



# How Can I Know God's Will?

Tyler Weymouth





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# Introduction

“How can I know God’s will?”

That question has been asked so many times in so many situations that it seems nearly impossible to be able to answer it with any finality. Throughout life there seem to be so many variables threatening to engulf the “breadcrumb trail” we’ve been following that it is like we’re in a no-win situation. We start to think that life is like being blindfolded, thrown into a pitch-black room of unknown dimensions, and told to find a painted coin that’s been tossed onto the floor. As if that weren’t bad enough, we’re also given a time limit to find the coin, and as we grope around in the dark, we then discover that the floor is covered with coins! It’s impossible!

So it is with life: every day people of all ages are bombarded with countless opportunities to make decisions. Every year high school students get ready to head out into the “real world,” when they are suddenly engulfed with responsibility and a load of questions from others.

“Where are you going to apply for school?”

“Are you going to get a job instead?”

“Will you go to college in-state?”

“If you go out of state, will you go to a Christian university or a secular one?”

“Are you getting financial aid? Have you completed your FAFSA?”

“Have you considered getting a Terry loan or a grant?”

“What about a car? Will you be getting one, or are you going to get rides?”

“What are you going to major in? Are you just going to take Gen Eds?”

“Will you be getting involved in any campus ministries?”

“How are you going to pick out a church to go to?”

“Hey, what about your girlfriend? Are you guys still going to stay together?”

“Maybe you should get married, get a part-time job and take online courses, have you thought about that?”

Okay, we get the point! There are so many questions about life and important decisions to make that it's like we're in a nightmare where our survival depends on whether or not we can keep up with a game of whack-a-mole. If you keep the moles in their holes, you win; if not, you lose, and life falls apart. As if this weren't bad enough, we know that Christians- those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior- are supposed to have this inexplicable intuition from God whereby we will automatically know exactly what He has planned. We will do what He wants us to do, we will go where He wants us to go, and we will be what He wants us to be. After all, we've got the triune God indwelling us, right? We've got the Bible, right? We've got the power of prayer, right? We've got the luxury of godly counsel, right? We've got the fellowship of a local church, right? Right to all of these! However, all of these wonderful resources won't help us if we don't know how to properly apply our lives to them and utilize them all together. Further, we begin to see that we have some unbiblical presuppositions about God's will that need to be washed with the water of the Word.

For example, the above illustration of that pitch-black room with the coin-covered floor is usually what

most of us think about God's will: "God has a personal, set-in-stone, uniquely individual plan for my life. He's got it prepared, and He expects me to find it. If I succeed in finding it- and I hope I do- then I will be happy. I will be free from trouble, heartache, confusion and stress from having to make a decision. If, however, I fail to find God's will- I don't find 'the one' God has for me to marry, I don't take 'the job' God wants me to take, I don't buy 'the right house' in 'the right city' in 'the right state' near the 'right church' with 'the right ministry' that He wants me to be in- I'll be miserable, God will be eternally angry with me, and I'll have wasted my short life!"

Most people, either consciously or subconsciously, have viewed God's will in this light. We think God's will is somewhere just around the bend, almost as if God is playing hide-and-seek with us. We think God's will is infinitely personal, to the point where every minute detail that He has arranged needs to be discovered and acted upon, or else the remaining details will be thrown all out of order. Throughout our entire lives we are filled with chaos and uncertainty because we have an unbiblical view of God's will. Further, we fear life's decisions because we are unaware of how to go about making them.

That's where this pamphlet is intended to help YOU! There are a lot of decisions to make in life, and yes, there are endless ramifications and consequences for making them, however, together we can study God's Word to see what He has said about His will and how to make biblical decisions. We'll be reading what other believers have found in the Scriptures, and how to apply our lives to them. If you're willing to take this journey- and hopefully you are, since you have taken the time to pick up this pamphlet and read this far!- then grab a Bible, a pen, and prayerfully consider what His Word has to say.

At the end of each chapter, there will be study questions. This pamphlet will be most beneficial if you take the time to answer the questions. One good idea would be to do this study with a few of your friends who are also wondering about how to know God's will. If you are planning a small group and are leading it, try to come up with further insightful questions that can help you and others learn more about God's Word. Set up a time each week in your dorm or at a central meeting place to have discussions about the material and read the Bible together. Most importantly, make sure that what you come up with for answers agrees with God's Word!

Let's begin!

# Chapter 1

## Laying the Foundation

As we already know, God's will is one of the most sought after areas of life. Everybody seems to be wanting in on knowing what God has planned. Here's how some people speak about it:

“God's got a specific plan for my life, and I've got to find it!”

“God's will is only important to find out when I've got a big decision to make.”

“I'll only be happy when I discover what God's will is for me.”

Do you notice a common thread running through these statements? There's a certain pronoun that's repeated. If you guessed “I,” then you're right! Whenever we ask about God's will, it's always directed towards “me, myself, and I!” This isn't necessarily a bad thing because we obviously have a personal responsibility towards God as individuals (John 21:15-22). Yet, the thing that we overlook is that God's will, while personal and intimately affecting us, is *not all about us!* We ask the question, “What is God's will for *my* life?”, when really we should be asking, “What is God's will?”, period. We have a really big opinion of ourselves, and our inner man is narcissistic, always thinking

about Numero Uno! It helps us to come back down to planet Earth by realizing that God's will is not all about us, but rather all about what *He* wants. We'll explore this particular aspect later on in the pamphlet.

