

Five Weeks to Live

Fulfilling God's Plan For Your Life

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Romans 12:2. I want to mention that today is Dave Hamilton's last day. Dave has been faithful here at the Bible study for a long, long time. In addition to that, he's been working at Man In the Mirror. Dave, we just want to send you with our best wishes and also with a deep debt of gratitude for your investments that you've made. Why don't we just give Dave a round of applause? As my assistant said, some of you guys may want to give him a hug or whatever it is you guys do, she said. Okay. Let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning. This will go to A men, get it? A men. A men.

St. John's Lutheran Church in Adrian, Michigan, Dan Baker is the leader. They're nine men who've been meeting for a couple of years with us. These are men who have either just retired or just about to be retired. This is a group of men there in Adrian, Michigan. I wonder if you'd join me in welcoming A Men to our Bible study this morning. 1, 2, 3, Hoo-rah!. Welcome guys we're glad to have you here.

We're in a series called 5 weeks to live. Today, we're going to week four, fulfilling God's plan for your life. The idea here, the premise of this series, you've been to the doctor, he said, "I got some bad news for you, you've only got five weeks to live". What would be important to you? What would you want to do and who would you want to do it with? What would be your priorities, the tasks you'd want to do, the relationships you want to be investing in?

The first week, we talked about finding a deeper personal relationship with God. The turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the God we want and start seeking the God who is. The next week, we talked about finding a new best friend in your wife after God. But before all others, make your wife your top priority. Last week, we talked about finding respect and honor at home. Our children's greatest need is for us to father their hearts not their performance. Now, this morning we're going to be zeroing in on God's plan for your life.

You got five weeks to live, why get out of bed, really? Why bother? In fact, for some of us usually, we'd probably feel that way from time to time anyway, why bother? What difference does it make if you even bothered? Who needs you? Who needs you? Just stay in bed. What difference does it make? Here's the thing, here's the thing, it's that you are a beautiful story and something wonderful is happening. God loves you very much and he has a plan for your life.

We're going to start out this morning looking at our great need. Because we are a beautiful story and something wonderful is happening and God loves us very much and he has a plan for our life, he has built into us a great desire, several great desires. The greatest of those for most men is this desire to lead a life of significance. Now, we're talking about someone, the human need that we have. Obviously, the highest need is to have a relationship with God. But in terms of our day-to-day lives, this great need that

we have to be significant that our life would have a direction, that we would have, there would be meaning in what we do, that we would have a sense of purpose, that there will be some intentionality to our lives. I have at the top of my do list, I would rather for a worthy cause than live for no reason. Most men feel the same way, would say it in different ways but most men would feel the same way.

What's the problem? It's just hard. It's just hard. There is, in addition to this great need that we have to make a difference with our lives, there is a greater need that we have and that's to bring our lives into sync with God's will. This idea God is in control, he does have a plan and his plan has universals that are for all of us. Then he also has a particular and a personal mission for you. God has a personal mission for your life. We're going to get into that.

Before we do that, I was struck by a story many, many years ago, I think I've mentioned it here a couple of times. St. Francis of Assisi was out hoeing a row of beans one morning. Then a pilgrim, a passerby who is on his own spiritual quest asked Francis over there rowing this hoe of beans, if you knew that you were going to die this afternoon, how would you spend the rest of your Earthly life? What would you do differently? Without hesitation, Assisi said, "I'd finish rowing this hoe of beans."

What was going on in that situation? Was it that Francis had discovered that hoeing a row of beans was so cool that he just couldn't, he was possessed to do it because there is nothing else quite like it in the world. I doubt that. I think it was probably hot, dirty, sweaty work. I'm guessing that he got blisters on his hands. I'm guessing that his clothes got dirty. I'm guessing that at the end of the day, he had sore muscles. What would possess Assisi, Francis of Assisi to say I would finish hoeing this row of beans?

