

My name is Afshin Ziafat. How many of you remember me from last time? Good. Okay, for those of you who are like, "Who in the world are you?," my name is Afshin. I come from a Muslim background and became a Christian my senior year in high school when I read a Bible and came to faith in Christ. And God has called me into the ministry, and I've been following after Him. I used to live in Dallas. Actually, some of you probably don't know that I moved to Houston in July, so that's why you haven't seen me around. The last couple of years before I moved, this was my home church and I was very plugged in here. And the Lord has used me now to travel and speak. I think last time I was here if you will remember, I had just come back from Turkey or from the Middle East and showed that video. Well actually you guys can be praying for me because I'm going back to the Middle East a week from tomorrow to train a new batch of men to go into Iran and plant underground churches. And I am so excited. So pray for me on that. Jason Elam, who you might know as a kicker for the Denver Broncos, he's going with me and Chad Childress, who's an awesome Christian man, the three of us are going to train. I'm really pumped and excited to be here. Well Matt said, "Man Afshin, I want to use you several times a year," and so we penciled in a few Sundays that he was going to be gone and that I would fill in for him. And actually I was supposed to be here last weekend and this weekend, but last weekend got scratched for a good reason, because we had too many baptisms sign up, which is always a good reason. So, I was thrilled to have Matt call me and go, "Man, we don't have time for you to preach really." And of course, I hear that he ended up preaching for thirty minutes anyways if you were here. But anyways, he said, "You'd only have like five minutes." So, I go, "That's cool. Don't worry about it." So today if I can, I'm going to try to morph two messages into one. I'll warn you ahead of time, you've gotta get your running shoes on ahead of time and you've got to run with me because we're going to hit some Scriptures today. Anyways, that's who I am. Pray for me. If you want to keep up with me, I have a website, www.afshinziafat.com.

So let's do this. God's put this message on my heart. I want to talk to you about the revealed will of God, God's will that has been revealed to us. And so, I want you to bow your head with me and close your eyes, and I want to take just a moment right now. I know we prayed corporately, but I'm going to ask every single one of you now to pray silently and prepare your heart right now to hear from God. Would you just take a moment and say, "God, speak to me through Your word." Just prepare your heart, and I'm going to close us in just a second. "Father, we thank You God for this morning. We thank You for this church that proclaims Your word weekly, a place to come and worship You and just to dance and sing and just the freedom that we have in Christ. Lord, I just pray today that Your word that accomplishes its purpose and never returns void would fall on our hearts. And we pray, God, that we would not try to make Your word say what we want it to say, but Lord, we would rather conform to Your word. I pray Lord that we would hear from you and walk out of here changed, not just because we heard from a speaker, Lord, but because we heard from Your word and we could never be the same. I pray today would be a revolutionary day for many in this room, God, maybe even for me, let it be God. To really grab a hold of what You have called us to, what Your will is, Lord. We love You. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen."

Alright, this may kind of date me or something. In the last three services, a majority have known what I'm talking about. Some of you that are older than me, this may fly over your head. And please forgive me but I'll explain it. Some of you who are a lot younger than me may not know what I'm talking about. But if you're around my age, you've done this game. I did it in elementary school or middle school. This was like the rave, okay. And it was a game that would pretty much predict your future. It was a great game and I loved it. And some of you who have forgot about it are like, "I'm going to go home and play it." It's called "MASH." How many of you remember MASH? Here is mash.

Let me tell you what it is. You get a sheet of paper and on the top, you write the word MASH, which stands for Mansion, Apartment, Shack and House. So, you would write MASH on the top, and then along the side you could put the girls that you wanted to end up marrying.

And me, being in elementary school and jr. high in the 80's, my list usually included these ladies right here: Kelly LeBrock, Kathy Ireland, Christie Brinkley, Brooke Shields, Elisabeth Shue, probably Olivia Newton John too. "Let's Get Physical," that video just like accelerated me through puberty, right. So you had all these ladies, and then your friend would put like some ugly girl from school at the bottom. That would be like the whammy.

Then you would have the list of jobs that you want. So I put doctor because of my dad and then NFL which is my dream, MLB and astronaut, lawyer, whatever. And then someone would stick something horrible that no one wants like proctologist or something.

