

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Taught by Bruce Bickel
“Hassled But Not Defeated” – Part 2
November 8, 2013

Well good morning, Men, it is good to be with you. Don, do you want to take us into a moment of silence? Let's just be silent and know that He is God. Prepare our hearts for what the Lord might have for us.

Father we recognize that it is because of Your grace and nothing but the Blood of Jesus that makes it possible for us to meet here today. We thank You, Lord, for Your mercy to us and Your compassion, Your sovereign grace, and us. Father, we are so undeserving of the blessings You give us, and may we be so overwhelmed by Your mercy this day, trusting that Your Holy Spirit once again will fulfill His job description and guide us into all truth. For it is the truth that sets us free. Give us a vision of the God of Biblical revelation and not the god of our human imagination. May it be so, Lord, that You would be pleased once again to open our eyes that we might behold You more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

Continuing our study on Triumphant Living and found in Paul's epistle, Paul is writing to the Church of Corinth in 2nd Corinthians. Would you open your Bibles please to 2nd Corinthians 4:7-12. We began an examination of these verses last week and I would like to read it for you again and I'll be reading from the New American Standard version.

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.” This is the Word of the Lord.

BRAVE MEN: *Thanks be to God.*

Last week we introduced this section by talking about why is it that God does not make life easier for us and do we feel that we live a life in a hostile environment? The answer is if you think that, you are absolutely correct. We do live in a hostile environment. We live in a system of the world that is anti-Christ, it is anti-everything that we stand for in the Scripture revelation and we talked about persecution. I think we have to be honest and admit to ourselves that we in the United States do not know what persecution is like. That is why I call this session “Hassled but not Defeated. We have hassles but I'm not sure that we could honestly say we have ever been persecuted. There is a pastor in Iran right now who has been there for years and there are situations all over the world where people are in fear of really being persecuted for their faith. If you are honest, despite all the garbage we have to go through in our culture, we have it really rather easy.

That's why I don't say we are being persecuted, I'm just saying we're being hassled. There are all kinds of hassles in life. I have a very close family friend who has two teenagers and I'm just overwhelmed with how they are managing their situation. There son has some severe mental issues and he's been in and out of Western Psych. several times and not able to go to school. The daughter was admitted last night to Children's Hospital

for the fourth time because she has back pains and they cannot figure it out. She has been in there on her back since September and has not been to school yet. How do they survive that? The mother is just overwhelmed but I went over to visit the child last night at Children's Hospital and I was talking to the Mom, my friend. I was overwhelmed at the Spirit of how she is managing this. Her response to me was essentially this, "This is what God has given me to do. Why should I do anything else? This is what He has given me to do."

Now it is fortunate that her husband can work so that she is a stay-at-home Mom but she could be doing a lot of other things; but she takes one son to Western Psych and then she takes her daughter to Children's Hospital. She runs back and forth and she has been doing that since September 1. I'm just thinking, how do you do that? And her response was this, "This is what God has given me to do. Why would I want to do anything else?" That is not normal, it is absolutely abnormal. That is exactly what this passage is teaching us. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

Last week we looked at the plan God has, and that is to share His life **with** us. His life is the treasure, our receptive body is the earthen vessel, or clay pot, or jars of clay...whatever your translation says. It is His treasure, the life of God, contained in the gospel message of Christ, which we studied in 2nd Corinthians 3. He shares that with us. The greatest definition of the Christian life, in my mind, is it is a shared life experience. God shares His life with us. That is the treasure, your physical body is the earthen vessel, clay pot, or jar of clay. So the plan is that God shares His life with us, that is 2nd Corinthians 4:7.

Now the purpose of that is, the rest of Chapter 4:7 is this: to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us. That is the purpose of this plan. The plan is to share His life with us, the purpose is to demonstrate the fact that the ability to survive the hassles of life come from God and not from us. And just as she told me last night, "Why would I want to do anything else but to do what I'm doing right now with my children?" Men, that is just not normal; that is really supernatural. That is a function of grace. That is the function of this young woman and this young man with their children...they are sharing the life of God within the treasure of their earthen vessel. The whole issue there is to show that the power to survive comes from God, not from us.

