

I went to college at Pittsburgh State University some years ago, and I was undeclared for my first three semesters as a student there. At the time, if you came to your third semester, and you hadn't yet decided what your major was going to be, they made you enroll in a particular class. I don't remember what the name of the class was, but essentially is, "We're going to help you figure out what you're doing with the rest of your life." That was the subtext that they had there for you. And there were quizzes about things that you might like to do, or what you didn't like to do, things that you were good at, and talks about different opportunities for jobs after college. But the reminder was that you really do need to decide on a major.

I believe that part of my hesitance in declaring a major at that time in my life was that I wanted to make sure that I was choosing the right one. I wanted to make sure that I was choosing wisely, that it was something I was good at, and something that I could make a reasonable living, that I was falling in line with what God had in mind for me. I struggled with that during my first several years in college, and I think by the time I reached the end of that class I decided on biomedical engineering as a possibility for me, so I became a biology major.

I didn't end up doing that for my career, clearly, but it was an example in my life that something I was struggling with, that I think a lot of people struggle with. The question that I was wrestling with turns out to be one of the most common questions that I receive as a pastor, and it goes something like this: What do you think God wants me to do? What is God's will for my life? How do I know that I'm going in the right direction?

Have you ever asked questions like that? I ask myself [inaudible 00:01:47] questions like this on a regular basis, it seems. And I would guess that among those that are here today, there are some that have significant decisions to make in the next week, in the next few months, or maybe some decisions that need to be made before the end of the year. Will you do this? Will you do that? I don't know what it is for you, but maybe a decision that has an impact on your life, on your career, on your family, on our community. And maybe, if you're something like me, you're looking for a little divine direction.

This worship series is designed to help us understand more about God's will in our lives, and how we might move in a divine direction. Today we're going to consider two ideas that build a foundation for the weeks ahead, and they're focused on this question: When it comes to God's will, what does God care about? What does God care about when it comes to God's will for our life? And when it comes to God's will, I would offer to you that one of the things that God cares about is that God cares about Who before Do. When it comes to the will of God, cares more about who you are than what you're going to do with your life. God cares about Who before Do.

When we look to the scriptures, we find that God's desire for humankind is for all of us to be holy. This is something that has to do with who we are. It doesn't really matter what it is that we do during the day. The Bible may give us clues about what it is that we might do in our life, but the most significant guidance that we find in the scriptures is that God's will for us is to be holy. It's a part of who we are. Holy is a word that means set apart. It means being different. Sometimes we get stuck in our head that holy is something for only a few select people in life, or maybe something that only happens when we're here in this space or around people that we deal with.

But holy is something that can live out in every part of our life. It means being different. If you're a follower of Jesus, we're invited not to look like the world around us. We're invited to look like Jesus. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're not to be driven by the values of this world. We're invited to make decisions and hold values based on the teachings and life of Jesus. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're not to live for what you see as important. We're invited to live for what God sees as important. We're invited to model our life after Christ, no matter what it is that we do. No matter how we spend our time during the day. God's will for you is more about who you are than it is about what it is that you do.

Part of what's true about that is that who you are never reaches a conclusion. You can have milestones in your life, when you think about what it is that you do. You might graduate with a particular major; you might begin a job; you might continue a career, get promoted, and come to retirement. There's milestones that might happen in what it is that you do, but when you think about who you are, that never ends. There are always ways to grow and to change, and to take the next step in following after God. Whether you are just beginning a life of following Jesus, or whether you've lived faithfully for years and years, there's always something more. There's always room to grow, to become more like Jesus.

That's why this series is called Divine Direction. We're moving in the direction, but it's not a divine destination. We've never arrived when it comes to following Jesus. You can never reach a place in your life where you say, "All right. Well, that's it. I'm finally all that I might be as a follower of Christ. I can hope for no more; that just doesn't exist." Instead, we're moving in a direction. In a direction that leads towards the cross. In a direction that follows after God. In a direction in which we love God and love our neighbors. We're moving toward Jesus; we're becoming like Jesus. Who we are is becoming more like Christ.

The question that we often find ourselves asking is, "What does God want me to do?" What and do. And I invite you to consider a different question, and that's this: "Who does God want me to become?" Who does God want me to become? If you start with the Who, it will eventually lead you to the Do. Who you're following, Jesus, is even more important than what it is that you're doing. When you're becoming who God wants you to be, you will find your way. You'll be moving in the divine direction. God cares about Who before Do.

The second thing that I would offer for you to ... The second thought for today is that God's will is Why before What. God's will is Why before What. For you see, motives matter to the heart of God. It's not just the actions that you take; it's the why that comes behind it. Now it is true that sometimes we take actions, and our hearts begin to change, but it's those motives that must change over time so that they might become more God-centered and less self-centered.

