

The Good Life: Discovering God's Plan for Your Life
"Maintaining Our Pace"
Part 2 of 4
Romans 12:1-2
January 13, 2019

Welcome and Series Introduction...

Last week we began this series of messages with something we would all love to believe:

There is a good God with a good plan.

And we discovered that God's good plan is available to everyone but, discovering God's plan for our life doesn't actually begin with the plan – it begins with something more foundational...a personal connection. Which is a fancy way of saying a relationship with God is the prerequisite for discovering his direction in our life. If we want to understand God's plan for our life, we must first take a walk with God, allowing our relationship to grow. We learned this by watching how God's plan for Abraham began.

A personal connection with God is a prerequisite for knowing God's plan for our lives but, like any relationship, it can be tricky, because relationships are tricky. Remember your first girlfriend or boyfriend? (Add something personal here.) Navigating all the nuances of that first relationship was tough but, if you hang in there, things can get better. Relationships do not happen in a moment, but over time. Think about one of the relationships you have in your life right now. To make this less emotional, pick out somebody you actually like! Odds are the relationship you're considering now took a similar journey as everyone else's:

- Journey begins, taking steps together, new is always exciting
- Trust Forms Over Time
- Trust Tested in Time

Your relationship began with an introduction. Or maybe it was eHarmony or a blind date. I don't know. Doesn't matter. But there was an introduction. Next you became friends. You got to know each other—just on the surface at first, but over time (literal time—it took time) you got to know each other more and more. Remember, it's a journey. And it was so exciting. You couldn't wait to see them again. You dreamed about them. You couldn't stop thinking about them. You had to drop a class because your thoughts shifted so much in their direction. You didn't realize it at the time, but you began to trust this person. You allowed them to borrow your car. You didn't mind introducing them to the family. And then it happened. It always does! You bumped into something that made your stop dead in your tracks. It might have just been a passing comment. Or they wreck your car! Or they made a promise they didn't keep. Or something happened that made you question their honesty.

When our relational trust is tested, we have a decision to make. We realize relationships are journeys where both people walk together in step. Conversely, we know, if we stop stepping, the relationship slows down or even stops. It stagnates (which only leads to algae and other gross stuff). If we stop, we stagnate. Anything that stagnates turns disgusting. That is true for a pond, and it's equally true in a relationship. The only way for the relationship to stay healthy is for us to keep moving toward a place of trust. Trust is the way forward. Trust is the secret to positive steps.

In any relationship, trust is the currency.

But trust is earned, so the testing of trust becomes a positive in our relationships because it allows trust to grow and in turn, the relationship grows. We can only travel so far without trust. If we trust, we travel. A relationship with God is a journey built on trust. Building a relationship with God isn't too different than any of our other relationships—except for the fact all the relational issues, all of the trust issues are on our side:

- Journey Begins, Take Steps Together, New is Always Exciting
- Trust Forms Over Time
- Trust Tested in Time

It began with an introduction when God said to you, "Will you allow me to love you even though you're pretty unlovable?". You took that one, first step. That led to you deciding to "follow." That's always how relationships begin. You jumped into going to church or a small group or Bible study. You began meeting friends who were Christians. It was exciting at first. You were discovering a new peace and hope, even in the middle of brokenness and overwhelming circumstances. You invited everyone you knew to church or Bible study, you were so excited. The peace and hope you've found caused you to trust God in a way you didn't know was possible. You were a fan of Jesus, but now you've become a follower. Everything was going GREAT. Almost too great. We were "following," but then, like in every relationship, we

bumped into something that made us pause. God didn't break a promise or lie to us. Most likely we bumped into a new truth, a biblical command, or something in our life that no longer matched up with our belief. A gap between our lifestyle and God's guidelines emerged. And we stopped walking for a moment. But we know, for a relationship and trust to grow, we have to continue taking steps, so when we stopped stepping, we stagnated the relationship.

This "Testing of Trust" is often discovered within God's moral will. As we've said, there is a connection between God's providential, moral, and personal will. The bumps along our journey occur when there's a gap between God's moral will and our life. Remember, last week we said God's moral will is the do's and don'ts we find in the Bible. When we discover God has said to do one thing and we are doing another thing, that is when our trust is tested. And that is a scary moment in our faith and our relationship with God, because, just like any relationship: If we stop, we stagnate. **When we trust, we grow.**

Paul recognized this connection, as well. He wrote about it to the Christians and churches living in first-century Rome. The people of Rome were living a very Greek culture, but the Christians in this culture were trying to determine God's plan for their life. Just like these first-century Romans, we too are living in an ungodly culture while striving to living godly lives.

Today, we are going to walk through just two verses, because what Paul says in these few sentences offers a massive clue into unlocking our ability to trust God with our obstacles and to step over each one as they get in our way.