This brings us to our first important point: God's will is revealed in His Word. In other words, if you want to know God's will, then you need to study His Word!

“But God's Word doesn't say anything to me personally, like telling me to go to school here, or marry this person, or buy this car! I'm not saying that His Word is insufficient or anything, but I think that He will use other ways in addition to the Bible to clue me in on what His will is.”

The real life implications of this thinking is seen in a story told by Navigators ministry founder Dawson Trotman. While speaking at a conference, a young man approached him and said that God was telling him to marry this particular girl. This was followed some time later when another young guy at the same conference approached him and told him a similar story. Eventually, Dawson had 4 different young men tell him the same thing: God was telling each of them to marry this girl. However, it wasn't much longer after that when Dawson realized that all 4 guys were talking about the same girl!

What do you think? Was God using something other than His Word to communicate to each of these 4 men? Do you think it was God's will for them to marry her? I would guess and say “No,” simply because God wouldn't contradict Himself and have 4 guys married to the same girl! (Romans 7:1-3). It's this outside-the-Bible thinking that gets us into trouble because we have been

given God's Word as a light and a lamp so that we can see the path that He has made (Psalm 119:105).

What other ways would God speak or "reveal" His will to us? When we use the word "revelation," we're talking about something revealed, shown, uncovered, and manifested. God has revealed Himself to the world with "general revelation" through creation, history, and humanity (John 1:9; Acts 17:24-29; Romans 1:19-20). The other category of revelation is known as "special revelation." This includes God's written Word- the Bible- and the Living Word- Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; John 1:1-5).

In the Bible we can find ways that God has given this special revelation to people. Some of the most frequently used methods are visions, dreams, feelings, impressions, burdens, leading, desires, circumstances, fleeces, counsel and prayer. God would use these different ways to reveal Himself and tell people what He wanted them to do. In the New Testament, for example, He gave believers special gifts like tongues to deliver special messages to other people who didn't speak the same language. Other times He would speak directly to His apostles audibly, or with visions (Acts 9:1-6; 10:9-16). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these apostles would write His Words and deliver them to believers. The Word of God that we have today came about as a result of these various methods.

Jesus Christ made God's will clear for people when He commanded them to follow Him (Luke 14:25-35), believe in Him (John 14:1), keep His commandments (John 14:15-24), love one another (John 15:12&13), and obey God on the inside first (Matthew 23:25-28).

“So, what’s the big deal with this? What does this have to do with God’s will?”

This area of special revelation is kind of a “hot topic” amongst people because the issue comes down to whether or not you believe that God is still giving this special revelation. Do you believe that God is still giving special revelation by speaking to us, or giving us new & directive insight to things not already written in the Bible? In order to have a proper foundation for discerning God’s will, we need to first agree on the fact that God is no longer speaking in special ways, or giving us new revelation apart from what He has already preserved in His Word. Several passages, like Ephesians 2:20, 2 Timothy 3:16&17, Jude 3, and Revelation 22:18, show us that God’s Word is all that we need in order to live holy, faithful, obedient lives before God. Other passages, like Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32, and Proverbs 30:6, warn us against adding to what He has given. God clearly does not want any part of His Word changed in any way.

So, as we finish this first chapter of the pamphlet, you need to decide if you will agree with the testimony of Scripture that God’s Word is complete. Nothing needs to be added to it or taken away from it. If you will believe what God has said about this, you will have the *best* foundation possible for discovering His will!

# Chapter 1

## Study Questions

1) What's the natural way we view God's will? How can we view it selfishly? What would be a better way to view God's will? \_\_\_\_\_

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2) Read Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8, and 2 Peter 1:3. How would you connect the fact that God doesn't change with His statement in 2 Peter 1:3? \_\_\_\_\_

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3) What do Psalm 138:2, Luke 11:27-28, Luke 16:31, and 2 Peter 1:19 all say about human experience and circumstances? \_\_\_\_\_

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4) What are the 2 ways that God has revealed Himself to humanity? What Scripture references can you find on each way? \_\_\_\_\_

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5) Why is it important to believe the Bible passages that talk about God's Word being complete? What does this have to do with being able to know God's will? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Chapter 2

## Defining God's Will

“Oh boy!” you say. “Now we’re getting into the real deep stuff! This is what famous Bible scholars and theologians have debated for years, and we’re going to get to the bottom of it once and for all!”

If this is what you’re secretly hoping for, then sorry to disappoint, but we’re actually going to try to simplify this whole issue! This is the best way to view the teaching of God’s Word, and since it’s put into plain headings, hopefully it will be all the easier to learn and remember for future reference.

When we talk about God’s will, we can basically summarize it into 2 main aspects: the first is what is referred to as God’s “directive” will. This is otherwise known as His “moral” will, which is what He has already revealed to us. Remember where we can find it? That’s right, His Word (good job, you were paying attention in chapter 1!). This directive will is what He wants us to do, and is clearly marked through statements like, “Thou shalt/thou shalt not,” “Do this/don’t do this,” “Think this/don’t think this,” et cetera. Clear, concise commands like “Honor your father and mother,” “Flee sexual immorality,” and “Speak the truth in love” are all pretty straight forward- there’s no question of what God’s will is with these statements.

