

Wednesday Night **BIBLE STUDY**

Wednesday, June 10, 2015 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

KNOWING AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD Conclusion - Discerning the Will of God *Various Scripture*

A PARABLE: A farmer went to church one day and listened intently as the preacher preached the Word of God. He was so impressed with the sermon he decided he wanted to be a preacher. The next day he looked up in the sky and saw a cloud formation that looked like the letter "PC," he took it to mean "Preach Christ." He ran back to the farm house and told his wife he was getting rid of the animals, trading in his tractor and selling the farm. To which his wife asked, "And just why are you don't this?" The farmer said, "I looked up into the clouds while out in the field just now and saw the letters "PC." It was God telling me to go "Preach Christ." The farmer's wife just stood staring at him with her hand on her hips and said, "And did you ever think Mr. Farmer Man that it might be God telling you to go "Plant Corn."

- 1) What did the farmer do right in this parable? He went to church, he was seeking after God's will and desired to spread the word of God.
- 2) What was wrong with man's approach with the clouds?
- 3) What role would you say the farmer's wife was playing in the parable? The voice of reason... God often places those around us who can help us navigate God's direction for us.
- 4) What is this parable telling us about the will of God?

A PARABLE: A woman stood at a crossroads. The woman threw a stick in the air to tell her which way to go at the crossroads. She threw it in the air and it landed. She picked it up, threw it in the air again and it landed. She did this again and again. After throwing it several times, she was asked why. She quickly replied, "Every time I throw it, the stick points to the road to the left, and I want to take the road to the right... it looks smoother." So she kept throwing it until it pointed in the desired direction.

- 5) What do you think the "crossroads" represents? Choices, decisions, direction, the will of God in our lives.
- 6) What is wrong with "crossroads" in our lives? They are perplexing, confusing, and often we don't know which way to go... they stop us in our tracks.
- 7) Give an example of a "crossroad" in life?
- 8) What do you think the "stick" may represent? Our attempts to try to decide what is right for our lives. Perhaps it represents our seeking which way we should go in life.

- 9) What was wrong with woman's approach with the stick?
 10) What is this parable telling us about the will of God?

"How can I discover God's will for my life?" "How can I be sure of God's guidance in my decisions?" "God, what do you want me to do?" Practically all believers have asked questions like these, especially at critical decision points in their lives.

Dr. Charles Swindoll says, *"(The will of God)... will become clear as your mind is transformed by the reading of Scripture and the internal work of God's Spirit. The Lord never hides His will from us. In time, as you obey the call first to follow, your destiny will unfold before you. The difficulty will lie in keeping other concerns from diverting your attention."*

"God never hides His will from us." **Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? Have you ever felt like God was hiding His will from you? Why did you feel that way? If God wasn't hiding it from you, what was going on instead?**

We shape and order our lives by the hundreds of decisions we make every day, and most of these are so small and trivial that we make them almost automatically. For many of us, the question of God's will hardly even enters into our decisions apart from those unusual times when we realize that a specific choice is "big" could affect the rest of our lives. Because the consequences of a wrong choice at a point like this could be disastrous, we suddenly break out of our usual habits just "winging it" and begin to pursue and sometimes agonize over God's mind and will on the matter.

Is there a better approach? In this concluding study to our study on "Knowing and Doing the Will of God" we will look at *God's will as a way of life* and not as an emergency support system. We will get a perspective on our role and God's role in the realization of His best for our lives and we will look at the prerequisites and principles of making decisions in a way that will be pleasing to God and fulfilling for us.

THE PRIORITY OF GOD'S WILL

Imagine the tragedy of waking up at the end of a self-centered and meaningless life. At the brink of death you reflect upon the years of wasted time and wonder how you allowed yourself to minimize the things you knew were important by becoming a slave of routine. Our years on this planet are brief, and none of us want to waste them. But unless we regularly acknowledge God and His desires, our lives will count for little.

