

Devotionals for the Week of April 23, 2023

Our devotional section provides additional spiritual input for helping you go further and deeper in your journey with the Lord. It is our desire, our hope, and our prayer that this devotional section will be a helpful Spiritual Life tool for you to utilize on a regular basis. Each day's devotional will typically consist of Scripture, commentary, and a prayer response. Current Devotionals can be accessed each day online at www.capecodchurch.com/devotionals or by using the Cape Cod Church App (select "Connect" on the bottom main page and then "Daily Devotional" on next page). Be sure to check Saturday and Sundays for special postings of poems, stories, etc. Printed copies from the prior week are available at the Connection Desk.

Monday – Doors - Choosing Doors – Best Pathways Assured

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Ephesians 5:8-10, 15-17 (NIV)

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:11 (NIV)

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you." Psalm 32:8

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

This is week two of a five-week devotional series entitled, "Doors." As followers of Christ, we seek to live fully for God. Living fully for God is all about having lives that are an expression of God's will and not our own. Our challenge is to discover, enter into, and see God's will fulfilled in our lives. Christians often use the idea of "Doors" to help them in their journey of seeking, finding, and living out God's will. Each of the five weeks of this devotional series has six Devotionals. We hope the "Doors" devotional series will further equip you to go forward in the lifetime pursuit of discovering and aligning yourself with God's glorious will for your life. Week One: Open Doors. Week Two: Choosing Doors. Week Three: In Between Doors. Week Four: True Doors. Week Five: Double Doors. We begin Week Two, Choosing Doors, with the following:

As followers of Christ, we come to the point in our lives where we choose to live fully for God. In doing so we embrace the open doors God puts before us as opportunities to serve the kingdom of God and bless the lives of other people. Living fully for God is all about having lives that are

an expression of God's will and not our own.

Figuring out which doors are opportunities to align ourselves with God's will and which are not, can be quite a challenge throughout the course of our lives. There are approaches for determining God's will that are flawed that get into the mix and complicate our lives. We will examine these faulty approaches over the course of the week and trust God for help at getting them out of the mix. For today we want to find the encouragement we need from our passages above that will help us to be confident that we can go forward in the lifetime pursuit of discovering and aligning ourselves with God's will.

What an encouraging expression from Ephesians: "Now you are light in the Lord." Because this is who we are in Christ we can: "Live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord." It says that we have been given the ability to: "Not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is." Let's join the Psalmist and say to God in complete assurance: "You make known to me the path of life." May we hear afresh the Lord speaking to us these wonderful words: "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you."

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, "fill me with joy in your presence" today. I know you will help me to be close to you. I am confident that this will keep me from being stressed out about the challenge of knowing your will for my life. I pray that throughout the week I will learn all the things you want to teach me about choosing doors. I look forward to all that you have in store for me. Amen!

Tuesday – Doors - Choosing Doors – Clear Understandings Gained

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

Genesis 4:2B - 5

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. Ephesians 1:4

So, we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better. Colossians 1:9-10

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

The subject of "God's will" is not an easy one to get a handle on. So, let's use an analogy to help us explore this very important subject. Imagine that God has placed you at the edge of a field of rocks. The field is about the size of a city block and the rocks vary in size, color, shape, mineral make-up, etc. God says to you, "go and find the rock that is meant for you and bring it back here. Before you go, here is a pamphlet of instructions to help you in your quest."

So, you decide that sitting down and reading the pamphlet is the best way to begin your quest. You learn that the field is divided into 4 quadrants that are clearly marked and then you read these very important words, "from the top right quadrant you may not choose your rock." Of course, that "narrows the field" significantly. You finish the pamphlet and come up with 5 important guidelines about choosing an acceptable rock: (1) it must be able to be held in one hand but not so small that you could hold more than one rock in your hand; (2) it can have any combination of red, yellow, black, or white coloring, but it cannot have any blue, green, or purple coloring; (3) it must have a bumpy surface; (4) it must be a rock that you would be pleased to have as your rock; and finally, (5) from the moment you step on the field you may not take any longer than 8 hours to make your selection.

With this good beginning to your quest, you look out over the field and the challenge you face doesn't loom so large as when you first looked out over the field before you read the pamphlet. But still, you have a lot of ground to cover and only so much time. As you go along in your quest, you soon realize that rocks that meet your criteria are not going to be readily found and you feel the weightiness of your challenge. On the other hand, you are glad for the clearer understanding of what you are looking for, because it means the vast majority of rocks in the field are eliminated from your search.

