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DOING GOD'S WILL

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work," Jesus told them. (John 4:34)

DOING THINGS FOR GOD

After Claude King graduated from seminary in 1984, he and his wife set out to fulfill their dream of becoming "tentmaking" church planters in Gwinnett County, Georgia. As a seminary student, Claude had taken all the church planting and evangelism classes he could. He spent eighteen months developing plans to begin churches all over the county. But everything went wrong. In a period of only 2 percent unemployment, Claude and his wife could not find jobs. Having exhausted their meager savings and with debts mounting daily, they had not even gathered a nucleus of interested people to start a church. Devastated, Claude moved his family back home to live with parents. He had wanted to reach people for Christ. He sought to expand the kingdom of God. He was willing to work hard. Yet the result was failure. For a while, he was bewildered as to why God had not blessed his efforts.

Then in 1986, God crossed my path with Claude's. He had taken a job as an editor for a Christian publisher, but his heart was still in church planting. As Claude and I talked, the Lord revealed that

his efforts, though admirable, had been misdirected. Claude had been making his own plans and trying to enlist God to bless them. God had been waiting for Claude to surrender his life to Him, making himself available for God to accomplish His divine purposes. As Claude changed his perspective, he immediately began to see the difference between man-centered and God-centered activity. Claude volunteered to help his local association of churches in church planting. But this time Claude did not develop his own plan. He simply shared with the churches in his association the need for new church plants and then watched to see what God did next.

Within three months, Claude received word from fourteen communities requesting new churches. Two years later, there were six new congregations with full-time pastors and the beginnings of a seventh church underway.

Claude saw that God could do more in a week than he could accomplish in years of his own effort. He also came to realize that he had been so busy attempting to do things *for* God he had not spent time enjoying fellowship *with* God. As Claude coauthored *Experiencing God* with me, he experienced God using his life in ever-increasing measure. The more he drew into a close relationship with God, the more God began to accomplish through Claude's life.

THE WRONG QUESTION

Jesus considered God's will to be His highest priority (see John 4:32-34). Following God's will is also important for you. Often when people want to know God's will, they will ask, "What is God's will for my life?" As one of my seminary professors, Gaines S. Dobbins, used to say, "If you ask the wrong question, you are going to get the wrong answer."

"What is God's will for my life?" is not the best question to ask. The better inquiry is, "What is God's will?" Because people are naturally self-centered, we tend to view the whole world—even God's activity—in terms of our own lives. Of course, we want to know what we should do and how events will affect us. But that is actually an inverted life-perspective. Once I know God's will, then my life gains its proper perspective, and I can adjust my life to Him and to His purposes. In other words, what is it that God is purposing to accomplish where I am? Once I know what God is doing, then

I see what I should do. My focus needs to be outward on God and His purposes, not inward on my life.

Now, that does not mean God has no plans for your life. He certainly does. He created you, and He knows how your life can reach its maximum potential. The Bible says He wants you to live an abundant life and to be filled with divine joy. But the plans He has for your life are based on what He is doing in the world around you. He has a larger purpose in mind for all humanity. His desire is for you to become involved in what He is doing to bring salvation to others. Discovering God's greater plan helps you know what He wants to do through you.

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING

We are an industrious people. We always want to accomplish something. The idea of doing God's will sounds exciting. Once in a while, someone says, "Don't just stand there—*do* something." Sometimes individuals or churches are so busy carrying out plans they think will help achieve God's purposes that they don't bother to find out what He actually wants. We often wear ourselves out and accomplish little for the kingdom of God.

I think God is crying out to us: "Don't just do something. Stand there! Enter into a love relationship with Me. Get to know Me. Adjust your life to Me. Let Me love you and teach you about Myself as I work through you." A time will come when action is required, but we must not short-circuit the relationship (Ps. 37:7). Your relationship with God must come first. Out of your walk with God, He accomplishes His plans for our world.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me." (John 15:5). Do you believe that without Him you can do nothing? Sure, you can keep yourself busy. You can immerse yourself in activities, programs, meetings, and events, but they will not have any lasting value for God's kingdom. The apostle Paul warned that one day every person's work would be tested by fire to see if it was done according to God's will and divine power (1 Cor. 3:13). The activities God will commend in the final judgment will be those which He initiated. If you are experiencing a time of spiritual dryness in your life, you may be trying to do things on your

own that God has not initiated. However, when you abide in Christ, you will be amazed at what God accomplishes through your life.