And finally cars: Lamborghini, Porsche, Delorian because you saw "Back to the Future," and then someone would put Pinto. And now, this is what you would do with this game. Someone else would draw a spiral on the middle of the sheet until you say "stop." And wherever you say stop, then from the outside you start counting layers, 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8. And so 8 is your number.

You start with the M of MASH and work your way around counting down to 8. Shoot, Brook Shields is off the list. So cross her off and resume counting through 8. You go all the way around until you've got one of each, and somehow this little spiral on the sheet of paper determines your destiny for life. I mean, it's just the craziest thing, and we kept doing it and we were always on the edge of our seat, "Please not the Pinto." And the funny thing is we should have given up on it because it never works out, it always gets jacked up because you're like living in the shack, but you're an NFL player or you're driving the Pinto and you've got Christie Brinkley as your wife or something. It just never worked out, but the interesting thing is if you think about it...I mean I already had the pressure of my dad wanting me to be a doctor but then you've got this game going. It's just so easy to see how in our culture the mindset is that the goal of life is this stuff. Marry a hot girl, drive a fast car, live in a mansion and have a really nice job. And so there's like these rungs in this ladder, this thing that we're groping for and running after to reach some status of success. And that becomes the goal of life. Well truly, we would say that in Christianity as we follow Christ, that's not the goal of life. So it got me thinking, "What is our goal?"

So, I want you to go with me to this Scripture in 1 Peter 4. Now we're going to jump into a passage of Scripture that talks about suffering, which isn't always fun. But in the midst of the suffering, there's a really key verse. 1 Peter 4:1, "Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries." (NKJV, emphasis added)

That Scripture right there I think is a key for us in our focus. It says this. Verse 1 says those who have suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin as Christ has. That doesn't mean that suffering somehow leads to sinlessness or that even sinlessness is something to be attained this side of eternity, this side of heaven. What I think he's talking about there is the same idea as Romans 6, that when we identify with Christ in His suffering and in His death, we become one with Him and that we walk in the Spirit basically. We will start to overcome sin. Kind of like Galatians says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." And also, Galatians says, "And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions." So, that's what it's talking about. It's Paul in Philippians saying "I want to know Christ and fellowship in His suffering and be conformed to His death." This is what it's saying: those who are of Christ now have a new goal,

they no longer go after the will of the gentiles or the unsaved world, they now are after one goal only, the will of God. That's what Jesus' will was. If you go into John 8:29, He says, "I only do those things that please the Father." And so as a Christian now, as being followers of Christ, we do the things that bring glory to God that is in His will. We're running after His will. It says we've spent enough of our time going after the will of the world. It's like in Ephesians 5 where it says, "Redeem the time, for the days are evil." How many of you would say, "Man, I've spent far too long running after the things of the world."

And so, it says, "Now we live for the will of God," but what is the will of God? You see, many times even as a Christian, the will of God gets boiled down to me on this list right here. "Who am I supposed to marry? What am I supposed to do with my life? What job am I supposed to have? Where am I supposed to live? Alright, that is the will of God for me. Am I supposed to go into the ministry or not?" And anytime I travel and speak to young people, I have college and youth and singles come up to me and ask, "How do you know God's will on this? How do you know God's will on that?" And so, God's will becomes all of the stuff we want to do for Him. But what I submit to you today is God's will is much deeper than that stuff. What I submit to you is this, that God has a revealed will already in His Scripture; He's revealed it, for you, as it pertains to who you're becoming not what you do. And what if, just what if we took our eyes off of what we do for God or what our job is or who we're to marry and all that stuff and we put our eyes on "God, what is Your will as it pertains to me becoming Christ-like, what You're doing in me?" I want you to see one more Scripture real quick. Go to 1 John 3. The first three verses, we get our goal. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." What that passage is saying is this, that we know that the ultimate goal is we will become like Him. It says anyone who has that hope, that's their hope of life, that our goal, if that is your goal, then anyone who has that hope purifies himself as He is pure. That doesn't mean that we can do that, but we seek to become purified, we seek to be sanctified, we seek what God is doing in us more than what we do for Him. God's will is something He does in us not something we do for Him. So, there again I say to you, instead of groping after "God, what is Your will on the things that haven't been revealed yet: Who am I to marry? What job am I supposed to have?" What about if for a second we quit groping after those things and let's look at God's word. And you're going to see some Scriptures that clearly say, "This is the will of God." There's no debating about it. And let's say, "God, what are the things that You've already revealed?" And you're going to see it's all about what He's doing on the inside. And say, "God, I want to submit myself to those things. I want to run after those things and leave the rest to You."

