saying we know what we are doing, we know it's not aligned with God's word, and we are ready to align this light in our life. Let's take care of business. If you say that, if you mean that, bring it between services. We'll gather some people around. We'll find flowers or something. They'll be around, but we will sign a marriage license so that marriage can be honored by all. And the marriage bed kept pure. Get this light aligned in your life. Again, it is not just for singles, it's for all of us. What are you watching, what are you listening to. Are you pursuing sexual purity in your life, for this is God's will for your life. And you know this is where so many in our culture are getting tripped up today with not being careful at all

Number 3 is the next light to align. **Practice gratitude.** It goes on just a little bit further in Thessalonians Give *thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in christ Jesus.* With everything we talked about today, we should be the most grateful people on the planet. When you walked with AL and Glenda, you know what you saw in Al and Glenda Boyer? The most grateful people you'll ever meet. AL was gruff in every kind of good way. He loved the Lord and he was grateful.

He was always thanking people always... the bible is clear in it's teaching on this. We don't allow circumstances to determine our joy, contentment, the light, or gratitude. We find the light, gratitude, joy, contentment, in Christ so that in any circumstance, we can be grateful. We give thanks to the Lord through difficult seasons, through difficult stages of life. Some of you have been through deep, dark valley's and ultimately, you came out on the other side, you've learned some things. You have gratitude in your heart. I look at seniors in here. You can look back on your life and see how God directed your steps and you can be grateful for it. and in times where you are trying to figure out what to

be grateful for it, go back and see how God has directed your steps. If you get frustrated after you move to Branson because you thought God called you here and things happened in Branson that didn't pan out and you realized wow! We don't ride go-carts and eat funnel cakes every day. We are just a normal town that has stuff happening in this town that happens in every town. Once you get to that point, don't forget to look back and see how you were brought here. Being grateful, You can look back on how he brought you through it, he taught you great lessons in your life because of it. gratitude improves your relationships, your sleep, your immunity increases, aggravation, anxiety, depression. We know this in marriage ministry. The best marriages are when you have a husband and wife who are grateful for each other. Not trying to change each other, but grateful for one another. So, I wanted to practice it this week and so I just wrote down a few reasons why I'm grateful for you, my church family. I do this several times a year

1 – you expect strong biblical teaching. It's an expectation. Bob, who was in our first gathering, is in the final quarter if not overtime of his life and dealing with a lot of stuff. He's the one that always asks me "How's the material today?" "that's what he calls the message.

He's a lot like AL. Al would come up and be like Hey, when you said this, I felt like you were holding back. go, give it"

You give generously to meet the needs of those in our community. I had someone come up to me in the first gathering in need and it was just great to go, "I don't even really have to look at a budget. I'm not in charge of the budget, I don't write checks, but I looked at this person and talked to so and so and we'll take care of it.

That's just because of your generosity. The believers were all one at heart and mind and they didn't see anything they owned as their own but from time to time they sold property, brought the money and the

proceeds went to the church and then they distributed it to people as they had need. That's what you do

Your gratitude for the Lord is evident when you worship. You invite your family and friends. You warmly welcome our guests when they show up. You serve faithfully and, and you love to laugh.

I'm grateful for all of that in you, my church family.

So, believe in Jesus, pursue sexual purity,

Practice gratitude
Do what's right.

I love this. It's almost like it's the light that covers everything else. But do what's right.

1 Peter 2: 13 – 15 ***submit your self... hold onto this for the rest of this point. For the Lord's sake. Why do we submit to the government? Why do we submit to the laws?***

It's for the Lord's sake, not because we fear being punished. But we submit as unto the Lord.

So, submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human authority whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors who were sent by him to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right, which is the primary purpose of government. That's a whole other series. For it is God's will that by doing good, doing right, doing what's right, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

Have you ever heard anybody say take the highroad? Take the high road means you do the right thing, you say the right thing, you don't participate in the gossip or the slander and all that going on and over time, people are going to see that. Your reputation will stand on it's own.

So, do the right thing, and guess what? You will silence the foolish talk, the ignorant talk of foolish people. Christians are called to obey the laws that the governor has in place, so long as we are not told to do something that the Bible forbids or are forbidden to do something the bible commands. Those are the only two acceptations.