I think the answer is that he was so absolutely convinced that he was exactly where he was supposed to be doing what he was supposed to do, that the fact that his life might come to an end and that the source of life would to end, it didn't make any difference. He didn't have to make any changes. The big idea here is that he was so convinced that he was in the will of God that he didn't feel like he need to make any changes. Here's the Big Idea in finding the God's purpose for your life. **I want to be so utterly convinced that I'm doing God's will that I wouldn't change a thing.** I want to be, I had Pat Morley and I hope you too, I want to be so utterly convinced that I am doing God's will that I wouldn't change a thing.

How does this happen? Well, it happens by our effort but it happens because God's makes it happen. Romans 12:2 tells us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of you mind". There is that part that we have, this human effort. Then it goes on to say, "Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good pleasing and perfect will". Turn to 2nd Corinthians 3:18. In this text, Paul is talking about how the veil gets removed when we turn to the Lord and he is the spirit and with the spirit there is freedom. Then in verse 18 it says, "We who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed". We are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the spirit. The Lord is the one doing the transforming.

We do our part and then God takes our little 3 year-old child-like hand that's trying to draw a stick figure of a human being and he puts his hand over our hand and then turns it into a wonderful story, into something beautiful with his power, just like it says here. Other verses in Ephesian 1:11, He's working out everything in conformity with the purpose of his what? Will. God is working out, we have been pre-destined. He's working out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. That's what it says in Ephesians 1:11.

I want you to see Philippians 2:13. Why don't you turn there and just look at it with your own eyes, it's so amazing. The verse before verse 13 talks about how we're to continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, again that's our part. But then, the next verse says this in verse 13, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure". God has a plan for our lives.

The idea is if we can bring our effort, us working out our salvation with fear and trembling, and us not being conformed any longer to the pattern of this world but being transformed by the renewal of the mind, if we can bring those things into sync with the will of God and have the confidence that we're doing it, we can say like Assisi that even if, we're now on day 35 of our five weeks to live and this is the last day. We can say whatever it is that we're doing with confidence that I am so utterly convinced that I am doing God's will that I wouldn't change a thing. Wouldn't that be awesome if we could live the next 50 years like that or however long you might have with this thought in mind that right now I am so utterly convinced I'm doing the will of God that I wouldn't change a thing.

That's five years to live thinking, five weeks to live thinking, five minutes to live thinking, that's the perspective that we want to have. You can't be, not everything's a 90-day project. Everything can't be urgent. Everything can't be urgent. Let's live every day in this context that we're talking about here.

We talked about our great need and we've talked about how this might come about that we would get in sync with the will of God. What is the will of God? What is God's great plan? What is God, even more specifically, what is God's great plan for you? Do you know it? Do you have confidence in it? Are you pursuing it? You are a beautiful story and something wonderful is happening. God loves you very much and he has a plan for your lives.

You're going to feel most significant, most alive, most useful, most happy, when you are doing what God created you to do. You will be in sync with God's will when you're doing what God created you to do. I said there are universals for all of us and then they get arranged in a personal way. The four universal purposes for all men, all women, everyone are these.

Number one is to love God with all your heart, could, mind and strength. Number two is to love other people, your neighbor as yourself, neighbor love. Those are the two universal purposes that deal with relationships. Then, to tend the culture, to take care of the creation in which we have lived which includes the families that we have, the work that we do, the government that we are a part of, the Earth itself, all of these things to tend the culture, sometimes called the cultural mandate or the cultural commission. Genesis 1, whatever it is, 28 or something like that.

Then, the other task, so these two over here two relationships, two tasks to tend the culture and the great commission, the great commission, helping people find Jesus, helping grow in Jesus, helping people live for Jesus. Taking care of the needs of the poor is certainly part of the great commission, Galatians 2:10. Paul up at Jerusalem, he said the only thing they ask is that I take care of the poor, the very thing that I was eager to do. You have these four purposes. Each of us has a personal mission. It's the unique in which God weaves together those four universal purposes. It's how we love God, it's how we love people, it's how we tend the culture, and it's how we help fulfill the great commission.