3 Reasons God's Will Should Be a Priority for us as Believers:

- 1. We owe it God** – Because God created us and redeemed us, God doubly owns us. We therefore have an obligation to fulfill His will as His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10) and His children (1 John 3:1). Jesus said in John 4:34, *"³⁴ My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."* Like Jesus, our spiritual food (John 4:34) should be to do the will of Him who has called us "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9; see Matthew 7:21).
- 2. We owe it ourselves** – We not only have an obligation to God but also to ourselves to discern and fulfill His will for our lives. Positively, it is only by making His will in our lives

a top priority that we will find the joy and satisfaction of a truly full and meaningful abundant life... the one Jesus actually desire to give us. Negatively, it is only in this way that we will avoid the undesirable and sometimes devastating consequences of pursuing our own will while rejecting God's. The initial pleasures of sin do not outlast the guilt and disillusionment that are its final product. God loves us and desires what is best for us; He is also omniscient and knows what is best for us. The Apostle Paul tells us in **Romans 12:2** that we are not to be... *"² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* Since His will for our lives is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2), it is in our own best interest to affirm His desires even when they are contrary to our own.

3. **We owe it to others** - A third reason for making God's will a priority in our lives is our obligation to others. We cannot choose in a vacuum. In other words, the decisions we make will inevitably affect others, sometimes in ways we could never imagine. God has entrusted each of us with the stewardship of a unique sphere of influence. In the decisions we make and in our resulting life-styles, we are called to be faithful ambassadors of Christ to the believers and unbelievers we touch. Listen to how Paul describes our obligation to others in 2 Corinthians 5:16-20, *"¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."*

THE PRACTICE OF THE WILL OF GOD

Think about it. How do we view God's will? Do we view it like an outline to follow... one that we must discover or uncover in order to do it correctly? Do we view God's will set of specifics for our lives that He has for us and if we miss it... well we have just missed out on His best for us? Do we view it as something different from these? How do you "view" God's will?

2 Ways We View God's Will:

1. **As a program** - All too often, God's will is seen in terms of a program that has been laid out before us. When it is viewed this way, the emphasis falls on developing a technique that will help us discover the details of that program as we move from one important decision to another. Should I marry this person? Should I accept this job offer? Should I move to this city?
2. **As a process** - It is far better to see the will of God *as a process rather than a program*. Viewed this way, the emphasis falls on developing an intimate relationship with God and not on following some all-purpose technique. Who we are should take priority over what we do.

The Bible concentrates on our need to cultivate intimacy with God but says little about methods of determining His will. It is not a how-to-do-it manual but rather a guidebook on who-to-know. God will not be manipulated by impatient demands and magical formulas. Instead, our paths will

be illuminated by our growing and trusting relationship with Him. Remember our key take away statement for this study:

Key Take Away Statement: “God’s will is rooted in relationship... with Him.”

Listen as the following two verses (passages) are read and respond to the questions that follow each:

Psalm 37:23-24

"The steps of a man are established by the Lord; and He delights in his way. When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand" (Psalm 37:23-24 NASB).

- 1) *Is this verse(s) saying anything at all about the will of God? If so, what?*
- 2) *Does this verse(s) support the idea that the will of God is rooted in relationship? How?*
- 3) *What does the statement, “When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong; because the Lord is the One who holds his hand,” mean? What does this have to do with our understanding of God’s will?*

Psalm 73:23-24

"Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand. With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:23-24 NASB)

- 1) *Is this verse(s) saying anything at all about the will of God? If so, what?*
- 2) *Does this verse(s) support the idea that the will of God is rooted in relationship? How?*

The biblical model of knowing God's will does center on relationship, but we must be careful to use the right earthly analogy in speaking of a relationship. In some relationships we simply want to be told what to do or we want to get approval for our predetermined plans. A better analogy is that of the joint decisions reached by a married couple who enjoy an intimate relationship of mutual concern, respect, and trust. In this case, both are involved in the decisions that are reached, and it is sometimes impossible to distinguish the parts each played in the process. Similarly, the will of God is a divine/human process, not solely divine or solely human. When we consciously acknowledge His presence and depend upon Him in the course of making decisions, the choices that are made are both ours and His. God's will, then, is not an end but a means of knowing Him better and becoming more like Christ.