The other aspect of God's will is what is known as God's "decreed" will. This is also known as His "sovereign" will because He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe and has complete control over *everything* (praise Him for that!). It has also been called His "permissive" will because of what He allows to happen, but it's not something that He just makes up on a whim; this is His ultimate, eternal and determined will because He has known about it from eternity! This aspect of God's will is mysterious and elusive because we can't know it ahead of time whenever we have to make a decision.

Now, pop quiz: which aspect of God's will is usually the one that everyone wants to know about? That's a no-brainer! The decreed will of God is what everyone hopes to have insight to. Why is that? Some reasons are being spared the work of having to make a decision, hoping that there will be no trouble, strife or undesired results from making a decision, and thinking that there will be no personal responsibility for the consequences of making a decision. In other words, "I won't have to answer for the decision I make." We can think fatalistically: "Since God's got all this planned, I can just do whatever I want, and I won't have to think about anything. God'll make the decision for me!"

One way this can happen is with people being called to ministry. One man began relating to others that God was calling him to Germany as a missionary, and the way he described this "calling" was so vivid, it was as if God had called him up on the phone! He was so completely convinced that God had called him to go to Germany that he went out, sold his car, bought a one-way ticket to Europe and left without taking care of some important things.

Among the list of neglected responsibilities were things like not taking time to learn the language, culture and proper protocol for living there, not setting up care & provision for his wife and family who were left behind in America, and not taking time to get approval & affirmation from the leadership and body of his local church! Now, do you think that it was God's will for this man to go to Germany? Absolutely not! You would have to be insane to look at this and say otherwise!

This story reveals the importance of what we founded in chapter 1: God has given us His Word as the means by which we are to live. When we look to other methods to discover God's will, no matter how spooky and hyper-mystical the story may be, we are sure to get into a mess!

Someone once said, "Mysticism is the lazy man's game." Our response to knowing God's directive will is to study it, memorize it, and, most importantly, obey it! God has given us a clear game plan, so now is no time to call an audible! The question is, "Am I willing to submit to what God has clearly revealed in His Word and obey it?" This question is actually fused with the key question from chapter 1- "Do I believe that God's Word is complete?"- because I need to trust what God's Word says about itself: If I believe that God's Word is complete, then I need to become an expert at knowing and doing what His completed Word says. This is what Moses reminded the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy 29:29 when he told them, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." For the sake of our "Knowing God's Will" pamphlet, we could paraphrase this verse to say, "God's decreed will is known only by Him.

We can't know it ahead of time, so let's just stick with what He *has* revealed to us. Our pursuit needs to be studying and living God's Word, and that's it!"

So, at the end of chapter 2, we've got another question to answer for ourselves: "Am I willing to submit to God and do what His Word says?" We all have to decide what our response will be. "Are you going to obey, or not?"

Jesus' desire for us is that we would surrender to Him, not as a cruel, harsh taskmaster, but as a loving, gentle Redeemer: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30) When we obey His directive will, there is joy and peace as we take assurance in knowing that we are now in His will!

# Chapter 2

## Study Questions

1) What are the 2 aspects of God's will? Which one is revealed in the Bible, and which one is known only by God Himself? \_\_\_\_\_

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2) Look up Psalm 40:8, Mark 3:35, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 4:19, Ephesians 5:17, and James 4:15. Which aspect of God's will is each verse talking about? (Don't get caught up in a debate over this question, just discuss it, and move on! This is just for an exercise, not a systematic theology book!) \_\_\_\_\_

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3) Why is obeying God's directive will so important? How does this help with our understanding of knowing God's will overall? \_\_\_\_\_

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4) Read Matthew 16:1-4. How can you connect Jesus' anger over wanting to see a sign with our responsibility to obey God's directive will? \_\_\_\_\_

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5) How does Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30 and God's promise in Jeremiah 29:10-14 sweeten the deal to obey Him? Would you say that obedience is appealing? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Chapter 3

## Making Decisions

It's been a fun study so far, hasn't it? Learning about God's will is enjoyable, especially when it's been such a cloudy issue in our minds for far too long!

“So, what about making day to day, specific decisions? My view of God's will has definitely changed, but how does the Bible help you make decisions on issues that it doesn't directly talk about?”

Glad you asked! As one of my favorite movie stars once said, “Let's down to the nitty gritty.” When we look to the Bible to make decisions, we need to understand the difference between the Bible speaking directly and indirectly. In other words, it's the difference between “thou shalt” and “here's a principle that's applicable here.” We'll give an example of this a little later. Closely connected to this are 3 basic propositions about biblical guidance:

- 1) There is no way to know God's will and receive His guidance apart from the Scriptures. Again, the question is, “Do you believe that God has stopped giving special revelation?”
- 2) There are scriptural principles and practices to cover all areas of life. The apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 1:3 that God has given us all things that have to do with life and godliness.

