



Israel's Greatest Hits Vol. II-Part 15

Purpose Fulfilled

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Existential nihilism. There are a couple of words you probably didn't toss around much this week. I don't think you did at least unless you perhaps teach philosophy or you've picked up some reading by Friedrich Nietzsche. But while you may not have said the words, existential nihilism, I think some of us have chosen to live that way. You see existential nihilism asserts that life has no meaning, there's no purpose behind it all. And that's a secular philosophy you may not subscribe to, but I think so often Satan is working hard to get you to live that way. I mean, think of the words we do toss around every day. I mean, we talk about things being meaningless or useless or a waste of time or what a random thing or, you know, that was by chance. I mean, these kinds of phrases, futile, absurd, they're words that have a lot of nihilistic thought behind them. I mean, we may not connect it all at that level but, I mean, it is something that we need to recognize as a fight between the truth and what some people would say is true, but of course is devoid from everything that is true.

Nihilists. Nietzsche, by the way, who was the most famous proponent of this early in the late 19th century, I think actually believed what he taught and he proved that by going crazy by the time he was 44. I mean his philosophy collapsed in on him while he was espousing to the world that you could become what he called, this German-Polish philosopher, he called the "ubermensch." You could become ubermensch, means a superman. You can rise above all this kind of meaninglessness once you recognize the meaninglessness of it all. Then you'll be the ubermensch, you'll be this superman. Well, of course, he ends up just going nuts and spends the last 11 years of his life in a vegetative state and dead. So, I think it's safe to say that this philosophy from one who claimed to understand it best is not the thing that leads to human flourishing.

I mean, if you think about it he's fighting and suppressing the things that actually do lead to God's creation being all that it should and can be. I mean, the things that allow the fueling of life in its fullest of course requires meaning. He popularized phrases like "God Is Dead" and "Christianity Is the Impediment." Of course God is not dead and Christianity is not the impediment. Matter of fact, Christian theology is the answer. The answer to the truth that God is a personal God who designs and creates. And creates individuals in his own image that have meaning and purpose and design and a plan. That's very important for us to recognize. There is an order to all of this and Psalm 138 can help us lock into that even when things are hard, even when we're tempted to say meaningless and random and futile and by chance and what was that for and that makes no sense and absurd. There is sense, there is purpose, there is plan even to your life when things get really, really tough or if you're just going through the mundane routine of life.

I want you to look at this passage with me. If you haven't already turned there, Psalm 138. It's a psalm of David as the superscription says. It reminds us that we've got to affirm a God, a God who is never pointless or random or chaotic. A God who is not random, pointless or chaotic with your life and the years that remain between now and the end of this life on this earth, there's always a

purpose, there's always a point, there's always design, there's always order, there's always meaning.

Matter of fact, I'd like you to start at the bottom of this psalm just to give you the theme that ties it all together. This is the cohesive statement that really helps us understand the context of the rest of this psalm. Psalm 138 verse 8 reads, "The Lord," and you can see capital O-R-D, which indicates to us that this is a translation of the Hebrew word Yahweh, God's personal name, "Yahweh will fulfill his purpose for me." So David's saying, I know this, I recognize this and then here's the very familiar phrase we've had in the last 14 psalms that we've studied. We've looked at this phrase often: "For your steadfast love," translating that Hebrew word "hesed" the loyal, faithful, tenacious love of God, "it endures forever." We've seen this line repeated over and over again through the psalms.

"God's steadfast love, it endures forever." I know that God is a God who has my well-being in view, that he has a purpose and plan for me and he's going to fulfill it. And yet, look at the juxtaposition of this last phrase that seems like a man very desperate to make sure he doesn't lose sight of all that. "Do not forsake the work of your hands." Who's he talking about? He's talking about himself. He's talking about himself? Yes. Why? Verse 7, just to go back up here, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life."

It's a hard time for him. I want to read this for you, the whole thing. We'll get to the punch line there again in verse 8, the theme that ties it together. But listen to this Psalm of David, all eight verses. Verse 1. I'm reading from the English Standard Version, it reads this way: "I give you thanks, O Yahweh, with my whole heart." I'm going to dig down deep from the whole of who I am. I'm going to thank you. Now here's an interesting phrase, "before the gods I sing your praise." Now you were taught, of course, there's only one God because that's the truth. There's only one God. But as Paul says to the Corinthians, a city full of a lot of idolatry, there are a lot of gods and a lot of lords, people, but there is really for us only one God and one Lord, because there is only one God and one Lord. There's only one person ultimately in charge who made everything. There are two categories of beings. The creator and the created. And though everything falls into one of those two categories and there's only one God, the Triune God of the universe, there are a lot of people seeking after the authorities and the powers and the deities and even the religions of other things, other entities.

But he says "before all those I sing your praise," I look right past them. I don't see them as anything. "I bow down toward your holy temple and I give thanks to your name for your steadfast love," there's our word again, your hesed, "and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." Above all things? Well, what are the things in view? Well, verse 2, "all the gods," the gods that were worshipped by the surrounding nations. Remember David was called, you might remember, to be the king of Israel and one of the things he had to do is depicted and itemized for us in Second Samuel Chapter 8. He had to defeat a lot of enemies in the surrounding nations, the Ammonites, the Jebusites, all these Philistines who he was constantly fighting, even from his teenage years, who worshipped other gods.