2 Ways God’s Will Most Often Comes to Us:

1. **As a subtle voice** - Because God honors our choices and desires our unforced love, He does not overpower or coerce us.

"God never burglarizes the human will. He may long to come in and help, but he will never cross the picket line of our unwillingness" -James Jauncey

He speaks to us in a subtle voice, and we may be unable to hear Him when there are too many distractions in our lives. Just as we would have trouble carrying on a telephone

conversation in a room full of blaring music and chattering people, in the same way the clamoring voices around us may distract and obscure the subtle voice of God.

5 Personal Distractions to the Subtle Voice of God:

1. **Selfish desires**
2. **Lack of submission**
3. **Pride**
4. **Independence**
5. **Unforgiveness**

All of these and more may prevent us from being receptive to the quiet and subtle voice of God when He speaks.

"Does God guide? Yes, I believe that he does. Most times, I believe, he guides in subtle ways, by feeding ideas into our minds, speaking through a nagging sensation of dissatisfaction, inspiring us to choose better than we otherwise would have done, bringing to the surface hidden dangers of temptation, and perhaps by rearranging certain circumstances. . . . God's guidance will supply real help, but in ways that will not overwhelm my freedom." - Philip Yancey

2. **As a way of life** - God's will is a way to be and a way to behave. He does not unfold His plan before us like a blueprint and expect us to do nothing until we see it. His will for us is a dependent walk in which we invite Him to participate in all of our activities.

We make thousands of decisions every day, most of them unconscious (which shoe to put on first, what to wear, when to look out the window, etc.), and it would be impossible, not to say foolish, to seek God's counsel on every one of these decisions. But there are still a number of decisions that are significant enough to capture our attention in the course of each day. A deliberate acknowledgment of the presence of God during these times will carry us far in making God's will a way of life rather than a crisis experience. The fabric of our lives is woven out of the threads of such minor choices, so it is wise to form the habit of being conscious of God while making them. This habit of taking God seriously in small decisions will make major decisions less traumatic.

THE PREREQUISITES FOR GUIDANCE IN THE WILL OF GOD

We have seen that the whole matter of God's will centers around a relationship rather than a program or a technique. The character and quality of this relationship, then, is the key to how sensitive and responsive we will be to His guidance. The five C's of conversion, commitment, confession, concern, and compliance are prerequisites to guidance, because they are facets of our relationship with God.

5 Prerequisites for Guidance in the Will of God:

1. **Conversion (John 1:12-13)** – Our relationship with God begins when we become His children by trusting in Jesus. As John tells us in John 1:12-13, *"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*

Until this happens, we do not know God, we cannot please Him (Romans 8:8), and we cannot understand or do His will.

2. **Commitment (Romans 12:1-2)** – After becoming a child of God, each Christian must come to the point where he places himself on the altar before God in an act of total commitment. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, *"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."* Without this declaration of God's complete ownership, our relationship with Him will be compromising and mediocre. Since a living sacrifice tends to crawl off the altar, this initial act of commitment can only be worked out in our lives as it becomes an *ongoing process* of daily submission to His will. This involves a gradual movement from a worldly to a biblical mind-set as our relationship with God continues to deepen. Again Paul said in Romans 12:2, *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* This all-out commitment and humble dependence upon God is the basis for what the wisdom literature of the Old Testament calls "the fear of the Lord." When a person pursues this kind of relationship with Him, discernment and direction are natural byproducts. Two very important and key "will of God" verses from the Psalm are Psalm 25:12 & 14. Psalm 25:12, *"Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose."* And Psalm 25:14 says, *"The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant."*
3. **Confession (1 John 1:6-9)** – Our fellowship, communion and relationship with God is always hindered by unconfessed sin. Before the Lord we must openly acknowledge any known sins in our lives (1 John 1:9) and ask Him to illuminate areas we have overlooked (Psalm 139:23-24) so that we will continue to walk in the light. Here is how John put it in 1 John 1:6-9, *"⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
4. **Concern (Matthew 26:26-42)** – An obvious yet sometimes overlooked prerequisite to guidance in our lives is a genuine concern on our part to know God's desires for our lives regardless. We must decidedly want to know His will (John 7:17). Jesus, Himself, the one we are to be being conformed to, set the example for concern with following God's will even when we may not understand or necessarily like where it may be leading us at times. Listen to Matthew 26:26-42, *"³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.' 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 You will.' ⁴⁰ And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? ⁴¹ Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' ⁴² He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.'" At the time of His greatest trial, Jesus cried out, *"yet not as I will, but as You will," and again, "Your**

