

Making Decisions In Accordance With the Will of God

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Lesson One

"An Introduction to Understanding God's Will"

We are told by the apostle Paul in *Eph 5:17* *So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* Paul informs the Ephesians to not take a foolish route, but to try and understand what God's will is for them. It is in the understanding of God's will that the thoughts of Christians are arranged, their actions are carried out and their emotions are soothed, knowing that one has done their part in basing their decisions on the will of God. The follower of God must seek to do the will of the Father for He is their Master and Lord. This pattern is clearly seen in the scriptures.

Some examples from the past:

- David sought to do the will of God. (Ps 40:8; 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22)
- Paul did the will of God. (2 Tim 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1)
- Paul's comrades yielded to the will of God. (Acts 21:14; 23:11).
- Christ is the supreme example of doing the will of God. (Mt 6:10; Mark 3:35; Matt 26:39; Heb 5:7-8; 10:5-7)
- The Early Church was commanded to do the will of God without option. (Eph 6:6; Col 4:12; 1Thes 4:3; Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 2:15; 4:2; 1 Pet 5:2; 1 Jn 2:17; 1Thes 5:18)

Some of the reasons that people do not seek nor do the will of God?

There are many reasons that people do not end up carrying out the will of God in their lives. Some are as follows:

- Embarrassment (John 12:43)
- Not Convicted (Luke 8:13)
- Not Convenient (1 Pet 4:19)
- Not enjoyable (Heb 12:11)
- Ignorance (Acts 17:30-34)

It is in this last reason, ignorance, that the focus of our study will take place, for it is in this area that a true seeker of God needs guidance. Many Christians would do the will of God if they clearly knew what the will of the Father is for their situation. If they simply had a good strategy to do so, it could result in many benefits.

What are some of the benefits of having a good strategy in determining God's will?

There are many benefits for those that will seek the will of God rather than their own contrary will. Some are listed as follows:

Earthly Blessings

- Stronger families and friendships
- Better use of time
- Wiser management of funds
- A greater joy, peace and happiness
- Overall better physical, emotional and mental health

Spiritual Blessings

- Improved relationship with God and other Christians
- A better understanding of our purpose in life
- A clear understanding of the value in other people's lives
- A clear conscience before God and our fellow man
- The ability to offer sound advice to others
- Eternal life

Many decisions will be faced in this life.

Making decisions in accordance to the will of God can be a dilemma for the Christian. Time and time again, difficult situations will arise for the Christian and calls for those decisions to be made based on God's will.

- ✓ Should I change this behavior?
- ✓ Should I buy this car?
- ✓ Should I make this trip?
- ✓ Should I choose this college?
- ✓ Should I buy this house?
- ✓ Should I accept this job?
- ✓ Should I have this medical procedure?
- ✓ Is this the person that I should be dating?
- ✓ Should I marry this person?
- ✓ Is now a good time to start a family?

The aim of this study is to learn how to make decisions that are in accordance with the will of God for these decisions and many more in a Christian's life. The following strategy will be used: 1) Ask the Bible 2) Ask God 3) Ask the Saints 4) Ask Yourself and 5) Ask the Circumstances.

Lesson Two

"Step #1—Ask the Bible"

Rom 12:1-2 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- In this passage, Paul reminds the Roman Christians that they have an obligation to be a living and holy sacrifice unto God, being acceptable in their spiritual service to Him.
- This beckons back to the Levitical sacrificial system of the Jews and the continual burnt offering of Numbers 28:1-6. It was the offering of the Jews of continual commitment unto the Father, a constant reminder of Who really is in control.
- He goes on to address the means in which to carry out this pattern of sacrificial living as that of a mental nature first. They are to resist conformation to worldly living by having their minds transformed into God's way of thinking.
- The result will be a way of life that is good and acceptable and perfect, that is the will of God.

The first and best question we can ask concerning this topic is "What does the Bible say about this?" This is because we have no other direct source of God's word other than the Bible. When trying to determine what is pleasing to the Lord, we must understand that *Matt 4:4* "*Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*" This Bible was put here for mankind to find the answer as to what the will of the Lord is.