3) The Scriptures speak directly and indirectly by implication. They help us make either/or and yes/no choices, or they give us a limited number of equally legitimate choices.

Having put these propositions in place, now we need to outline steps for good decision making. Carelessly making decisions is not good, but also being frozen with indecision is not pleasing to God, either! We are pleasing to God when we come before Him in needy dependence for His grace and wisdom, and we are equally as pleasing when we act upon what He has shown us to do through His Word.

First, gather all the facts- list the pros & cons and the options. This step takes some time, and without a doubt it's easier to do the "spooky" thing of just going by feelings or circumstances.

Second, search out all the principles, examples, guidelines, etc. of Scripture that have a bearing on the decision. Again, knowing when the Bible is speaking directly or indirectly will be important.

Third, evaluate the pros & cons and the options by these principles. "Why do it in this order?" you ask. What sometimes happens is that when these pros, cons, and options are put up against the Bible's effectively discerning power, what was once a pro is now a con, and what was once a con is now a pro! The Bible shows us what we need to see.

Fourth, seek godly counsel so that they can help you think of some things biblically that have not been considered. A godly mentor can also help in applying the pros & cons to the different principles of God's Word, as well as help you correctly interpret these different passages.

Fifth, if everything gets narrowed down to two equally good decisions (based on direct and indirect biblical principles), then there may be opportunity to decide on the basis of preference. That's right, you get to choose! Sometimes God, in His graciousness, gives us two equally legitimate options that we can pick based upon what our desires are.

Finally, if there is a question of possible sin involved in the decision, use what is known as the "holding" principle. Romans 14 (and particularly verses 13 and 23) explains that the issue under consideration may or may not be a violation of God's commandments, but the sin occurs when I think to myself, "I'm not sure if this is sin or not, so I'm going to do it anyway." The sin is in the attitude, not necessarily the action, because it reveals a heart of rebellion before God, defiantly resisting the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in my heart. It also reveals a concern for self and a lack of consideration for anyone else who might be affected by my decision. This is one of the most important steps because it goes back to the importance of doing what you do by faith (Romans 14:23; Hebrews 11:6).

Has this chapter given you hope? Are you starting to see a practical end to being able to discover God's will and make wise, godly decisions? If you're still wanting some more direction, don't worry, we'll flesh this out in the next chapter. Hang in there!

# Chapter 3

## Study Questions

1) What 2 aspects of the Bible speak to us? Give an example of each and the Scripture where each aspect is found.

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2) What are the 3 basic propositions about biblical guidance? \_\_\_\_\_

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3) Outline the basic steps for decision-making. \_\_\_\_\_

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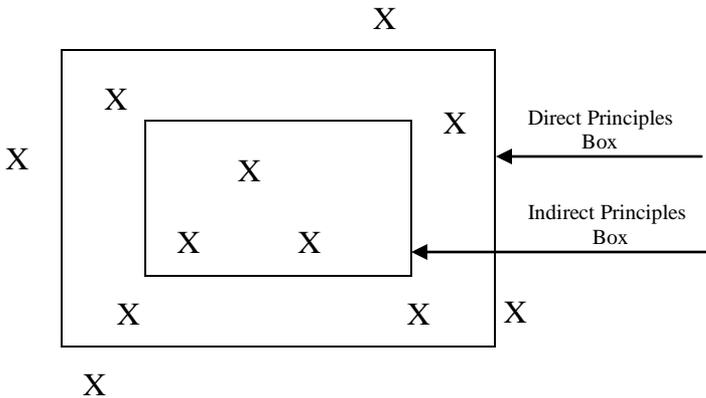
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# Chapter 4

## Getting a Better Focus

So, is this whole “will of God” thing as clear as mud now? Not really? Hmm... Okay, so let’s clarify this a bit more by showing a diagram. This is found in books by counselor and author Jay Adams, and it’s really helpful to show just how this whole decision-making process works. We’ll use the example of “Kevin” choosing a spouse to help clarify this diagram.



The 2 boxes are pretty self-explanatory: one is the boundaries of options set in place by clear biblical commands, and the other is the boundaries of options set in place by indirect but applicable principles of God’s Word. Again, to be able to set up these boxes means that we study the Bible so that we set them up properly!

The “X’s” are options (blondes, brunettes, tall, short, thin, wide- any and all girls that are out there). Since Kevin goes to a church with a large population of college students, finding a wife shouldn’t be too hard. As Kevin studies the Bible, he first takes a biblical look at the single life. “Is it God’s will for me to be single?” Kevin asks. So, he prayerfully looks at passages like Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 18:22, Matthew 19:10-12, 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5:25-33, and 1 Peter 3:7. After studying marriage, its responsibilities, and its benefits, Kevin decides that his desire to build a godly family and serve within a local church alongside a faithful, godly wife is pleasing to God. Decision reached! He’s on the market, and on the prowl!

But what about all these options? How can he possibly know which one to pick? Knowing that God’s Word is sufficient, he dives deeper into it. In order to evaluate a person’s sensitivity to biblical authority and influence, where else would he go but the Bible? He comes across 2 Corinthians 6:14, which teaches him that God commands believers not to be yoked with- in this case, married to- unbelievers. So, 3 X’s outside the box are no longer options because, as unbelievers, they are currently “off the list.” To date and marry one of them would be to sin against God’s clear, direct statement!