Dagon, Moloch. All the rest of the gods of the nations, he had to put them down and he does so with thanksgiving knowing that God is faithful and loves him and he realizes that he's going to thank that God in the midst, or before, in the presence of, he doesn't care what people think about other leaders, other gods or their idols. I praise you with my whole heart. "You've exalted your name above all things." Every power, every authority, every principality and your word, what you say goes. "On the day I called, you answered me," and there were times in the past that look a lot like the present, which is verse 7, "walking through the midst of trouble." But in the past I've prayed and you've answered me.

I love this phrase now, something Nietzsche could have used, "My strength of soul you increased." I realize this thing that holds us together is God's purpose for me. He's called me in this case, in David's case, to be the king of Israel, to establish a nation, a unified nation, which was divided at the time, a lot of tribalism among the twelve tribes of Israel. And he is called to do something important in all of that. He defeats his surrounding enemies and he realizes in the midst of it God is answering his prayers and his soul is strengthened. "All the kings of the earth," all these enemies that have surrounded me. All the false princes and authorities and powers that bow down to false gods, "all the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O Yahweh."

There's vindication. You are the great God. Your name and work are exalted above all things. Guess what? One day, it says in the Bible, every single power and authority will bow down to Christ. The Triune God will be worshiped and thanked. Every knee will bow, every tongue confess, "For they've heard the words of your mouth," and one day they'll be held accountable for it. "They shall sing of the ways of Yahweh, for great is the glory of Yahweh." There will be, even in that poetic moment of judgment at the Great White Throne, there will be a sense of vindication for God's greatness and glory. God will be honored as it says in Romans Chapter 11 even by the judgment of those who were lost.

Verse 6, "For though Yahweh is high," I mean he's exalted of all things, "he regards the lowly," the humble, "but the haughty," the proud, "he knows from afar." Verse 7, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies," all these surrounding nations that are up against me and all their devotion to their false gods, "and your right hand delivers me." Oh I know this: "Though I'm in the midst of trouble right now," verse 7, he says in verse 8, "The Lord, Yahweh, will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Yahweh, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands."

A great psalm to remind us that God has a plan. A plan not only for the universe and the cosmos, he's got a plan for you. You're not called to be the king of Israel, obviously, but you're called to do something, to exercise dominion somewhere in God's creation. And God has a plan for your life. Life is not meaningless. Life is not chaotic. There's design, there's purpose, there's order. There's nothing useless, ultimately. There's nothing meaningless, there's nothing pointless, there's nothing, ultimately, that is a waste of time in God's economy.

Let's just start with that. Verse 8. Let's just put that down. I know we're starting backwards, but that's the theme that holds this together. Let's write it down, number one. You need to "Be Confident in God's Plan for You." You've got to be confident in that. Crazy people aren't confident



enough. People who collapse in on their own theology of meaninglessness don't get the fact that there is a God, a personal God, who designs, intelligently, individuals and he gives them a purpose. Think about it. When Paul is talking even to the Athenians, the most secularized, idolatrous culture of the Greeks in the first century, he says remember this: "the God who created from one man all families of the earth, he has determined," there is a very important word of purpose and volition, he has determined. "He's determined the exact times, their allotment," for where they will live in the timeline, "and the boundaries of their own habitation." Let's just start with that. You would not argue with that that you had very little to do, nothing to do with when you were born or where you were born. And that, both for the very skeptical and autonomous existentialist or the nihilists who believes there's absolutely no meaning in life, is absolutely contrary to what the Bible says. God determines when you're born, where you're born and it starts with, in this particular statement in Acts 17, with the fact that he wants you to seek him. He wants you to move toward him. He wants you to find him, though he's not far from any one of us, because "in him we live and move and have our being." What a great passage we read there on our Daily Bible Reading this week that I'm quoting.

And I guess we can start with that. If you're going to be confident in God's plan for you I hope you sit here this morning as a redeemed individual. You've repented of your sins, you put your trust in Christ, you've reached out for God in all sincerity, you've sought him with all your heart, soul and strength. God says if you seek me with all your heart I will let myself be found by you. So you should know this: the number one thing of God's will for your life is for you to be saved. As a matter of fact, I can quote a passage for you. How about this, First Timothy 2:4, "God desires all people to be saved." That is his will and in your case if you sit here as a redeemed individual you've stepped into that first primary thing, that calling in your life to be saved. Hey, check that box off and that feels pretty good. It's foundational, it's comprehensive, it's huge, it changes everything. If you're a Christian here today you are fulfilling that particular part, which is not just a part, it's the foundation of all other parts of your calling. God's plan for my life is to be a repentant Christian.