Romans 12:1-2

1 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. 2 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.

We honor God by trusting God as we walk with God. This is difficult, right? This is why we stumble over obstacles in our journey with God. This is why our trust in God is tested all the time. This is a daily idea, not a once and done thing. Jesus calls us to wake up daily and become a living sacrifice. It's not our default setting so it takes work and commitment. We are called to live differently in light of what God has done for us, to ***not conform to the pattern of this world...***

What is the "pattern of this world?" Believing the good life is as good as it gets. Believing that you can buy the good life, or that you can marry the good life, or that you can somehow manage your career into discovering the good life. The world believes that the pursuit of wealth, fame and power is the best life has to offer. That's the pattern of this world. Paul says: "don't let the world around you squeeze you into its mold." Don't fall into the trap of thinking the world's way, trying to discover happiness, meaning, and purpose outside of God's will - will provide what you want and need. Instead, we're supposed to be transformed...to think the way God's thinks.

The key to this verse is ***"be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** Renewal is a process, not an event—JUST LIKE A JOURNEY! The journey we take with God forces us to process our trust in God as we bump into obstacles along the path. And every time we choose trust and take a step, our relationship grows deeper, and we are closer to understanding God's good plan for our life. The relational journey with God transforms us—as long as we continue taking steps. The renewing of our mind is what changes our level of trust and therefore allows us to keep taking steps. Paul finishes the thought with this: ***2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

And there it is. This is what we are hoping to discover: God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. God's personal plan for our life. But the secret is connecting these dots: When we begin to think and live differently by following God's moral will, we will position ourselves to test and approve of his personal plan for our life.

Walking with God begins as an exercise in following, but our journey eventually shifts into an exercise of "trusting." God's providential will asks us to "follow." But God's moral will asks us to "trust." And both are a prerequisite for discovering God's personal will in our life. Beginning the relational journey with God is the beginning of discovery—trusting along the way is the secret to moving forward. If you are trying to discover God's plan but struggling to make headway, maybe this is the gap. Maybe you just needed to be reminded to:

Live His way to discover our way.

It's impossible to discover God's personal plans for our life when we are ignoring his plans for life. But when we follow Jesus, allowing what he's done on our behalf to fuel our trust in him, we can have confidence to face any obstacle without fear, stepping over it as our relationship with Jesus grows with each step. As we said earlier, trust is earned—which means we grow in our relationship with God every single time we trust God and step past a struggle. But if we allow our trust to wane, we will find our relationship with God slipping into a stagnate pond.

If you ever feel that your relationship with God is a bit stagnate, if you're hoping to follow God's will for your life in 2019, there's a simple, yet painful question we can ask ourselves: When did I stop trusting and in allow **my** way to trump **God's** way? It's a painful question, but one that leads to discovering a better way—the best way—God's way and his plan for your life. And that's what we want. Good news/bad news: You probably already know how to answer this question, but can I give you some possible considerations?

1. Dating God's way. God might not give you clarity on whom to date, but he has given you great clarity on how to date.
2. Married God's way.
3. Loving God's way.
4. Forgiving God's way.
5. Serving God's way.
6. Sharing God's way.
7. Giving God's way.

Of course, we aren't going to get this right every time. When we mess up and get it wrong, God's grace covers it all. Here's one reason God is such a perfect, loving Heavenly Father: God realizes we are going to hesitate from time to time, so he is patient with us. He waits on the other side of our hesitation. He encourages us and tries to remind us of past bumps in the road that we successfully navigated. But for most of us, we find ourselves torn—we deeply want to step over the bump in the road and rejoin the journey with God, but our fear and doubt keeps us looking down at the struggle rather than fixing our eyes on Jesus. If we want to move forward with God and over time discover God's personal plan for our life, we must deal with this question:

Trusting God and His will might require a change.

EXAMPLES: We may need to budget differently or allocate time differently. We might need to move out or move back in. We probably all need to say we're sorry. It might not be an easy step to take, but it's worth the step. Not because it will be easy or lead to a life that's easy. God has never promised us easy. God has promised something way better than good. He has promised a journey with him that will lead not to a "good life," but to the "best life." A meaningful life. A life of purpose. Full of peace and hope.

This theme of trusting so we can continue our journey with God is all throughout Scripture. Solomon, writing what is now one of the most well-known Proverbs, said it this way: **Proverbs 3:5-6** ⁵ *Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.* ⁶ *Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.* Solomon understood it all comes down to trust. And if we can trust, even in the face of an obstacle, our relationship will grow and our path will feel straight. Not because life is easy. We all know that. God has never promised an easy life. But the path feels much straighter when all we are focused on is following the person leading the walk. Want to know God's will for your life...trust and follow daily, the One who knows you better than you know yourself. He will not disappoint.