In order to do this first step properly, we must be willing to accept that the New Testament was written by inspired men of old and eye-witnesses to the works of our Majesty Jesus Christ. The New Testament was written with apostolic authority!

- Jesus introduced the concept of apostolic authority. (John 17:20-21; John 14:26; John 15:26-27; Acts 1:21-22; Acts 2:1-4; 2 Pet 1:20-21)
- Apostolic authority was validated through the miraculous workings of the Holy Spirit. (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:12; Mark 16:20)

- The first-century church respected and accepted apostolic authority concerning their writings. (1Thes 2:13; 2 Cor 8:5; Acts 2:42; 1Thes 2:6; 2 Pet 3:2; Jude 1:17; Rev 2:2)

All our scripture is “*inspired by God*” (2Tim 3:16) and we must be willing to turn to it first for the answers to the will of God. We must be willing to put that answer to work in our lives for “*...the sacred writings...are able to give... the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*”(2 Tim 3:15). We must be willing to ask the Bible about the will of God for it is “*...a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.*” (Ps 119:105) It is through these writings that we can ever expect to possess the hope that is offered by Jesus. *Rom 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

With this in mind, there are many passages in the Bible that specifically teach us the will of God. Below are a few of them.

- The Bible says that it is God’s will that all are saved from the sins. (1 Tim 2:3-4; 1 Pet 1:23)
- The Bible says it is His will that we live a sanctified life. (1Thes 4:3-7; 1 John 2:17)
- The Bible says it is God’s will that we rejoice, pray and be thankful. (1Thes 5:16-18)
- The Bible teaches us that He has a multifaceted will for us. (Eph 1:5-11)

The first thing we are to do when trying to figure out the will of God is to ask “What does the Bible say about this?” If the Bible reveals something about the will of God, then it is the will of God. We know many specifics of God’s will in the Bible. According to the Bible, God does not want us to kill, lie, cheat, steal, commit adultery, covet, be jealous, threaten people and a number of other things. This is why we must be familiar with the Bible by studying it everyday. If we reason the Holy Word of God, then we should be able to see the clear commands of God’s will.

It is impossible to know all the Bible in the complete way that we need to know it. This is why we go to the next step of finding God’s will. But what about the issues that are not so clear? What about the areas where there are only generalities, leaving the door open for options?

- We know that God wants us to take care of our family, for the Bible says so. *1 Tim 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his*

household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.

- We know that the Bible says that we are to work hard and provide for them. *II Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.*
- We know that we are to bring up our children in the love of the Lord. *Eph 6:4 And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

The Bible does not say if we are to provide for our family by being a carpenter, a lawyer, a doctor, a telemarketer and even a dog catcher. It is not specific as to what job we are to have. We can carry out the will of the Lord in many ways concerning the command to take care of our families. There are many decisions to be made within the parameters of rearing children. This is why in many cases we must go further in the process of finding God's will.

Discussion Questions
(Lesson #2)

- 1) **In first making a tough decision in accordance to God's will, why is it important to ask, "What does the Bible say about this?"**

- 2) **What is "Apostolic Authority" and why is this important in making your decisions?**

- 3) **If something is clearly spelled out in the Bible, then has the will of God been determined?**

- 4) **What are some of the issues that we can clearly see is God's will as spelled out in scripture?**

- 5) **What are some of the issues that are not so clear concerning the same?**

Lesson Three

"Step #2—Ask God"

We are told in *James 1:5* *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* What does it mean to ask God for this wisdom? Was it through email? Was it through the telephone? No, it was prayer. When we are trying to understand the will of God in our lives, we are to pray to God for guidance. (Phil 4:6; Matt 7:7-8)

We are to ask God for understanding concerning His will. He will come through in some way, for He always does so in His timing. Take for example the imprisonment of Peter in Acts 12. *Acts 12:5* *“So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God....”* The church was praying for Peter to be delivered and he was led out by an angel. It was when Peter was outside the prison walls that night that he said in *Verse 11* *“Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”* They prayed for direction and the Lord came through just in the nick of time.