God wants you to gain a greater knowledge of Him by experience. That's what abiding in Him will do for you. He wants a love relationship with you, and He wants to involve you in His kingdom work. He alone can initiate His plans. He wants your involvement, but you cannot do it for Him. When you believe Him and do as He directs, then He will accomplish His work through you.

Jesus had advice for those who wearied themselves trying to do things in their own strength: "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. All of you, take up My yoke and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

A yoke was an instrument built for two oxen to work together in tandem. Often farmers would pair up an experienced animal with a younger ox. Thus the younger one could learn from the seasoned animal. Jesus' invitation is for you to join up with Him—to walk alongside Him and follow His lead. When you labor where He is already at work, He accomplishes His purposes through you. The experience is not meant to be exhausting or burdensome, but exhilarating and fulfilling. Sadly, the chronic ailment of Christians today is burnout, particularly among pastors and those in Christian ministry. They grow weary doing things for God in their own strength. Yet Jesus promised that those who walk alongside Him and work with Him will find rest for their souls. God has more than enough knowledge, power, and resources to accomplish whatever He desires. Our involvement—at His invitation—is a privilege that should invigorate us and keep us close to Him. If you are worn out or stressed by your "Christian duties," perhaps you are not properly yoked to your Master.

GOD PURSUES A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

Some people have suggested that God gives us general directions and then turns us loose to work out the details of our lives. *I disagree.* God's intention is to have a love relationship with each of us. We get ahead of ourselves when we try to discern a life plan up front. Some folks want the security of deciding if they will be a

businessperson, a school teacher, a preacher, or a nurse. They want to know if they should settle in their home country or go to Japan for decades or move to Argentina. But God doesn't necessarily lay everything out that way. He may place you in one job at one location for an extended time, but God's assignments come on a daily basis. You should always be open to whatever He has for you—even if it's not something you could have foreseen.

God calls you to a relationship in which He is Lord—where you are willing to do and be anything He chooses. If you respond to Him as Lord, He may lead you to do things you would never have dreamed of. If you don't follow Him as Lord, you may lock yourself into a job or an assignment and miss something God wants to do through you. I've heard people say things like: "God called me to be a _____, so this other opportunity couldn't possibly be His will." Or "My spiritual gift is _____, so this ministry couldn't be God's will for me." We tend to seek things that keep us comfortable, but God is not restricted by our fears. He sees beyond our current limitations and is constantly leading us to grow into the person He knows we can become.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that God gives us a life plan and then abandons us to work it out. Rather, the pattern and emphasis in Scripture is a daily walk with Him in which He gives new assignments and then works through us to accomplish them. That is what a spiritual gift is—a supernatural empowering to accomplish the assignment God gives you.

Don't focus on your talents, abilities, and interests to determine God's will. Instead, seek God's will and watch Him equip you for whatever assignment He gives. I have heard so many people say, "I am good at _____; therefore, it must be God's will." That kind of thinking is self-centered. Since Christ is Lord, your attitude should instead be: "Lord, I will do anything Your kingdom requires of me. Wherever You want me, I'll go. Whatever the circumstances, I'm willing to follow. If You want to meet a need through my life, I am Your servant, and I will do whatever you ask."

THE FARMER WAS MY MAP

For twelve years, I was the pastor of a church in a city surrounded by farming communities. One day a farmer invited me

to visit him at his home. His directions went something like this: "Go a quarter mile past the edge of the city, and you will see a big red barn on your left. Go to the next road, and turn to your left. Take that road for three-quarters of a mile. You'll see a large popular tree. Go right for about four miles, and then you will see a big rock. . . ." I wrote all of this down, and only by God's grace did I eventually manage to find the farm!

The next time I went to the man's house, he was with me in my vehicle. Because there was more than one way to get to his house, he could have taken me any way he wanted to. This time, I didn't need the written instructions. You see, he was my map. What did I have to do? I simply had to listen to him and do what he said. Every time he said "Turn," I did what he said. He took me a new way I would not have discovered on my own. I could never retrace that route by myself because the farmer—my map—knew the way.

JESUS IS YOUR WAY

Often people approach knowing and doing God's will this way: They ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do? When do You want me to do it? How shall I do it? Where shall I do it? What will the outcome be?"

Isn't it typical of us to ask God for a detailed road map before we are willing to set out on the journey? We say, "Lord, if You would just tell me where I need to end up, then I'll be able to set my course and go." You might even decide you won't move forward until God tells you ahead of time the details of what you will face. But that is not the way God led people in the Scriptures.