That ought to be great encouragement for us. Yes, we go through hassles of life; I cannot honestly say that I have ever been persecuted for my faith, but I have had many hassles. But we never really have been persecuted. And perhaps the Lord might be pleased to permit that one day to our country so that we might get more serious about the work of the Church. But until that time how do we manage these hassles of life? The plan is to share His life, the purpose is to have all the power come from Him; and the purpose of all that is for God to give His life away.

Now notice some of these verses. Twice He says this: look at Chapter 4:10-11. "Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." What happens in this whole process of the hassles of life is God just wants to give His life away. How does He do that? He does that in His sovereign grace and His providence; He puts us into situations that we are hassled by life environment that we cannot handle ourselves and He handles it through His grace. The end result is that when somebody says, "How do you handle that?" The end result is, "God alone is adequate."

This is the way in which God wants to give His life away. I gave you the illustration last week of what would you do if you were the owner of the world's largest diamond? I asked if you would give it to your kids, your

grandkids and let them take it to school to show and tell? Of course not! You would probably do what the owner of the world's largest diamond is doing with it today. He's got it locked up in a bank vault because his mind-set is this: "I don't want that valuable thing that I own to come in contact with humanity, because if it does it is likely to diminish its glory, decrease its value, and decrease its luster and glory.

Take that mind-set with what we see here in 2nd Corinthians 4:7. We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us. In other words God has taken the most precious commodity in the universe...which is the life of His Own Son...to the gospel of Christ and when we hear that message, He shares His life with us and He puts it in the weakest vessel He could ever create. What is the weakest thing that God has ever created? Us! We are the weakest thing that God has ever created, and by design He wants to put the valuable possession that He has...His Own life...He puts it in the weakest vessels so that when you and I go through the hassles of life, the end result is it is His power that is put on display and not ours.

There is a plan, there is a purpose, and there is a process behind God giving His life away. The whole end result of the product is that God gives His life away to other people through our normal hassles of life. Now he describes for us four different pressures or hassles that we go through. Please look at your Bibles as we go through this.

This is what I would call the principle of outward pressure or growth under pressure. The process is growth under pressure. We have seen the plan is God shares His life, the purpose is to put His life on display but there is a process behind that plan and that purpose. There is a very interesting principle that we see in this Scripture and that is the principle of what I would call out-ward pressure and inward power. There are four pressures that are listed here in the Scripture to which we are subjected.

Our treasure. There is an equal and opposite power on the inside which is the shared life of God, the grace of God sharing with us. This is what I call, growth under pressure. We have the pressure of the circumstances being imposed upon us from the outside but yet we have God's grace bringing in an equal pressure from the inside. This is a principle of equilibrium that you see in ship design, especially submarines. When a submarine goes into the water, the pressure of the water begins to push the hull of the submarine in and if you do not have something existing from the air pressure from the inside to push that out to bring equilibrium, that submarine is just going to blow up because the pressure is so severe. It goes deeper into water, you get more pressure on the outside and you have to have more pressure on the inside. This is what you call growth under pressure. Sometimes a wise captain of a submarine may flood a compartment in order to equalize that pressure so that the ship does not blow up and explode. It is called growth under pressure. There is a pressure from the outside but there is an equal and opposite pressure from the inside. That is what the captain of a ship will do.

You see the same thing in God's plan for us. We have these pressures form the outside...these hassles of life which we are going to go through...and he lists four of them...but there is an equal and opposite pressure from the inside that restrains that so that you and I don't explode. That pressure on the inside is the shared life of God, it is God's grace. So yes, you are going to be hassled through the normal things of life but you have the grace of God from the inside pushing you from the inside and establishing equilibrium in your life and the end result is, you do not explode!

Let me read something from a science magazine that I saw when I was doing some research on this concept of growth under pressure. This is something that happens in nature...this growth under pressure...there is equal

pressure on the outside, equal pressure from the inside to establish equilibrium so that things do not destroy themselves. “The blossom of a plant is produced by growth under pressure. At the point furthest away from the root, the vital forces are the weakest and the supply of nourishment almost exhausted. Therefore, the ordinary leaves are compressed by their power of resistance of the forces to which they are subjected and modified into the strange shapes and changed into the beautiful colors of the flower. The compression goes on further into the interior parts of the flower according as the resulting power becomes less until the last and innermost center part, the outer forces and the inner forces are brought to a point of equilibrium and the plant finds rest in the round seed, which is simply the most complete compression to which leaves are capable.” Now this simple principle of growth under pressure accounts for the shape of every leaf, the germination of every seed, the formation of every organ of the body, and for the beating of the heart within the breast. It is growth under pressure.