Secondly, as long as I'm quoting passages, he doesn't just want us to seek him, that's a great statement there in Acts 17, but he wants us to grow up and be more like Christ. I'll just quote this to quote a passage about the will of God. First Thessalonians Chapter 4 verse 3. "This is the will of God for you, your sanctification." Sanctification means to be set apart. To be more and more increasingly a reflection of God's holiness in this world. So if you're fighting a battle with temptation, if you're fighting to be more Christlike, even if you're fighting to get up in the morning and spend time in his Word. That battle, you're right in the center of God's will. You're moving in the direction of what God wants for your life.

You should be confident in God's plan for you, but that is just not all there is to it. Because you're looking at a passage about David saying you're going to fulfill your plan for me and I think you're plan for me clearly has been given to me through Nathan the prophet. I understand with the Davidic covenant is, Second Samuel Chapter 7, that I'm supposed to be the king, a very important king, who is going to set a prototype of the kings who will come and the ultimate Messiah who will come. But more than that in the present day, "I got nations surrounding me with other gods and I know what it is to protect and defend these people. I'm to shepherd the people politically as



the commander in chief. I know what I'm called to do." And it would be good for us to know what we're called to do. Right?

Turn with me to Romans Chapter 8. Just to show you there's more to it than saying, "I know the will of God for me, the general will of God, which is for me to be saved and be sanctified." But let's start with that. That is good. As a matter of fact, that is key. And I hope you've "checked those boxes" by having that experience of stepping into the family of God through repentance and faith and fighting the daily battle of sanctification, that's ongoing, and you'll continue that, I trust, for the rest of your life. But let's look at this statement that's often quoted but I do think helps so much to remind us and be confident in God's purpose for our life.

It's Romans 8:28. You've already turn there because you knew where I was headed. Look at it. Romans Chapter 8, scroll down to verse 28 and let's read this as though we've never read it before. "And we know that for those who love God," OK, that's me, saved, working at progressive sanctification, "all things," that seems like a big word, "ALL things work together for," now here's a word that reminds us of the word we just learned again, afresh, in Psalm 138:8, which is hewed, his steadfast love. David says, you're going fulfill your purpose for me because your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever and it's pointed at me and you've set it on me and I know you love me. Well, here's a good complimentary word for that. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good," God has a good plan, "for those who are called according to his," now here's really what I'm trying to get at, "his purpose."

Well, what is his purpose? Some of you are already leaning back, skeptical, you're a Sunday school grad, you know the Bible well, you're going, "people quote this out of context all the time. Keep reading Pastor Mike." Thank you. I'm glad you're here, skeptic. I'm so glad. I want to help you by letting you know that I know that and I want you to read the next verse. And this reaffirms what I've just said, God wants you saved and sanctified because both those elements are here, verse 29, "those he foreknew," which means more than just looking down the corridor of time, the creator of time, he sets his love on you, he knows you in the sense that he loves you, "he's predestined you to become conformed to the image of his Son, in order that we might be the firstborn among many brothers." In the first century, clearly they were. "And those whom he's predestined he's called, those he's called he's justified, those he's justified he's glorified."

So there are the two elements, verse 30, to be saved, and verse 29, to be sanctified. There you go. "I'm still stuck with a lot of just ambiguities about my life. All I know is I'm supposed to be a Christian, I'm supposed to be holy." Yep, you're right and that's good, that's a good place to start. That is God's will for your life. But it could be that God is calling into a position of leadership. It could be that God's calling you into a position of service, could be that God's got you in this task that he wants you to take, or to move to this place or to be involved in that ministry or to take that job or to marry that person. There's the will of God. "Well, that's not in the passage." It is in the passage. I guarantee you it's in the passage.

Look up at verse 26. Here are the verses that precede all this. I know purpose has more to do than just with being saved and sanctified, although clearly that's God's will for your life. Look at verse 26. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as



we ought." I don't know what kinds of things you pray for. I bet you pray for things like this: "here's an opportunity, a new job, maybe I should take it?" "Here's a major, I might want to major in, maybe I should choose that. I don't know. Should I choose this one or that one?" "Here's a person, maybe I should marry this person or that person." "Maybe it's time to have a kid right now. Maybe it's not." "Maybe I should buy this house, maybe I shouldn't." "Maybe I should rent this apartment, maybe I shouldn't." "Maybe I should live here, maybe I should live there." "Maybe I should go to this church, maybe I should go to that church."

We don't know how to pray as we ought. We pray for a lot of things but we don't always see what's right. "But the Spirit himself," here's the good news, "intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words," which completes a triad of a theme about caring deeply about something. Creation is caring deeply. It's personified in the passage as groaning for the redemption of the sons of God. We ourselves groan within our souls. We can't wait to be redeemed and have this sinful body replaced with a glorified body. Now he speaks of the Spirit groaning. It completes this trio of groanings. He groans, he deeply wants what's best, what's right for us to fulfill that purpose. "He who searches hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to," here's the purpose right here, "the will of God." Guess what the Spirit of God is interceding for in my life today as I sit down and pray with a limited view and perspective on what really would be best? Well, the Spirit is interceding according to the will of God about all the details of my life.