will be done" (Matthew 26:39, 42). An attitude of indifference will inhibit our knowledge of God's will. "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). Are we merely curious, or do we really want to know what God wants for us?

5. **Compliance (Psalm 40:4-8)** – The Psalmists said in Psalm 40:4-8, "*How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood. ⁵ Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done, and Your thoughts toward us; there is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, they would be too numerous to count. ⁶ Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; my ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. ⁷ Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. ⁸ I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.*'" The Psalmist said he "delighted" to do God's will... in other words he made a decisive decision that he was going to do what God said. There is little point in pursuing God's will if we are not willing to comply with it. This begins with obedience in the things He has already made known to us. How can we expect more light if we have not responded to the light we have been given? God's guidance ceases when it is unaccompanied by our acceptance. Therefore, if we are serious about knowing and doing the will of the Lord, we should examine our lives to see if we are disobeying in areas He has already made clear. Second, we must be willing to comply not only with what God has already shown us, but also with whatever He will show us. An attitude of *availability in advance* is crucial, because it is the true measure of the degree to which we really trust God as a person. God's will for us is "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2), but just as the serpent deceived the woman in the garden into thinking otherwise, we too will be tempted to think otherwise. Our natural tendency is to believe that our own plans are in our best interest, and that anything else is a threat to our happiness. This is why so many people limit their availability to God through multiple choice prayers. Instead of giving Him the whole deck, they offer up a small hand of cards (with one or two sticking out prominently) and tell Him, "Pick a card--any card." When we hold back from giving God an unqualified yes to whatever He may choose for us in the future, we are really questioning whether His character is loving and good. We somehow get the idea that we must make a choice between the misery of God's will or the happiness of our own. God is not some cosmic kill-joy who delights in taking advantage of people who are foolish enough to submit their wills to His. The one who loved us enough to sacrifice His Son to save us when we were His enemies (Romans 5:8-10) is certainly worthy of our trust now that we are His children. "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32). We don't need to "surrender to God's will" as though we were resigning ourselves to a somber and joyless existence. Instead, we can say with David, "*I delight to do Your will, O my God*" (Psalm 40:8), knowing that He loves us enough to desire a destiny for us that is beyond our highest hopes. God is causing "all things to work together for good" (Romans 8:28) in the lives of His children, even though the things that happen sometimes do not seem best at the moment (e.g., Joseph and Job).

THE PRINCIPLES OF GUIDANCE TOWARD THE WILL OF GOD

The set of principles that follows can assist us in the process of making tough decisions, but remember that they are not step-by-step formulas.

