

IF IT BE YOUR WILL

By Sarah Gandy

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:36-44

[36] Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." [37] And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. [38] Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." [39] And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." [40] And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? [41] Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." [42] He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." [43] Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. [44] And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. [45] Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. [46] Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

OBSERVATION

Throughout scripture we are given examples of prayer—prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of repentance, prayers of petition. But in Matthew 26:36-44, we see Jesus pray the will of the Father. The passage takes place on the night of the Lord's supper, as Jesus walked with His disciples to where He knew He'd be betrayed and arrested. He is about to be crucified and die on the cross to save all people from sin. In what is described as soul-crushing grief in some translations, Jesus bowed before God and cried out these words, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." Then again in verse 42 He prays a second time, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."

I often hear prayers begin or end with "if it be your will, Lord," and it seems more ritualistic than authentic. But Jesus's prayer in the garden is a genuine depiction of praying the will of the Father. As I read this scripture, I imagine Jesus on His face before God crying out for mercy, while faithfully asking God's will to be accomplished even if it meant He would die. When *we* pray it is dying to our own desires and trusting His purpose to be fulfilled, even if it means we must suffer for His kingdom's sake. Our human flesh will always fight to pray for our own selfish desires. This is why the scriptures tell us to follow Jesus, we must die to ourselves daily (Luke 9:23).

Prayer is one of the hallmarks of a disciple of Christ and effective prayer aligns with the will of God. But how do we know the will of God, much less pray it? Dr. Charles Stanley defined the will of God as “that which God approves and determines to bring about; it concerns God’s choices of what to do and what not to do.” So how do we know what God approves and determines? Simply put, the Word. The will of the Father will never contradict the Word of God, but to know the will of God you must spend time in His Word. Consider your favorite sports team and the amount of time they put into preparing for each game. Regardless of natural ability, without proper training and discipline they will not be successful. The same is true of our prayer life. Our “natural ability” is sinful flesh, but by the power of the Holy Spirit we find freedom to pray the will of the Father. Praying the will of God is a spiritual discipline that cannot be accomplished apart from a personal relationship with Christ.

OBEDIENCE

There are a number of things we can learn about prayer from Jesus in this passage of scripture. Most vividly, we witness an act of obedience as He prays God’s will above His own, ultimately fulfilling God’s plan for the salvation of mankind. Prayer is an act of obedience and a Christian’s responsibility to develop intimacy with the Father, following the model of Jesus.

- When we pray the will of God, we release control to a holy and righteous God. Can you honestly say you have released control of your life to walk in obedience to Christ? If not, start there; repent, call on Him, and seek to follow Christ as Lord.
- Spend time in prayer this week, humbly asking that your heart be aligned with His will for your life. If you are unsure, spend time in the Word for clarity. Then pray to that end, whatever the consequence.
- Consider the last “major” decision you made. Did you spend time seeking the will of the Father before moving forward? The purchase/sale of a home or vehicle, a relationship, the school you attend, the career you pursue... big or small, did you seek Him for guidance? If not, repent and then ask that He use your decision to reveal Himself more fully to you.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for loving us and sending Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Grant us grace as we seek to honor You and insight to know Your will for our lives. As we pray, give us discernment to know how to pray and faith to trust Your ways are better than our own. Use Your Word to align our hearts with Your will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.