



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God**

*God pursues a love relationship with you that is real and personal.*

**John 5:17 - 19**

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This summer we're talking about experiencing God. You and I come to know God by knowing and doing the *will* of God. Just think what your life would be like if you could know God's will. Most people, though, don't have a clue about what's supposed to happen or what direction *works*. They base their life and decisions around their emotions and circumstances and false beliefs rather than God's will. It leads to stress and frustration.

Like the office jokes: Is it time for your medication or mine? I'm not tense. I'm just terribly, terribly alert. They say stress is when you wake up screaming and you realize you haven't even fallen asleep yet. ☺ The sobering fact is, 2 out of 5 average Americans feel *more* stressed than they did 5 years ago. Prescriptions for anti-depressants, anti-anxiety drugs, and sleep aids rose 27%. Let alone un-prescribed drug use. The NY Times reports the cost of stress to business costs up to \$300 billion a year in absenteeism, lost productivity, turnover, and illness. Just think of the loneliness! The crazy thing is people aren't choosing this, they're trying to do the best they can. But they have no idea what God's best is. Why is it we have more education, medical personnel, counselors, and technology than ever before, and yet stress and our ability to cope is lower than ever? Where's God's will in that?!

Isn't knowing God's will like foreseeing the future? Like reading ahead in a novel? In some ways it is! After all, we *know* God is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. We know God wills for his perfect good to happen. Therefore we can have hope. We can be generous. We can be faithful. We can be quietly optimistic. God is still at the center of the universe, despite our feelings and despite all appearances otherwise. God's will has been revealed in the Bible, God's Word, and in the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Because of this, we know God wills to mend the whole creation. Romans 8:19 *"The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 21 For the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."* The whole creation liberated! But in order to experience God in the meantime, you've got to realize there's only one thing God wants from you, but even though he's God, he can't take it from you.

There's only one stronghold God cannot or will not break down: the human heart. The only thing God has ever wanted from the beginning of creation is a love relationship with people. And that's key to your experiencing God. The truth is, everything in your Christian life, everything about knowing and experiencing God, everything about knowing his will, depends on the quality of your love relationship with God.

Wait a minute. My "love relationship" with God is this going to help me in my marriage? Or my parenting? Or my job? Or my frustrations? Or my success? Or my pain? Yes. Don't let this message

stay in your “church/spirituality” box. Let it permeate every area of your life, and you’ll begin to experience God and God’s will. A love relationship with God isn’t just for Sunday; it’s going to make a difference on Monday, because the only thing that will help you experience God and God’s will is your love relationship with God—at work, school, home, and in the rest of the world.

**I used to worry so much that I’d miss God’s will for my life.** One time, my final year of seminary, I was facing some major life decisions: Where to live, what to do, which job to take, who I wanted to work for... It became all-consuming. I was so stressed out thinking I’d miss the one God wanted me to take, I became almost paralyzed. Until Professor Ashbrook, a wise old professor of Pastoral Care said to me: “God’s will can take place in any one of those positions.” It hit me like a ton of bricks. You mean God’s will wasn’t like “the narrow road” that I might miss by 3/10ths of a degree? He was saying “No. When you’re in a love relationship with God, God’s will can take place in any situation you might face, because you are enacting his will—wherever you are! God’s already at work! Do you honestly believe that you can choose a path so far gone that God’s will can’t take place in the midst of it? Even if you feel that you could be “so far gone” in a major area: your marriage, your career, your family, your addiction, or any consequences to bad choices you made? You decide to walk with God, and then you choose where you want. If you’re passionate about God, you can trust your passions.

**The most important thing to know** about God’s will is that God is pursuing every single person to enter into a love-relationship with him. Christianity is not just a book of teachings or principles for living. It’s about being in a love relationship with God, so that the whole creation gets mended. When you know this it radically changes you. You’ve glimpsed God’s story. You’re experiencing God in your own life. And you’ve experienced God’s desire that every person can have this love relationship. Knowing this, it means your life will very likely interact with theirs again, in this life, or the next. What if you acted like that?

- **What if every interaction you have with someone is based on what will happen the NEXT time you run into that person?**
- What if you act in such a way as to make it easier to see that person the next time?
- What if you treat that person kindly, so that the next time you see them, it’ll go better?
- What if you treat people fairly now, so that in the future they just might remember you and the God you love?
- What if God wants to intersect that life, and He wants to do it through you?

Remember what Pastor Steve said last week: God is always at work all around you. When God called Moses to the burning bush in and spoke to him, God said, “*7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians"*” Ex. 3:7-8. Do you see it in verse 8? God says “I have come down to rescue them.” It wasn’t Moses who freed the Hebrew people. It was God. Because He loved them so much, God will was that God was going to free them, with or without Moses. And Moses experienced God in ways no one ever had, because Moses chose to enter into that relationship and go with God.

Look at Jesus and all he did. During his 33 years, he completed everything God gave Him to do. Jesus explains it: “*17 My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working. 19 "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. 20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these."*” John 5:17, 19-20. Jesus tells his followers:

- The Father has been working right up until now.
- Now God has me working.

- I do nothing on my own initiative.
- I watch to see what the Father is doing.
- I do what I see the Father already is doing.
- You see, the Father loves me.
- He shows me everything that he, himself is doing.

Now stop. This is not a step-by-step way of experiencing God, it's a description of a love relationship Jesus had with His Father. Jesus is saying basically, watch and see where God is working and join Him!

**The big problem is, we don't know how to recognize God,** let alone what God's doing *around* us. This is one of the greatest tragedies of God's people. We can't even begin to recognize God, because we won't let him work through us. We hold back. We're like Moses, still sitting by the bush, not willing to go with God to free the people, because we old back, never enter into a love relationship with God.

In the burning bush, God took the initiative to come to Moses and love him. God invited Moses and he's been inviting people ever since. **He's inviting you and me today:** to come away with him; to talk with him and be with him; to work for justice with him on the greatest adventure of your life; but first and foremost to enter into a love relationship with him only.

*And if you've already given your heart to him,* can you describe your relationship with God by sincerely saying *"I love you with all my heart?"* If not, it simply means something's gotten in the way. We're going to pause right now and ask the Holy Spirit to bring our church into a whole-hearted love relationship with Him.

**You can't substitute your relationship with God for anything.** Nothing can substitute for it. There's an old hymn I've found that I treasure, because I want it to be our prayer. You can sing it, pray it, or just soak it up as the rest of us sing and pray our way through it: **HYMN: "I'd Rather Have Jesus"**

Which will it be? Jesus, or silver, gold, riches untold, houses and lands? Jesus, or men's applause and world-wide fame? Jesus, or be the king of a vast domain?

**If you knew all you had was a relationship with God, would you be totally and completely satisfied?** The Bible leads us to understand that God is saying, *"I want you to love me above everything else. When you are in a relationship of love with Me, you have everything else there is."* **To be loved by God is the highest relationship, the highest achievement, and the highest position you can achieve in life.** John 15:15 *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."*

Allow yourself to enter into a love-relationship with God and just be. When you are filled with Him, what else do you need, but more of Him?