So the first one is that God's will is that we be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Go with me to 2 Peter 3:9. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Now let's go to 1 Timothy 2:3-4. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Now, I understand that these two verses are major battlegrounds for the people who debate Calvinism vs Arminianism, and I'm just going to tell you up front, we're not going there today. And let me tell you why. It's not because I'm afraid to or I want to avoid it. It's because it's going to take us on a whole other tangent when I want to keep us on the will of God. But I will say really quickly that this obviously doesn't mean that God's will of decree, which never gets thwarted, is that every single person is going to be saved and will be saved. It can't mean that. The Scriptures are very clear that there are many who are going to go down the wide road which leads to destruction. And that Scripture is clear, and we just know that practically. Not all come to repentance and turn to Him. But His will of desire is that all men be saved. And that "all men" doesn't mean every single individual, but men of all kinds, of all races, of all areas of the world would come to Him. But here's what I want you to grab. Instead of going into the whole election thing, stay here with me okay. What I want you to grab is this, that God's desire for me, before who I marry and what job I have and any of that, is that I would

know Him. His desire is for people to come to a knowledge of the truth. His desire is for people to turn to Him and know Him. So the first thing, the foundational thing I want to grab is this, that God wants me to know Him. He doesn't want you to know stuff about Him only, it's not just say the right things about Him, it's God is inviting you to know Him. And sadly, many of us miss that and we settle for something far less.

I had the incredible opportunity to go to lunch with Hakeem Olajuwon many years ago. If you don't know who Hakeem is, he's a basketball player for the Houston Rockets. And I grew up in Houston, and so he was like my hero. I had his poster...I mean, he was it for me. Well, my roommate at UT in college was a former Muslim who became a Christian also. His father is a Muslim, and he disciplined Hakeem. So, he wanted to turn us back to Islam so he set up a lunch with me and my roommate to try to convince us to come back to Islam. He tried to sucker punch us. He knew that Hakeem was my favorite, and he didn't tell us that Hakeem was going to be there.

So we went to this Lebanese restaurant and we're sitting here. He keeps looking out the window like every five seconds. I'm like, "What's he looking for?" And then all of a sudden, I look and I see this Mercedes pull in with gold plates that say "DREAM" on the back, and I'm like, "No stinking way!" Because his name is Hakeem "The Dream" Olajuwon. And this big, giant 7 foot man gets out of the car, walks into the restaurant, all these Estonian business men jump up and they're all like, "Oh Hakeem!" and go shake his hand and all that. He walks past all of them and sits down next to this punk college kid, and I'm like, "Yeah, what's up? He's with me. How y'all doing?" And so, he comes and sits across from me and we start talking. Throughout the lunch, all these businessmen would come up and ask for his autograph. It was kind of annoying. "Hey, can I have your autograph?" He'd be like, "Uh, okay." Someone else. "Uh, okay." And he just kept doing it the whole lunch. Well the lunch got over and I finally got back home and called my buddy and called a bunch of my friends. And they were all like, "You had lunch with Hakeem? Did you get his autograph?" And I went, "No, I didn't." They were like, "You didn't get his autograph?" And I go, "No." Then they're like, "Well, surely you got a picture with him. Did you get a picture?" I go, "No, I didn't get his picture." And I was like, "What was I thinking?"

And I started thinking about it and it dawned on me. It never crossed my mind to get his autograph. Why? Because I had something much greater than that. I had a lunch with him, and in a small way, I got to know him, I got to have a relationship with him. None of those men could pull up a chair and start talking with Hakeem because they weren't invited to the table, but I was. Michael Jordan's son doesn't do back flips when he gets an autograph from Michael Jordan. Why? Because he knows his father. He knows him. And so, I say God the Father who created the universe is inviting you to the table today, "I want you to know Me" And so many of us are settling for just the autograph, just knowing about Him, just going to church.