After about an hour into your search, you realize with a great deal of excitement that you are holding in your hand a rock that meets all the criteria. So, you travel on holding it in one hand. About two hours later you find another rock that is acceptable. Again, you are excited and then resume your search with a rock in each hand. You have been at it another hour when a realization suddenly strikes you. If a third rock is found, you will not be able to carry all three rocks and you will be forced to make a decision to leave one of the three behind.

You know that you found the two acceptable rocks in the first quadrant and there are still two other available quadrants. You know you only have 4 hours left. You know that if you spent the rest of your time searching you would find other acceptable rocks and a decision would need to be made each time. You know that if you had all the acceptable rocks in front of you, it still would come down to a decision and it would be even harder. You then realize you don't need to use all the available time and you don't need any more acceptable rocks. You simply put one rock on the ground and walk back to where you started. When you get back, God says, "well done, enjoy your rock."

This analogy will be helpful to us throughout the week as we explore the subject of "God's will" and as we look at "faulty" approaches for determining God's will. Remember, it is an analogy and doesn't touch on everything we need for a full understanding of God's will. We will add additional understandings as we go along. For today take some time and find things in the analogy that correspond to real life and the pursuit of God's will. In particular, in what ways does the analogy help you with the faulty approach of thinking there is only one right rock? Also, look for correspondence between our Genesis passage and the analogy.

There is relief that comes to us when we realize we don't have to find "the one right rock" out of all the possible rocks out in the field. It is important that we guard ourselves from viewing God's will, beforehand, as finding the one right rock, while understanding that the rock we choose becomes the one right rock afterwards. We will look at this more fully as we move through the week and we will explore the role of God's guidance in decision making as well.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, we ask you to give us complete knowledge of your will and to give us spiritual wisdom and understanding. May the way we live always honor and please you, Lord, and may our lives produce every kind of good fruit. Grant that we will keep growing as we learn to know you better and better (from our Colossians passage). Amen!

Wednesday – Doors - Choosing Doors – Transformed Hearts Secured

But he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.
Genesis 4:5

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. Psalms 37:4

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:1-2

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

Let's create an imaginary version of the "Cain and Abel" story from Genesis that is based on our "rock" analogy from yesterday. As you read it, pretend that you haven't read the "rock" analogy yet. Here goes: "It was time for Cain and Abel to come before the Lord for worship. Cain brought the rock he had selected from the field of rocks as a gift to the Lord. Abel also brought the rock he had selected from the field of rocks as a gift to the Lord. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked

dejected."

If we hadn't read the "rock" analogy we would be perplexed about the outcome of Cain and Abel's worship experience. But we have read it, so let's create a little more detail as we use the "rock" analogy with Cain and Abel. Cain went into the field of rocks and walked for hours and hours. He had begun at 8 am and it was already 5 pm. He had found several rocks along the way that would have been great selections, but he just couldn't make a decision. He kept thinking that somewhere in the field was the perfect rock. Cain decided to walk to the very center of the field where he could easily see into all four quadrants. Not far into the top right quadrant Cain saw a beautiful rock. Cain said to himself, "I gotta have that rock." Cain dropped the two rocks he had been carrying and went into the top right quadrant. The rock was even more beautiful than he had thought and he was extremely delighted with it. Cain's rock took two hands to carry back. It was a beautiful blue-green rock and very, very smooth.

Let's get back to Genesis. The Lord did not accept Cain and his gift because he chose to do things his way and not God's way. There was nothing wrong with Cain being a farmer. There was nothing wrong with his crops. It's just that his crop gift was not a part of the worship plan that God had evidently communicated to both of them previously. Our passage from Psalms helps us understand that our primary focus in life must be God. When we delight in the Lord and his ways, he transforms us so that the desires of his heart become the desires of our heart.

It would seem that the primary focus in life for Abel was God. He delighted in God, and he delighted in his ways. The desires of his heart were all strongly connected into his being one who delighted in God and his ways. Cain, however, was more focused of the desires of his heart than he was in delighting in God and his ways. Like Cain, if our primary focus is not God, we are at risk for having the desires of our heart move beyond God and his ways. Cain delighted more in the fruit of his labors than he did in God and his ways.

In an ironic twist, Cain comes to worship God (an act of devotion and surrender) in his own way. Cain wants what he wants to be what God wants. So great is Cain's expectation that God will accept him and his gift, that he is blown away with anger and dejection when he and his gift are not accepted. God is not in the business of conforming his will to our will. We can so strongly desire to go in a certain direction (door) with our lives that we equate the strength of that desire with God's will. Like Cain, we want what we want to be what God wants. When we do this, we are deceived and are not being ones who delight in God and his ways. In the words of our Romans passage our greatest need is that of our becoming "a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable."