Another passage that Kevin studies is Proverbs 31, which contains a goldmine of description about godly women. To examine other girls in light of the qualities found in this chapter is key to finding a spouse whose number one priority is glorifying God through obedience. There are some girls that Kevin knows who are faithful in many of these specific things listed, and so they are definitely worth considering further. Another aspect of the direct principles box is put into place. It’s looking pretty promising!

A further area of study occurs in the several passages of Scripture that highlight a woman's responsibility to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. "What does submission involve? What does it look like?" Kevin asks. He observes several girls talking negatively and disrespectfully about their fathers, and he sees their short-tempered responses when they are told to do things by other men. Kevin knows that the way a girl responds and interacts with her father is the same way she'll respond and interact with her husband some day, so he puts that biblical principle into place. Another one bites the dust!

Then, indirect principles come into play. Kevin is good friends with several girls who meet a lot of the biblical criteria for being a godly wife. On more than one occasion he and a girl named Sarah have had their friendship put to the test when an unforeseen problem surfaces. Being the guy means he is the leader, and Kevin again goes to the Bible to seek guidance on how to deal with the problem. Sarah also looks into the Word of God and works alongside Kevin in order to come to a biblical decision that is pleasing to God. As they work together, Kevin sees that Sarah is serious about walking in obedience to God by following his leadership in reaching a biblical solution. Point for Sarah!

But, Danielle is looking just as promising! Not only is she very attractive, she is also very godly. She took a semester off of school in order to take care of her elderly grandfather just before he passed away, and she is a faithful servant in the local church by meeting with young girls in the youth group and discipling them.

*Now* what should Kevin do? He's got Sarah and Danielle to choose between! Both have passed the biblical parameters of direct and indirect principles, both want to be stay-at home mothers, both would be suitable wives, and

both like Kevin! So, who should he pick?

It's this last aspect of God's will that really frustrates some believers because, for some reason, they want God to leave them with just one option so that there will be no doubt as to what His will is. An appropriate question to ask at this point would be, "What's wrong with picking?" Picking is a good thing! Praise God that He has allowed you the privilege to do so! He has graciously provided us the responsibility to make such a decision. Hopefully at this point Kevin isn't thinking subconsciously, "Well, I really like Danielle because of such-and-such a reason, so I'll choose Sarah because probably God wouldn't want me to pick the one that I want because that would be sinful and selfish."

Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold it! If you've found yourself thinking along these lines, what is your view of God? Do you think that God is some kind of celestial killjoy, who secretly wants you to be miserable, or who tortures you by presenting a legitimately preferred option that He really doesn't intend for you to have? We as believers need a really good dose of Scripture that describe God's goodness, benevolence and love!

That's where this chapter is going to end. Whether you're buying a car, renting an apartment, looking for a job or considering a school, this concept of biblical principles is key to making sure that your decisions are following the Word of God. If that is your desire, then go all out!

# Chapter 4

## Study Questions

1) Think about some decision that you have to make. Now would be a good time to run that through the steps of biblical decision-making from chapter 3, and diagram it out like we did in this chapter...

2) Look up Ecclesiastes 11:9, 1 Corinthians 7:39, and Philippians 2:12-13. What do these passages show you about making a decision or choosing a biblically legitimate options? \_\_\_\_\_

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3) When we find that our desires are not in conflict with God's Word, why is it okay biblically to choose what we want? What unbiblical mindset(s) about God do we have to correct in this area? (Hint: check out Ezra 3:11; Psalm 25:8; 73:1; 84:11; 100:5; Nahum 1:7; Matthew 19:17) \_\_\_\_\_

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# Chapter 5

## Correcting Some Misconceptions

Has this biblical look at God's will been different from what you originally thought about it? I know that it was for me when I first learned about it! It is *so* much better to know what God's Word says about this than it is to wallow around in the confusion and uncertainty of my own thinking!

In this chapter we'll look at some of those misconceptions that we have when it comes to discerning God's will. Every time we go to the Bible, we need to go with humility- in this case, we humble ourselves to accept what God's Word says even though it goes against what we were raised with or with what we may be completely convinced is right! There are some common Christian clichés that have found their way into our philosophies and our lifestyles, and we need the cleansing water of the Word to wash away what is not true.

*"God will lead me to the right decision."* I couldn't even count how many times I've used this phrase, and, hey, why not? It's a really spiritual thing to say, right? However, when we view God's leading as the way to discern His will, we are following the incorrect interpretation of Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18. While it seems like these frequently cited verses are talking about following the leading

of the Holy Spirit in decision-making, neither context is dealing with that issue. Instead, both contexts deal with growth as believers in Jesus Christ, not God's leading a person apart from His Word. "Led" means "motivated," which is an evidence of salvation. If I am a true believer, I will be growing in Christlikeness.

