

Just Do Something!
Leave It Better
June 1, 2014

**PRELUDE – O Love That Will Not Let Me Go
Our God's Alive / Christ is Risen**

**Intro Video
Announcements/Promo video / Survey**

Feature – Change the World / Offering

As Shannon said, today we're beginning a brand new series which I'm calling *Just Do Something ...* which is going to last for three weeks ... which I'm very excited about ... for two reasons.

First of all, I'm excited because this series is actually a direct result of a couple of conversations that I had earlier this spring with several men who are part of this congregation. I love it when that happens; when questions and discussions turn into teaching opportunities that help people in everyday life. And I think that's what's going to happen in this series.

Second, I'm excited because the issue raised in these conversations is a really big deal for a lot of people, especially for those who are followers of Jesus – people who have not only come to the place in their lives where they've realized they are a sinner in need of a savior and that Jesus is that savior and they've trusted him and received him as their savior - but also people who are trying to follow in his footsteps – listening to his teaching and trying to integrate what He says into their life. And the issue for many of those people, for me, maybe you, is ... *Why am I here? What is my purpose for being on this earth? I mean, if God created me and allowed me to be born in this time and place He must want me to do something while I'm here. So, what is it? What is God's will for my life?*

That's a big deal and I'm excited to get to talk to you about it.

I'm also excited (and this would actually be a third reason) because over the years, I've observed (and personally experienced!) a lot of confusion over this issue of God's will in our lives – what it is and how we can know it – and I believe that what I'm going to tell you over the next three weeks will go a long way towards clearing that up. In fact, I'll make you a promise: *if you will be here for all three weeks of this series (or listen online to whichever weeks you miss) you will know more about God's will for your life than ever before.*

Popular Misconceptions

In order to accomplish that, I think the first thing we need to do is to clear up a few popular misconceptions; faulty thinking that many of us have adopted concerning God's will and our purpose in life. I thought of four misconceptions that I have believed at times and maybe you have believed them, too.

Maybe you're believing them right now. Let's find out.

Misconception #1. God's will is almost always “mystically perceived” and therefore difficult to

discern.

According to this misconception, if you really want to know God's will for your life, you have to be able to assess your circumstances and correctly interpret "the signs" that are God's way of telling you to do something. Or you have to hear a voice (not audibly but within your spirit). Or you have to have someone come up to you and speak a prophetic word of direction.

Or you have to do what one of the judges of Israel in the Old Testament, a guy by the name of Gideon, once did. Gideon wanted to know if something was God's will so he laid out a sheepskin one night and said, "If I wake up and the fleece is wet, then I'll know that God wants me to do this."

The next morning he awoke and found that it was wet. But then, he realized that it *could have been wet because of the dew* and so he did it again. But this time he said, "If it's *dry* in the morning, then I'll know that it's God's will."

Now, I'm not trying to minimize or poke fun at what Gideon did because God did speak to him through that and he went on to do some great things for the nation of Israel. But even for him, it was difficult to interpret the fleece – he didn't trust it on the first try ... which is why, when it comes a lot of people think of understanding God's will as a mystical process and therefore difficult to discern.

Another misconception that a lot of us have is that ...

#2. God's will is like a blueprint that must be followed to the exact detail.

As I've mentioned on several occasions, we're remodeling part of our house and one point we hired a kitchen designer to help us think it thru. She gave us a plan and so we ordered cabinets and lighting and flooring based on that plan and we're installing them according to that plan because to not do so would be disastrous. Things wouldn't fit together right and our kitchen would be non-functional!

A lot of people think God's will works the same way. They think that God has already drawn up the plan for your life and it specifies in exact detail things like ...

- Who you should marry (or not marry).
- Whether you're supposed to buy a particular house in a particular neighborhood when you're 30 and then again when you're 40 and then again you're 54.
- Whether you should go to college at MU or KU or not go to college at all.
- Whether you should drive or fly on your next vacation.
- How many pairs of shoes you should own.
- How many Royals games you should attend this year. (God is saying zero? I'm kidding. I love the Royals.)

There's a very specific plan, a lot of us believe, and the secret of being blessed by God is to discover that plan – the blueprint – and then follow it.

Of course, since God's will is (supposedly) mystical and difficult to discern there is the strong possibility that you will miss God's plan and forever be saddled with plan B or C or P or Q or Y or Z ... which is one reason why this particular misconception is so toxic.

Here's another misconception - which is sort of the opposite of the blueprint idea - and that is that ...

#3. God's will is primarily concerned with life-altering decisions.

According to this idea, God doesn't care so much what I do with my life on an everyday basis but He *does* want to be consulted (because He *does* have an opinion) on the big things. So, I need to be seeking his input whenever they come up.