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, deliver me from worldly thinking and behavior. Transform me into a new person and

change the way I think and act. Lord, I give myself to you, a living and holy sacrifice. I know this is your will for my life and that it is good and pleasing and perfect. Amen!

Thursday – Doors - Choosing Doors – Circumstantial Pressures Resisted

When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. Genesis 4:3

There is a wide-open door for a great work here, although many oppose me. 1 Corinthians 16:9

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

It was pointed out yesterday that we can so strongly desire to go in a certain direction (door) with our lives that we equate the strength of that desire with God's will. Cain wanted what he wanted, and the strong desire of his heart moved him beyond God and his ways. Cain's crop gift was not a part of the worship plan that God had put in place for mankind and yet he went with it anyway thinking that what he so strongly wanted would somehow be alright with God .

Cain went with a crop gift for another reason as well. Other than the fact that it was harvest time, we don't know why the moment was right for Cain and Abel to come before God with their gifts in an act of worship. But, evidently, it was time and it seems that Cain succumbed to the pressure of the moment. His circumstance of needing an immediate gift contributed to Cain's poor choice. His succumbing to the pressure of the moment was very likely due to a lack of preparation. Cain could have raised some sheep on the side, or he could have made arrangements with his brother, Abel. Either way he needed to be prepared for this moment and he wasn't. Cain's circumstances contributed to his making the choice of a gift that was unacceptable to God.

How often the pressure of the moment leads to our choosing the available doors before us in the hope that somehow our choices will be acceptable to God and will work out to be his will for our lives. It is vital that we cultivate a heart and life aligned with God and his ways. This preparation will help us become ones who are able to rise above the pressure of the moment and consistently choose doors that are acceptable to God. More often than not, the doors that are acceptable to God are not acceptable to us because they may lead to rough and tough circumstances. We want to keep our circumstances smooth and easy. This is another way that circumstances influence our choice of doors. Open doors for us are only those that will maintain our smooth and easy circumstances or get us out of ones that are rougher and tougher than we would like.

In our 1 Corinthians passage we see that the Apostle Paul viewed a door that would lead to rough and tough circumstances as an open door. He was able to do this because his heart and life were

aligned with God and his ways. In the words of Proverbs, the Apostle Paul was able to trust in the Lord with all his heart, not depend on his own understanding, seek his will in all he did, and be shown which path to take (over and over again).

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, teach me what it means to be one whose heart and life are aligned with you and your ways. Show me ways that my decision-making process is flawed. Help me to trust you with all my heart and truly not depend on my own understanding. I choose to seek your will in all I do and I believe you will show me the paths that are acceptable to you. Amen!

Friday – Doors - Choosing Doors – Sinful Desires Subdued

“Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.” One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him. Genesis 4:6-8

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Epaphras, a member of your own fellowship and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God. Colossians 4:12

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

What a great prayer in our Colossians passage. It means a lot to have people praying for us and it's particularly good if they are "asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God.," like Epaphras did in his prayer. It is kind of obvious that Cain needed a lot of work toward being made into someone who was strong and perfect and fully confident in following the whole will of God. It seems that Cain was at a crossroads in his life.

So far in his life he was straddling the fence between living for himself and living for God. Then came the proving ground moment that we saw earlier in our story. Cain missed the mark when it came to worshiping God in a manner that was aligned with God and his ways. We see in our Genesis passage that Cain was angry and dejected because he and his gift were not accepted by God and because Abel and his gift were accepted. God then shows Cain the crossroads he is facing when he says, "You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what

is right, then watch out!"

This is a moment that will set the course for Cain's life. God says to Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master." Cain's act of murdering his brother shows us that sin won the battle not just for that moment but for a lifetime. When Cain was at the crossroads of choosing between a life lived for God according to his righteous ways and a life lived for himself according to sinful ways, he chose the latter. In Jude, the next to the last book in the Bible, godless people are described there, and it is said of them, "Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain.

If someone says they are a follower of Christ, and yet they go about living for themselves and pursuing sinful ways, the reality of their practice calls into question the reality of their profession. Our 2 Corinthian passage says, "anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" So, it is essential that we are sure about whether or not we are a true follower of Christ. A true follower of Christ is committed to becoming the new person that goes along with belonging to Christ. The person who belongs to Christ totally wants to cooperate with Him so that truly the old life is left behind and the new life is pursued. In addition, they want to do their part to help others become genuine followers of Christ as well.