The Lord doesn't send us off like an errand boy. He intends to accompany us on the journey. He wants us to continually heed His voice and go with Him one day at a time. As long as we walk daily with Christ, we will always know where to be—right beside Him—and will always end up where He wants us to be. Jesus did not say:

- "I will give you the entire plan."
- "I will give you a road map."
- "I will tell you which direction to go and send you off."

He did say, "I am the way" (John 14:6). Jesus knows the way; He is your way.

Can you trust God to guide you as the farmer led me, pointing out each turn along the route? You might say, "No, Jesus doesn't direct people specifically like that." But He does! The Bible is full of examples where God guided His people precisely. Perhaps you have been taught—or concluded—that you have to take control of your own life and do the best you can. But your life is too valuable to waste by trusting your own best thinking. You are human and prone to making mistakes. God alone is perfect and infinitely wise. He knows the future. He is all powerful. Your life is in far better hands when you surrender it to God and His leading.

When you get to the place where you trust Jesus to guide you one step at a time, you'll experience tremendous freedom. But as long as you rely on your own judgment, you'll worry every time you must make a decision that you might take a wrong turn. I know several people who were so immobilized with worry that they spent years in a limbo of indecision, all because they didn't believe God would really give them specific guidance. But God does not want us to live in anxiety (see Phil. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:7).

When I focus on my relationship with God, out of that divine fellowship God shares His heart with me. When God speaks, I respond to everything He tells me daily, and He gives me plenty to do to fill each day with meaning and purpose. When I do what He says, I am in the center of His will, and He can use my life to accomplish His purposes. My primary concern should not be, "What should I do with my life tomorrow?" but rather, "What does God want me to do today?" *As you follow Jesus one day at a time, He will keep you in the center of God's will.*

Abraham Followed God One Day at a Time

Abraham walked by faith and not by sight. In the following passage, read about the call of Abram to do God's will. Watch to see how much detail he was given before God asked him to follow.

The LORD said to Abram: Go out from your land, your relatives, and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, I will bless

you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse those who treat you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and the people he had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan. (Gen. 12:1–5)

God said, “Get out of your country.” How specific were the directions? He gave Abram this much detail: “to the land I will show you.” That is all God asked Abram to do. God promised to do the rest. Abram had to move all of his possessions and family day by day waiting for God to show him where he was going. Would you be willing to follow God’s directions for your life with so little detail?

FEW DETAILS AT FIRST

God often calls people to follow Him without giving them all the details at the beginning. That is certainly the pattern in Scripture. Many times, as with Abram, God invites people to follow Him step by step. If God were to give you a specific plan for your life, you would likely put your focus on the plan rather than on Him. God does not want your life to depend on a plan or an income or a person or anything else. He wants you to trust Him.

Throughout Scripture, God seldom gave the same amount of detail to each person as He revealed His will. God told Moses much of His plan before Moses returned to Egypt. On the other hand, God told Abraham to begin moving, and He would provide further details along the way. God gave extremely specific instructions to Ananias about where to find Saul and what to do to heal him (see Acts 9:10–19). Yet Jesus would not even tell Andrew where He was staying for the evening (see John 1:39). In every case, however, people had to remain close to God for their guidance.

For Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Paul (see Matt. 4:18–22; 9:9; Acts 9:1–20), God gave minimal details about their assignments. He simply said, “Follow Me.” Jesus said: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be

provided for you. Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:33–34). God wants us to enter each day seeking Him. Out of that relationship, we will experience Him guiding our lives.

SUMMARY

God is far more interested in a love relationship with you than He is in what you do for Him. His desire is for you to love Him. As He walks alongside you, He will guide you into specific activities. But even as you do those things, He will be the One working through you to accomplish His purposes. He is all you need. Christ in you is your way; He is your map. When you follow His leadership one day at a time, you will always be right in the middle of God’s will.

EXPERIENCING GOD TODAY

Are you anxious about the future, or are you content to walk with Jesus one day at a time? Take some time alone with God today, enjoying fellowship with Him without focusing on what you may need to do next.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you struggled to know God’s will? If so, what has been your biggest challenge?
2. Are you satisfied with your relationship with Christ, or do you constantly feel the need to be doing something for Him?
3. How have you experienced God working through your life as you have been abiding in Christ?
4. Are you content to follow God one day at a time, or do you become anxious if you do not know where God is leading you in the future? If so, why is that?