The purpose of God for me is set. God knows what he wants me to do. God knows what he wants you to do. You sit down and pray. Should I? Should I? Do I? What do I do? The will of God, what God wants in fulfilling your purpose. You're not alone in trying to seek what that is. I want to encourage you this morning there is a plan and though this is not a counseling session, I want to be pastoral and at least let you know you ought to seek to know, to do, what is pleasing to God. Most pleasing to God, because the decisions are never really between, if you know about saved and sanctified, between good and bad, it's between better and best. I want to do what's right. I want my life to count. God's got a plan for me. I want to know if I'm supposed to be the king of Israel, to fight this battle, am I supposed to make Joab this commander? I need your help, God. I'm going to pray, give me wisdom. And the Spirit is going to be praying, interceding for the saints according to the will of God. Because we know, now I can read verse 28 knowing that it has more than just to do with our salvation or sanctification, he's going to work ALL things together for good. He is going to, to quote our passage, "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me." Why? "Because his steadfast love endures forever." We know that "for those who love God all things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose." Big purpose? I understand verse 29 and 30, sanctification and salvation, but verses 26 through 27, the details of your life. God wants to accomplish his purpose for you.

We've been reading in the Daily Bible Reading through Acts and it's been a great read this week. I've already quoted some things from Acts 17, but I've also read through Acts 20 and 21 and a lot is being revealed to the Apostle Paul about the hard times that face him on the path that God has chosen for him. Much like David. David was supposed to be the king at a time when all the enemies surrounding Israel want to see Israel collapse. Under Saul there is a lot of shaky stuff going on. David had to step up and really consolidate the power and there are a lot of people



trying to undo him. And yet, in the passage in the Apostle Paul's life it's similar in that there are lots of trouble in the path. There are battles for David. There are battles for Paul. You might remember recently this week we read of Agabus saying to Paul you're going to go and you're going to have a lot of bad things happen. You go to Jerusalem, you end up going to Rome, you're going to be in a lot of hurt. You're going to be persecuted, you're going to be imprisoned, you're going to lose your freedom.

In Acts 21, here is what the Ephesian leaders thought of that. "When we heard this," and Luke is writing this, he's one in the crowd here, one of Paul's traveling companions, "we and the people urged him not to go up to Jerusalem." "Don't go. You're going to get arrested, you're going to be in trouble, it's going to be bad, you going to go to prison." "And Paul answered," he said, "what are you doing weeping and breaking my heart?" Right. "I am ready not only," verse 13 says, "to be imprisoned but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased..." Ceased doing what? "Saying, oh Paul, you shouldn't go, you shouldn't go." Why? "Because the will of God is going to be hard for you. We stopped with that and we said," great line, it jumped off the page this week when I was reading, "let the will of the Lord be done."

If God's purpose is going to be fulfilled for you, you need to have Paul's perspective which is "I'm ready. I'm ready not only to be in prison but to die. I'm ready to spend and be expended for the purpose that God has for my life." You want rest? You want perfection? You want everything to go well? Great, it's coming. It's called the New Jerusalem and it's on the way. But right now it's going to be hard. And so it is for your life. Don't think like the world does that if it doesn't feel good it's not God's will for you.

I saw a lot of people quoting this on social media when we read in our Daily Bible Reading Acts Chapter 20. Same theme. People concerned about Paul's well-being going to Jerusalem and Paul said this: "Now I know I'm going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit." That's God's purpose for me. I sense it and I know it and I'm heading there. "Not knowing what will happen to me there," at least not in detail, "except," verse 23, "that the Holy Spirit testifies that in every city imprisonment and afflictions await. But I do not account my life as of any value nor as precious to myself, if only that I may," here it comes, I love this, "finish the course and the ministry that I received from the Lord." In that case his was to testify the Gospel to all these people of the grace of God in the Gentile lands and he said, "listen, I don't care about anything but staying on the path of God's will for my life."

Now again, this is not a counseling session, I can't get into the details of your life. I'd love to counsel you through what the will of God is for you in detail, but I can tell you this: there is a will, there is a path. Don't freak out, don't get into paralysis by analysis. Know what the will of God is in terms of your salvation and your sanctification and then start to pray and pray and pray and seek the truth of God's Word. He's exalted his Word above all things. Right? His name and his Word. Consult it, seek it, and move forward. You can't fear the stuff that David is laying out for us in verses 1 through 5 of our passage. Look at it again, Psalm 138. "I give you thanks, Yahweh, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise." The gods? He has no loyalty to the gods. The gods are being consulted to take David down. "I bow down toward your holy temple," these are



false gods, you're the true God, "I give thanks to your name for your steadfast love," you love me, "and your faithfulness," and your faithfulness to me, "for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. On the day I called you," look in the past I've seen it, "you've answered me," I mean even in the shadow of Goliath you answered me, "my strength of soul you increased. All the kings of the earth will give thanks to you O Lord, for they've heard the words of your mouth, they shall sing of the ways of Yahweh, for great is the glory of Yahweh." He doesn't seem to be afraid. Matter of fact, his enemies who want his undoing, the people who want to pull him off the path of God's will, he's sitting here saying, "They're going to be on my side."

