

THE WILL OF GOD

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN THE WILL OF GOD?

To be in God's will means that you are carrying out what God's purpose is for you. You are fulfilling God's desires and wishes for your life. God really does have a purpose for each one of us. As our father he also has our best interest at heart.

Most of the God's will for your life has to do with your relationship with Him. Where you live, work, and go to school, are all secondary issues. God cares about your character more than where you live work or go to school. God does indeed care about all the little details in your life; yet it seems to be these secondary issues that most often lead to confusion about what God's will is for our lives.

It is in these secondary issues that the will of God is often spoken of as some kind of mystery. Although it may be true that we may not know what the Lord would have us do in every situation, which has little to do with being in the will of God. Being in the will of God is not solely dependent upon our understanding of it. The simplest way that I can think of to answer the question, ("How do I find the will of God?") is to answer, "By walking in it!"

When I am hiking a path out in the woods, I cannot see the end of the path from where I start. I must follow the path. If I leave the path and venture out into the bushes, I may not see the path at all — but it is still there. Sometimes I may come across fallen trees, landslides, snow, or other obstacles that obstruct the view of the path. At times, obstacles have obscured my sight of the path. I have found that if I keep going in the same direction and look for it, I can find the path again. Sometimes the path is steep, and hard; often, that is when it is most rewarding to stay focused on the path. Following the will of God for your life is very similar.

The farther off the path you go, the harder it will be to get back on track. You may even have to look at a map or ask someone for directions by reading your Bible or seeking Godly counsel.

HOW HAS GOD LED PEOPLE IN THE PAST?

God has led people in several different ways in the past. In Exodus, God led Moses and his people in the desert with a cloud and a pillar of fire. God has led people in the Old Testament through prophets and signs. God also has led people using angels, dreams, and visions. God has spoken to people directly and through others. God is not limited to one set pattern in the leading of His people. We are to always seek God for His guidance.

WE CAN SEE IN SCRIPTURE THAT MAKING PLANS AND DECISIONS WITHOUT CONSULTING THE LORD IS NOT WISE.

Isaiah 30:1-2: “ ‘Woe to the rebellious children,’ declares the LORD, ‘Who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin; Who proceed down to Egypt, without consulting me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!’ ”

Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

HOW DOES ONE DETERMINE AND FOLLOW THE WILL OF GOD?

The will of God is in His written word. I remember a friend once told me that the answer to everything was in the Bible. I objected and said that the Bible did not tell me what color of socks to wear each day. My friend Mark laughed and insisted that it does! He then gave a partial quote of Matthew 6:25: “Do not worry about what you will wear! Is not life more than food or clothing?”

In God's written word there are a lot of things that we are told to do as well as things we are told not to do. However, God is not a cosmic killjoy who has set out to make your life miserable (Matthew 7:11). In fact, Jesus said that He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Everything that God tells us to do, or not to do, is really for our own benefit — not His. As already stated, God is first concerned about our relationship with Him. Where we live, work, or go to school, comes after this.

Matthew 6:33: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." (The context here applies to food and clothing.)

Psalms 37:4: "Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart." (The interesting thing about this passage is, if you really delight yourself in the Lord, the desires of your heart will be godly things.)

Did you notice that these verses told us to put God first, and then "these things would follow"? There are a lot of "dos and don'ts" in the Bible. For those who fret over the letter of the law and become overwhelmed, Jesus made it simple when He said all the Old Testament law hinged on two things.

Matthew 22:37-40: "And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

To follow God's will, maintain a good relationship with Him. The thing that ruins our relationship with God is sin. To restore our relationship with God we need to continually admit our faults and turn away from them. We must confess our sins and repent.

1 John 1:8-9: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Proverbs 28:13: “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”

So far, we have seen that to be in the will of God we must first develop our relationship with Him. This involves confessing our sins and turning away from them. Next, we will need Biblical convictions. There are numerous examples in the Bible of people who had predetermined to follow God no matter what. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to obey the King’s orders to worship the golden image that he had set up. They did this even at the risk of being burned to death (Daniel 3:17-18). Joshua also had predetermined that “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). Ruth is also a good example of someone who was blessed because she had predetermined to stay with Naomi and serve God and not return to her people and their false gods (Ruth 2:15-16). Peter and the apostles said they must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). We also must predetermine that in any given situation we will follow God and not the crowd, or so-called wisdom of man.

