

## Knowing God's Will

**Thesis:** Romans 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 4:2-5; John 21:15-23

**Text:** We can know the will of God by getting close to Jesus, embracing new levels of surrender, and trusting the Lord to get us where we need to be.

Intro:

The question I am most often asked by young people is "How do I know the will of God?"

Illustration: Senior summer at Baylor.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned in life is discerning the will of God.

Let's talk about knowing the will of God.

### 1. **God's will is a person and a relationship.**

- a. We are called us into relationship with God through fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- b. Get close to Jesus and stay close to Jesus, and he will get you where you need to be (Matthew 4:19; John 15:5; Psalm 25:12 ESV).
- c. Love God above all else (Matthew 22:37-39).
- d. Seek first God's kingdom and God's character (Matthew 6:33).
- e. God wants to know you personally and wants you to know him personally (John 17:3; 15:5).
  - i. Make your personal devotional life a priority always.
  - ii. Practice spiritual disciplines relationally, intentionally, and intensely to help you make yourself available to God and to connect with God.
  - iii. Remember that God loves you. He wants to meet with you (Hebrews 11:6).
  - iv. Remember that God is worthy of your praise, adoration, and worship.
  - v. Knowing and loving God is your highest calling, your first priority. That is the will of God for your life. Don't neglect it.

### 2. **God does want to guide you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

- a. Get these truths into your spirit by rehearsing them and praying them.
  - i. Psalm 23
  - ii. Psalm 25:12

- iii. Proverbs 3:5-7
- iv. Isaiah 42:16
- v. Matthew 6:13
- vi. Choose to believe them, to pray them, and to use them to remind God of his promises to you in guiding you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

3. **God invites us to discern what is the will of God** (Romans 12:2).

- a. *"Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).*
- b. Years ago, I heard a message that freed me up regarding what it meant to discern the will of God. That sermon gave me some understanding or categories for God's will. Up to that point, I wanted to know God's will like it was a road map for life. And, I wanted to know God's perfect will for my life. I wanted God to speak clearly to me so that I could do his will completely. What I learned from that message in the early 1990's changed my life.
- c. According to Romans 12:2, the will of God is discernable as 3 levels: that which is good, pleasing, and perfect.
- d. **Perfect level.**
  - i. The perfect level of the will of God involves God speaking clearly.
  - ii. Scripture, history, and personal experience teach us that God does speak clearly. However, God probably will only speak clearly about a few issues, directions, or callings for your life (2 or 3 instances?).
  - iii. Here is what most of us want. We want God to speak to us clearly, audibly, and decisively about everything. Or, we want him to write his will upon the wall. Or, we want clear revelation like in a calendar.
  - iv. What happens when God speaks clearly to us at the perfect level? The temptation when we have such clear revelation is to become judge and jury over what God tells us to do. Or, we are tempted to make God's will happen. God wants relationship with us and willing submission. So, if speaking clearly to us tempts us to do it on our own, I doubt if God will speak that clearly to us.
  - v. Remember the cost / clarity equation: The clearer the revelation, the higher the cost for disobedience or the higher the need for revelation to stay the course. Illustrations: Joseph, Moses, Paul, Jesus.
- e. **Pleasing level.**
  - i. God will also communicate with us at the pleasing level, and it will involve less clarity than at the perfect level.

- ii. God speaks for more frequently at the pleasing level to us regarding his will than at the perfect level using prophetic revelation (dreams, visions, prophetic words, encounters, impressions, etc.).
- iii. It takes skill, discernment, godly counsel, wisdom, Biblical understanding, humility, and God's help to correctly interpret such revelation. *"All interpretation belongs to God" (Genesis 40:8).*
- iv. We sometimes get offended when God won't speak clearly to us, like Scriptures teaches us in Numbers 12:1-8).
  1. God spoke much more clearly with Moses than with others (Numbers 12:7-8).
    - a. By the way, that is why his disobedience in Numbers 20:1-13 was so costly. God told Moses to speak to the rock so that water would come forth. Moses struck the rock. That level of disobedience to clear communication cost Moses dearly. He did not get to go into the promised land with the children of Israel.
  2. Miriam and Aaron got offended by how God chose to communicate, according to our passage in Numbers 12:1-8.
  3. Listen to what the Lord says in response to Miriam's and Aaron's offense:
    - a. *God said [to Aaron and Miriam], "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"*
  4. The normal way God speaks to his people is through dreams, riddles, parables, stories, and unclear sayings. Why? Because he wants us to ask him "What do you mean?" (See Mark 4:10-11 for an illustration. The disciples got together privately with Jesus asked, "What in the world do you mean by these parables?") **God's way of communicating with us draws us into a dependent, relational conversation.**