Now Guys, listen to this. There is a plan, God shares His life with us. There is a purpose, to put His life on display, to show that the all-surpassing power comes from Him. The process is growth under pressure. How are you and I going to grow into the maturity of our faith? We are going to do that through the hassles of life. It is called growth under pressure and you have the grace of God, the shared life of God which is His treasure... that is the inward power pushing out to resist these hassles that we go through in life.

So my friend who has the difficulty with the two teenage children...how are they surviving? It is through growth under pressure. They are maturing in their faith at a rapid rate that they have never done before. She told me last night, “You know, Bruce, as difficult as this is I’m really beginning to understand the mercy of God.” That is growth under pressure. Is this an easy thing for her to go through? Absolutely not! Is it something that she would like to go through? The answer is absolutely not! But she is recognizing this: this pressure that I’m going through, this hassle of life with my teenage kids, is causing me to grow; it is causing me to grow in my faith and, therefore, what is she doing? She is now putting her life on display. I happened to be there when one of the nurses came back in last night and the nurse said something about, “Oh, I see that you’re back again. You are always so gracious when you’re here, it is nice to see you.” Here is a nurse telling a mother of a sick child, “We’re glad you’re back in the hospital because of who you are.” What is that? That is God giving His life away. Showing that the life of Christ is demonstrated in our mortal bodies. Paul says that twice in these verses. He just wants to give His life away and how does He do that? He does that through the hassles of life.

Let’s take a look at these four hassles that are described for us in this passage. Notice we see in verses 8 and 9. “We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed...” Now what is the key word in those two verses? It is the word “but” and it is what I would call the “apostolic but.” {LAUGHTER} It is the word “but” because it shows you the contrast and it is describing growth under pressure. You have this external pressure that Paul is going to describe for us “but” you have this internal force of God’s grace bringing equilibrium into your life and it is causing you to grow in maturity so that you will fulfill the purpose of God’s life, and that is to give His life away.

All God wants to do is give His life away to people who go through the normal situations that everybody else goes through. Let’s take a look at these four words.

First of all, the first word is “afflicted or hard pressed.” It literally means “squeezed,” it means “pressed as grapes.” Notice the contrasting word—“but”—to be in a narrow place that is cramped. There are all kinds of pressures on us but whenever we are in such a tight corner in our life and there is no way out, you might feel

squeezed but there is always a way out. That way out is God's grace. So that may be one of the hassles—you might just feel squeezed or hard-pressed. Hostile forces may press in on all sides and threaten to immobilize you through the normal search of situations of life. But because of divine grace, there is always a way that is provided as a way out, so you might feel afflicted but you are not going to feel crushed, squeezed as a grape.

Secondly, the word “perplexed.” Perplexed but not despairing. The word “perplexed” means to be unable to find a way out. You might feel like there is not a way out, but you are never at a lost. You never despair. There is a difference. You might feel there is never a way out, but you are never despairing because you always know that there is a way out because of God's grace. We may be at wit's end, but we are never at hope's end. There is a difference. See, you always have hope. You may not understand the situation but remember this: Deuteronomy 29:29. “The secret things belong to God, the revealed things belong to us and to our children...” For future generations. Guys, there are many secret things going on in your life and the hassles of life. One of the questions that I don't ask anymore is, “Why?” It is a dead end, I don't know why. I don't need to know why. Guess what? It is a secret thing and so I am not going to find out the secret thing; I want to make sure I'm in the revealed will. Two of the revealed wills of God in the Scripture—there are six of them—that you are saved, that you are sanctified, that you are Spirit led, that you are submissive, that you are saying thanks, and that you are suffering. Those are the six revealed wills of God for all of us.

Two of those right there would say this, “In all things this is God's will for you, to be holy.” The question is, can I be holy in the situation of the hassle I'm finding myself? Not why is it happening. The reason I know that it is happening is because I have the treasure in the earthen vessel. The reason why it is happening is because growth under pressure. God is growing me to a more saving relationship with Himself to demonstrate His life more visibly through the hassles of life. That's the why. The real issue is, am I being holy in the midst of this thing that I don't understand? Then you know that you are in God's will.