Talk about being on the right side of history, here it is again: you will be exactly where you need to be if you fight every opponent to stay firmly committed to the will of God for your life. If you know what it is, and you know what it is in terms of salvation and sanctification, and now it's going to get into the details of the Word like, I don't know, "Bad company corrupts good morals." "Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers." I mean, things like that, they're going to cost you. But you're going to say, I don't care what you say, I don't care what people think, I'm not going to deviate, I'm not going to be afraid of someone who's actually going out to try and kick me off of the path of the will of God. I'm not going to fear.

Number two, "Don't Fear the Opposition," verses 1 through 5. Don't fear it. You have a lot of opposition to the will of God in your life. As a matter of fact, we have a spiritual foe. David is talking about the gods of the nations. I know this, all the way back to Moses he made it very clear, there are no gods. The gods or the idols are nothing but demons. That's the point. Anything that would want to pull us away from giving thanks to the one true God, serving him and being sanctified in his truth, all of that is nothing but spiritual opposition even if it comes in the form of human beings saying, "I don't think you should do that." In other words, we don't battle against flesh and blood, we battle against the things that are moving behind those people who are criticizing, who are trying to move us off a center of God's will. Principalities and powers. We've got an adversary, a slanderer. According to Second Corinthians 2:11, we're not supposed to be outwitted by Satan because we're not supposed to be ignorant of his schemes, his designs, his plans, his strategies. And you do know his strategies don't you? There's always going to be opposition to the will of God in your life. Always. Always.

Let me take you to a passage real quick in Second Timothy Chapter 2. In Second Timothy Chapter 2 Paul is writing to Timothy, his understudy, who had left at a church to be the pastor there in Ephesus. He'd spent three years there, Paul did personally. He cared a lot about who he put in charge of this church. And so here's Timothy being the pastor and he's left with a job to exercise some dominion as a pastor. I say that because everyone's called in the image of God to exercise leadership in some area of life, whether you're raising kids, whether you're digging a ditch, whether you're building buildings, whether you're pastoring a church, you've got an exercise of dominion. And in this case within the will of God we know this: it's to have a peaceful, joyful, harmonious fellowship that's growing in Christ to make it look all throughout Scripture to really develop and bolster that kind of statement. I mean, Timothy was called. The will of God for his life is to lead a joyful, peaceful, congregation at Ephesus. He had that confirmation.

Drop down to verse 23, Second Timothy 2:23. Here are some things that might want to kick you off the path, discourage you, might even make you want to quit. Avoid them, "Have nothing to do with foolish and ignorant controversies." Now, that's not the will of God for Timothy to be engaged in that. There are a lot of things this week in your life, that are going to engage in your life, that are going to tempt you in your life, that are going to oppose you in your life to get you off of what God's will is for your life. That's the kind of thing that you've got to avoid. Have nothing to do with it.

Here's the rest of the verse. "You know that they bring quarrels," and certainly that's not the goal. That's not God's will for your leadership in Ephesus. "For the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to everyone, able to teach." Now here's the thing. You want to plow ahead with the will of God but you're going to have to "patiently endure evil." And there'll be a lot of it thrown at you to try and get you to back down. "Correcting his opponents..." He's speaking now in the third person but of course he's talking to Timothy about the Lord's servant. "He should patiently endure evil, he should correct his opponents with gentleness." You've got opponents? Yeah, lots of opponents. "God may perhaps grant them repentance," maybe they'll change, maybe they'll stop, maybe they'll turn down, "leading to the knowledge of the truth, and that they may come to their senses," underline this now, "and escape the snare of the devil, having been captured by him to do his will." After being captured by him to do his will.

Guess what? Satan's will for your life is not God's will for your life. Satan is always going to ensnare people to try and be the discouragement, to try and be the opposition, to try and be the slanderer or the adversary against you accomplishing God's will. And I bet you can think of people right now in your life. I know you're mad at them if you really have a righteous indignation about opposition, but realize all of this, not to relieve them of culpability, because of course they are guilty, accessories to Satan's work, but you just got to know our battle ultimately is against the adversary of God, who does not want you to accomplish God's will for your life.

When I talk about opposition, I want to clarify real quickly with two passages that I'd love for you to jot down. Don't have time to turn there but jot down First Corinthians 16:7 through 9. First Corinthians 16:7-9. Actually, let's look at this. Let's just start there. We got to look at it. I mean, I don't know how to do this without showing you how this works. So, I want you to see with your eyes. Here's the point. I want to make sure that the opposition that you're fighting is the opposition of the enemy and not God's opposition. In other words, you're going down a pathway, let's just make it a road, you're going down a road. They've been doing some work here locally on the roads and I've seen roads shut down and detours. If I'm going down the road and I see those barricades up, I want to know who put them there. Is that barricade put there by the enemy who doesn't want me going down this road? Or is this put up there by God saying, "Hey Mike, don't go down this road?" I've got to be able to distinguish the two.