The way that we've put all of that together and the unique city that you live in, the unique job that you have, the unique temperament, personality, calling, gifts, all of these things, the way that they weave together then this is your personal mission. This is God's great plan. It's to give you a personal mission,

Ephesians 2:10, for we are God's workmanship or we are God's masterpiece, a wonderful story, a beautiful story. Something wonderful is going on here, you're a masterpiece, you are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance, he has a plan which he prepared in advance for you to do. You see how it works? You see how it works?

When we tap into this mission, when we tap into this plan that he has for our life and when we pursue it and understand it, by the way, it's certainly a journey. It's certainly not... it's not something that you necessarily always have a 100% clarity on, but you always have a general idea of what direction you should be moving in even when it is hard, even when it is hard.

I was fooling around with this yesterday, I'll probably end up doing something with it like a blog post or something. I didn't even put it in here, that's how much I thought of it so far, you think about Moses. What is Moses would have said, "Man, this burning bush thing, it's really impressive but I'm sorry you're going to have to get somebody else. I ain't going back there." What if Abraham said, "Are you kidding me? This place is like Scottsdale. I'm not leaving here and go to some place I don't even know where it is. Forget that." What if Joseph would have said something like, "I know you brothers, when you sold me off into slavery, you meant that for harm and now I'm going to get my revenge." What if David would have said, "Man, that giant is really big. You know what? I'm going back home, my dad needs my help." What if Nehemiah would have gotten the wall half-built and then when all the people came in at the end he said, "You know, that looks good enough for me", and he quit a halfway.

I'll tell about more at this in a minute but I've been in a real funk. Paul, I've been reading 2nd Corinthians, and Paul, I never noticed before how much fear and worry and anxiety Paul experienced. This is kind of Christian culture that I grew up in where once you are a real christian, you don't have those things anymore. Let me tell you, Paul, Nehemiah, Abraham, Moses, all these people, they had all kinds of anxiety, all kinds of fear, all kinds of worry, and you will too. Why? Because well, you may be a wonderful story and something beautiful may be happening and God may love you and God may have a plan for your life but it's still hard. This is the problem. It's still very hard.

The way to deal with this is to engage all of these four purposes and understand what it is that God wants us to do and then to be brave because listen, listen to this. Be careful, listen to what I'm saying. Are you ready? Everybody ready?

You don't have to be brave if you're not on mission. You don't have to be brave if you're not on a mission. You can sleep in. But if you're going to be on a mission, you're going to have to be brave because everybody in the Bible had to be that way and you're going to have to be that way too and I'm going to have to be that way too and so it's important to feel like we're synced up with the will of God and be able to be so utterly convinced that I'm doing God's will that I wouldn't change a thing. That doesn't mean that it's not painful, it doesn't mean you don't have to work through certain things, it doesn't mean that you're maybe doing at this moment the thing that you most like to do in the whole world like hoeing a row of beans. If you want to fulfill God's plan for your life, then the idea is to understand your personal mission and then just to walk it out. How do we fulfill it? How do we fulfill it?

I'm going to give you some technical things here that you can write down and then I will tell you a story. How does this happen? This great plan, how do we fulfill it? Number one, these are in no particular order and this is not comprehensive. This is a representative list of things. I think it's most of the big chunky things that you'd want to know. I think the starting point though is gratitude for grace, gratitude for grace. I think understanding the gospel and what that, I was trying to... I never did come up with an

analogy that really turned me on but here's the thing. You are a sinner, you were a sinner, even if you're a believer now, you're still a sinner but the point is that at one point you were a sinner who is lost. You were a sinner who is sinning in such a way that you were alienated from God.

In the fullness of time, God saw that you couldn't fix yourself. I was watching my little dog this morning, I love this little dog. I've learned more about how God must feel about me by thinking about how I feel about this little dog. Guys, he's looking at you and he loves you so much. God is crazy about you, he really is. He's looking at you and he's thinking, "You know, there's just absolutely no way, this guy Jeff, Fred, Cain, Abel, wherever you are, there's just no way that he's going to get out of this mess that he's gotten himself into. But I can't, I'm holy for crying out loud, I'm, God, I'm holy. He's going to have a terrible life if he continues to live like this, what can I do? What can I do? I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to get somebody to pay the price. There's a price you have to pay when you do these terrible things, these wicked things that you've done. I'm going to get somebody to pay that price so that he doesn't have to.