And I'm telling you, knowing about Him will never save you, will never free you, will never fulfill you, but knowing Him will. Knowing Him is the key. Jesus said that you will know the truth and the truth will make you free. The truth isn't just a set of rules; the truth is a person. He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except they go through me." So, when you know Jesus, you will be set free from those bondages in your life. You will have life and have it to the full. Some of you today, you haven't gone in that step, and I'm telling you, forget who you're going to marry, forget what job you're going to have if you don't have this, you don't have the main purpose of life. You were created for God. Colossians 1:16 says, "all things were created by him and for him." (NIV) You were created to have a relationship with Him. 1 Corinthians 1:9 says "God, who called you into fellowship with Christ Jesus..." He's calling us to fellowship, to know Him and fall in love with Him. And I'm saying, you're not going to experience purpose and meaning in life until you have that. God is saying, "Know Me." Paul said it this way: "If you want to list out the things we've done? I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. As for zeal, I persecuted the Christians, I was perfect to the law," he says, "but I considered all of that trash compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." And so I say, do you know Him? Furthermore, some of us know Him but our gifted purpose or our calling supersedes our created purpose. For me, I'm gifted or

called to go and preach the gospel. But if that becomes my walk with Christ, if that becomes my everything, it will be unfulfilling. I am first created to worship Him and know Him. So number one, God's will is that we would know Him.

Number two, God's will for you is that you would be Spirit filled. Go with me to Ephesians 5. I love this passage here. Starting in verse 15, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." There it is. Plain English. You don't have to wonder about this one. Verse 18, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit..." What an incredible analogy, a picture that Paul paints for us there. What he says is, "Don't be drunk with wine..." And by the way, this isn't going to be a talk about drinking either. "Don't be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, the rest of the world is running after." We would think, when we heard that statement that the next statement would probably be something like this, "Therefore, abstain. Abstinence, not even one drop of alcohol. Don't be drunk with wine, so just stay as far away from it because it leads to dissipation." But it's interesting, that's not the strategy he lays out for us. Not just get away from that thing that leads to dissipation, but this is the strategy. He says, "Don't be drunk with wine, instead turn and be drunk with the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit." That's his strategy.

Jesus said this, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never be hungry and he who believes in Me will never thirst again." So does that mean that if we come to Christ, we won't be physically hungry or thirst again? Of course not. Of course it's a spiritual hunger and thirst. But does it mean that He doesn't want us to hunger and thirst at all, He wants us to quench it? No. I believe what Jesus is saying is, "If you come and feed on Me, you won't hunger and thirst after that stuff that won't fill you." Let me tell you why. If you look at Matthew 5, Jesus says this, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." So, you can't miss this. Here it is. What we do is, we have hungers in our life and we try to meet them with sin or we try to meet them with addictions and hang-ups, and it burns us.

So then our strategy then becomes, "Let me stay as far away from it, like fast from it as much as I can," when the real strategy shouldn't be just fasting from it, but then feast on the bread of life. And you will be filled, and that stuff will lose their appeal. That's the strategy. You will lose the appetite for the junk food when you are filled with the real food, which is Christ saying, "Be filled with Me." And I love it that he compares it to being drunk, being filled with the Spirit, because I know none of you in here probably know what it's like, but you may have heard of someone who was drunk or seen someone who's been drunk. If you see anyone who's drunk or intoxicated, what happens? Basically, they have given over control of their thoughts, of their speech, of their actions, they've given it over to a foreign substance. And they are now acting in ways and speaking in ways that they normally wouldn't when they're sober. That's what he's talking about. He's saying, "Be drunk with the Spirit, so that you literally give control over to a foreign substance, which is Christ in you, living." It's like Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." And so, those who are filled with the Spirit are like a drunk person. They start acting and speaking in ways that they normally wouldn't on their own. And so, I start doing supernatural things when I'm walking in the Spirit, when I'm filled with the Spirit. I say things at the right time to the right person, Scriptures come to my mind when I'm preaching that I haven't even memorized when I'm walking in the Spirit. It's supernatural. You will start loving people who hate you in a supernatural way. My dad says he doesn't love me, he disowns me. A human reaction would be, "Well, get out of my life then." But God in me is able to do something supernatural and say, "Dad, I love you. I love you." And so, walk in the Spirit, be drunk, give control over. It's a passive tense. In other words, it says, "Let yourself be filled with the Spirit. Let go and let Him consume you." Peter, when he walked in the Spirit, did supernatural things. He walked on water when he walked in the Spirit. When he didn't walk in the Spirit, when he wasn't filled with the spirit, he denied Christ three times, but thank God that God restored him. He was filled with the Spirit in Acts and he preached, and thousands came to Christ. It's supernatural when you're walking in the Spirit. So, God's will is for us to know Him and to be filled with the Spirit.