But we obey the laws. By submitting to the law and those in charge, we honor God. Avoiding punishment is not our primary motivation. Our motivation is to please the Lord. When persecuted, accused, mistreated, we let our good behavior stand on it's own. We let our good behavior silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Christians should be great citizens. Grateful people, great citizens, so let me ask you, are you cutting any corners to get away with anything lately? We Just came out of tax season.

Are you cutting any laws just to make it...

When you think about it, again, today, these four are not all there is to the moral will of God, but it's a start here. Believe in Jesus, be sanctified and pursue sexual purity. Be grateful and do what's right. have these aligned in your life and some of you are like, I'm still at that place. I have a decision to make, this message didn't give me the clarity, I'm just going to say this, – before you plan tomorrow, make sure you are living right today. get the living right today settled first, and align your life with God's Word. Then think about tomorrow. Number your days. You should be thinking about tomorrow. Make plans for tomorrow. Plans are good. Invite others into those plans, get

wise counsel. Save, don't devour. Wise people don't devour all they have today. they put something away for tomorrow.

If you have these four aligned, and you are walking with the Lord, take a deep breath, choose, enjoy your relationship with the Lord and the life he gave you.

I will leave you with this. Is anybody in here worried? I'm the best worrier in my family. Amy doesn't worry, which means I have to worry for both of us.

If you get a text today from your boss that says, meet me first thing in my office tomorrow. okay. Those people that just made noise, they are my people. How many of you would lose sleep off of that text? I would. Because what you have to do is come up with scenarios. You have to get all these scenarios going because you need rebuttal to each possibility and I'm going to have no less than 5 to 20 scenarios walking in to that office tomorrow.

How many of you if you got that text would be like, "I'm getting a raise?"

Well good for you sunshine. The rest of us go to a very dark place really fast. We are to plan for tomorrow, we are to seek wise counsel for tomorrow, we are to think about tomorrow, we are to save for tomorrow, but what we are not supposed to do is worry about tomorrow. You have plenty going on today. take the next step.

People tell me they don't know what to pray for. Phillipians 4:6 gives you all you need to pray for. **do not worry about anything, instead, pray about everything.** So, if you don't know what to pray for, just put a list together of your worries. What are you worried about. And start there.

Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Look back and see how he has directed your steps. 52 years old in Branson, Missouri, preacher in a castle. I never thought that for a day in my life. How many of you can look back on your life and where you are now and go, 20 years ago, never thought in a million years I'd be where I am right now. Let me just see your hands.

But guess what? God directs our steps. I'm still going to plan. I have big plans. I'm not dead to my dream of country music yet. Move over Morgan Wallen. Cody Johnson did it all online. He didn't need no record label. You never know Jim Elliot missionary, said this, – wherever you are, be all there. Live life to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God. You have plenty going on today... live in make the most of this. Choose, take the step. Live in peace, live in freedom.

I'm just going to end. I put it in the notes because since easter, I've been singing the song "Because he lives." I've also been singing what somebody sent me some of the southern gospel that I said the whole summer is southern gospel at Woodland hills. This stuff is so on fire. I've been listening to I'll fly away, and when we all get to heaven, and I keep coming back to my dear friend AL. Who has experienced this final verse.? And then one day I'll cross the river and I'll fight life's final war with pain and then his death gives way to victory. I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know he lives."

Let us walk in the will of God today and make the most of every situation that he brings across our path.

Father, I thank you for Glenda today and I pray grateful for a church that has gathered around her to mourn with her and to comfort her in this time. I just pray for peace for her as she continues to serve.

Grateful for the testimony of AL and how he impacted so many of us. We are going to miss his Amens in this church.

I pray for the ones who right now are headed in the wrong direction, that today the holy spirit calls them by name, and they seek to begin to align the four truths, these four wills of God straight from scripture today in their life. And that they begin heading in the right direction, starting with belief in Jesus, faith in Jesus Christ, and

I just pray for those who need to make big decisions that as we go through this series, they will be able to take a deep breath, they'll be able to walk in that permissive will of God and that personal will of God, knowing you are directing their steps, even as we pray that we would trust you in you and your work in our lives.

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