

## Understanding the Will of God

Much has been written, preached and counseled concerning the will of God. I have heard some of the most bizarre situations explained away by just a simple, “It must be the will of God...” and have seen some of the most disastrous failures in life with the person involved trying to explain their actions with “I thought it was the will of God”.

Young people, especially, experience heart-rending days because of uncertainty about the will of God for their future. It seems that some of the most critical, life-impacting decisions we will ever make (choices about mates and marriage, careers, education, ministry, etc.) are made in the time of our life when we are most unsuited and unprepared to make those decisions – that is, when we are yet in our youth. It is important, however, that we know and do the will of God on a daily basis all of our lives, because we want to please Him and fulfill the ministry He has given us.

I often think of the question asked of the Lord by Saul of Tarsus, as he was on the way to Damascus to get letters that would give him legal authority from the high priest to persecute believers in Christ. The story is recorded in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Acts. As Saul journeyed, a bright light shone from heaven and struck him blind. When Saul found out it was Jesus calling his name from heaven, he asked, **“Lord, what would you have me to do?”**

He was given divine direction. Jesus told Saul to continue on his way into the city and take lodging on a certain street in the house of a man named Judas. “There,” he told him, “it shall be told you what you must do.”

Saul obeyed. He had those who were with him lead him by the hand to the place of which God spoke. There he prayed, with fasting. After three days, God spoke to a saint named Ananias and told him where Saul was lodging and praying. He told Ananias to go there and put his hands on Saul and pray for him to receive his sight and to receive the Holy Ghost.

Meanwhile, as Saul was in prayer, God spoke to him in a vision and let him know that a man named Ananias was going to come and pray for him. It happened just that way. Ananias showed up and prayed for him; his eyes were opened; he received the Holy Ghost and was baptized. Ananias prophesied to him that he

had been chosen to bear the name of the Lord to kings, to the Israelites and to the Gentiles. In doing so, he would suffer great things for Jesus' name.

The testimony of his conversion and calling into the ministry is powerful. Paul shared it with people several times throughout the book of Acts. He knew that the **will** of God for his life would always be in accordance with the over-riding **purpose** of God.

Have you ever been confused and disconcerted because you did what you thought was his will, and things did not go as well as you had anticipated? You probably thought, "I must have missed the will of God." In actuality, the will of God will sometimes bring us into perilous and difficult times. As one man said, "The will of God is not always a soft bed and a juicy steak."

At one point during the course of Paul's travels, a man named Agabus prophesied to him that if he continued on his way to Jerusalem as planned, he would encounter severe persecution and hardship. What did Paul do? He continued on his way, understanding that the eternal **purpose** of God was the ultimate objective of his life. Later, as a prisoner and in a terrible storm at sea, he was reminded of that purpose. Even though he was a captive and influenced by the decisions of others, God's purpose in his life could not be thwarted.

Let me say at this point, that I believe that PRIMARILY the will of God for each one of us involves...

***A PROGRESSIVE GROWTH of our knowledge of God and His eternal purpose.***

Any person, place, thing, or situation that helps us grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus becomes a part of the will of God for our lives.

Some things, people, and situations come into our lives for a short time, some for a season of time, and some for a lifetime. The problem is that sometimes we are not willing to let something go that has fulfilled its purpose. In holding on to it, we actually frustrate the purpose (or will) of God for our growth.

**What we need is some basic understanding of what the scripture says is the general will of God for ALL OF US and then we will be better able to understand personal specifics.**

***Ro 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your***

*reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

We note here that the will of God is not scaled on a 3-tiered level; rather, his will for our lives is good; it is acceptable and it is perfect.

**There are four prerequisites for determining God's plan for our lives:**

1. Salvation. Participation in His plan is for those who are part of His kingdom, which we enter by being born again of the water and of the Spirit.
2. Dedication. We must “present” (give, yield, dedicate) ourselves completely to God and become fully His, willing to do anything He asks and go anywhere He sends us.
3. Separation. We must clean up our lives. Things of the world that are wrong and evil must be forsaken. If we love the world and the things that are in the world, they will get in the way of our ability to gain God's guidance.
4. Transformation. Daily study of the Scriptures and having communion with God will renew our minds so that we mature and become fruitful in our knowledge of Him.

**Here are some specific things that we know from scripture to be the will of God:**

I Thessalonians 5:18 ***“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”*** It doesn't get much plainer than that! He wills for us to always be thankful.

In I Thessalonians 4:3-7, Paul lets us know what the will of God is in daily living.

*4:1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. 3 **For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:** 4 That every one of you should know how to possess [control] his vessel in sanctification and honour; 5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: 6 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the*

*avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. 7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*

We see from this passage of scripture that the Will of God is...

**1. That we live our lives in sanctification and honor - set apart unto God. We are not to live our lives in sin and uncleanness.**

- Moral purity made Paul's list of necessities for God's will, regardless of what Hollywood says or does. We are to keep ourselves from all forms of sexual immorality, controlling our bodies in a holy and honorable manner, not in passionate lust like those who do not know the Lord.

*9 But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 10 And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;*

**2. The Will of God is for us to love one another.** In fact, our love for one another is to increase more and more toward all the brethren. That means not just in our local church here in Reedsport, but that we love the saints of Landmark Church in North Bend, in Florence, in Sutherlin, in Roseburg and throughout the other churches in our section, throughout Oregon, across North American and in all the earth. Loving one another means that we rejoice with others in their joys and we weep with them in their sorrows. It means we bear one another's burdens, pray one for another, encourage one another, minister one to another and help one another.

