

2017-02-11

Ways people miss God's perfect will for them #1

Hi all,

In 1985 I was between churches - that sounds so elegant doesn't it? Between churches? That means the new guys came into power and I was fired from my position of Campus Minister of a particular ministry at the University of Colorado in Boulder, thinking they could do it better now that I had spent nearly 2 years bringing that ministry to balance out of a very destructive 'shepherding movement' direction that almost killed it. (They closed the ministry within a few months after they fired me)

So I was 'between churches' and delivering pizzas for Domino's Pizza just to put some food on the table and a roof over our heads. They asked me to go into management, and after much delay as I desperately wanted the Lord to open a church to pastor or anything in ministry, but needing to feed my young family, I agreed.

As a manager I was making more money than I ever had in my life, \$50,000 in 1985, which is the same as \$114,640 today according to www.dollartimes.com, but my heart was still with full time ministry. At the time the Vice President for the company for everything in the US west of the Mississippi River lived in Boulder, and he hand picked me to go into troubled stores to fix them and make them profitable again - which I did as God's grace and wisdom was in me to do.

My choice

Then the day came when I had to either move up with them or move out. They offered me a supervisor position over 9 stores in the area, which would have actually been a pay cut, or become a franchisee in any of several other states. They suggested a 23 store franchise to start in Englewood, California, or in Seattle which was just opening up and would have been my territory, or even Anchorage, Alaska. Franchising with them meant income in the high 6 figures, if not low 7 figures figuring bonuses and other franchising opportunities.

I had a handicapped son who needed surgeries and special education, our 2nd son was born in 1982, and Barb was pregnant with our 3rd son at that time, so I could really better my family by franchising. Additionally, Barb and I both came from families that could be described as the 'country club set' - we had a lake house, an RV, my dad had an airplane, owned his own business and other real estate investments, and so on. Barb's parents owned a department store in town and were well known in the area. That was the life we grew up with, the social circles we knew.

But when we came to the Lord as teenagers in love with each other and with Him, we went fully for Him - we said we would go anywhere and accept any challenge because of the excellency of knowing Him - and we meant it. Even as teenagers we had amazing experiences with Him because our hearts were fully with Him. If He said jump, we jumped without asking how high.

That was then...

We declined the offers for a supervisor position and franchising because even though they were about to fire me for declining their offers, we knew Jesus wanted us in Colorado at that moment in time. Let me make that clear - I gave up millions of dollars and lost my job because we knew in our hearts Jesus still wanted us there in Colorado, though I hadn't a clue where my next job or church would come from. We had a mortgage, a car payment, all the usual financial commitments any young couple in their 20's with 3 young boys have - and we turned it all down simply because we knew where Jesus wanted us. That's how we've always lived.

and this is now...

But today I so often see people who say they want to obey God, but they have conditions in their heart that qualify that statement. They will move where He wants, but only if they feel safe with their bank account first. They will change jobs because He is leading elsewhere, but will only move when the details have been worked out. At what point did Christianity get to the point we made God our servant instead of us, His? That shift into spiritual neutral happens individually first, then as a culture.

Years ago when we lived in Colorado there was a couple who were going to retire, use their 40 acres of prime Colorado mountain land for a missionary and ministry training center, as well as offer a retreat for those in ministry. That was their retirement plan. There were prophecies confirming what was on their heart by men and women who knew nothing of their plans, showing their plans were born in their spirits of the Lord.

But one day, faced with a less than attractive business offer, he said to me, "If I sold my businesses and paid all the bills and set up the rest in a fund for our retirement, I would only have about \$750,000 (\$1,719,601 in today's dollars) left over, and you can't do anything for God with only 3/4 of a million dollars!"

Opting out

Retirement seems to be a burden for many we've seen through the years - from medical professionals who talk of donating time to staffing clinics in needed places around the world, to doctors with skills to change the lives of children, to business people who talk of taking short terms trips to help fund digging wells or building church buildings - they end up buying an RV, remodeling the house, taking a cruise, babysitting the grandchildren, and never doing what God put on their hearts.

Somewhere along the way the call of God on their hearts that was so strong a couple years before, got laid aside in the name of comfort and having all the details in place before they were willing to make that move or take that trip with God. Life happened and they opted out.