That's exactly what Jesus has done, you see. I don't think I'm surprising anybody to tell you that because of the things that you have done, the sins that you have done, you deserve to die. That's what you deserve. To understand that and just remind ourselves of it from time to time that we really did deserve to be erased off the face of the planet. But this God loved us so much that he called on someone else to pay the price for what we've done and then he's given us a pass. He's given us a pass. The only thing we have to do is embrace it, accept it.

There are people out there, Jesus died for everybody, there are people out there, "I don't need it. I don't need that", yes you do. Hopefully they will come to their senses and embrace it. That's the piece, we have to receive it. All of this is what is called grace. All of that is what we call grace. When we stop every now and then to think about it, "Oh my gosh, oh my god, I cannot believe this, that God would do this. I'm so overwhelmed with gratitude for grace that I have to respond, I have to respond." You want to be motivated? Don't go to some pep rally, don't go to some success seminar, just dwell on the greatness of God and the goodness of what he's done and let this gratitude for grace become this turbine engine that's constantly humming in the background and giving you power. That's one little long explanation there, gratitude for grace.

Number two is gifts. If you want to be fulfilling God's plan for your life, you should figure out what your spiritual gifts are. You should understand the concept of calling if you don't already and try to determine what is God's calling on my life. Number four, spiritual disciplines. The practice of the spiritual disciplines will keep you in touch, in sync with God's will in a powerful way. Number five, opportunities. If you want to be on mission and on point, if you want to be found hoeing your garden and being happy about it, then view everything that you do all day long, look for the opportunity in it.

If you can't get the gas pump to work, I'm making this up but I mean if you can't get the gas pump to work and you have to go inside and get somebody come out and help you, okay, all right, there must be an opportunity in here, it could be just to encourage that person, it could go all the way to something where you're talking to them about why you're not wanting to fire off a letter to the president of a company and tell him what a terrible company he has, why you're being so kind to them even though you're having this problem.

Number six, it's step out in faith. CS Lewis he said this, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the point of testing." Courage is not just one of the virtues, it is the form of virtue

at the point of testing. Step out in faith, have courage, trust God. Then, 7th is just be intentional. If you want to be on God's plan then be thinking these are the four big things that God wants me to do, to love him, to love others, to build the kingdom, to tend the culture and then just be intentional about doing those things across the course of a day.

I said that I... the reason for that, God would rather you be... are you ready for this? God would rather you be imperfect in actuality than perfect in potentiality. Do I need to say that again? God would rather you be imperfect in actuality than perfect in potentiality. It's a dance, you're a wonderful story, something beautiful is happening here. He loves you, he's got a plan for your life, and we get there by just engaging in it just by being intentional.

I'm not... I was thinking about this yesterday, I'm fluid, I have skin, I get cut, things fall off my body, I had to cut fingernails, I'm organic. I'm not a mathematical formula, I'm not a machine, I'm a human and I'm flawed. We say it here many times if God think he's flawed, then he wouldn't have any work with. He wants to be engaged in our lives and he wants us to be on the plan.

We're doing a capital campaign at the ministry. It's very exciting, we're at a very exciting time. We've quintupled our staff in four years, gone from 28 to 120 people, now we want to do that again. Actually, what we want to do is we want to grow 10x. The mission is working, everything's working so why not? We want to grow 10x, from 100 staff to a thousand staff. I don't know, I guess it's a 5 or 10-year plan, I'm not sure. You will see how it works out. We're raising the same amount of major donor dollars this year that we did 10 years ago. All the growth that we've had, it's been funded by the program itself. We haven't been out raising more money to spend more money. We've been spending the same amount of money. If we're going to do the 10x, we need to ramp up our infrastructure and we need to ramp up our recruiting program, and that's going to take some, let's just call it, series B financing, another round of financing. We're putting together a \$5 million capital campaign for the next 3 years.