7 Principles That May Guide Us Toward the Will of God:

1. **Communication: What do the Scripture say?** – If we want to know and experience God's direction, we must communicate with Him through prayer and Scripture. Many Christians are concerned about knowing the will of God, but how many spend even five minutes a day asking God for His wisdom and direction? Prayer should envelop the whole process of guidance. Communication with God also involves a regular time of reading the Bible with an open heart and mind to hear God's Word for our lives. The Bible is the central revelation for all believers, and its precepts and principles clearly give us the answers to most questions about the will of God in decision-making situations. The Scriptures were provided not only to teach us the way of salvation, but also to guide us in the way we should live after becoming God's children. Psalm 119:105 says, *"Thy word (God's Word) is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."* God designed His Word to equip us to accomplish "every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17), that is, to fulfill His purposes for our lives. God clearly reveals His moral will in the positive and negative commands of the Bible, and these precepts by themselves can guide us through the majority of the decisions we will ever make. In addition, the Bible offers a multitude of general principles that can be effectively applied to very specific circumstances. There is no need for us to seek guidance in areas that have been expressly commanded or forbidden in Scripture. A believer does not need to wrestle, for example, over whether to marry an unbeliever, since the answer is already in the Bible. We can be sure that *God will never lead us to do anything that is contrary to His Word*. Since the Bible is our primary source of guidance, we owe it to ourselves to become so familiar with its contents that its precepts and principles become ingrained in our patterns of thought. This process of renewing our minds with the Word takes time and effort, but there is no other way to "prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). If we do not program our minds on a daily basis with Scripture, we will find our minds programmed by default with the temporal value system of the world, and our lives will soon reflect those values.
2. **Conscience: How does this decision affect my love for God and others?** - This is the ethical dimension of decision making; an option may appear to be sound on the intellectual level, but it may be unsound on the moral level. We cannot avoid the matrix of personal relationships in the decisions we make. Paul stressed the importance of living with a clear conscience. He said in Acts 24:16, *"I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men."* (See also Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:3). God has implanted within us an intuitive sense of right and wrong. As we grow in Him, our conscience becomes more sensitive, more attuned to His desires. When we reject the input of our conscience, the proper response is to confess it (1 John 1:9), not to cover it. A failure to respond in this way will place us under a burden of guilt and take the joy out of our lives. Even worse, we can sear our conscience (1 Timothy 4:2) and become callused by repeatedly rejecting its warnings. *"My will, and not Thine be done," turned paradise into a desert. "Not my will, but Thine be done," turned the desert into paradise, and made Gethsemane the gate of heaven.— Edmond Dehault de Pressensé*
3. **Common Sense: Does this decision reflect good judgment?** - A Christian may be committed to the Lord, willing to comply with wherever God leads him, communicating with Him in prayer and in the Word, and enjoying a clear conscience. Even so, he still may not know which option to choose in a specific situation. It is within this framework that common sense should play an important role in the choices we make (outside this

framework, common sense may simply feed the me-first mentality). God was not erratic or capricious in the way He designed the universe, and He is not haphazard in His design for the lives of His children. He gave us minds and He wants us to use them to evaluate the consequences of our actions. The Scriptures tell us to "think so as to have sound judgment" (Romans 8:3). We should be level-headed and not rash in the way we evaluate our gifts and opportunities. Paul, for example, stayed where there were open doors (Ephesus) and left when his life was threatened. However, common sense has its limitations and it should never be our only criterion for discerning God's guidance. There are times when He leads people do things that are contrary to our concept of good judgment. We are often too nearsighted to see the goal He has in mind. Because we see such a small part of the puzzle, we should always be willing to submit our thoughts and plans to His. Proverbs 16:9 says, *"The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."* And the God speaks through the Prophet Isaiah to tell us in Isaiah 55:9, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

4. **Circumstances: How does my state of affairs relate to this decision?** - God, who "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11), is in sovereign control of the circumstances of our lives. He causes *"all things to work together for good" to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.*" (Romans 8:28). Notice the word "together." In isolation, some of the things that happen to us may not seem so beneficial, but God uses them in combination for our good. Similarly, He does not allow our circumstances and temptations to overwhelm us without offering us the grace to endure (2 Corinthians 10:13). Because of His providential care and involvement in the details of our lives, we should be sensitive to the situations in which we find ourselves. Factors like finances, aptitude, education, experience, family, spiritual gifts, and occupation all play a part in God's direction. For instance, if a Christian who is considering a job possibility realizes that her ability, education, and experience do not at all match the qualifications, she should be very hesitant to take another step even if the job opens up. God often works by opening and closing doors as we come to them, but we should be careful not to make this our primary means of guidance. Just because a door is open does not mean that we should go through it. The "throwing out the fleece" approach is rarely valid. It is easy to misread circumstances and interpret them in ways that flatter our preconceived plans.

A couple of great quotes concerning the will of God: What is each saying?