While many focus on the Great Commission, and we see examples like Peter and John walking away from the ownership of their fishing business, and Matthew walking away from his profitable tax collection business, there were others who said they wanted to follow Jesus too. But as always, Jesus weighs the hearts, weighs the motives to see if they really had what it takes to back up the love they claimed for Him with their lips, with action.

1 man invited, 2 asked to follow Jesus

In Luke 9:57-62 three men wanted to follow Jesus. The first man Jesus never invited, he simply told Jesus he would follow Him wherever He went. Don't spiritualize 'I will follow you', for in context the man meant he would literally follow Jesus and His merry band of disciples around, camping here and there, staying in homes when they could. All Jesus promised him was homelessness. Nothing would be nailed down for him. They would start the day very often not knowing where they would sleep that night. We don't know what happened to the man.

But he was like the people above and so many more, who want all things figured out before they follow Jesus. Jesus just isn't always like that folks.

The next man Jesus asked directly to follow Him. This man wanted to accept Jesus' invitation, if he could just go home and bury his father. In that age, burying the father meant the disbursement of the will immediately - we could speculate therefore he wanted to be financially secure with an independent income before he would follow Jesus into a future of unknown sources of support.

But the outcome seems to have been a compromise between them - Jesus said, "Let the (spiritually) dead bury their (physically) dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." Jesus at first said 'come', but upon hearing the conditions Jesus told him 'go'. The man wasn't in His perfect will, but rather His adjusted will based on what the man would give Him, living (presumably) off that independent income which was the stated condition upon which he would serve the Lord.

The last man is another one the Lord did not invite directly, like the first man he came on his own to Jesus with the statement "Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say goodbye to my family." Again in that context, he would have been saying goodbye to his parents and most likely he would have been launched into 'the ministry' with some fanfare. Jesus' response that anyone who puts his hand to the plow and then looks back (to his family with regret implied, a divided heart between extended family and God) is not even fit to be in the kingdom of God - forget the desire to follow Jesus - Jesus said such a man wasn't even fit to be part of His Kingdom!

This series looks at ways people miss the Lord's will. In modern times as in Jesus' day as we've seen in Luke 9 above, many prefer the gospel of comfort, the gospel where all details are known before. When the Lord leads He doesn't do so with a big neon light with a flashing arrow pointing 'this way', rather He suggests and reveals His will in the heart, and then steps back to see how we will respond. It is subtle - unless you are one of those white-hot in love with God people who tell Him they will go where He says, and have the character to prove that commitment in the heart by action - you may end up on a different path and be secure, but unfulfilled spiritually.

A series of small decisions in the life of Peter - And we'll pick it up there next week, until then, blessings,
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2017-02-18

How people miss God's perfect will for them #2

Hi all,

Life is a series of small decisions, and in the Lord those decisions involve either making us into the image of our Lord, or making the Lord into our image. Each decision is either a decision for growth and change, or remaining in the familiar and comfortable.

This series is about how people miss the Lord's perfect will, and I'm starting with the call to discipleship - not just a believer, but a disciple.

Jesus is not seeker-friendly

We live in a church culture that says just 'accept' Jesus and He will make all things better in life, "invite Him into your life" means He will come into your life and change it for the better. Where is the gospel of the scriptures that tells us salvation is about us changing into His image?

When a person makes the decision to follow Jesus based on the modern version of the gospel, when the time comes that He asks them to make a hard decision like forgive someone, or to take a step of faith and take a job or course of study that wasn't in their plans, they will most often remain in their comfort zone 'just a little bit longer Lord'. At that point they explain away their refusal to grow - 'When they pick up the phone and contact me I'll respond' - instead of reaching out to try to build a bridge. "I will do that Lord, as soon as I get the job and housing lined up", and when it doesn't happen they explain it away by saying it must not have been God after all, but really what happened is their love became cooler for the Lord, wanting to serve Him in the comfort - whether that be their familiar bitterness towards someone, or refusing to enter into ministry - they delude themselves into thinking they love the Lord just as much, for their refusal to grow proves otherwise.

All the while He is faithful to give them His peace down in their spirit, signaling He has made the way if they will just step out...to forgive, to move, to reach out to that person...but so often they won't follow that peace - they love the Lord they say, but at that point they have become a hearer and not a doer.

Last week we looked at 3 men which represented 3 categories of conditions people place on the Lord before they will walk in His perfect will for them: Comfort of knowing where they will live, financial security, and the support of family and friends.