The second thing would be this, in all things give thanks. Can you give thanks in all situations? It is not normal to do that, but yet that is God's will—it is revealed—in all things give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Can you say thanks in the midst of all these hassles. My friend last night, as I prayed with her in the room last night, was saying “Thank you.” How do you do that? Here is a mother just every other day going to Western Psych and Children's Hospital, back and forth. Somebody just ought to pay gas money to help them out. She is just running all over the place, and yet she is saying, “Thank you.” Thank you. See she is right in the middle of God's will because of what? Not because of the circumstance, it is because of her response to that growth under pressure. She is growing in her faith. He is growing in her faith. I prayed with the girl last night and she just said, “Bruce, thank you for coming by, that was so helpful to me. I know that God is behind this, I just don't know why.” I said, “Don't worry about the why, let's just take a day at a time.”

You might feel at wit's end, but you are never at hope's end because you may feel perplexed, but you are never going to be despairing. That is because of the growth under pressure concept of God's grace, pushing the outside from the pressures on the inside.

Yes?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT. *Can you repeat those six...?*

Certainly. Dick made a suggestion here last week and I think Tom that you and I can talk about this. We'll print these out for you on a card. Let me see, do I have them with me? I can give you the verses. I came prepared. Thank you for asking me the question. {LAUGHTER}

The contrast is this, we do not know why God does a lot of things. Those things are secret; we know conceptually that it is this growth under principle process. If you are going to go through the normal hassles of life, the grace of God is going to be the resisting force from the inside out, and that is going to cause you to grow just like it does every other seedling in the science world. The same thing happens to the Spirit of the soul. We grow because of God's grace taking us through these hassles of life and the end result is God just wants to give His life away. The real issue for us is for us to say, "Am I **in** God's will?" Then I'll find out the secret things because these are the six revealed things that is God's will for all of us.

Let me give you the Scripture:

1. Timothy 2:4. You are saved. You have a saving relationship to God the Father, through God the Son. 1st Timothy 2:4 says, "who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth." Now that is not universalism, he is talking about the elect. He is talking about the elect. People ask me all the time, "Are we in the last days?" Of course we are. The last days started at the ascension of Christ and will end when the Lord returns in all of His glory. Of course, we are in the last days. Quit looking at tsunami and at lightening bolts, and storms, and rumors of war; that has been going on for generations. So yes, we are in the last days. We just don't know to what degree of the last days that we are in but we are in the last days. When will the Lord Jesus return? He'll return when the last person who God gave Him as an elect will come to saving faith and He won't come back until then. So the reason why Jesus is not coming back yet is because not all the elect have come to saving faith.

Do you realize that when we become a believer, that we receive an inheritance and the first demonstration of that is the gift of the Holy Spirit and the inheritance is eternal life; but do you also realize that you are an inheritance to Christ—you are part of His inheritance. Do you realize that? As a saved believer, you are a part of Christ's inheritance. The reason Christ has not come back yet is because He has not gotten all of His inheritance. Where is His inheritance? It is all in the elect. When the elect come to saving faith, Jesus gets His full inheritance and then He'll come back. Yes, we are in the last days.

The very first thing is this: do I have a saving relationship to God the Father through God the Son, who desires all people to be saved? All people refers to the elect not to universalism, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2nd Peter 3:9 would be another verse for you. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Who is Peter talking about? He is talking about the elect. He is not talking about each and every person who has ever been born. He's talking about those whom God gave Him before the foundation of the world to come to saving faith.

So what is our role? If you want the Lord to return more quickly what should we be doing? Preaching the gospel of Christ so Christ will get His inheritance. He has a lot of inheritance out there that have not come to saving faith and when He does, He'll get His full inheritance and will say, "I've not got my full inheritance." Brothers and Sisters do you realize that we are God's inheritance? You are an inheritance to Christ. We're

always talking about our receiving inheritance, but do you realize that personally you are an inheritance to Christ? What God the Father ordains, the Son accomplished, the Holy Spirit applies. You and I are an inheritance to the Lord Jesus; and if you want Jesus to return let's get off our butts and preach Christ to the world, to every creature, and see what happens. Those whom God gave Him before the foundation of the world will come to saving faith.

John 6:37 says, "I will not cast anybody out who does not seek me." You see, that is what is going to happen. If you want Christ to return, let's proclaim the true Biblical gospel so the elect will come to saving faith.