I'll have you look at this one. I'll save the other one for another time. First Corinthians 16:7. "For I do not want to see you now just in passing." So Paul is writing to the Corinthians saying, "You know, I'm traveling through, doing all this missionary work, I don't just want to quickly just stop by and just get a quick meal and a night's sleep and move on. I hope to spend some time with you." So he's got words here: "want" and "hope." Here's my hope and here's my want. But then he

adds this, which is a great, great teaching for every Christian and that is: "if the Lord permits." Now flip that over. If the Lord didn't permit what would he do? He would prevent it. So the Lord might prevent it. "I mean, here's what I want to do. I want to go down this road, which is to stay with you for a while, but the Lord might prevent it. And so that means I would be pushing with my wants and my hopes but God would say, 'no, don't go down this road,' and he would prevent it. He would stop it or he might permit it and the door would be open."

OK, well, that's good. You should know when God is preventing something. You should not try to push down a door that God is trying to close. Well then, God may open some doors. Verse 8 and 9. Verses 8 and 9, "But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost." Why are you staying and in Ephesus so long? Where you would eventually leave Timothy. "For a wide door of effective work has opened to me." Now what's the assumption? God's opened the door. "And there are many adversaries." OK, you're at a crossroads, there are two doors. They're both cracked open. Right? God has cracked one open, Satan has cracked one open. God's behind one door saying, "Don't push through this door. Don't push through this door." And he may not want you to walk through that door and the other door, he wants you to walk through, but Satan is on the other side and he's pushing against it. You've got to have the wisdom to discern between those two.

And again, he's exalted above all things his name and his word. He speaks not only the decrees in heaven that we can't see, he speaks the decrees in the Bible that we can read and we can understand from that book the things that would help us to know is door "A" or door "B" the will of God for my life. Not to mention good counsel, which if I want to talk about why Timothy knew for sure that he should be the pastor in Ephesus or that David should be the king in Israel, it's because he had some godly people clearly affirming that direction. In that case he had Samuel, he had Nathan. In Timothy's case he had Silas, he had Paul. So we need to seek his Word, read his Word, meditate on his Word, talk to people who know his word better than we do to say, "Do you think this is God's will?"

And then here's the thing about both doors: you're going to have to push on both. You just need to make sure you're not pushing against God, you're pushing against the opponents. Because even if God opens a door there's going to be plenty of people trying to shut the door. And that's wisdom and you need input from other people to help you with that. A lot of people that think it's the will of God to sing on the worship team. Let me just say that for a second. You should get some confirmation from Joseph, our worship leader, before you get up and get a microphone on the stage. You've seen American Idol. Right? I mean, a lot of people think they can sing and they can't. And so it's important for us to realize that the will of God needs to be affirmed and just because you hope it and want it as Paul did about staying there, that may not be what the Lord permits. The Lord may not want that.

You can't just be driven by circumstances because there are a lot of open doors you should not walk through because you want to know who's pushing back against that on the other side. Again, I feel like in many ways this sermon is very unsatisfying because it's going to get you to a level of thinking through issues and you need to go further. That's why it'd be a good week to meet with your small group or someone you're in a discipleship relationship with if this raises issues that need to be addressed further.

God's Word, the work of God's Spirit through good biblical counsel. So important. So that you can in the midst of the gods who want to undo you, the kings of the earth who want to defeat you, the people who want to push against you, you can say, I know, here's a good thing, God's will will prevail. All the enemies will one day bow down. Even Jesus in his death proclaimed victory to the spirits in prison, or as it's put in Colossians, he publicly took the authorities and the powers and put them to public shame. And every demon is going to recognize their defeat. Are they still pushing against the doors of God's will to try and shut them in our lives? Absolutely. And like a game where you might have as a kid, I remember one, going to a game in a basketball league and the other team had forfeited but they had, I don't know, some kid's friend play. We played the game even though they had already lost. That's what it is for demons. Right? They're playing the game even though they know they've lost. When Jesus showed up and confronted some of them they're like, "Oh don't punish us before the time." They know they're losers but they're still going to push against the will of God in your life.

But don't fear the opposition. Instead do what verses 6 and 7 say in our passage and that is make sure you qualify for where God is going to look and how he'll regard and lift up and direct his people. "For the Lord, Yahweh, is high," he's exalted above all kings, all gods, all demons. Yet, look at this, "he regards the lowly, the haughty," the proud, "he knows from afar," doesn't have much regard for them. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble," here's someone, here it comes, I preserve my life. But, no wait. I read that wrong, "though I walk in the midst of trouble," I can handle it. Darn. Let me try again. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble," I know I can do it. No. Now here's what the lowly say, whereas the [00:37:35] **haughties** [0.0s] say that, the lowly say, "You preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies," you push back my opponents, "your right hand delivers me." Not I did it my way or I accomplished it or I can do it. All the tripe on the Internet about you being empowered and getting it all done. Stop with that, you're nothing. God knows you're just dirt. That's what it says in Psalm 103. You need God, you need to cling to God to get his purposes accomplished in your life and that takes humility. There's the keyword in these two verses, the lowly. That's the goal for my life.