But look at other things Jesus said. To Peter He said if we want to follow Him we must take up our cross to do so. It was Peter's rebuke of Jesus in Matthew 16:21-26 suggesting Jesus not go to the cross that got the Lord's statement about carrying our cross, with the revelation to think otherwise is from Satan. Jesus said Peter cherished the plans of man rather than the plans of God, and that anyone who follows Jesus must crucify their own plans and carry that cross of God's plans for their life. That doesn't sound like Jesus conforming to our plans, but rather us crucifying (in a torturous process) our plans because we love Him so very much.

In Luke 14:26 Jesus said if you did not 'love less' your extended family you can't follow Him. (Wife is not included in the Greek, and the KJV using 'hate' is not 'hate' in Greek, but 'love less', the sentence is a contrast putting love of Jesus so far above the love of those closest to you the contrast appears love/hate.) In other words - our love for the Lord is to be so white hot that in comparison our love for our extended family is far, far less. Is that true of us? Does our (your) extended family know you will follow Jesus' will for your life and ignore their emotion filled and reasoned plans for you if He asked you to do so?

The conditions Jesus placed on following Him are very different from 'invite Jesus into your life'. The truth is, He is inviting us into His life, and it comes with a price:

Total abandonment to Him in a life-long process of being conformed into His image, continuously affirmed by a life-long series of small decisions.

We have millions of believers but relatively few disciples

Many people have a difficult time following Jesus in part because they approach His will in their lives in the same casual way they became a believer - hand raised, inviting Jesus into their life, praying along with everyone else in the congregation, and they were taught a gospel that says Jesus will conform to your life by healing your money, your body, and your relationships. So they approach their walk with Him in that same casual way, crying and whining with no backbone when He places before them what to them is a

crisis-point decision, never having the drive to become the best person they can be in Him, conformed to His nature and character.

But Jesus is THE King and is the same Lord who made those statements in the gospels requiring totally abandonment of self to become a disciple. So when they say "I will follow you anywhere", He hears that through the ears of His statements in the gospels - and He will arrange things in your life accordingly.

But when they say 'I will follow you anywhere', having come into the kingdom in that casual, hand raised easy gospel culture, they want to hold onto their plans and their (flawed, baggage filled character), loving the Lord only to the point Jesus makes it all better for them. Next week - a series of small decisions for Peter.

Peter's decisions...really, I will pick it up there next week...:)

Blessings,

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2012-02-25

How people miss God's perfect will for them #3

Hi all,

The Lord's will is most often found in the mundane routines of life. Therefore missing His will also happens in the midst of the mundane things of life.

We must obey His will in the mundane before we can expect to be led in the big things in life. It includes loving your neighbor who is obnoxious and messy and so outside of your comfort zone you are repulsed when the Lord tugs at your heart to take them a plate of cookies. It includes things like inviting that back-biting co-worker to lunch, and keeping your mouth shut when someone rubs you so the wrong way you'd like to tear their head off, at least verbally, in response.

In Acts 9:10-19 the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him to go lay hands on Saul of Tarsus, but he objected, stating that Saul was arresting believers and the Lord was therefore asking Ananias to risk his life for the Lord. But he went. It was outside his comfort zone, but he obeyed. Ananias grew a little bit in the Lord that day.

This is how the call of God works on a day to day basis, small decisions that on the surface mean absolutely nothing.

How do we get that heart of love with no strings attached? Through a series of seemingly small and insignificant decisions...

We have the benefit of seeing many small decisions Peter made, and they relate so perfectly to decisions people make today when following the Lord - or missing Him.

The decision points were these:

- 1) Peter's brother, Andrew, introduces Peter to Jesus, who prophesies his name will be changed to Peter, petros in Greek, a small stone. John 1:41-42
- 2) Jesus uses Peter's boat to speak from, and in payment provides a catch of fish requiring 2 boats to handle. Jesus invites Peter to follow Him. Luke 5:1-11
- 3) Jesus stays at Andrew and Peter's house, and heals Peter's mother-in-law, then heals and delivers those who came to the door of the house. Mark 1:29-39
- 4) Jesus speaks a hard to understand parable to weed out those who were following Him for wrong motives, and many leave Him. Peter stays. John 6:22-69
- 5) Following #4 above, the feeding of the 5,000, Peter makes his 2nd statement that Jesus is the Son of God no matter what others say. Matthew 16:13-20
- 6) Peter is used by the devil, trying to persuade Jesus not to go to the cross, and is rebuked for it. Matthew 16:21-28
- 7) Peter denies the Lord the 3rd time and Jesus immediately turns and looks directly at Peter. Luke 22:60-62

