

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
7th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, July 12, 2026
Scripture: Jonah 1: 1-3 ; James 4: 11-17
Sermon: Do I Have To?

There's the story of a mother who wakes up her daughter telling her it's time for school. The daughter rolls back over and grumbles, "Do I have to?" "Yes", the mother answers, "You're the teacher."

A statement that most children make to their parents after they ask them to do something is what? Answer: "Do I have to?" As children we have things we like to do and things we definitely know we don't like to do. Do parents usually say to their children, "Okay, you don't have to" or is the response usually, "Yes, you have to!!!"?

What parents ask children to do is good for them. They are asking them to do something that will develop their character and help them grow up in a healthy way and develop discipline.

In the same way God, who is our parent, wants us to grow up in our faith and to develop our mature Christian character. Sometimes God asks us to do things and our first response is, "Do I have to?" Just as parents don't want to hear that from their children God doesn't want to hear it from us. God wants us to be ready and eager to obey and to know that God is there with us all the way.

Sometimes we just don't have the right attitude toward what God is asking us to do and we need to pray to God for a change of attitude.

God has a plan for each of our lives. God is the God of wisdom and God knows what ought to happen and when it should occur. God is the God of love and God desires the very best for His children. We need to realize that to follow God's calling is to be in the will of God—it is to be at peace with God.

In our Old Testament lesson we read from the prophet Jonah, a man who disobeyed God. Jonah was fleeing from the will of God. Jonah was going in the opposite direction from where God wanted him to go. Jonah

knew the will of God but chose to disobey it. Jonah had the gall to say to God, "I know what You want me to do but I prefer not to do it. I really know more about this than you do!"

God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh to tell the people to repent of their wicked ways against God. But Jonah deliberately disobeyed and went to Tarshish. But God did not accept Jonah's deliberate disobedience and God intervened supernaturally and caused a storm at sea. The storm and the sailors were used by God to confront a rebellious Jonah. While Jonah was trying to run from God, the captain of the boat forced Jonah to call on God for help. The storm reminded Jonah of God's constant presence. Jonah realized that his rebellion from God had brought danger to all aboard the ship.

God has many ways to get our attention. Jonah's admission of guilt was the first step in his return to following God. How does God get your attention? The great fish was the means for God's gracious deliverance of Jonah from death when he was thrown over the side of the ship by the other sailors. God intervened through nature to perform a miracle to challenge Jonah's disobedience and to deliver Jonah from death. When Jonah said to God "Do I have to?" God said, "Yes, you do!"

Though Jonah deliberately disobeyed God the first time he was given another opportunity to follow God's call to Nineveh, showing us that God saves the undeserving and offers a second chance for serving Him. Jonah's initial rejection of God's plan did not disqualify or excuse him later.

Jonah did go to Nineveh and proclaimed God's warning loudly and the people repented and turned toward God and away from their wicked ways.

Jonah and the people of Nineveh recognized that God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and patient with the disobedient, God is abundant in lovingkindness, personal and consistent and demonstrating unconditional tenderness." God responds to the repentant. We can learn a lot from Jonah's life and how God dealt with Jonah.

Why do people who know the will of God deliberately disobey it? Pride? We like to think that we are the master of our own fate, the captain of our soul. We think we can plan our ways.

Proverbs 16:9 says, "A person's heart plans his ways, but the Lord directs his steps."

We also act like we can accept or reject the will of God. It really isn't an option even though we think it is. It is an obligation to follow and obey and to know that the Lord directs our steps to places we never thought we would go.

Whenever we have changes in our lives and God calls us to something unknown and unfamiliar to us, let's admit it the thought goes through our minds, "Do I have to?" God wants us to follow Him with joy in our hearts. Saying, "Yes, Lord, I trust you to step where I never have been before."

When we disobey God it is then that life is harder, and we are out of the will of God. We follow our own plans.

The Apostle Paul who was once a persecutor of Christians and became a believer himself was in the will of God and he didn't consider the will of God a chain that shackled him; rather it was a key that opened doors and set him free.

To be in the will of God is a freeing feeling because God has designed a special plan for each one of us. The will of God is a living relationship between God and the believer. This relationship is not destroyed when the believer disobeys but we must repent and confess our turning away from God's will as Jonah did.

Being in the will of God is like saying you are in the arms of God. God reveals His will to those who are ready and willing to obey, and like Jonah God may need to get your attention to keep you on track.

God wants us to understand his will; to understand WHY we are doing something. But to understand and discover God's will we just need to work at it and obey.

It is like learning to swim or learning a language or learning how to play a musical instrument. You eventually "get the feel" of what you are doing, and it becomes second nature to you. It takes just doing it one step at a time. Once you understand one part, then God opens the way to the next step. We learn from both successes and from failures.

Thomas Edison famously encapsulated his approach to trial and error with the quote: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." He is also known to have said, "I've never made a mistake. I've only learned from experience." These variations reflect his perspective on

experimentation, particularly during his arduous work to develop a practical incandescent light bulb. Rather than viewing unsuccessful attempts as defeats, he treated each mistake as a necessary step in the elimination process, drawing immense value from discovering exactly what did not work.

Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me." (Matthew 11:29). The yoke suggests doing things together with God, putting into practice what God has taught you and learning from the past.

We must do God's will from the heart and not out of fear but out of love for God. God wants us to get joy out of doing His will. God wants us to enjoy the journey of this world by serving Him cheerfully.

What God wants is for us to have a heart that loves Him and sincerely wants to do His will and glorify His name wherever we are.

What are the benefits of doing the will of God?

You enjoy a deeper fellowship with Jesus Christ.

You have the privilege of knowing God's truth and seeing prayers answered.

You have eternal life with Jesus.

Do we think about God's will as we make our daily plans and decisions?

Do you refuse to obey God's will at times?

The one who obeys God's will, will enjoy God's blessings. Their life may not be easy, but it will be holier and more peaceful.

The years go by so quickly, the weeks go by so quickly, the days go by so quickly. James said, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (James 4:14)

Our time here on this earth is so precious that God doesn't want us to waste it going in the wrong direction like Jonah. Each day that we have should be a day in the hands of God, in God's direction and will.

Since life is so brief, we cannot afford merely to "waste our lives" as so many people seem to do, but we must "invest our lives" in the things that are of God, in the things of eternity.

God reveals His will to us in His word, the Bible and in His Son, Jesus Christ yet most people ignore both. God gives us the Bible to guide us in

every area of life and promises He will be there to help us. We are not alone in knowing the will of God—God will reveal it to us.

Each day is a gift from God to be in His will. It is never too late while you are here on this earth.

God wants us to turn to Him and confess where we have turned away from His will. God wants us to repent and ask for forgiveness. God gives us another chance just as He gave Jonah another chance to do His will. God wants us to be reconciled to others in our life that we are estranged from. That is important in our relationship with God to be in His will. God wants us to take the first step to know the joy of saying “This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it.” For this is the day we are seeking the Lord’s will for our life. God wants us to realize that our life has a purpose and is important.

There will be a time when we aren’t here so let us live life in the will of God.

God will reveal His will for our lives, probably not all at once but step by step. If you knew the whole picture where would our trust in God be. People want to know the whole picture and that is why people go to Palm Readers and psychics. But as Christians we don’t need to know the future details of our lives because we know who holds the future.

Are you Jonah running the other way from God’s will for your life? Or are you trying to seek God and His will for your life?

Are you saying like Jonah, “Do I have to?” Or are you saying, “Yes, Lord, I will obey because I love you.”

Each day is a gift to serve God, may we seek God with all our heart and follow Him in the direction He wants us to go.