Number 1 is that you are saved.

Number 2 is that you are Spirit filled or Spirit led. Ephesians 5:17-18. "Therefore, do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is." All these verses have to do with the will of the Lord, it is revealed. "Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery but be filled with the Spirit."

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT. *What is that Scripture again?*

That is Ephesians 5:17-18. "Do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery but be filled or led by the Spirit." That is His will. Are you being led by the Spirit of God? That is His will, that is revealed.

Number 3: Sanctified. Saved, Spirit filled, Sanctified. 1st Thessalonians 4:3. "For this is the will of God," Now that cannot be any clearer than that! "For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality." Do you want to be in God's will? You are sanctified. Sanctified means to be set apart for a special purpose. That is what Christ does, He is our sanctification. When you are saved and you are Spirit led, you are sanctified. Are you being holy? This is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. You cannot be holy in that environment, then do not go there because you will not be in God's will.

Number 4: Submissive. Saved, Spirit filled, Sanctified, Submissive. 1st Peter 2:13-15. "Be subject for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to please those who do good. For this is the will of God that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." You want to be in God's will? Do good. Especially when you are being harassed for it. Do good, you are right in the middle of God's will.

Ephesians 5:21. "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." That would be another reference. How about suffering? Do you realize that part of God's will might be for us to suffer? That is why I want to study this passage.

2nd Timothy 3:12. "In deed all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

1st Peter 4:19. "Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will..." Are you willing to suffer? It may be God's will. "Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." So what are you supposed to do when you are being harassed and being persecuted? Do good and you will know you are in God's will. God's will is not the environment, it is your response and my response to the environment in which we find ourselves. If you are being harassed at work, your answer is: bitch, complain and moan? No. Your answer is, do good. It is God's will for you.

How about 1st Peter 3:17. “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” Guys, this cannot be much clearer than that. When you are harassed at work and your boss is a twit, what do you need to do. You need to be in God’s will. Or go to seminary because you cannot do anything else. Many people will say...I always get this answer, “God wants me to change my job.” “Why?” “Because I don’t like my boss.” I say, “Go back and do good and see what happens.” “Well, I don’t want to do that. I want God’s will. I want what is best for me.” That implies that God has a second best and that is an offense to God’s character. God can only do one thing and that is to give Himself.

How many times have you heard, “I’m waiting for God’s best.” That means God has a second best? That implies that statement and yet we flippantly say that. God can only give Himself and whatever He does is Holy. “It is better to suffer for doing good if that be God’s will than for doing evil.”

Number 5, the last one. 1st Thessalonians 5:18. “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will in Christ Jesus for you.” Now, Brothers, we need to make sure that we are found **in** God’s will before you **find out** God’s will. Are you **in** it? That means are you saved? Are you Spirit led? Are you sanctified? Are you submissive? Are you suffering? Are you saying thanks?

Brothers, when you and I find ourselves **in** God’s will, you will **find out** what it is.

Yes, Dick?

DICK: *Bruce would you touch on what you are talking about there with the example of your having to come back closer to home because of your parents and you went down through these things, job opportunities...I think that is really...most people go through the [UNCLEAR] and they don’t take any other consideration.*

Well, I’ll give you a quick illustration or a quick version of this. When I came back to Pittsburgh to take care of my parents who were showing signs of Alzheimer’s, I was pastoring a church in Chicago and I knew you don’t stop honoring your parents when you’re forty. So, I just said, “Lord I need to take care of my parents and I came to saving faith through the ministry of my mother and father, and if I have to put my life on hold for awhile to honor my mother and father I will trust that you will honor that. If you called me to preach and teach you only can remove that. So knew that God’s will for me was not a job. There were not church opportunities; my first exploration was were there church opportunities for me in Pittsburgh and there were none. Not many people were looking for a reformed Baptist. {LAUGHTER} Some people would say a reformed Baptist is a Presbyterian. {MUCH LAUGHTER} So there were not church opportunities for me at the time. But I knew this: that’s God’s will was not a job.

So I began to some exploration and there were two opportunities that came up. One was to work at PNC and one was to work at the Pentagon through a friend of mine from the Naval Academy. The one at the Pentagon really met my heart’s desire and my qualifications explicitly. It was a great, great resume builder. But I knew God’s will was not the Pentagon or PNC, the real issue is who am I going to be if I go to PNC and who am I if I go to the Pentagon? That is the issue because I want to be found **in** God’s will. God’s will is not the job, it is who you are, where you are.