There are certainly more than 7 events the gospels show us of Peter's life, but these 7 each involved a small decisions Peter made at each crisis point that led him to becoming more deeply involved with Jesus. That is how it is for us as well. When Jesus told Peter he would be a fisher of men, He didn't also reveal to

him at that point that he would die a martyr's death some 35 years later. He allowed Peter to grow into his destiny, giving him every opportunity to decide whether to go deeper, or to draw back.

1) Peter's brother Andrew introduces Peter to Jesus.

This exchange is found in John 1:41-42 when Andrew says to his brother, "We have found the Messiah." Andrew then brings Peter to Jesus, who merely says "You are Simon the son of Jonah, but you will be called Cephas (Greek; petros, a small stone).

That's it - the key is Andrew's claim 'we have found the Messiah'. What did Peter do with his brother's claim? What did you do when someone started talking to you about the Lord? Peter thought about it, that's what. The Jewish culture believed the Messiah would defeat the Romans supernaturally and restore the greatness of Israel. Peter had to examine his expectations about the Messiah, and what finding Him might mean to his life.

You and I did the same thing - is this person crazy, needing a crutch in life by becoming religious? What would my life be if I believed in Jesus like they keep saying? Would He change my life, isn't religion for weak people? Why would I want God...yes I want to go to heaven, but really, can I know that before? Don't we all just sort of find out after we die? What if I did follow Him; how would that change my life? Would He make it better, or would I end up in the mental institution?

Peter didn't recognize it at the time that his response to his brother's claim would change the course of his life. According to Luke 5:1-11 Peter was a partner in a fishing business that had at least 3 boats - he was an up and coming entrepreneur.

2) Jesus borrows Peter's boat to speak from, and repays with a load of fish. Luke 5:1-11

We don't know exactly what Peter's conclusions were about Jesus based on his brother's claim He was the Messiah. But the next time we see Peter it is after witnessing the miracle catch after Jesus spoke, and in response Peter fell on his knees telling Jesus in v8; "Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord!" From these 2 points in his life we can surmise Peter needed to see a miracle, some evidence Jesus was who Andrew claimed He was. After all, he was a busy business owner and didn't have time to wander the countryside listening to all this Man said. He worked hard and had a family and business.

At this point Peter realizes Jesus is the Messiah - just as at some point we also believed. When Peter repented Jesus' response was to say in v10: "Don't be afraid, from henceforth you will catch men." Peter was suddenly aware of his sinfulness and acknowledged it - but Jesus' answer was "Don't be afraid."

Don't be afraid

This is the point where a believer becomes a disciple (learner) - seeing their sinfulness, their lack, their empty life and the horror of it all - and going through that fear. Much of the discipleship process continues to consist of going through fear: The fear of something new. The fear of what if I forgive them but they get angry. The fear of stepping out to share something I think is from God but if I'm wrong what will they say? The fear of walking in love makes me appear weak and spineless.

Being a disciple is a life of constant personal growth and internal change. We have no idea where each little decision through fear will lead us - that part is faith. Peter had no idea that tiny decision to believe what Andrew told him about Messiah would lead to Peter healing the lame or writing scripture - God's will is in the mundane and rarely announces itself.

A person doesn't make the decision to be a disciple just once in life, that decision is made repeatedly by each little decision to be more like Him.

We'll close this out next week, until then, blessings,
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2017-03-04

How people miss God's perfect will for them #4

Hi all - let's pick it up with point #3 of 7 small decisions Peter made that determined his destiny - and they were all normal, mundane, simple decisions.

3) Jesus stays in Peter's home, Mark 1:29-39

We are told the house belonged to Peter and Andrew, and that Peter's mother in law was sick, whom Jesus promptly healed, and it was at their front door the whole city came to be healed, have demons cast out, and they stayed until the sun went down.

The next morning the text tells us Jesus rose and went out by Himself into a solitary place, and prayed. Verses 36-39 reveal Peter and others went searching for Jesus, for once he found Jesus, Peter said, "Everyone is looking for you" - clearly thinking the 'miracle and healing service' would pick up where it had left off the night before. That was Peter's plan. That was the plan others had for Jesus. That was what everyone expected. Everyone, that is, but Jesus.