The goal has been set for me, I didn't set this goal by the way, to raise \$2 million by the end of the year. Guess how much we've raised every year for the last 10 years in this period of time between now and at the end of the year, \$400,000-\$500,000. We've never raised \$2 million. I get assigned this goal of raising \$2 million. I have been depressed about it. I have been overwhelmed. I've been filled with anxiety. I've been filled with fear. This message this week has been so helpful to me. It has been so helpful to me. I was able to actually write this letter and I'm going to tell you why. I wrote this letter to a donor who wrote me and he said, "Best wishes for your project but I can't help out because of my commitments to other ministries." I'm thinking, what other ministry could possibly be as important as ours? Humor aside, I wrote back and I said, "First name, I understand completely. No one can do every deal every time and callings and passions are arranged by the Father. Please pray for us that we always and only pursue God's plans done God's way. Warm regards in Christ.

I meant it. What it was that empowered me or enabled me to write that note? I had a couple of these very interesting insights this morning, this week rather. There are two reasons that a man is overwhelmed and worried, fearful, anxious. One is that he's a man on a mission. The other reason is that he's not a man on a mission. There are people in the world who are overwhelmed and filled with anxiety or fear because they are not on a mission. Then there's the rest of us and we are also overwhelmed from time to time because we are on a mission, because we do have a wall to build, because we do have a country to establish, because we do have people to save, because we do have a country that we cherish, because we do have a personal mission.

That was very helpful to me. Then, the second insight was that, and this is a very much a tight rope, when you're trying to do something great for God and you need to get people to help you with it, it's very difficult not to fall into seeking man's favor instead of seeking God's favor. If God doesn't do this, it's not going to happen. I have enough faith to say that I could send you a shoestring in an envelope and if it's God's, you'll give me \$100,000, I believe that.

We do have to workout a salvation with fear and trembling, you do have to use common sense and wisdom. I think every business principle that's ever been established you could find in the book of Nehemiah. Use good business sense but then it depends on the Lord's favor. It doesn't depend on... I don't have to worry how I'm coming across to a potential donor or in your case a potential customer. You don't have to worry about how you're coming across to them. You're on a mission. It's better that you're imperfect in actuality than perfect in potentiality. You just go and do what you do and then depend on the favor of the Lord.

As we do this, remember, a man on a mission needs to be brave but a man not on a mission, he doesn't need to be brave. A man not on a mission doesn't need to be brave. Let's do be brave and the way to be brave is, it's the big idea today, it's to be so utterly convinced that I'm doing God's will that I wouldn't do anything else. What I'm hoping that you will just think about in your discussion, this is reflect where you are. Can you say that I want to be so utterly convinced I'm doing God's will that I wouldn't do anything else, I wouldn't change a thing?

Let me tell you, there are some of you men in this room I happen to now, this is not even how I say it, I don't say I want to be so utterly convinced, I say I am so utterly convinced. I am, I am so utterly convinced I'm doing God's will that I wouldn't change a thing, I really wouldn't. I'm able to stand here before and say, as much anxiety and sense of overwhelm and fear and dread that I am going through, if I found out today that I have 5 weeks to live, I'm going to read to you what I wrote down, I would want to finish what I believe God has led me to start. I'm that convinced, I'm that convinced. Either you are that convinced or if not you'll be able to say the other big idea. I want to be. I want to be. I want to be so, I want to be so utterly convinced that I'm doing God's will that I wouldn't change a thing if I found out that I had 5 weeks to live.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for these men where you have each of them on their journeys. Lord I pray that you would help each of us to figure out how it is that we're going to fulfill your plan for our lives and that we would live out the next 5 or 50 years as though we have 5 weeks to live, that you would help us to be so utterly convinced that we are doing your will that we wouldn't change a thing. If we need to get in sync with your will, then we would do that too. We ask this in your loving name, Amen.