Number three, you've got to "Maintain a Humble Heart." That's the goal. You're never going to see the purposes of God realized in your life if you don't keep a humble perspective. "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." Have you heard that verse repeated three times in Scripture? God is opposed to the proud. Why? Because you're out of touch with reality. You want to talk about, you know, nihilism or existentialism. Here is someone completely out of touch with reality. Someone who's proud. You're just out of touch. Because you are not someone you think you are. The existentialists are a great example of this in philosophy. You are not the person you are... Your rebellious turn against, as we saw in the Enlightenment, against God and throwing off the strictures of God, and thinking independently for yourself. Here's the thing. You've unmoored yourself from truth and you've drifted out into a sea of craziness, which is exactly what we've seen in philosophy in the last 150 years. It's nuts. The reality of what we have in our day is a lot of people who are filled with pride, autonomy, self-sufficiency. I mean, go read the self-help books and see what's out there. Matter of fact, don't, you'll waste your time. It's all about getting people's acclaim, getting people's applause, having earthly comfort. That's the seeking of power, authority and high position that God opposes.

Let me give you, I don't know, four verses here. I just went through the Psalms looking for a few verses about what just this one songbook says about God's relationship to the humble. Psalm 149:4. "The Lord adorns the humble with salvation." He loves to save the humble. Psalm 25:9. "The Lord leads the humble in what is right." The next phrase, "The Lord teaches the humble his way." I mean, I don't even know the will of God unless I'm humble. I've got to come to God going, "You know the purpose for my life, I don't fully know it." Against the existentialists who say, you know, "There's no predetermined purpose and meaning for your life, you just got to go out find it and figure it out." Or the nihilists who I think takes it even further and goes, "Well, if there is no pre-existing purpose for your life, well then there is no purpose for life." Then you can end up vegetative in a bed for the rest of your life.

I said four verses. I'll give you a couple more. Psalm 18:27. "You save a humble people, but the haughty eyes you bring down." Psalm 147:6. "The Lord lifts up the humble but he casts the wicked to the ground." Humble, humble, humble, humble, humble, humble. Humility is key. Humility is a person who is praying, who seeks the will of God, who doesn't get up in the morning to say I'm going to do whatever I want today. It's not saying I hope God can help me be the butler in my life to get everything accomplished that I want, so that I can feel good, get people's applause, have people acclaim my life, everyone can think I'm popular and great. It's not about that. It's about God's approval. It's about Christ's agenda. It's about people's good, selflessly seeking people's good.

Now, I say all that because I'm not wanting you to use humility as an excuse to be passive. People use humility sometimes as an excuse to sit around and never be ambitious about anything. And you do understand the Bible's all about ambition, about Godly ambition. The Bible talks about storing up treasure in heaven. The Bible talks about running to win, Galatians 2, First Timothy 6, Hebrews 12, boxing to win, First Corinthians 9, training to win, First Timothy 4, winning crowns and wreaths and trophies and treasures. God wants you to be ambitious. Ambitious for opportunities in context and even roles. You want to be a pastor, it says that's a noble thing you desire. That's a good thing. But it's not for your own acclaim, man's applause or earthly comfort. It's for people's good, Christ's agenda, God's approval.

And maybe you've tried to push your way through a door that God pushed close and maybe you got your fingers stuck in the door jamb. You're like Moses when you wanted to do something in your time, in your way, and God said, "No, you're going to go to the desert for a while and work for your father-in-law." And then God shows up and says, "Now I got a job for you." And you remember what Moses did? I think I wrote something and put it out recently on this. Moses got God angry and you know why. Because the humble man, and I'm not despising the fact, he's a humble man, but this humble man unfortunately stumbled over his own humility and sat there and said, "Oh, would you just send someone else?" God said, "No, I want you to go speak to Pharaoh." "Well, I'm not a good speaker." God insists, "I need you to go and take this staff and go lead the people out." "No, can you just take someone else?" It says the anger of the Lord burned against Moses.



How about Esther? Mordechai was not a man known for his big faith. But when Esther said, "You know, if I go in before the king and I'm not asked to come in before the king, I could die here." And Mordechai responds and says, "Listen, you're going to die if you don't step up," because at least that's what was facing the Jews at that time, "you're going to be exterminated." So he asked the question, probably one of the most famous lines from Esther Chapter 4, after quoting Exodus Chapter 4 and Moses. In Esther 4, Mordechai says, "Who knows whether..." It's not a great, faith-filled confident statement but of course we know it's true. "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Maybe God put you in this place, in the palace, to have access to the king, even though you're scared to step up. Maybe this is why you're here. And there's no maybe about it when you read the rest of the book. Esther could have said what Moses said. And God in both cases said, "No Moses, step up." "Hey Esther, step up."

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble," verse 7 says, "you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, your right hand delivers me." You've got to have more of that. It's scary to step in front of Ahasuerus. It's scary to step up in front of Pharaoh, but you'd better have confidence that God has a purpose for you and sometimes that purpose is going to lead you into battle or situations, conversations, jobs, relationships that might be frightening, but God has a plan. I want you to be able to say with David, "Yahweh will fulfill his purpose for me." Why? "Because his steadfast love endures forever."