Let's take a look at Proverbs chapter 16, verse 2: "All the ways of people are pure in their eyes, but the Lord tests the motives." Isn't that true? When I think about my own life, my ways are pure. Always, when I think about myself, right? When we look at our own actions, we have the best of intentions. We always have acted with the proper motives, but the Lord tests the motives. God pays attention to the why behind what it is that we're doing. "All the ways of people are pure in their eyes." You may think that everything you do is right, and for the right reasons, but the Lord tests the motives. Motives matter to God.

There's an old saying that there's always two reasons why people do something. There's the reason that we tell everybody else, and then there's the real reason. There's the reason that we say out loud to our family and friends, and then there's the reason that we would rather keep to ourselves. Motives matter to God.

Consider the words of Psalm 139. The Psalmist writes this: "Examine me, God. Look at my heart. Put me to the test. Know my anxious thoughts. Look to see if there's any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path." The Psalmist here is inviting God to examine the motives that the writer has. Have you ever prayed a prayer like that? It's a powerful prayer, and one that, if you really take the words seriously, might be difficult. "Examine me, God. Look at my heart. Put me to the test." Do you want God putting you to the test? "Know my anxious thoughts. Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me." And then, "Lead me on the eternal path."

The eternal path is the way that leads to life. The eternal path is the way of following after Jesus. This journey that we're on, the direction that God has in mind for our lives, is a journey of becoming more like Jesus. Only after we've examined our motives does the Psalmist invite God to lead us on the eternal path. It's unsettling at times to consider how often our motives may not quite be 100% pure.

If I take time to be honest before God, if I take these words of the Psalmist seriously, my motives are too often me-centered instead of Christ- or God- or other-centered. All too often it's about what I want, and not always what God wants. Here's the problem. It's difficult, it's nearly impossible to be moving in God's direction, to be on the eternal path, when we have the wrong motives. It's almost impossible to get on the journey that God invites us to when we start with the wrong why. The why really matters to God.

Paul wrote it so powerfully in the scripture for today from Colossians. "Whatever you do, whether it's speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and give thanks to God the Father through Him." Whatever you do; it doesn't matter. Whatever it is that you do, whether you are entry level where you work, or whether you own the place. If you're a student or a teacher, if you're an administrator, if you're a retiree. Whatever it is that you do, in speech or in action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Whatever you do, wherever you are, serve Christ there. Wherever you live, serve Jesus there. Wherever you're working, serve Christ in that place. Wherever you are, instead of saying, "God, what's that thing that you have out there for me in the future," serve Jesus right where you are.

When you serve Jesus right here, it helps you get to the there. It helps you take the next faithful step on the journey that God has in mind for us. Sometimes we make the mistake of assuming that there's just a few significant decisions in our life, and that if we get those right, then we're all set. And if we get those wrong, then we really missed out. But the truth is, is that's just not how it is. There are thousands of decisions that we make every day, every week, each month, that can put us closer towards God or move us away from God.

We can choose to live each day a little bit more in the light, or a little bit more in the dark. We can choose to make decisions based on the values that God has in mind for us, or we can make decisions that are only focused on ourselves. We can decide to take action, to seek justice for those that need someone to speak a voice for them, or we can decide to say, "You know, that's just not my problem."

We can offer clothing to those that need it, food for those that are in need, shelter for those that find no place to sleep, or we might say, "You know, God, I just want to keep that for myself."

Every day we have a chance to make decisions, big and small, where we can say, "Yes," to God, or we can say, "No," to God. And every time that we say, "Yes," even in small ways, we take the next step on the journey that God has in mind for us: the eternal path, the direction that leads to becoming more like Christ. When we make these small decisions right, God leads us step-by-step in God's direction, into the right places, in the right spaces, interacting with the people that God has in mind for us. The good news is that when we are living our life in the name of Jesus, we don't have to worry about the future, because God will take us there step-by-step-by-step, moving in the divine direction.

God places within each of us the power to become who God is calling us to be, this power of the Holy Spirit that can transform our motive from focusing on ourselves to focusing more on Christ, to living out God's will for our lives. So my invitation for you today is to be who God calls you to be today, to know that you are a child of God, to love God, to serve others, to follow after Christ. Whatever you do, pay attention to who you're becoming. Whatever your actions are, seek that your motivations might be those of God.

Wherever you live, whatever your job, whatever your current life status at the moment, whatever you do, do it all in the name and for the glory of Jesus Christ. Be faithful with what's right here, and God will lead you in the direction that God has in mind. Will you pray with me?

Oh God, I surrender to you. Take all of my life and make me brand new. Forgive me of my sins. Fill me with your spirit, so that I can know you, serve you, and follow you. Direct my steps in your direction, and help me to be faithful to you today. In Jesus' name, Amen.