So I began to take a look at these verses and I said, “Alright, Lord, I want to be found **in** your will and then when I’m found **in** your will, I am going to **find out** what your will is. So the two that I really hung my hat on

were these last two. “In all things give thanks for this is the God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” “In all things be holy for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” So my question was this: I have two opportunities. Which one of those two opportunities gives me the best chance to be holy and give thanks? That is God’s will, it is not the job.

As I began to look at myself, I said, “I do not compromise too well, and I’m afraid if I go work at the Pentagon with my friend for the Secretary of the Navy, I am going to find myself in a political environment that I’m going to feel, perhaps, uncomfortable and I don’t compromise too well and that might just compromise my convictions. So, I’m not sure if I could be holy as I would like to be in that environment.” Contrast that with the Bank. I never worked at a bank. Can I balance a checkbook? Yes, I could work at a bank. {LAUGHTER} I’m not a banker, my degree is in engineering and theology. Why would I want to work at a bank? Well, because of the options I had, I might have a better chance to be holy there than I would over at this one.

So I called my friend who was Secretary of the Navy and told him of my situation. He said, “Bruce, you are an idiot.” {LAUGHTER} “Don’t you understand what I’m offering you? This is a job of a lifetime for you. Your life is set if you take this position with me. It is a done deal. But you are an idiot.” I said, “Well, I appreciate your honesty but I just cannot do that because I don’t think I can be holy and give thanks in that environment.” So, I took the job at PNC. Now did God lead me to PNC? Absolutely He did, but it was through the process of not looking for a job, I discovered His will, which was PNC and I discovered that by being found **in** His will, which was giving thanks and trying to be holy. That and the end result was, “I wanted you to be at PCN all along.” But the issue was never PNC. The issue was me. When you are found **in my** will, I am going to reveal the secret things.” So all along in God’s providence it was PNC; I just didn’t know that until after I made the decision based upon being found **in** His will. See how it works?

So, Brothers, you need to be found **in** His will so that you **find out** what His will is. You will never find out His will until after you have made the decision. The real issue is why do I make my decisions that I do? For me it was these six things...to be found **in** His will. I’ve been there now going on twenty-six years and it has been a wonderful experience. The Lord has mightily changed my life in that situation. But it was never because He led me to a job initially. He led me to understand what it means to be found **in** His will. When you do that, you find out the revealed things.

Often times, we try to seek for the revealed, don’t we? We look for the revealed and it is frustrating because you don’t find it. But guess what, Brothers, by design you will not find it because it is secret. It is secret. Be found **in** His will. Be found **in** His will. That is why it is so encouraging to me last night about my friend at Children’s Hospital. She said, “Bruce, why would I want to do anything else. This is what God has given me to do.” She is really trying to be holy and give thanks in a very difficult situation with her teenage children. But she is saying, “I just want to be found **in** His will so I am going to be holy and give thanks in the midst of these hassles of life.”

It’s like this, let’s say we had a fifty-five gallon drum right here on this floor and it contained some water. Now the water is only impacting that one circumference area of the fifty-five gallon drum, correct? It is not impacting anything other than that one local spot where it is. Now if I gave you a hammer and a saw and some nails and said, “Go beat on that thing for a little bit.” What happens? It’s going to crack and what will happen to the stuff on the inside? It’s going to come out because of the cracks or pressure of the external forces, the internal liquid is going to come out and what is it going to do? It will flow all over the room. That is exactly what God does to these hassles of life. You and I are subjected to the normal hassles of life, just like everybody

else and a little bit of us die all the time because the hassles of life do take their toll. That is what Paul says, “Those of us who live are being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake.” Yes, these hassles takes its toll, but what comes out of us when we go through the hassles of life? God’s grace and that is how He impacts the world around us.

Do we go through these normal hassles, just like the fifty-five gallon drum that will beat upon and the liquid comes out and infuses and takes the whole room? That is what happens...God’s grace just comes out of us because it is the treasure in the earthen vessel. That is the pressure of growth under pressure. It comes out of us in what we do—we impact society through the normal hassles of life.