For instance:

- Does God want me to take that job?
- Does He want me to marry this person?
- Should I move my family to that town?
- Is this the direction I should be going?
- Is this what I should be doing with my life?

Now the problem with this misconception isn't that God doesn't want to be consulted on the big issues in our lives. After all ...

The Apostle James writes:

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."
James 4:13,15 (NIV)

God is interested in the big issues and decisions we make. However, the problem with thinking that God's will *primarily* covers life-altering situations which, by their nature *simply don't occur that often ...* is that it can lead us to think that God's will has nothing to do with everyday ordinary life.

As we'll see shortly, that's nowhere close to accurate.

But, first, one more misconception ... which is that ...

4. God's will is typically related to some "spiritual" activity.

According to this faulty thinking, God's will is primarily concerned with avoiding sin or participating, in a more positive sense, in some kind of spiritual development activity such as Bible reading or prayer or going to church or serving in some way.

In fact, one of the greatest selling books of the past 20 years, secular or religious, is Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* in which he says that every person was created to fulfill five purposes: to worship God, to fellowship with other believers, to enter into a process of discipleship, to get involved in some type of ministry, and be involved in some sort of mission ... all very spiritual-sounding, aren't they?

Ok, those are four misconceptions that, at times, have been part of my thinking.

Just curious ... how many of those have been part of your thinking? How many *are* part of your thinking, right now, today, this morning?

Now, here's what we need to understand: *sometimes, those things are true, but they are not the norm.*

In other words ...

1. Sometimes, God's will *is* mystically perceived and it *is* difficult to discern. But most of the time, it is not.
2. Sometimes, God's will *is* like a blueprint. He has a very specific plan for you or for me in a very specific situation. But most of the time *it is not* and *He does not*. Most of the time, God's will is more like a game plan than a blueprint (and I'll explain what I mean by that in just a bit).
3. Sometimes, God *does* have an opinion on a life-altering situation or circumstance we're faced with. Many times, however, He says, "it's up to you. *You* decide as long as it's consistent with the overall game plan." And the game plan – our purpose in life – has much more to do with our everyday existence than it is the occasional life-altering circumstances and situations.
4. Finally, as for those activities that help us to become more "spiritual," while God certainly *does* want those to be part of our lives, they are *not* our fundamental purpose. They are not our "reason for being" on this earth.

Contrary to what many of us have heard, we are *not* "spiritual beings having a physical experience." We are physical beings who have the ability to have spiritual experiences because, unlike the animals, we have been created in the image of God. The scripture says, "God breathed life into the first human beings," and that's how we have spiritual capacity. And while spiritual activities help us to know God better, we are not made just to stand around like statues "knowing God" as important as that is. God intends – God wills – for us to *do something ...* and that something is our purpose.

Actually, there are three "somethings" that God always wants for you to do. Wherever you are, whatever your situation, God always wants you to be doing at least one of these if not all three of them at the same time. These three things together make up the overall game plan that God has for your life and mine.

Now, the thing about a game plan is that its implementation is flexible. Rather than spelling out everything in exact detail, a game plan specifies the general strategy, with lots of freedom to make changes as the game unfolds, as long as you stay within the rules.

For example, in football, when the head coach and his staff create a game plan, they come up with a basic strategy that they believe will win the game. They might decide "we're going to run it as often as possible so as to keep the other team's offense off the field." Then, during the game, it's up to the offensive coordinator to call plays consistent with that overall plan. The head coach might occasionally suggest a play or overrule a play, but most of the time, the coordinator is in charge of carrying out the game plan dreamed up by the head coach.

And that's the way it works with these three things that God wants you to be doing in your life. God has designed a basic strategy and game plan for your life and mine. It's up to you and me to call plays consistent with that plan while allowing that God may choose to call an occasional audible.

“Something” Number One

Now, I know that some of you are thinking “I am dying to know the three things. I wish he would get to the point and tell us.” (And I know I do that to you guys a lot. It's intentional.)

So, what are the three things that God wants us to do that form His purpose for our lives? I'm going to tell you the first one today and then, in the next two weeks we'll talk about the other two.

And here's the first one: no matter who you are, where you live, what you do for a living, or who you're married to (or not married to); no matter how old you are, how smart you are, how pretty you are, how rich you are; no matter what race you are, what family you come from ...

Do you remember the Boy Scout rule? Not the one that says “be prepared...,” the other one that says, “Always leave the campground cleaner than you found it.” If you, as a boy scout, find a mess on the ground, you clean it up regardless of who might have made the mess. You intentionally improve the environment for the next group of campers. Actually the original form of that rule, written by the founder of the Boy Scouts was “try and leave this world a little better than you found it.”