The Bible does talk about leading: the Lord "leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). But don't stop here, follow the logic through! If God's Word of truth is what sanctifies me in this journey of sanctification (John 17:17), then I can be sure that the Bible is where I need to go to be led throughout this life! John MacArthur said it best when he wrote,

*Scripture never commands us to tune into any inner voice. We're commanded to study and meditate on Scripture (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-2). We're instructed to cultivate wisdom and discernment (Proverbs 4:5-8). We're told to walk wisely and make the most of our time (Ephesians 5:15-16). We're ordered to be obedient to God's commands (Deuteronomy 28:1-2; John 15:14). But we are never encouraged to listen for inner promptings. On the contrary, we are warned that our hearts are so deceitful and desperately wicked that we cannot understand them (Jeremiah 17:9). Surely this should make us very reluctant to heed promptings and messages that arise from within ourselves. (**Reckless Faith**, page 192 Crossway Books, 1994)*

Along these same lines is the phrase, "I have a peace about it, so this is God's will." Colossians 3:15 is the

“proof text” for this one, but once again, it has been misinterpreted to fit the popular philosophy of knowing God’s will. In reality, this verse is dealing with maintaining peace within the local church. The “you” is plural, meaning pursuing corporate peace as a body. Paul says that peace is supposed to act as an “umpire” in all situations within the body. So, whenever I consider a decision or a course of action, the question I must ask is, “Will this promote peace in the church?” Instead of looking within to “feelings of peace,” I need to follow the Word of God because, let’s face it, sometimes God’s will is anything but peaceful! Usually this peace comes at the end of the process. We need to stay away from using feelings as the guide for making decisions.

Have you ever said this one before: *“Well, I’ve prayed about it, and so I’m sure that it’s God’s will.”*? Along these lines is the philosophy that I listen for God to speak to me and tell me what to do while I’m praying. *“I always pray, and when I’m praying, I listen to God.”* If we’re expecting God to speak in some kind of inner intuition or audible words, we will be waiting for awhile because, as we’ve already learned, God is finished speaking this way.

In the same breath, we must never underestimate the importance of prayer in decision-making. When we come to God in humble, needy dependence of Him, recognizing like Solomon that we need His wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:8-10), God is pleased! That’s a good thing to pray! However, prayer must not be the final authority in making decisions (Matthew 26:36-44). We need to walk in the example of David in Psalm 25 when he asks God for instruction. Instruction doesn’t mean that he is praying for God to lead him, and then listening for a response. Verses 4, 5, 8-10, 12, and 14 all are referring to God’s Word, the means

which He uses to teach us the way in which we should go. David is praying for God to illuminate the truth of His Word to him. In this same way, when we pray for wisdom in a decision, we must pray for a greater understanding of Scripture, not a still, small voice of God to guide us (see also Psalm 119:18, 26, 33, 34, 64, 66, 68, 73, 108, 124, 125, 135, 144, 169 & 171 for the emphasis on having insight into God's Word).

*“My circumstances aren't clear; I'm waiting for Him to open a door.”* That's a really well-known one! 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 is one of the passages that talks about it, but Paul's account of this open door is given after the fact (in reflection). Also, it was an open door that he never went into. In Colossians 4:2-4 we see that Paul's request was for opportunities to preach the gospel and expound on the hidden truth of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Sharing the gospel was clearly commanded by Christ before His ascension, and so whether or not the gospel should be presented by Paul was not even an issue; it was a sure thing (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15)!

Sometimes open doors are meant to be kicked in because Satan is holding it from the other side. Other times closed doors should stay closed because some doors lead to elevator shafts! Interpreting circumstances without the objective standard of God's Word leads to confusion and doubt. The same ink blot on a piece of paper that looks like a flower to one person can look like a monster to another. Each person looks at their circumstances differently, while only God is completely true & objective (Job; Isaiah 40).

So, what's the takeaway? Stick with the Word of God!

# Chapter 5

## Study Questions

1) How has God showed you some unbiblical thoughts you've had about His will? What does His Word say about it? \_\_\_\_\_

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2) Why is coming to God in needy dependence and reliance pleasing to Him? Why is this especially important when it comes to knowing His will? \_\_\_\_\_

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3) What does God's Word say about leading? What are the contexts of Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18 talking about?

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4) Read Colossians 3:15. How do you see the corporate unity in the context of this verse? What role does peace play in the local church? \_\_\_\_\_

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5) What do we need to understand about using prayer in decision-making? What attitude does God want in our hearts? \_\_\_\_\_

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6) Why should we be careful about using circumstances to discern God's will? \_\_\_\_\_

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# Chapter 6

## The Key Ingredient

Hey! We're almost done! It's been a really good study, hasn't it? We've gone from establishing the foundation of God's Word for knowing His will all the way to learning how to actually make biblical decisions. Not only that, if we're believers in Jesus Christ, we've also had the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in our minds & hearts, teaching us and illuminating our understanding the whole entire time! Pretty awesome, huh?

Well, for this last chapter, we're going to look at what could be considered the most important element in all of this study. We could have included it in chapter 5 with the rest of the misconceptions, but we really need to spend some time on this one. We talked earlier in chapter 1 about how we selfishly think of God's will as being for "my" life. This mentality is often found alongside the subtle thinking that, "God's will is separate from my day-to-day lifestyle. Whether or not I obey Him in the 'small' things isn't really important. I just have to obey in the 'big' things." We have this idea that, as long as I get it right with where I go to college, who I marry, where I live, and what career I pursue, God will stamp my life with His approval.