So yes, your car battery is going to go dead during the winter, just like everybody else’s. And when the flood is going to come in your neighborhood, it is going to be your basement just like everybody else’s. We are not exempt from that stuff. But the issue is this: how do I respond to that stuff? That is the difference because we are not victims of circumstances, we are just the vessel in the circumstance. So, Brothers, I would say that we need to find ourselves **in** His will if we are going to **find out** what His will is.

Let me finish these other two hassles of life. We’ve seen what it means to be hard pressed and we’ve seen what it means to be perplexed.

Number 3. Persecuted. We are persecuted and that word means “pursued and hunted intentionally.” It means to be hunted intentionally, but you are not abandoned. You are not left in the lurch. Even though friends and fellow workers may forsake you, remember the divine promise of Hebrews 13:15. “Never will I leave you nor forsake you.” So you might be pursued—persecuted means pursued—but you are never going to be left behind. I’m very grateful that I served in the armed forces of a country who taught me when I was a pilot that if you ever go down, we will not leave you there. We’ll come and get you. When I was shot down, they came and got me. The one thing I kept telling myself this while I was there on the ground waiting to see who was going to come. I kept telling myself this: I know they will come. I know they will come. It might be in five minutes, it might be in five hours, it might be in five days, but I do know this, I am basing my life on one statement I was told: we will never forsake you, we will come and get you.

That is the same thing that God tells us here in His Scripture, “I will never forsake you and never leave you behind.” Yes, you might feel persecuted, you might feel hunted intentionally, but the one thing about it—the word “but”—because of God’s grace on the inside is this: I will never forsake you, I’ll never leave you behind.”

And lastly, struck down. That means “level, to hit with a sudden blow.” But notice, you may be hit with a sudden blow but you are never going to be destroyed. We may be leveled to the foundation but because of the treasure of God’s life and His grace within us, we always rebuild from the foundation and up. That is growth under pressure.

The supreme test for us, Brothers, is this: it is not whether or not you and I fail, because we will fail, the real issue is how quickly do I respond when I do fail? That is the test of our Christian character. It is not, am I always right. It is how do I respond when I’m wrong. That is the real issue, that is the test of our character, and that comes in this process of growth under pressure. What is God’s plan? His plan is to share His life with us. What is the process? It is growth under pressure. And what is the purpose? To put His life on display. The product is this: You and I share the life of Christ by going through the normal hassles of life. Have we ever been persecuted? I can’t honestly say that we have; but you are going to have hassles in life just like everybody

else. The question is, how do I respond to those hassles? There is a divine providence behind all of these. You and I are never, ever the victim of circumstances. What we will always be because of God's grace...we will just be the vessel in the circumstances. I am not a victim of the Vietnam War, I'm just a vessel from it. And therein lies a whole different attitude at how I look at that experience because I see this: I'm not a victim, just a vessel.

Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Ted Wood and I were called to start a new church and we have had more people say to us, "What on earth are you doing?" I'm 79 years old and my younger brother called me up and said, "What the hell are you doing? You are 79 years old. [UNCLEAR] and I said, "I'm trying to follow God's will as I understand it. [UNCLEAR]...*

Amen to that. That is why it is so important. You bring up a good point. It is so important that we ask ourselves, "What is God doing around me?" When we join that because when you join that you will know that we will be blessed because God has already blessed it when He started it. As Jesus says in John 5: "I initiate nothing on my own, I do nothing on my own initiative, I only do those things I see the Father doing."

Brothers, the best thing we can do as we walk this door today is to ask ourselves this: What am I going to do about what I just learned and secondly, Lord, show me what you are going to do around me today so I can be an aggressive responder to what you are doing, so I can be found **in** Your will.

Let's pray.

Father, it is overwhelming how clear You make things and how complicated we make them. You have told us what Your will is yet we worry and frustrate ourselves and become anxious about trying to find the secret things. Lord, help us to just understand in the growth under pressure principle that you teach in this passage, that Your plan is to share Your life with us, the purpose is to put Your life on display, the process is growth under pressure, and the product is that we share the life of God through the hassles of life. May it be so, Father, that today we as men who are all failures but yet we are rescued by and redeemed by grace. Give us the character to respond to those situations where the normal hassles of life give us the opportunity to give Your life away. Yes, it will take a toll on us, we are going to die a little bit everyday through these hassles, but we understand that we are never, ever the victim of circumstance, we are just the vessel for God's glory. And all the Brave Men said, Amen.