Earlier in speaking of Cain, we talked about him facing a "proving ground moment" and then afterwards facing a "crossroads" that would set his destiny. We face both of these as well but in reverse order. Since the moment Christ secured redemption on the cross, every person must face the crossroads of accepting or rejecting Christ and his gift of redemption. One who accepts Christ has the destiny of becoming a new person with a new life. As Christ followers we are given "proving ground moments" that test how we are doing with being aligned to God and his ways. If we miss the mark at these moments, it does not change our destiny. God provides relational forgiveness, restoration, and renewal. Our gracious God has a way of incorporating all of this into the grand plan of our lives as true followers of Christ.

In other words, your "missing the mark moments" do not derail you from being one who is committed to "following the whole will of God" throughout the course of your life. In addition, God will continue to make you strong and perfect, fully confident in your pursuit of living fully for God and his will for your life. God is truly awesome.

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Thank you, Lord, for your commitment to me. Your amazing patience and unfailing love are so obvious and so welcome in my life. Today, dear Lord, I pray the prayer of Epaphras for myself: Make me strong and perfect, fully confident that I am following the whole will of God. Amen!

Saturday – Doors - Choosing Doors – Intimate Council Experienced

I will lift up my soul to you, Lord. I trust in you, my God Cause me to understand your ways, Lord; teach me your paths All the paths of the Lord lead to gracious love and truth for those who keep his covenant and his decrees Who is the one who fears the Lord? God will teach him the path he should choose The intimate counsel of the Lord is for those who fear him so they may know his covenant. My eyes look to the Lord continuously. Psalm 25:1-2A, 4, 10, 12, 14-15A (ISV)

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10

Today's thoughts from today's verses:

Earlier in the week we talked about the importance of guarding ourselves from viewing beforehand the discovering of God's will as finding the one right door. We also put forward the understanding that the door we choose becomes the one right door afterwards. In order to get a better handle on these understandings and the role of God's guidance in decision making, it will be helpful to consider God's will in three different ways. We will consider God's "prescriptive will," his "sovereign will," and his "intervening will." To do this adequately we will need more than just today's Devotional. It looks like these considerations will fit in well with next week's emphasis, so we can look forward to delving into all this more fully throughout the coming week.

So, to wrap up our week we will introduce you to the three forms of God's will we just mentioned and touch on some thoughts from today's Scriptures:

(1) God's prescriptive will: when a doctor gives you a prescription, he is making medicine available to you, but it is up to you to make use of what he has prescribed for you. Similarly, God prescribes things for us in his Word, the Bible. That which God prescribes for us in Scripture are his desires for us, but it is up to us to respond just like it is up to us to take the medicine the doctor has prescribed. The Bible says that God is not willing (does not desire) for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (his will or desire).

(2) God's sovereign will: not all that God desires for us as people actually happens. In the end there will be those who have repented (God's desire) and those who perish (not God's desire). When we get to the end of time, all that actually happens is God's sovereign will. This one is complex, and we will try to unravel it a bit next week.

(3) God's intervening will: God is always at work in our world and in our lives. He is always at work as he seeks to draw people toward himself and toward a positive response to what he desires (prescriptive will) for them. Down through the ages, of all those who repent and of all those who do not, there will not be one that God did not seek to draw to himself and the response of believing in him for eternal salvation. This is God's intervening will and it is the kind of thing

he is constantly doing as he seeks to help us find and go through the open doors he has for us. God is so amazingly interventive in the outworking of his will, that he is able to incorporate every single choice we make into the grand scheme of his sovereign plan.

We can look forward to going further with all this next week. It is truly amazing to begin to grasp the extent that God has gone to bring about the absolute best outcome for our lives. The Psalmist's understandings of experiencing God and the unfolding of his will in one's life are expressed beautifully in today's Psalm: "All the paths of the Lord lead to gracious love and truth for those who keep his covenant and his decrees Who is the one who fears the Lord? God will teach him the path he should choose The intimate counsel of the Lord is for those who fear him so they may know his covenant."

Today's prayer response from today's thoughts:

Lord, I pray the Psalmist's words as a part of my prayer to you today: "I lift up my soul to you, Lord. I trust in you, my God Cause me to understand your ways, Lord; teach me your paths My eyes look to you continuously." And now I pray these words from the Lord's prayer: "Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth (and in my life), as it is in heaven." Amen!