"Let us go into the next towns so I can preach there, for that is why I came (from the Father)." v38 This was Peter's first big crucifixion of his plans for Jesus. He had plans for the day and he had the added pressure from his neighbors. But Jesus said no, He would go to other towns - where there wasn't a home for them to stay in, where no one was expecting them, where no advance team had gone.

Everyone of us has had those moments when we thought sure God was leading one way, and then faced a sudden change that caught us by surprise. Peter and the others adjusted their plans, this tiny decision to say 'Okay Jesus, we've made all these plans but I can tell the others to stop, and I'll say goodbye', or words to that effect.

There was no announcement; 'This is a test Peter where we see if you kill your plans on what you want Jesus to do for you, or if you follow Him nothing doubting.' Such a small decision to adapt to the Lord's change of direction - yet Peter made the right decision though he didn't see it for what it was.

4-5) In John 6:22-69 Jesus had just fed 5,000 men plus women and children

And in the early morning hours He simply walked across the lake to get directly to the other side. Many of the people who had been miraculously fed had walked around the lake and then asked Jesus how He got there. He deflected their question, not about to tell them He walked across the water, and upon stating the fact they followed Him not because they were believers, but because they got their bellies filled, He decided to weed out the ones who 'believed' with ulterior motives.

He did this by teaching hard to understand parables like 'You must eat my flesh' and 'drink my blood'. Those statements caused even many of his disciples to leave. He asked the 12 if they too would go. Peter cut through to the core truth - essentially saying, I don't know what you're talking about, but you have the words of eternal life and are the Messiah - so to whom else would we go?

We also face that decision point where Jesus asks something of us we don't understand and can't explain. It may not be a parable about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, but it will be a hard to understand spiritual truth relevant to our lives. What was your first point of a similar decision to follow Jesus even though you didn't understand everything? What was that first point of confusion about what He was saying or the way He was leading? Many back away from the Lord at that point, confused, hurt, saying it is too difficult to be a Christian, or to do what He asked.

6) Peter is used by the devil because details of Jesus' plan are revealed - He must die - and Peter says 'No way!' Matthew 16:16-28 (21-28)

At this point in his life, Peter didn't love the Lord with no strings attached, He saw the Lord through the eye glasses of what HE thought Messiah should be to him.

We all face that next step - we survive and make the right decision at the first point of confusing teaching, or the Lord asks something of us we don't understand at that moment, or life has thrown us a curve, yet we decide to stay in His will and follow Him. Up to the point of Jesus' arrest, after 3 1/2 years of following Jesus, Peter STILL had no clue Jesus had to die. Jesus told him he loved the plans of man rather than the plans of God. That's what it gets down to - your plans for your life or his?

7) In Luke 22:60-62 Peter has just denied the Lord for the 3rd time as prophesied, and it says 'And the Lord turned, and looked at Peter.'

This is the point in each believer's life, each disciple, where the ugliness of our heart is revealed to us. At this point we have a choice. Peter went away and wept bitterly, his ideas of what Jesus would do as Messiah were dashed on the rocks to the point he denied 3x even knowing Jesus. He was confused, angry, hating himself and his cowardice after making several bold statements in the weeks and months before. He saw the worst part of his heart, and He knew Jesus saw his heart too.

In times like that people go one way or the other when they consider the total deconstruction of how they thought their life would turn out and the decisions they made that put them in their current situation. But Peter and the others hung around for one last promise - something about being raised from the dead. What's that mean?

That's exactly what He asks each of us to do - He allows us to experience different decision points which crucify and kill part of us, but these must happen to experience a resurrection that is far, far better.

We've seen a series of small decisions Peter made that were key to keeping him in the Lord's perfect will in his life. The Lord's revelations to us about His will come with subtlety, simplicity, and gently. It is like a railroad track that runs parallel for a long and straight way. Then one track starts bending away ever so slightly, until it reaches a point the train cannot run on it any more for fear of derailment. That is how it is with the Lord. We are on one track and He on the other, but when we start to bend away it takes a very close and honest look at our hearts to discern we have actually widened the gap between where we are going and where He is going. At some point we may stop and wonder how it happened, and as we've not come to know, it happened one small decision at a time.

New subject next week, until then, blessings,
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