When we fail to ask in prayer for the answer to His will, we should not expect to see it clearly, for we have not because we ask not (*James 4:2*). We must even be willing to pray concerning God’s will for us, even when we might know what the answer already is. Case in point...Jesus (*Matt 26:36-46*).

Jesus knew that He would have to die for the sins of mankind and that hour was approaching. He came into this world and dwelt among us so that He could redeem us from all our sins. This was a dark time for Jesus because He was going to have to take the sins of the world on His shoulders. *2 Cor 5:21* *He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* The sun went dark as Jesus was on the cross and God turned His back on the only begotten Son for the sins of the world were being put on Him. *Rom 5:8* *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* It all goes back to a prayer in a Garden called Gethsemane, a phrase when Jesus uttered the words, “Not My will, but Thy will be done.” Jesus prayed at a time when His human-side needed to line up with the will of the Father and we must do the same.

We know that God desires all to be saved (1Tim 2:4) and to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9), but that is not going to happen for we have a will as well. If we do not want to go to heaven, then God is not going to make us. So that leaves a question, do you want to go to heaven? That is most definitely the will of the Father, but is your will going to line up with His will? Will you say “Not my will, but Thy will” in response to the salvation question?

The Example of Solomon

Solomon faced this great decision in being granted a request from God for whatever he wanted. Solomon could have had anything, but he requested the wisdom of God (1 King 3:9-12). We need to make sure that our focus is humbly upon the Father’s interest and not our own, knowing that He will work it out for us in the end. *Rom 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His} purpose.*

What are we to pray to God concerning His will?

A simple pattern to follow would be in the four other steps of the process in making these decisions in accordance to God’s will.

1. Ask God for understanding of the Scriptures. (2 Tim 2:15; 1 Cor 10:12; Isa 5:21; 1 Cor 8:2; Prov 2:1-5)
2. Ask God for guidance in finding good counsel. (2 Tim 4:3; Prov 13:20; Prov 12:15)
3. Ask God to sort out your preferences concerning the decision. (Prov 3:5-6)
4. Ask God to make the decision obvious through the circumstances. (Job 1:20-22)

Lesson Four

"Step #3—Ask the Saints"

In the last lesson we discussed the first two ways making a decision in accordance to the will of God. We are to first ask the Bible to see what decision the scripture renders. If we desire to do something and want to determine if it is the will of God, then there should be nothing in the Bible prohibiting it or something condoning it. If it is okay with the Bible, then we must submit it to God in prayer for that is the precedent set forth for the Christian. We ask God through prayer for a clear understanding of the Bible, for wise counsel, for clear emotions and circumstances. All these issues are covered in our request to God. *Ps 119:34 Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all {my} heart.* It is in this third step, asking the saints, we are seeking godly advisors for further direction.

It has always been the will of God for His people to seek out good counsel before moving into action. One cannot read the Book of Proverbs without confirming this fact. (Prov 1:5; Prov 9:9 ; Pr 12:15; 13:20; 14:7)

Because the entire will of the Lord is not always so clear to the individual, it is important to seek out some of the other saints in the church for advice. Even the wisest of individuals cannot know it all concerning the word of God. Perhaps a person might be overlooking some biblical evidence that could make all the difference. In many cases the struggles of one saint could mirror that of another. *1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man...* When we are having trouble trying to make a decision in accordance to God's will, we must seek the advice of Godly saints. Take sickness for example (James 5:14-16). When someone is in dire straits concerning their health, it is good to have people around you that are able to guide you through the process. A person who is sick near to death may or may not make it through the illness, but having the saints there is a good thing, for they can give good direction. Who better to have there than the wise and experienced elders of the church? If the man has something sinful on his heart, they are there for him to lift the burden of guilt.

When we are facing a tough decision, it is a must that we are to seek the counsel of good advisors, for they have more wisdom and can help us to find the will of God. *Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days (Prov 19:20).* There is strength in using one another in the church concerning counseling to make a good decision. (Eccl 4:12; Prov 27:17)

- Rehoboam: A Bad Example (1 King 12:8; Prov 15:22)
- Moses: A Good Example (Exod 18:13-26).

