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Disciplemaking 1 Abiding in His Word

GOD'S WILL

"Therefore I urge you, 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. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:1-2

Knowing God's will is very important to every believer. However, our goal must not be just *knowing* His will. Our goal must also be *doing* His will. Much of His direction for our lives is of a general nature that applies to all believers uniformly. He also has an individualized will for each believer. There are no shortcuts, no gimmicks, and no magic formulas in determining His will. Most often God gradually unfolds His will to us as we grow in our walk with Him. It is a product of routine faithfulness.

The importance of following God's will is seen in the life of Jesus. He said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me."* John 4:34. Jesus also said, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."* John 6:38. Obviously, before we can do His will we must know and understand what His will is. Paul stressed the importance of knowing God's will ... *"So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."* Ephesians 5:17.

We can know God's will. *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go."* Psalm 32:8. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."* Proverbs 3:5-6. Moreover, the Bible assures us that His will is good. *"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."* Romans 8:28. *"The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way. When he falls, he shall not be hurled headlong, because the Lord is the one who holds his hand."* Psalm 37:23-24. *"For I know the plans that I have for you', declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'" Jeremiah 29:11.*

We know the general will of God for us (and for all believers) directly from the Bible. His general will is the same for every believer. We know God's individualized will for our individual lives as a product of a faithful life in the general will of God. From that base of obedience, we follow three steps to determine His individualized will ... we ask the Father ... we acquire guidance from His Word, His wisdom, His people, and His peace ... and we act when we know His will.

HIS GENERAL WILL. Much of God's direction for our lives is His general will that applies to all believers without variation. We understand His general will directly from the Bible. We learn of His general will from the commandments, principles, and examples in His Word.

Commandments. There are clear commandments in the Bible for every believer. *"For this is the will of God ... that you abstain from sexual immorality."* 1 Thessalonians 4:3. *"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution ... for such is the will of God."* 1 Peter 2:13-15. Jesus expects us to obey these and the others... *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."* John 14:15. Obedience should be our way of life.

Principles. There are principles in the Bible covering varied situations. There is the principle of good stewardship described at the beginning of Luke 16. The cost of discipleship is at the end of Luke 14. The principle of spending time with lost people is presented in the three parables of Luke 15. We need to understand and apply all the other principles given in the Old and New Testaments. The principles and commandments give us His general will.

Examples. The Bible contains good examples to follow ... and bad ones to avoid. The best example is that of Jesus Christ. Washing the disciples' feet Jesus said, *"For I gave you an example that you should also do as I did to you."* John 13:15. We should follow the His example of humility, Philippians 2:5. We should walk in His steps in 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 2:6. We should follow Daniel's good example of honoring and serving God in a godless place. Paul gave a good witnessing example in Acts 17. Paul wrote, *"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."* 1 Corinthians 11:1. In addition, there are bad examples to avoid such as King Saul giving partial obedience to God ... David's adultery with Bathsheba ... and the 17 cycles of failure during the time of the judges.

HIS INDIVIDUALIZED WILL. We need to follow three steps to learn and to do His individualized will. First, we are to ask Him to tell us. Second, we need to acquire guidance from His Word, His wisdom, His people, and His peace. When we know His individualized will, we need to act ... to do what He has told us to do.

Ask. The starting point of knowing His individualized will is prayer. The Psalmist's prayer should be ours ... *"Teach me to do Your will."* Psalm 143:10. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *"Your will be done."* Matthew 6:10. Paul prayed that the believers at Colossae would *"be filled with the knowledge of His will."* Colossians 1:9. Epaphras labored earnestly in prayer for them that they would *"stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God."* Colossians 4:12. Our earnest prayer for ourselves, and for others, should be to know and do the will of God.

Acquire guidance. God gives us His individualized will through His Word, His wisdom, His people, and His peace. We ask God to reveal His will to us ... and He answers those prayers through the four means described below.

1. His Word... Knowing God's individualized will is often a product of routine Bible study. Or it can be from a study relating to a specific situation. God's individualized will for each believer becomes clear as we gain wisdom and understanding from God's Word. He will never lead us to do something contrary to His Word.

2. His Wisdom... God's wisdom comes from an obedient spiritual life, 1 Corinthians 2:14 - 3:3. The more obediently we walk with Him, the more we can understand His Word and His will. Paul wrote, *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* Romans 12:2. Ask God for His wisdom. *"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God ... and it will be given to him."* James 1:5.

3. His People... God's people are a resource for understanding His individualized will. Those who teach His Word through speaking or writing can help, Colossians 1:28. It is good to get counsel from mature believers. More than one counselor is a good idea ... *"Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."* Proverbs 15:22. Remember that advice is only advice. The majority vote of a number of counselors may be right ... or may be wrong. Ten of the twelve spies sent into Canaan in Numbers 13 and 14 were wrong. Mature believers can give us meaningful insight to help us understand God's will.

4. His Peace... God's peace in our hearts can be the final confirmation of His individualized will. *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."* Colossians 3:15. *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:7. This peace is a God-given deep sense of rightness about a decision. It is not rooted in emotionalism or human desire. It does not stand alone. His peace is the confirmation that follows prayer, study of the Bible, spiritual wisdom, and insights from a number of spiritually mature counselors. We must seek and wait for His peace.

Act. It is time to act when we know His will. The answer may be *no* as it was for Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. It may be *wait* ... then we must continue to seek His will. His answer of *wait* can result in great blessing, Isaiah 40:31. When His answer is *yes*, we must do His will even if it is difficult, uncomfortable, unpopular, or costly. We should delight to do His will ... and do it from our hearts, Psalm 40:8 and Ephesians 6:5-6.

WARNINGS

His Word. God will *never* give individualized guidance that is contrary to His written Word. He will *not* lead contrary to His Word ... no matter what wisdom we think we may have ... no matter what advice we get ... and no matter what peace we feel.

Fleeces. Gideon put out a fleece to get physical confirmation of God's will. It is a dangerous thing to do. Gideon's own words revealed his hesitancy, Judges 6:36-40. Gideon feared God's anger as he asked Him twice to confirm His will. Putting out a fleece seems to be more popular among believers today than it ever was in the Bible. We should put out a fleece very infrequently ... and only after much prayer and consideration.

Suffering. Suffering is not necessarily out of the will of God. It may be God's will that you suffer, 1 Peter 3:17, 1 Peter 4:19. Suffering may help you do His will, 1 Peter 4:1-2. An example is the persecution of the early church, Acts 8:1-4, that caused believers to take the Gospel out of Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus in Acts 1:8. Pure silver is purified in the furnace of suffering, Isaiah 48:10.

Progressive stewardship. Most often God's will for us involves our steady growth as we learn and gain experience in our walk with Him. Moses spent 40 years in preparation, tending obstinate sheep before he was ready to tend God's people for 40 years in the wilderness. After his conversion, the Apostle Paul spent possibly up to 14 years growing in his walk with God before he went on his first missionary journey. Jesus taught this principle in Luke 16:10-13.

Polarization. Determining God's will requires balance. It is dangerous to focus on one part of knowing God's will (polarizing to an unbalanced extreme) while ignoring the other parts of knowing His will. To focus all our attention on applying wisdom to the exclusion of God's peace is dangerous ... we could be tempted to exclude the leading of the Spirit. To focus all our attention on the inner confirmation of peace is dangerous ... tempting us to ignore the Word and the wisdom He has given us.

Counterfeit answers. Be careful of the counterfeit answers taught in the name of Christianity. There are no shortcuts, no gimmicks, and no magic answers to knowing God's will. No one experience gives all wisdom.