

God's Way or Your Way

Key Passage: Matthew 16:13-23

Supporting Scripture: Isaiah 55:8-9

Summary

Has there ever been a time when you truly believed you were doing the right thing, only to discover that you were wrong?

Maybe you took on a responsibility that God had not given you, or perhaps you tried to avoid a situation He wanted to use in your life to accomplish His purpose. Even when we sincerely desire to follow the Lord, we may unknowingly veer off course and become an obstacle to His purposes. That's why it's so important to seek the Lord's guidance before we try to maneuver our way out of a difficult situation or rush in to fix a problem. Our plans often seem logical, reasonable, or compassionate, but if they don't align with the Lord's will, we are just getting in His way.

Sermon Points

In Matthew 16:13-23, Jesus wanted His disciples to know two important truths: (1) that He was the Messiah, and (2) that His death was necessary for the atonement of mankind's sin.

Peter understood the first one when he boldly proclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16), but he couldn't comprehend the second truth because it didn't fit with his preconceived plan. The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus, not to watch Him die.

At this pivotal point in Christ's ministry, He began to show His disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem, experience great suffering, be killed, and be raised up on the third day (vv. 21-23). To Peter, this seemed like an impossibility so he pulled Jesus aside saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You" (v. 22). But what seemed so logical to Peter resulted in a severe rebuke from Jesus, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interest, but man's" (v. 23). Peter was actually opposing the Lord's redemptive plan with his human reasoning.

Why do we get in God's way?

We are really no different from Peter because we too can be guilty of putting our own interests ahead of Christ's. We may get in God's way if . . .

We don't understand the whole story. When Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter was still determined that the plan not unfold as Jesus said. That's why he drew his sword to fight for Him. He didn't understand that Christ's death was essential for the Lord's plan of salvation. Sometimes God's will is unexplainable or seems unreasonable from our perspective because it may involve suffering, pain, or loss. But the Lord's plan is so much greater than ours because it's a heavenly one. Although it may include hurt and hardship, it's always the best.

We fail to see the cause of hurt as God's tool to accomplish something in our lives. Strangely, we have the idea that the Christian life ought to be easy and free from too much trouble or suffering. Therefore, if our expectations of a comfortable life are not met, we may try to change God's plan. But He's the One

orchestrating whatever's going on in our lives. He alone knows what's required to make us into the people He wants us to be and exactly what will equip us to serve Him in the manner He's planned. Pain never means God doesn't love us.

We are ignorant of His plan. Instead of assuming that anything hard or painful could never be a part of God's will, we must consider that we may be exactly where we should be. The apostle Paul experienced extreme suffering as he served Christ, and Joseph was unfairly treated by his brothers and the Egyptians, yet both these men were exactly where God wanted them.

We are ignorant of God's ways. We tend to think that we are in God's will when life is pleasant, but that we've somehow missed it if we experience adversity of some kind. But His will does not always include happiness, health, good times, and prosperity. The Lord doesn't think or act like we do. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us that His thoughts and ways are much higher than ours. If we don't understand what He's doing, we may wonder how a loving God could let us experience difficult or painful situations, yet oftentimes these are exactly what He uses to shape our character into Christ's image. By misunderstanding the nature of His love and denying that His plan could ever include pain or hardship, we are actually getting in His way.

We are prompted by sincere devotion and loyalty to intervene when someone is hurting or suffering. It's difficult to watch people suffer, especially loved ones. Our immediate desire is to fix the situation if we can. We want God to heal every physical or emotional ailment and meet every need, but that's not always how He operates. Our protective love may actually hinder what the Lord wants to do in the other person's life. This calls for discernment because Christians should help and care for one another, yet our priority is to follow God's will. We can't rescue everyone from trouble, but we can help them by seeking the Lord on their behalf. Instead of immediately requesting relief or healing, we should ask the Lord to keep them faithful, submissive, and humble until He accomplishes what He desires in their lives.

We have a strong tendency to take up another's offense. When we see someone being mistreated or misused, we may want to do whatever we can to right the wrong, but the Lord could be working in that person's life through the unfair situation. If we get between God and what He is doing in someone else, He then has to deal with us before He can achieve His purpose in the other person's life.

We interfere because of our selfishness. When Peter denied Jesus three times, he was thinking about his own safety. Being in the center of God's will requires that we deny ourselves. We must be willing to let Him use painful and difficult situations to sift and sand us into Christ's likeness. And we also have to trust Him to do the same in the lives of those we love.

Response

Can you think of any ways you may have gotten in God's way? What happened as a result? What did you learn from these experiences?

Have you ever been disappointed because the Lord didn't intervene in a situation as you expected? As you look back, what higher purposes do you think He was trying to achieve through your suffering or adversity?

Sometimes our protective love for others causes us to get in God's way. Rather than immediately trying to rescue someone from trouble or suffering, how can you respond in ways that give precedence to God's will?