This misconception is probably the most serious of all the other misconceptions because it stems from an inward heart of rebellion towards God. In other words, what I'm saying is, "God, you can have this part of my life- it's

yours- but this part over here is for me. I'll obey you when it's beneficial and when it's something that You and I agree on."

Jesus had several things to say to us about this compartmentalization. In Matthew 22:36-40, He told that a person's love for God is to come from every aspect of our being: heart, soul, and mind; the entire inner man. Nothing withheld, no obstructions. John 13:15, 21, 23, and 24 all clearly show God's standard of love, and that is when it provokes obedience. Jesus made it very clear that love for God is revealed by obeying Him on His terms, not ours. His unchanging message during His earthly ministry was all about denying self, taking up a cross, following Him daily, putting allegiance to Him as the first priority, and even putting aside any earthly relationships that would interfere with total devotion to Him! Passages like Matthew 10:34-39, Matthew 16:24-26, and Luke 14:25-35 contain radical and shocking demands on our lives. How could Jesus require so much of us?!?

One of Jesus' beloved disciples- John- later wrote in 1 John 5:1-3 that assurance of salvation comes when we walk in obedience to God. He also wrote that we can know we are truly saved when we love other believers (1 John 3:14-24). If we're not loving God by walking in obedience to Him, and by loving other people, then worrying about "God's will for my life" should be put on the back burner for awhile because we've got a much more serious issue to deal with! Our final destination for eternity needs to be determined first because God's will for all people is that they are saved (1 Timothy 2:4).

"What's the point?" you ask. "What does this all have to do with knowing God's will? Where does obedience factor in?"

The simple truth is that God's will for us as Christians is to obey Him. That's it! Mystery solved! You want to know God's will "for your life"? Just obey Him!

Proverbs 3:5&6 makes a clear case for obeying God:

*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.*

Picture having to drive through a mountain range filled with steep dropoffs, giant boulders, and thick woods. There's a road that's built, but you need to stay on it! If you decide to blaze your own trail, or if you toss the road map aside for the sake of trying to figure it out on your own, then watch out for that first step, 'cause it's a doozy! God's Word is that map that shows us how to go through the most unfamiliar and treacherous of terrain. When we "off-road" by sinning and forsaking His clear commandments, it may be fun and adventurous for awhile, but eventually when we're lost, at a dead-end, and out of gas, we wish we were back on that safe & familiar road. Trusting that God's Word will get us to our final destination prevents us from looking elsewhere for directions.

"Straight" means "smooth." There's nothing like driving on a road that's been freshly paved. Your CD won't skip, your coffee won't spill, and your nerves aren't set on edge! Obeying God is like that: when I walk in obedience to Him in *every* aspect of my life, I am able to enjoy a road that is infinitely smoother than any skilled construction crew could put down. Why? Simply because God promises us a rock-solid foundation in the most troubling of times when there's uncertainty and doubt. Matthew 7:24-27 tells

the story of 2 guys each building a house, and, well, you know what happens. When both go through the storm of the century, one guy's house is still standing, but the other guy is left with a pile of rubble. Our lives, if we found them on the sure rock of obeying what we know from God's Word, will be filled with joy and peace because we know we are in the will of God.

The most important lesson in this entire study is this: I must be walking in the Spirit at every moment of the day, surrendered to God to obey His Word so that I won't give in to my sinful desires (Galatians 5:16-25). If I become skilled in obeying God in the "little" things, I will have no trouble making decisions about "big" things.

Dave Swavely, in his book "Decisions, Decisions," wrote,

*So to be walking in the Spirit, you must be regularly confessing your sin and turning from it. But you also must be willing to do whatever God wants to you do as you approach your decisions. To put it another way, God's guidance is dependant upon your commitment to obedience. It is hypocrisy to ask God to help you make a decision when you have already decided what you are going to do, regardless of what he says. It is rebellion to say that you will only accept God's leading, if you can approve of the path he has chosen for you. (Decisions, Decisions, page 102 P&R Publishing, 2003)*

This next part helps explain what has just been said: in a relationship with a girl (whether a wife or a girlfriend), a guy will, at some point, ask himself, "Would I be willing

to take a bullet for her? If somebody walked into the room where we were and fired a gun at us, would I step in front of my girl and take the full force of the shot?" Now, on the surface it seems like a huge issue, something that a guy could really sweat over and debate about with himself, and for sure it is a pretty big thing! However, dying in such grand and movie-quality fashion is actually overshadowed by another question: "Am I willing to die every day for my girl? When push comes to shove, and I'm put in a situation where what I want and what she wants are at odds, do I put my desires on the shelf?" Now *there's* a question! You see, it's much easier to focus on that glorious death scene (which, for 99.9% of the male population of the world, will never happen...) than it is to look at specific and seemingly insignificant every-day details of life and see if it's really happening! By dying to self at all times, a guy will subtly answer that first big question, oftentimes without even knowing it. If he has made it his joyful and delightful practice to sacrificially do whatever is pleasing to his girl, then he will be in that position of being ready to sacrifice himself even in an extreme situation.