Well, guess what? No matter who you are, where you live, what your situation ... blah, blah, blah ... *that* is God's will for your life. *That* is God's fundamental purpose for you as a human being.

God's will is for you (and me) to change the world for the better.

Just *do* something – anything – that leaves the world a better place than you found it. Change the world.

Now, before we talk about what that looks like, I'm sure that some of you are wondering “where do you get that idea, Rick? Sounds kind of new-agey. Sounds like something you would hear a politician say.”

And that may be true but, where I get it from is the first few pages of the Bible where God reveals something truly amazing. And it's not how He created the world. In the first few pages of the Bible, God reveals why He created human beings.

And that's an important distinction to make because, in recent days, many Christians have felt the need to spend a lot of energy debating and defending the “how” of creation. And I understand the need to do that – to a point – however, what's most important, at least as it concerns everyday life, is the “why” ... because understanding why God created human beings is the key to knowing God's will and to living according to his purpose for our lives.

So, let's take a look at it – at least, a look at the high point where the creation is complete. Genesis Chapter 1 verse 27 tells us that after creating everything else ...

God created mankind in his own image,

*in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

By the way, it's written like that because it's poetry; maybe even part of a worship song that was sung by the Israelites.

After creating humans, Genesis 1 says that ...

*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
Genesis 1:27-28 (NIV)*

Note the wording here – the commands to increase, fill, subdue (which means to tame or organize), and rule. These are all words associated with improving things in some way or another.

Which is why we read in chapter two that ...

The Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed ... The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:8,15 (NIV)

Now, that's why we are here. We're to take what God originally created (which He described as being "very good") and leave it even better than we found it.

And I'll unpack this more in just a bit but I think it's also important to understand why God had the writers of the scripture record all this for us. You see, scripture didn't arbitrarily one day fall out of the clouds as a complete package. Instead, God, through the Holy Spirit, at various points in history, inspired men to write specific things down for our benefit. There was a reason why God said, "this needs to be written down; this needs to be recorded." It mattered for a reason.

And in this case, most likely the stories contained in the book of Genesis (especially the creation stories) were part of Israel's oral history. In other words, these stories were passed down verbally from generation to generation most likely beginning during the time of Moses. However, most biblical scholars believe that the first five books of the Bible (those attributed to Moses) were not finally written down or at least collected and put together in their current form until the time, hundreds of years later, when the nation of Israel had been almost wiped out and most of its people exiled to Babylon in 587 BC. I know that's a lot of history and some of your brains are freezing over now, but that's okay. Stay with me because it's important.

So, the question is, why would it be important during that period of time to have this written down? Because the remnant of Israel was living among a people who worshipped idols that *they had made instead of a God who had made them*.ⁱ In addition, their concept of the gods was a hierarchy where humans were meant to always be subservient, not to the ultimate Creator God, but to the lowest gods in the system. In other words, the purpose of human beings was simply to do the dirty work of the lowest gods. Without going into too much detail, it was, in reality, a system of belief designed by the ruling class of Babylon to maintain the status quo – to keep the powerful (them) in power over the powerless.ⁱⁱ

But what God had revealed to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and the nation of Israel about himself and his intentions in creating humanity was just the opposite of that. God never intended humans to be mere grunts

subservient to anyone – not even to Himself! In contrast to the dehumanizing alternatives presented to them by the spirituality of their neighbors in Babylon, God reminded them (and us) that they (and we) were created in his image ... for an incredible purpose.

What does that mean to be created in God's image? It's fascinating. The Hebrew word that gets translated for "image" in this particular passage we just read, is actually the same word translated elsewhere for "idol." And an idol in that culture was a localized visible physical representation of the divine.

So, when God created humans, he was creating little idols – localized visible physical representations – of himself!

Fascinating isn't it? The Babylonians were creating idols of gods who didn't even exist. And God was reminding the Israelites that He was the first idol-maker. He had created them (and the Babylonians and us) as localized visible representations of himself.

That's what we are. That's who we are. We're not grunts. We're not grunts to some spiritual system. We're royalty, friends, because God is a King presiding over "heaven and earth" (which is what we see in these first pages of the Bible).

And as royalty, as God's representatives and agents in the world, we've been given authority and power to share in God's rule over the earth's resources and creatures and, to the point, to continue doing what he started. We're to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over it – to administer and develop it in such a way that the earth and all of the people and everything in it comes to its full potential; so that it's even better than before.

That's our purpose. That's God's will for us no matter who we are, where we live, how much money we make, blah, blah, blah.

Getting Practical

So what does this mean, practically speaking? I'll just throw out a few ideas.