Number three, turn to 1 Thessalonians 4. God's will is that you be sexually pure, your sanctification. I've always wanted to do a sermon where I skirt on Calvinism, drinking and sex in the same message. Starting in verse 3, "For this is the will of God..." No debating, no getting around it, this is it. This is God's will. "God, what is Your will for me? Who am I supposed to marry? What job?" Hold on, hold on. Look at here. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God." God's will for me is that I would be sexually pure, that I would become sanctified as I follow Him, that I would learn to honor Him with my body, which is bought with a price and does not belong to me, it belongs to Him. The Bible says sexual sin is the sin that's against the body, against His temple. And the Bible says we are to abstain from sexual immorality so that our vessels honor God. And what if we spent more time focused and fixed on God's will as it pertains to us being sanctified? Abstain from it. And again, these are two messages that each one of them, I could talk forever on, but I've got to hurry through this. So, I don't have enough time to say as much as I want on this, but 2 Timothy 2:22 tells us to "flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness." But sometimes what we do is we just kind of dabble in it. And I don't have to tell you that sexual immorality is probably the number one killer of our culture, ministries, families all over this world, all over this country especially. And so, we've got to run as far away from it. Look at Hebrews 12, and God just put this in my head earlier and so I'm going to run with it. Look at this in Hebrews 12, starting in verse 3, "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." It's saying, "Man, you have not resisted to the point of bloodshed. You haven't been this committed and serious about this." I mean, Jesus says, "If your right hand offends you, cut it off." That's bloody. "If your right eye offends you, gouge it out," meaning, get serious with it. If you need to, confess it to someone else. If you need to, bring it into the light. But this is God's will for you, run after it, that you would be sexually pure.

Now, I preach at a lot of youth camps, and Panama City, Florida is like the Mecca of youth camps. I've done like a hundred there. It's a beach camp, and the recurring theme at each one of these beach camps inevitably becomes, "Girls, you're dressing a little too revealing." It always happens. Someone gets up on the stage and makes an announcement, the counselor lady goes and talks to the girls and "Don't wear two pieces," whatever. It always happens. Well, in this one particular camp, it especially was a problem. And so, one high school guy did something that I'll never forget. This high school guy did something that spoke louder than any sermon that was preached at that camp. He went to one of these little "make a t-shirt" stands that air brush things and he made this t-shirt that said on the front, "Why am I not looking at you?" Okay, pretty random, right? He wore that shirt like every day. I don't know if he washed it, so it's pretty gross. And so, he would walk through camp wearing this "Why am I not looking at you?" shirt. He'd walk past girls, he'd walk past guys, and they'd all see "Why am I not looking at you?" And as he would pass by, on the back, they read "Job 31:1" So, they all ran back to their room, guys and girls, turned in their Bibles to Job 31:1, which says, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." (NIV) And he just kept looking straight ahead as he walked. And he just turned the entire attitude of that week, saying "I have decided, before I let myself get in a position where I will fall, that I made a covenant with my eyes." See? Back to the Spirit filled idea. Folks, what consumes our mind and our eyes and our heart, it will ultimately control us, just like getting drunk. And so, that's why the Bible makes such a big deal about...Colossians 3 says put your mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Philippians 4 says whatever is pure, whatever is noble, whatever is trustworthy of good report, dwell or meditate on these things, saturate yourself in these things. Alright, so God's will is that I be sanctified.