f. **Good level.**

- i. If you have sought God for his wisdom, will, and direction, and if you have submitted your heart to him out of love to the best of your ability, then, you are free to trust God and go with what is in your heart to do.
- ii. For the good level of God's will, it is helpful to seek Godly counsel, wisdom, prayer, and submission.
- iii. It is also important to practice patience.
- iv. Make sure that what you are doing is in line with the missional and moral commands of Scripture. If what you want to do violates the word of God, the example of Christ, or godly wisdom, it is probably not God's will. (We would need a much longer conversation than time permits here to talk about how God in Scripture directs his people to do things that violate their interpretations, their mental models, and their cultural and religious norms. See Acts 10 for example.)
- v. Based upon this level of love, connection, surrender, and dependence, step out and do what you think is right.
- vi. Then, ask God to intervene or redirect you if you are making a mistake or falling short of his will in any way.

**Here are some other principles for discerning the will of God.**

**1. Look for confirmation along the way:**

- a. **God's word** (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
  - i. One of the most frequent ways in which God speaks to us is through his word.
- b. **Two or three witnesses:** confirming affirmations, conversations, experiences, etc. (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16).
- c. **Godly counsel and wisdom** (Proverbs 15:22).
- d. **Circumstances.**
  - i. God can speak through circumstances.
  - ii. However, don't use circumstances alone for confirmation. You need discerning help of the Holy Spirit.
  - iii. There were times when Paul said that the Holy Spirit led his team through open doors (circumstances) (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12).
  - iv. There were times when the Holy Spirit closed doors or kept Paul and his team from going in a direction (Acts 16:6-8).
  - v. And, there were times when Paul said that they were stopped, prevented, or hindered by the enemy using circumstances or closing doors (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

1. *For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us (1 Thessalonians 2:18).*
2. **Deal with expectations** (1 Corinthians 4:2-5).
  - a. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. And so does everyone else.
  - b. Learn to let God give you his expectations for your life.
3. **Follow your passions and creativity, and they will lead you to your creator** (Psalm 37:4).
4. **Engage in the spiritual practice of discerning the voice of God through dialogue.** (See Acts 15:1-30 and Acts 16:6-10 for examples.)
  - a. Dialogue is another key way to hear the voice of God through authentic community.
  - b. *During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10).*
    - i. Paul had a vision during the night.
    - ii. Paul submitted his revelation and interpretation to the team with whom he was traveling.
    - iii. Together through dialogue, they concluded that God was indeed speaking in the revelation and giving them direction.

### **One more truth to consider.**

Years ago, Pastor Steve taught us about *Rules for the Second Half of Life*. In his teaching on our journey of spiritual formation and spiritual maturity, Pastor Steve gave us an illustration that I have remembered ever since.

I will probably butcher Pastor Steve’s illustration, but here is the gist of what I remember.

For a Christian, think about your journey of life like being in a canoe with Christ. When you set out on your adventure called life, you are in the front of the canoe with a paddle. Jesus is sitting in the back of the canoe. You keep asking the Lord to lead you, direct you, and guide you. You check in with him. You listen for his voice and his directions. You are seeking to paddle your canoe of life where Jesus leads.

At some point in your journey with God, Jesus asks you to let go of being in charge. Jesus asks you to hand him the paddle. The Lord is asking you to embrace new levels of

trust and surrender. You are still in the front of the canoe, but you no longer are in control. Now, there is a new level of dependency and trust.

Letting go involves decreasing control, increasing trust, and increasing surrender. It is disorienting, because your goal at the front of the boat was to do God's will and get to where God wanted you to go. But you had the paddle. You got glimpses and understanding of where you were headed. The goal is to let go and to trust God more. Now, spiritual maturity is defined by new levels of surrender, even if you don't know where you are going, how you will get there, or when you will arrive.

I am not talking about abdication, where you abdicate responsibility for your life and become passive and uncaring, like a ship tossed in the wind. What I am talking about is embracing new levels of trust and surrender where you live into what is really real. Now, you live detached from the fruit, but more attached to God by his Spirit, more dependent upon God than ever before, and more responsive to relationship with Christ and others.

Jesus said it this way to Peter (John 21:15-23).

*John 21:15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"*

*"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

*16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"*

*He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

*17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"*

*20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"*

*22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not*

*die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (John 21:15-23).*

Let me say it again.

Letting go involves decreasing control, increasing trust, and increasing surrender. It is disorienting, because your goal early in life is to do God's will and get to where God wanted you to go. But you had the paddle. You got glimpses and understanding of where you were headed. The goal is to let go and to trust God more. Now, spiritual maturity is defined by new levels of surrender, even if you don't know where you are going, how you will get there, or when you will arrive.

We can know the will of God by getting close to Jesus, embracing new levels of surrender, and trusting the Lord to get us where we need to be.

**Ministry Time:**