I love that purpose, that overarching sovereign purpose, and then that statement of love. These go together in a scene and you might not expect to find it here but in Revelation 19, I was preaching, as you know, to the students this week at Revival and we talked about Christ coming back in Revelation 19. We didn't take time to observe this but if you read the passage you'd find that the robe that Jesus is wearing as he comes back to the valley there of Megiddo and takes on the opponents of God's people. He's wearing a robe and two things are said about it. Number one, it said what is written on it, "King of kings and Lord of lords." So, he's got a name tag and the name tag is "I'm in charge here." I'm in charge. Every king who thinks he can do whatever he wants is going to have to bow to me. Every lord, every prince, every authority, every power, every boss, every manager, every supervisor, is going to have to look to me. I'm now going to exert my power and begin to reign. King of kings and Lord of lords.

The other thing it says, is that that robe was dipped in blood. That's a strange thing to say. Well, from the very beginning of the book The Lamb of God, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, is presented as someone who has been slain. A lamb that was slain. And every Jewish person in Bible times knew exactly what that was like to see the blood of a lamb splatter on their sandals at the sacrifice and worship on the Sabbath. They knew what that was about. They realized this: that that animal was a symbolic depiction of the innocents dying for the guilty. God's steadfast love for us endures. Here's the idea, you and I have love set upon us so much so that God has a plan for us and it will prevail against every opponent. The King of kings and Lord of lords because he has taken your life and he has wrapped it in that bloodstained robe. And that's the picture of the saints. They're wrapped in robes that were washed in blood. What a strange idea.

With that combination of concepts I want to ask the ushers to come forward and pass out the elements for the Lord's Supper. If you're a Christian I want you to take these elements in your



hands. If you're not just take a moment with us, it'll be a calm time and you just let it pass. But if you know that you are a repentant faith-filled Christian, that you are a follower of Christ, your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, I want you to take those elements and I want you to think about the fact that the King of kings and Lord of lords died on a cross declaring his victory over every opponent. If God is your God and Christ is your Lord, you've got a plan for your life and I want you to get out there this week and live like it. To purpose to follow the God who has a purpose for your life. Even when you're praying he promises I'm going to pray for the right things even if your view is limited and you might be praying for the wrong things. He's going to come back wearing a robe that reminds us that he is the King and every authority bows to him. It will also remind us how much he loved us by showing the robe that declares his sovereignty and dominion has been dipped in blood. That's the only hope we have.

The book of Revelation starts this way. "Jesus Christ is the faithful witness," this is Revelation 1:5, "the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood." Rest in that for just a moment. If there are any unconfessed sins you confess them to God silently. I'm going to come back up in just a couple more minutes. Give you a chance to talk to God privately. If there's something standing between you and God confess it and then commit yourself afresh to walking out of this building this morning and saying this: "The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me." And be sure you're saying, as they did in Ephesus, "May the will of the Lord be done," even if it's hard. I'll come back up in just a minute and we'll take these elements together.

It's good that God is a forgiving God. Think of how good God is to take people like us who should have a purposeless and meaningless existence in outer darkness. I mean, we really because of our rebellion and our sin and our immoral choices and our evil thoughts and our self-promotion and our pride and our gossip and our lying, we really deserve nothing good. And yet God takes us, as it was put so graphically from the Old Testament prophets, from wallowing in our own filth and he picks us up and he adopts us and he dresses us and he clothes us and puts jewels on us, and he says I've got a purpose for you now. He says to Israel in the worst of times I have plans for you. Plans for good, plans for welfare.

God says to us, to those who love him that all things work together for good. God, I know, shuts a lot of doors we'd like to walk through. He puts us on paths sometimes we see as a left turn but the way of God is straight. It's our desires and our preferences and our limited view that wants it to go left or right. God knows exactly what he's doing. Our job is to humbly seek his will and to be super grateful that his steadfast love and faithfulness rests on you. So if you're a Christian you know what it is to have trusted in the finished work of Christ. You can celebrate that kind of care and adoption that God gives us. I invite you right now with me to eat this bread and drink this cup.

God, as we ingest these elements we're reminded of our desperate need for alliance with your Son. He died in our place so that we might not bear our sin anymore, that you wouldn't look at us in reference to our transgressions any longer. And so God we need Christ. We need Christ more than we need food. We need Christ more than we need air, we need Christ because when we can't eat and we can no longer breathe, our spirit comes before you, we need the clothed righteousness



of Christ. His authority over us is a sovereign powerful authority, and yet we recognize that his robe dipped in blood is the thing that makes us right before you. The death on the cross that forgives us and empowers us to be children who now are accepted and loved and have access to you. So God, I pray that you would help us today to walk with the kind of confidence that David expressed in Psalm 138, knowing that the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me. God, you're a steadfast, faithful, loving God. Remind us of that this week. Let us walk in that kind of victory, that kind of faith, that kind of confidence.

In Jesus name. Amen.