Some of the Qualities to Seek in Advisors

1. Choose people that are biblical. (Acts 17:11)
2. Choose people that are experienced. (James 1:22)
3. Choose people that are honest. (John 8:32)
4. Choose people that love you. (1 Cor 13:4-7)

Lesson Five

"Step #4—Ask Yourself"

After you ask the Bible, ask God and ask your fellow saints for advice, it is still necessary to ask yourself, for we may still have a choice concerning the will of God. In the first-century church at Rome there arose dissension among the brethren about the celebrating of certain holidays and the eating of meat. The text reveals the following in Rom 14:1-8...

- If you are a vegetarian, do not be judgmental to others when someone desires to eat meat. Those that eat meat should not be judgmental of vegetarians. God, the one that gives you the freedom to eat meat or not eat meat, is the One allows both souls to live and serve Him (1-4).
- You who celebrate certain holidays should not be judgmental of those others that have chosen not to celebrate them. One brother celebrates a particular day unto the Lord and the other chooses not to celebrate it through his convictions because of the Lord. One brother eats meat because of the Lord and the other abstains through his freedom in the Lord. Both are thankful to God and are right in these cases because God gave them these choices (5-6).
- In the end what matters is that both are Christians living a life of conviction unto the Lord. These freedoms remain your choice as long as you do not use them to place a stumbling-block before the brethren (7-13).

The point of studying this is that even after going through the first three processes, there still remain personal freedoms in Christ. You can choose "Yes" or "No" to the same question as long as you do it with the glorification of God in mind. There are many of these areas in our life that boil down to our own personal preference; therefore it is necessary to ask ourselves what we would like to do concerning the matter.

Marriage?

Moses recorded of God in *Gen 2:18* *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."* He made the woman for the man in order to complete him. Each of them can help each other in their walk with the Lord, the raising of their family and the workings of the kingdom. They had companionship, love, joy, peace, struggles and sorrows, but they had them together. It is not good for a man to be alone.

Yet, on the other hand we find Paul saying in summary in 1 Cor 7:1-7...

- It is good to not be married, but because there are fleshly pulls in this life, marry. In that marriage, tame the sexual temptations of the flesh through that relationship of a husband and a wife (1-4).
- It is okay to refrain yourselves from physical relations for just a short time during prayer, but don't go to long lest Satan tempt you to be unfaithful. Paul said this was a concession, not a command (5-6).
- It would be good if you could stay single like Paul, but if you do not have a gift of celibacy, marry instead of burning in your lust (7).

A Christian has the right to marry a Christian (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14) and the right to not be married as long as lust is under control (1 Cor 7:7). If you want to be married...GREAT! If you don't want to be married...GREAT! You must ASK YOURSELF what it is you want. Pray about it and ask some people that you respect about both concerning whether or not to marry.

With that in mind, if you decide you want to be married, the you still have the option of WHOM you want to marry. What if you are not physically attracted to that individual? Would you not ASK YOURSELF, "Do I want to marry this person?" The candidate might have some quirky traits in their personality that require you to ASK YOURSELF if you want to be with them for possibly decades to come. Since the marriage covenant is intended for life, God probably would not want you with someone that you find repulsive. You have a choice within many of your freedoms in the Lord, but you must ASK YOURSELF.

There are many choices that you have the freedom to ASK YOURSELF is this what I want? Here are some of these:

- What should I wear? As long as it is not revealing and extravagant, it should be fine.
- What should I choose to eat? As long as it is not gluttony, it should be fine.
- Where should I go on vacation? As long as it is in the budget and is not of a corrupting nature, it should be fine.
- What home should I buy? As long as it is affordable and provides for your needs and you use it for the work of the kingdom, it should be fine.

- What friends should I make? As long as you are either trying to convert them if they are lost or strengthening them if they are saved, it should be fine.
- What career should I choose? If it is an honest living that one can provide for his needs and it is what you enjoy, it should be fine.

The purpose for emphasizing this point is to remove some of the pressure of the moments of indecision that arise in the freedoms in Christ. If it lines up with scripture, if it was prayed about, if it was something that sound advice supports and something that you personally like, then feel free to press onto the final stage in determining God's will.