We can apply this knowledge in many ways. Let's say, for example, that a young beautiful woman is looking for a job. In the “Help Wanted” ads she sees two different job listings. One job pays five times as much as the other. Should the dollar amount be the determining factor? The lesser-paying job is as a waitress. The higher-paying job is as a stripper in a nightclub. For the woman with Biblical convictions, the decision is easy. She may consider what Jesus said — “men commit adultery simply by looking upon a woman with lust in their hearts” — and want no part of it.

Biblical descriptions of a Godly woman would also help show her that the higher-paying job was not in God's will for her. Imagine that there is a third job listed, working as a business consultant, and the lady does have a degree in business. However, the job will require her to move. Does that mean that it is God's will for her to move? Not necessarily. How will this affect the rest of her life? Is there a good church in the new location? How will moving effect other relationships? All these questions are things to prayerfully consider before reacting. The woman following God knows that the salary offered by any job should not be the determining factor of whether that job is accepted.

In our next example, we have a young Christian man who is lonely and would like to marry. He meets two ladies who show some interest in him. One is wealthy, and prettier than the other, but she wants nothing to do with going to church with him and shows no interest in God. The other woman, although not as pretty or as wealthy as the other, talks about the Lord regularly and consults the Lord in all her decisions. Now, just because one woman loves the Lord does not automatically mean that it is God's will for our young man to marry her. The wealthy, prettier woman would be the choice many in the world would pick. However, the young man following God automatically rules her out as a choice because the Bible tells us not to be bound together to unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14).

We should consider the counsel of God in His written word wherever we can find application. Determining to do this beforehand can save us from many pitfalls and miseries. This does not mean that we should be paralyzed and not do anything unless God directly tells us to. Rather we move ahead and filter everything through what we do know of God's will and trust Him to lead us. In the case of looking for a job, we don't just pray for a job, but we also go out and look for one. While looking for the job we ask God to lead us, remembering that it is easier to direct us, if we are moving. Similarly, it is hard to steer a parked car.

READ THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES AND ASK YOURSELF, “DOES GOD DIRECT OUR STEPS THROUGH HIS WRITTEN WORD?”

Psalm 1:1-3: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”

Psalm 32:8: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.”

Psalm 73:24: “**With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me**, and afterward receive me to glory.”

Psalm 111:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments His praise endures forever.”

Psalm 119:9-11: “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee.”

Psalm 119:101-105: “I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Thy word. I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, for Thou thyself hast taught me. How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”

Proverbs 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 2:1-7: “My son, if you will receive my sayings, and treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity.”

Proverbs 4:11-14: “I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths. When you walk, your steps will not be impeded; and if you run, you will not stumble. Take hold of instruction; do not let go. Guard her, for she is your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not proceed in the way of evil men.”

Isaiah 48:17-18: “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.’”

Jesus said both of the following statements: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me (John 4:34); and "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4, quote from Deuteronomy 8:3).

GOD CAN USE THE COUNSEL OF OTHERS TO DIRECT US

Proverbs 15:22: “Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed.”

Proverbs 1:5” “A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.”

GOD ALSO DIRECTS US THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCE

For example, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, according to Old Testament prophecy (Micah 5:2). However, the reason Joseph took his pregnant wife Mary to Bethlehem was because of a decree issued by Caesar Augustus that required everyone to return to their own city for a census (Luke 2:1-8). Joseph did not go to Bethlehem to be in God's will and fulfill prophecy. Joseph went to Bethlehem because he was required to for the census. Joseph was in the will of God without knowing it.

I once drove from Oregon down to Yreka, California, to pick up my nephew. When I got there and knocked on the door, nobody answered. Since I had already driven that far I decided to drive a little farther, to hike around at Castle Crag State Park, and then come back to see if my nephew was home yet. I started up a trail that crosses the Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from Mexico to Canada. As I approached that intersection, I heard a little girl screaming and crying. I started running toward the sound to see what the matter was. It turned out she was lost and terribly frightened. I spent some time talking with her and praying with her concerning the whereabouts of the adults she was supposed to be with. I then took her back down the trail to a parking lot, where she recognized the car, she came in. So, I left a note on the windshield telling them they could find her at the ranger station. I then drove her to the ranger station and informed them that the adults could also possibly be lost out there.

Later when I drove back to Yreka, I found out my nephew had been home the entire time. He had been asleep, and did not hear me knock on the door.