Number four, God's will is that you would submit to authority in your life. And Ephesians 6 says, "Children, obey your parents." And then it talks to bondservants. It says, slaves, obey your masters in the flesh, because Christ is your real master now. Obey them as if you're honoring Christ. Don't do it as men pleasers, but a God pleasers, and it says this is the will of God for you in Ephesians 6. Now here's the deal. I'm hitting slavery too. I'm hitting all of the controversial topics. This is not a passage condoning slavery, but it's saying a Hebrew slave who comes to Christ and is in this situation

that has a master, that's what it's saying, that he has to honor that authority. So, God is looking for the person who isn't always bucking authority, who honors the authority he has been given as if he is doing it to Christ. Because God is looking for a good follower before He makes him a good leader. God wants to know, will you submit to authority before He places you in a place of authority.

This next one, more than any, really shows that it's more important what God is doing in me than what I do. God's will is that I would be willing to suffer for His name. Go with me to 1 Peter 3:17. "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." Now, you may say, "Afshin, that said if that is the will of God." Well let me tell you, all throughout Scripture, this concept is taught that God has called us to suffer. He has called us into a life of suffering. It's interesting again when we look at it as what God is doing in me, it makes sense. Now if you don't believe me, go to Philippians 1:29 and I want you to see it here. "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake." That is the gift that God has given you. He is granting you the opportunity, not to just believe in Him but to suffer for His sake. Now, if you and I hear that, we think, "Where's the good in that? Where's the hope in that? Why is that a gift?" You see, the early Christians when they suffered for the name of Christ, they left the scene and they started thanking God. They praised Him and thanked Him that they were counted worthy to suffer for His sake. How is that a gift? Let me tell you how it's a gift. If your goal is the stuff of life that you get and what you may lose in life, then there is no hope in suffering. But if your goal, like we saw in 1 John, is "one day I'm going to be like Him and that's the goal I'm pressing towards. I'm becoming Christ like," then there is hope in suffering. It's not fun, but there's hope when your eyes are on the right goal, when your eyes are on "me becoming like Christ." Because that's what He did. Now, listen to Romans 5, starting in verse 3, "And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." You see it? You see suffering or tribulation is building perseverance in me, which leads to character and therefore leads to hope. I've got hope. Why? Because I'm being made like Christ through it. James 1 says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." God is doing something in us, and there's the hope in it that's more about His will for me and what I'm becoming.

Now, I'm a UT guy, so I've got to just say that up front. I went to the University of Texas and earlier this fall, we played Texas Tech. Now you Red Raider fans, I'm sorry but I've got to tell this story. We played Texas Tech and we were getting stomped. I think it was 21-0 or 21-7, something ridiculous, and we came back and won. It was an amazing game that I didn't see live. Let me tell you why I didn't see it live. I was on a date. Can you believe that? Don't fall out of your chair now. Don't get too excited because nothing happened with it. You'll probably find out why there were no more dates after I tell you this. First of all, you've got to be proud of me that I went on a date. Because if you knew me, the idea that I would miss a Texas game was huge. But here's why there were no more dates. At the dinner, the Texas game was on over her right shoulder, so I was like, "Uh huh...oh yeah?...is that right?...Mhmm...Oh!" It was that horrible. And then I went to a concert, some folk singer, which I like folk usually but this was boring. And so, I had my phone in my pocket and it was vibrating like crazy. Now look, Texas fans never call me during the game because they're focused like I am. The only people who call me during the game are anti-Texas, my A&M friends. They're like, "Hey Afshin, how about your horns?" And so, I'm like, "Great, it's buzzing like crazy." Or it's a great game and my casual fans are calling me saying, "Wow, what a game!" So, I knew something was going on and I'm like, "Great." And so finally when the concert's over, I check my text messages and I have like 500 messages. And they start off "Hey, how about your Longhorns?" and all of a sudden, they didn't call me back and everybody else is like, "Can you believe you all won?" So, I found out we won. Now, there's a great invention in life. Let me tell you the greatest thing since sliced bread is TiVo. TiVo is the greatest invention, right? And that's why I was calm, because I knew I was having the game TiVo-ed. But I knew what happened. So I went to watch the game and it was interesting. I'm watching the game on TiVo and we're behind 21-0 or 21-7 and I have the biggest