So it is with knowing God's will. When I make it my joyful, delightful, and Spirit-led practice to sacrificially die to myself in all of the "little" aspects of my relationship with God through Jesus Christ, I will be in that position to make God-honoring choices with "big" aspects of life. And *that* is something I can know without a doubt!

# Chapter 6

## Study Questions

1) Read Job 27:8-10, Psalm 66:18, Proverbs 28:13-14, James 1:5-7 and 1 John 1. What is the common thread that runs throughout these passages? \_\_\_\_\_

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2) What does Matthew 7:21-23 tell us about people who obey God only in certain parts of their lives? \_\_\_\_\_

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3) Think about the nation of Israel. What do passages like Judges 2:11-23, Isaiah 1, Matthew 15:1-9, and Matthew 23:29-39 tell us? \_\_\_\_\_

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4) What part does confessing specific sin to God & others have to do with walking in obedience to Him (1 John 1:1-2:2)? How would confession (agreeing with God about my sin) play into being able to discern His will? \_\_\_\_\_

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5) If we as believers are like sheep and oxen that need to be led, what aspect does a rod, staff, and yoke introduce to our lives? Can we reconcile Jesus as our Shepherd and Helper with Jesus as our Lord and Master? (for reference, see Psalm 23 and Matthew 11:28-30) \_\_\_\_\_

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# Conclusion

So, looking back over our study, was it worth it? Think you came away with what you were hoping to find? I really hope so!

Hopefully this pamphlet has gotten you to think differently- biblically- about God's will. Whether it was not making God's will all about us, or seeking His will through something other than His Word, or obeying Him only in certain parts of life, we all need to learn what God says! He is the only One Who can grant us repentance- a new way of thinking- as we walk in confession of our sin. We need His help so badly!

If you're looking for more teaching into the details of knowing God's will, perhaps so that you can teach others, check these books out. The information included in this study came from several of these outside sources, which are as follows:

1. Swavely, Dave. *Decisions, Decisions*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2003.
2. Adams, Jay. *The Christian's Guide to Guidance*. Woodruff, SC: Timeless Texts, 1998.
3. Adams, Jay. *A Theology of Christian Counseling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979. (see pages 16-37)
4. Viars, Steve. *Christian Liberty (audio series and work-books)*. Lafayette, IN: Faith Baptist Church.  
[www.frlafayette.org](http://www.frlafayette.org)
5. Viars, Steve. *How Do I Know the Will of God?*. Biblical Counseling Conference teaching session, Lafayette, IN: Faith Baptist Church.

These resources have been produced by Spirit-filled men of God that have spent many hours studying and applying their lives to God's Word. We are all much better off to be able to personally learn from what the Spirit of God has taught them. Ultimately we've got to remember that everything for life has to be derived from God's Word, including books and Bible studies!

While the issue of God's will is somewhat more of a specific topic, other resources for helping us grow as disciples in Jesus Christ can be found elsewhere. The FFC Resource Center is a great place to find similar pamphlets dealing with issues such as:

*Daughters of the King: A Biblical Apologetic on the Role of Women*

- A biblical look at how women are to live in this anti-biblical world, this study (and the companion study "Young Daughters of the King") looks at specific, practical ways to be pleasing to God as a helper, mother, and homekeeper.

*Young Daughters of the King: What Does the Bible Say to Young Women?*

- This study is similar to "Daughters of the King" with a focus for how young women can please God by submitting to their fathers and training for their future role as a helper, mother, and homekeeper.

*Deliberate Godly Friendships: Stop, Look, and Then Listen*

- How to pick godly friends and be a godly friend is the focus of this pamphlet, which gives guidelines for evaluating friendships in light of the Word of God.

*Garbage In, Garbage Out*

- The lie of the world is that secret sins of lust and pornography aren't hurting anyone. The truth, however, is that they are hurting the person who is caught in them! See the hope of Jesus Christ by going through this study.

*Iron Sharpens Iron*

- The importance of having an accountability partner cannot be underemphasized. This pamphlet helps us know what accountability looks like for believers within the local church.

*Teaching Our Children What the Bible Says About Sex*

- Even though some of us aren't parents, we can all benefit from taking a biblical look at sex. We need to know what the Bible says and be living in obedience before we can teach it to someone else!

*Tenacious Training: Seven Steps Toward Discipleship*

- The nuts and bolts of being a follower of Jesus Christ are explored in this study. While new followers of Christ are encouraged to learn these aspects, even long-time believers will grow from seeing what God commands of us!

*Walking in Wisdom*

- Need wisdom? Want to find it? Study Proverbs! This pamphlet goes through the entire book and practically teaches ways to walk in wisdom. You might be surprised by what you find!

While going through these studies, perhaps God will reveal a deeper need for Biblical Counseling. At FFC, God has blessed us with the opportunity to serve as a Biblical Counseling Center, where the hope of Jesus Christ is al-

ways found through obedience to His Word. Here counselors can help you get from where you are to where you know you need to be. Call the Counseling Office at 716-759-0591 to set up an appointment.

The answers for life are found in God's Word. Read it, study it, memorize it, obey it! That's how we can glorify God in this world. God bless you!

*You will keep in perfect peace him whose  
mind is focused on You, because he trusts in  
You.*

—Isaiah 26:3

# Notes