- Get a job. I know the economy is tough. Even if you're doing something you're not trained for. Work. If you can't get a job then volunteer. Do something that adds value to people or creates beauty and organization. Do something that lifts the culture up instead of degrading it.
- Invest and create wealth that can be used to make the world better not just for you but for everyone. A rising tide lifts all boats, as they say. Start businesses, make money, be generous.
- Get married and/or raise a family and thereby make society better because, statistics show that marriage and children make society better. I saw this last weekend. One of our daughter's childhood friends, who we watched grow up in our neighborhood, got married and we went to the wedding. It was the most amazing thing – their vows to each other were about their children about how "we are making this commitment to one another for the benefit of our future children." It was cool that they were getting that "our job is to make this world better and that's part of the rold of our marriage."
- Educate yourself. Learn something. Improve yourself.

- Do things that add to the overall value of people and the world; things that lead to shalom in the culture and creation; things that bring healing, prosperity, joy and celebration, peace and harmony.
- Invent something. Build something. Program something. Paint something. Write something. Photograph or film something. Decorate something. Organize something. Cook something. Grow something (legal that is). Sell something. Buy something.
- Dare I say it – if you're brave enough or crazy enough, remodel something!
- Encourage someone. Help someone. Pray for someone. Rebuke someone.
- Make your bed; clean up your room.
- Work, play, love, worship, plan, create, share, teach, care in such a way that the world and the people in it become better than it and they already are.

That's your fundamental purpose as a man or woman created in the image of God. Leave whatever you find better than it was when you found it, whatever that looks like.

Now, a couple other pieces of advice before we finish:

1. Do this in a way (especially if you're going to do this long term or if this is your vocation) that makes the best use of how God wired you up – how you are gifted, what your skills are, what you love, what floats your boat – because part of your task of stewardship over the earth is to be a good steward of yourself!

Andy Crouch, in his book, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* makes a great point when he writes ...

If the work of creating consistently leaves us depressed or drained, it is likely that we have somehow missed the path that we're supposed to be on. Creation, even on a human scale, is meant to end with the glad exclamation, "It is very good."ⁱⁱⁱ

And "it" refers not just to the product but to the process as well. If we're not able to say it is good, chances are we're operating outside of how God wired us up or ... we're not observing the Sabbath – taking a day off to renew, restore and regenerate our passions and abilities. Some of us are depressed and discouraged and we hate our jobs and we hate our lives and it's because we never take any time off.

2. Don't compare yourself to others. Don't compare your gifting and your wiring to other people.

Don't say "well, what she can do or he can do is more impactful or more effective at making things better because they're smarter, prettier, they have more money, more opportunity, blah, blah, blah."

Maybe it's true and maybe it isn't. But it doesn't really matter if you implement the advice the Apostle Paul gave.

He wrote:

*Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do [whether you're an astronaut or you dig ditches], do it all for the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)*

Not everyone in this culture can make the same contribution to the flourishing of the earth and the flourishing of the people (some of us may be disabled or have limitations/we're older/we're tired or maybe retired). Everybody has a different capacity, but that's OK if your vision and your attitude are about honoring God and bringing glory to God in what you can do.

One more thing ...

3. As you seek to be a co-creator with God and to make the world a better place, remember that the world we occupy is cursed by sin and death. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden, the story goes on that God told them there would be a curse from this. God told Adam, "you're going to work the ground but it's going to be hard. There will be thorns, you're going to cut yourself and it's going to hurt. The ground will get hard. It's going to be hard to fulfill this mandate I've given you. It will be a struggle."

And that is going to be true no matter what you're trying to do whether it's relational, physical, vocational. Your efforts will often be hindered and frustrated ... which, quite frankly, can leave you frustrated and hindered! And that's OK but those hindrances and frustrations are to be a reminder to you and to me that a day is coming when God is going to completely change that. God is going to intervene in history again and he is going to renew, restore and regenerate this creation in all the people who are following Christ and who've received Christ and have been saved by Christ, he's going to completely restore all that and everything to the way it was. The curse is going to be removed. The restoration and renewal that began when Jesus was resurrected from the dead is going to be made complete.

And we have the opportunity to look forward to that day even in the middle of this struggle to know that this is not all there is and that there is a day coming.

Let's pray together ...

<prayer>

- Some of us have been doing this. Yea!
- Some of us are in vocations that do not add to human flourishing and we need to make a change.
- Some of us are willfully neglecting God's call to be productive.

Feature – For Your Glory

CLOSING COMMENTS

Endnotes

ⁱ A great explanation here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gssQ56kx8#t=374>

ⁱⁱ See https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/01-genesis/text/articles-books/middleton-imagodei-csr.pdf for an amazing explanation of this.

ⁱⁱⁱ www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/3094100-culture-making-recovering-our-creative-calling