Lesson Six

"Step #5—Ask the Circumstances"

Paul proposes an interesting discourse in Philippians 1:21-26. He is in prison in Rome and does not know if he will be freed or executed in the end. He was weighing up the possible outcomes, both of which he would have been acceptable to him. If he lives, then he will serve Christ. If he is executed, then he will be with Christ. If he lives, he will continue to minister to the saints, but if he dies then he will be happier. He was hard-pressed, seeing benefits on both sides. He preferred one above the other, but submitted to the next and final test...the circumstance. In making decisions based on the will of God, the circumstance typically carries the final word.

After we have asked the Bible, asked God, ask the saints, and asking yourself, it is necessary to ask the circumstances. There are many times that something is permissible in the Bible, with prayer, with the saints and with your personal preference, but that it will not materialize in an open door for us to carry it out. *1 Cor 16:8-9 But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; 9 for a wide door for effective {service} has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

David and the Dying Child

The story of David and his first child with Bathsheba in 2 Sam 12:14-23 is a good example of circumstances making the will of the Father very clear. He was already told what the outcome was going to be, but he still kept fasting and praying. "Who knows?" he asked. Obviously when the child was dead, the decision was already final. Perhaps there was some confusion on his behalf as to the outcome? Maybe he thought that God would change His mind in light of the consequences? Either way, it was clear in the end for the child was dead and the circumstances had the final word in the matter.

Be willing to cast out a fleece.

Sometimes we must be willing to cast out the fleece in order to know the will through the circumstances. This is the principle that was introduced by Gideon in Judges 6:36-40. It is okay to lay out a fleece to find out what the will of the Lord is concerning the circumstances.

Example of using this pattern to find a congregation

Years back, my wife and I decided that we wanted to move to another mission location. There was nothing in the Bible prohibited me from going to another locality and much about working for the kingdom.

We prayed about it and asked a few brothers and sisters in Christ for their input. Our advisors confirmed our thoughts with us and our search was on. The congregation near my wife's hometown in Iowa had opened up and we were offered the position. At the same time, a congregation in the distant land of Pennsylvania had contacted me and the phone interview went well. When I told my wife that the congregation in PA wanted to fly us out for an interview, but she really was not as receptive as me. I knew that she wanted to go to the congregation that would put us near her family, but I asked her to at least come and interview. Knowing that it was imperative that my wife would be happy, I decided to throw out a fleece. If after the interview she valued the church family in Camp Hill more than being in the congregation near her hometown, it would be the deciding factor.

We flew out for the interview and it went great. The people were wonderful, loving, organized and compatible. The youth group was inviting and energetic. They interviewed with strength and had won my heart and hers. On the plane trip back to Iowa, we discussed our thoughts concerning the matter and she confirmed that if Camp Hill offered the position, she would love to go there. I asked her about how her family would feel knowing we might move a thousand miles away instead in the home area. She restated again that Camp Hill was hands-down the better fit for our family.

There was still another circumstance (fleece) that had to be met, would Camp Hill choose us. We prayed about it, putting it into His hands. A few days later, one of elders called and told me that the congregation would like us to come if it was our will. Knowing in our hearts and minds that it was in accordance to God's will that we come, we accepted. We never regretted going there, knowing that we had taken a process to know that it was God's will.

Ask the Bible, ask God, ask the saints, ask yourself and ask the circumstances, five ways to determine God's will. If you follow it, you will always be assured that you will be on the right path, for you will be making decisions in accordance to God's will.

Discussion Questions

(Lesson #6)

- 1) **How do the circumstances have the final word in the process of making decisions in accordance to God's will?**

- 2) **Discuss the difference in the miraculous fleece of Gideon and a circumstantial fleece of today.**

- 3) **Discuss past experiences where the circumstances of God have confirmed His will to you.**

- 4) **What is the greatest will of God in the lives of men and women everywhere? (hint: John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; Acts 17:30-31)**

- 5) **Have you followed this greatest will of God and if not, then why not?**