1 Th 4:11-12 (NKJV) *11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*

The NLT words verses 11 & 12 this way: *11 This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we commanded you before. 12 As a result, people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others to meet your financial needs.*

**3. It is the will of God that we daily go quietly about our own business, working with our hands and living in such a way as to gain the respect of the world.**

Those are some important aspects of being in the overall will of God. At critical junctures of our lives, however, when our decisions could affect us, our families and the church for a long time, it is good to gain some more insight.

There is a story told about a missionary family who lived years ago in the Philippines on one of the outlying islands. To get supplies and make contact with the outside world, they had to travel by boat to the main island nearest to them. When returning to their home they would leave the main island on a large boat and travel to a certain set of sailing coordinates, lining up with recognizable markers. At that point, they would leave the large boat and enter a much smaller vessel because the reef structure around their home island would tear out the bottom of a larger vessel. Sometimes their travel would be in the dark of night. On the island, visible in their approach to home, was a series of bright spotlights, positioned to lead them through the extremely narrow channel. When all the lights were lined up so that they appeared to be only one light, they knew they were in the safe zone of the channel. If they could distinguish multiple lights, they knew they were out of the channel and subject to being shipwrecked. Thus the missionaries were able to safely travel a very treacherous course. They referred to it as “lining up the lights to home”.

The Father's plan is not like a blueprint laid out on a drawing board with every detail visible at one glance. God's plan for us, rather, is like a scroll that reveals His will bit by bit as it is unrolled. The complete unrolling of your scroll may take a lifetime.

**Here are eight lights of Divine counsel and guidance that, when lined up, will provide specific direction for our lives.**

1. **The Word of God** - what does the Scripture say about this matter? The psalmist said, *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”* Read parts the Bible that pertain to the subject, for God already has revealed His will about hundreds of matters. A topical concordance will help you quickly and easily find Bible passages that deal with many subjects. Look for something that applies to your situation, either specifically or at least in principle.
2. **The Life of Christ** - John 1:4 says, *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...”* Ask yourself, “What would Jesus do?” Can you find any instance

in the life and ministry of Jesus that would indicate how he would respond to a similar situation?

- 3. The Direction Set by the Holy Spirit** – Don't go by just any voice you hear! The voice of your old nature or the course the flesh might have you follow cannot be trusted, nor can that of worldly-minded friends and ungodly counselors.

- Ac 16:6-12 *6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, 7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. 8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.*

- 4. Visions and Dreams** - Ac 16:9-12 *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.*

The only caution is to check the vision or dream out carefully to be sure it is not in conflict with a scriptural principle.

- 4. Circumstances** – Ac 16:13-15 *And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

In case you are unfamiliar with this chapter, it is the one in which the prison jailer and his entire household gets saved as one circumstance led to another.

- 5. Through prayer and waiting on the Lord.** Did you know that we can actually pray according to the will of God without even knowing the will of God?

- Ro 8:26-27 *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [weaknesses]: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought* [One of the infirmities or weaknesses that we have in our own flesh shows up in our praying: we are short-sighted; we are biased in favor of what we want]: *but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us [on our behalf] with groanings which cannot be uttered.* [Sometimes the Spirit burdens us to pray and we can't even put our prayer into words and so we pray in the Spirit] 27 *And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints **according to the will of God.*** [That is why I told you that we can pray according to the will of God without even knowing the exact will of God in a situation....
  - 1 Jn 5:14-15 *And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will , he heareth us:* [This shows us, again, the amazing power of praying in other tongues, for when we pray in the Spirit, God hears us because the Spirit itself makes intercession for us according to the will of God]. 15 *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*
- Rom 8:28 *And we know* [Here is something that we do know] *that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* [If you and I love God, and are the called according to his purpose, everything that happens in our lives will work together for good, regardless of how bad or out of place it may seem at the time. Now, what does it mean for us to fit into the category of being the called according to his purpose? The next verse explains it.]
- *29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* [Our conformation to the image of Jesus Christ is the ultimate purpose of God for every one of us. That is why he saves us; that is why we dedicate our lives to him; that is why we separate ourselves from sin and the world, and that is the reason our minds must be renewed.]

So far, then, I have talked about several lights we can seek to line up so as to know we are in the will of God: 1) Find out what the Bible has to say on the subject, 2) Determine what Jesus would do, believing that his life is in you and that you have the mind of Christ. 3) Are you being led by the Spirit instead of doing your own thing regardless of the Holy Ghost forbidding you? 4) Has God given you a vision or dream? If so, does it harmonize with the other lights? 5) Have you prayed in the Spirit as well as with the understanding?

6. **The Peace of God** - Php 4:6-7 *Be careful [anxious or fretful] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And .the peace of God that passeth all understanding, shall **keep** your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* (GRK.) Keep = to guard, to be shielded-to mount a watch as a sentinel.

- Isa 26:3 *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*
- Philippians 3:15 *"let the peace of God rule in your hearts."* (GRK) Rule = to be an umpire; to decide, or determine; to direct, control or rule.
- For me personally, the peace of God in a matter is very important. Anything that disturbs His peace in my heart is something I need to take note of. I dare not allow His peace in my soul to be jeopardized. If His peace rules in my heart, I know that, come what may, by His grace I am going to make it!

7. **Godly Counsel** – Some of the proverbs tells us that the counsel of a respected elder can be truly invaluable. There is nothing like the seasoned wisdom of years.

8. **Provision** – A wise man said, "Where God guides, He provides."

Note: There may be times when all the lights don't seem to line up. Even if everything seems to give you a "Go" signal, the timing may not be right. Here is where faith and patience play a critical role. And after all is said and done, quit sweating the details of what you will do or where you will go. Launch out, get wind in your sails and let your destination and destiny be driven by the wind of the Spirit!