smile on my face. I'm like, "Yes! We're behind 21-0! I can't wait to see how we come back. I can't wait." I keep watching more and watching more. And then in the end, in the fourth quarter, we fumble in our own territory. There's no way we should win. And normally, if I didn't know the final score, I would get up and start kicking things and throwing things. But instead, I was like, "We fumbled! Oh my gosh! I can't wait to see how we pull this one out. Without Vince Young. This is amazing." Here's the deal. When you go through life and you know the final score and you know the goal is my becoming Christ like, then maybe it's not fun to go through suffering, but then there's hope because we can say, "Wow, I can't wait to see what God does through this." And see, there's joy then and there's that ability to smile even through suffering because you know the ultimate goal is what He's doing in me.

So, let's close with this. In Proverbs 16, there's a few verses that you're going to see that it's all about you focusing on the inside and let God deal with the outside. Verse 1, "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD." Focus on the heart; give everything else to God. Verse 3, "Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established." Verse 9 says, "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." God is the one who guides his steps. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." And we always say, "Wow, I can't wait for those desires." But the emphasis is delight yourself in God, that's the goal. And leave everything else to Him. Jeremiah 29 says, "I know the plans I have for you." But what we do is we do is we start worshiping the plan and we forget that we're supposed to worship the one that has the plan. It says, "I know the plans I have for you," then it goes on and says, "then you will come and seek Me and pray to Me and you will find Me, because the goal is Me, not the plan." So here's what I submit to you. Maybe this game, maybe all this stuff that we get in life is not the goal of life. Maybe job and maybe marriage and having children, maybe they're the experiences we go through life that are shaping us and molding us and pushing us towards the ultimate goal, and that's becoming like Christ. That's what He's doing in me.

So, here's what I'm ready to do if you'll go here with me tonight. What I'm ready to do is say, "God,..." I don't know if you've seen the movie "Facing the Giants," but the whole movies about this. "...I want to honor you with my life and leave the results up to You." So, what if we did this, guys? What if we said, "God, I want to quit looking on the outside stuff, who I am to marry, what stuff I'm supposed to have, and I'm going to fix my eyes on the inside." And say, "God, let Your will be done above all else in my heart and on my inside, and I'll give You the rest." And watch what God does in your life. You put your focus on what He's making you to be and not what He's calling you to do. Just do that. "God, let Your will happen. Consume me."

So, if you're here tonight and that's not happened for you, call out to God and say, "God, consume my life, change me from the inside out." I want you to bow your head with me and close your eyes. Paul said this, "I press on, not that I've already been perfected or have already attained this, but I press on towards this goal, the upward call of Christ Jesus." His eyes were on what God was doing in him. Maybe you're in here today, and you don't know Jesus Christ, the first thing we talked about. And maybe you're saying, "I know about him. I've been to church, I've been on the fringe of Christianity, I've been in the culture, but Afshin, I don't know if I really know Him. Man, I'm struggling in my life. I've run after the junk food and I'm ready to turn and repent and know Him and be filled with the abundant life." The Bible says all who call upon Him shall be saved. Why not call upon Him even now? The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. So if that's you today, why not just say a prayer right now? Pray silently, "Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I believe You died on the cross for my sins. And today I call on Your name. Come into my life, wash me of my sins, pilot my life and I will follow You God, the will You have for me. Amen." Keep your head bowed one moment longer. Praise God, those of you that prayed that prayer. Heaven is rejoicing anytime God enters a life like that.

If you're here and you know God, you know Jesus, but for you again, it's "I need to change my focus." We're going to sing "Inside Out," and what I want you to do is take a moment, and if you need to, bow your head or get on your knees. If you need to, sing the song or just pray to God. Whatever one of those areas that God spoke to you on His will, maybe it's the sexual purity thing, maybe it's being filled by the Spirit, maybe it's the authority thing, maybe it's the suffering you're going through, would you just say to God, "God, I turn to You and say change me from the inside out. I give this to You. Let Your will happen, and I want to run after Your will as it pertains to who I'm becoming and that's like Christ."

"We love You. Jesus, we come to You now to worship You. And I pray that You would have this time of response in our hearts and that You would speak to us and you would be glorified in it. And we pray that we would run after Your will and not the will of the world. In Christ's name we pray all of these things. Amen."

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