I am convinced that God had more in mind for me to do that day than to pick up my nephew or go hiking. The Lord led me to help a lost little girl. He led me there through circumstances. Call it a coincidence if you want to. I have found that the more I follow the Lord, the more “coincidences” I have, especially after prayer

Following is some Scripture that supports the idea that God directs our paths. Notice that these passages do not imply His leading only by His written word.

Psalm 37:23-24: “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.”

Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”(NKJ)

Proverbs 16:3: “Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established.”

Proverbs 16:9: “The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

The next couple of verses are examples of how God closed doors to redirect Paul.

Acts 16:7: “...and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them.”

Romans 1:13: “And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you and have been prevented thus far...”

CAN ONE ALWAYS KNOW WHAT GOD’S WILL IS IN A PARTICULAR SITUATION?

As we can see in the following passages, the apostle Paul, James, and the writer of Hebrews, did not always know what God's will was in every situation.

Acts 18:21: “but taking leave of them and saying, ‘I will return to you again if God wills,’ he set sail from Ephesus.”

1 Corinthians 4:19: “But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power.”

1 Corinthians 16:7: “For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.”

Hebrews 6:3: “And this we shall do, if God permits.”

James 4:12-17: “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

IF I FOLLOW THE WILL OF GOD, WILL MY LIFE BE EASY?

It is most difficult to understand the will of God during a hardship or tragedy. Often there does not seem to be any answer that is comforting to the hurt deep down in our souls. Why does God allow some things to happen? I don't know any answer that will immediately eliminate all the pain. I can only tell you that we see a very narrow slice of the picture, whereas God sees everything — past, present, and future. We are not alone in this struggle of understanding. Many people in the Bible also struggled with this.

Perhaps the deepest anguish or hurting feeling recorded in this area is what Jesus experienced from the cross. What Jesus experienced when He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46) is far beyond what we can comprehend. We know that Jesus was made sin for us, and in this process, He was accursed of God (2 Corinthians 5:21 and Galatians 3:13). We also know that Jesus committed His spirit unto the Father moments after this (Luke 23:46). Still, the anguish that Jesus must have experienced, to feel rejected by the Father while being tortured, is beyond our imagination. Yet even then Jesus was in the will of the Father. Consider what Jesus prayed before He went to the cross.

Matthew 26:39: "And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.'"

As we can see by what happened to Jesus while He was in the will of God, being in God's will does not mean that our lives will be easy. Jesus was crucified. All the Apostles died martyrs for their faith, except for John, who was exiled to the island of Patmos. The Apostle Paul had many hardships during his missionary journeys, as we can see in the following passage.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28: “Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.”

In some cases, we will be blessed because of our hardships.

Luke 6:22-23: "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.”

James 1:12: “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

James 1:2-4: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

This last verse lets us see a purpose in our trials. Notice that it says, "When you encounter various trials". It did not say "IF" you encounter trials, but "when".

WHAT IS THE INCENTIVE FOR FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL?

There are many incentives, which could be a study, but here are a couple of examples of abundant life here and rewards in heaven.

John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly."

1 Corinthians 3:8: "Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor."

Hebrews 10:30-36:

"30 For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'

31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings,

33 partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.

35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."

Matthew 6:19-20: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal..."

PRAYER PLAYS A PART IN THE WILL OF GOD

Matthew 7:7-11: "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

John 15:7: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you."

James 1:5: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

James 5:16: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

1 John 5:14-15: "And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."

You are not big enough to ruin God's will beyond repair. Learn from your mistakes and go on.

Romans 8:28: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

THE WILL OF GOD IS FOR US TO TURN TO JESUS

For those who do not know the Lord, yet this is the place to start.

John 6:38-40:

38 " 'For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

39 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

40 For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in

Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.'"

JESUS WAS ALWAYS WITHIN THE WILL OF THE FATHER

John 8:29 " "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

John 5:30: " "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

CONCLUSION

The Bible does not give us a set pattern by which we can make all decisions. God can lead us in a variety of different ways — including Scripture, advice from Godly and knowledgeable people, through circumstances, and, less often, through dreams or visions.

The best way to be sure to be in the will of God is to seek Him in everything. Study His word and strive to obey Him in all areas of life. God can and does direct us without our complete understanding of exactly what He wants us to do for every situation. Our main part is obedience to that which we do know and seeking Him in everything.

I know not what the future holds, but I know who holds the future.