When David Livingstone was asked if he didn't fear that going into Africa was too difficult and too dangerous, he answered,

"I am immortal until the will of God for me is accomplished." -David Livingstone

"I had rather be in the heart of Africa in the will of God than on the throne of England out of the will of God." -David Livingstone

If it were in the will of God, I'd plant an oak tree today, even if Christ were coming tomorrow.--Martin Luther

5. **Counsel: What do wise and godly friends say about this decision?** – Listen to Proverbs 11:14, *"Where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is*

victory." And Proverbs 12:15 say, *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel."* Proverbs 15:22 says, *"Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed."* The Bible is full of examples of people who profited by heeding wise counsel and of people who suffered by ignoring it. We are called to exercise wisdom in *"teaching and admonishing one another"* (Colossians 3:16), and wise counsel involves both. If a decision has significant implications, we should not limit ourselves to our own judgment, but we should also seek the perspective of mature and godly people who have wisdom and experience. Good counsel is both instructive and corrective, and requires frankness, not flattery. Remember, however, that the counsel available in the precepts and principles of Scripture must always be the first and foremost influence in the choices we make. Even the wisest of people are finite and biased, and we must avoid the pitfall of uncritically accepting the advice we receive as if it were a word from the Lord. Ultimately, we alone are responsible for the decisions we make.

6. **Complusion: What are my own desires?** - In Romans 8:14 Paul wrote that *"all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."* In Philippians 2:13, he said that *"it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* One of the ways God works in us is to give us the desire to do the things that are pleasing to Him. A compelling desire to move in a specific direction or a burden to minister to certain people may be coming directly from God as a means of guidance. But we should bear in mind that God never gives us desires that are contrary to the commandments and counsel of His Word. Burdens and desires can be a significant input in our decisions as long as they are evaluated in the larger context of communication (prayer and Scripture), conscience, common sense, circumstances, and counsel. Otherwise, we may become victims of desires and inclinations that are not from God.
7. **Contentment and Confirmation: Do I have a sense of peace and assurance about this decision?** - Philippians 4:6-7 tells us that we are to turn our anxieties into peace by offering our problems and needs up to the Lord. God wants us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). If a decision gives us a sense of doubt, distress, or confusion, something is wrong because it is not accompanied by the peace of God. Paul, for example, had an open door for ministry in Troas, but because he had no rest in his spirit, he went instead to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). By itself, peace is a supplemental, not a sufficient principle of guidance. But if a particular option passes the test of the other principles and fails to provide peace, the wisest course of action is to wait on the Lord (if the decision can be deferred) and allow Him to provide further input. The option may be right, but the timing may be wrong.

ANSWERING SOME MISCONCEPTIONS REGARDING GOD'S WILL

There are many misconceptions and poor-conceptions surrounding our understanding of the will of God. The greatest danger of these misconceptions is their ability to obscure, distract and mislead. They may keep us from really enjoying the abundant life and relationship God so desires for us to walk in with Him. These things may in fact cause us to really miss God and misjudge God.

8 Misconception Regarding God's Will and How God Works:

1. **I must pray about each decision I make** - Some decisions follow logically from others, and do not need to be prayed about. If you decide to go to college, you do not need to ask

God whether you should attend classes and do the required work. Many other decisions, like what clothes to wear and how to behave in different social situations, are matters of common sense.

2. **God's will is often contrary to human reason** - While it is true that God's thoughts are much higher than our own, this does not mean that His will for our lives is erratic and peculiar. He gave us a rational capacity and wants us to use our minds in the decisions we make. It is our responsibility to submit our thinking to the truths of Scripture and the illumination of the Spirit so that we will have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). God may direct a believer to do something that does not seem to make the best sense, but this is exceptional, not usually normative.
3. **To submit to God's will, I must give up my happiness** - God is not a majestic monster who wants to make us miserable. His will for us is in fact the only pathway to freedom, fulfillment, and joy (Psalm 37:4; John 15:11). He loves us and offers an abundant life to those who walk in His ways (John 10:10).
4. **If I follow God's will, my problems are over** – A quick reading of the book of Acts makes it clear that an abundant life does not mean a trouble-free life. Obedience to God prevents and corrects many problems, but does not exempt a believer from trials and temptations. Nor is the abundant life the American dream; an obedient Christian may or may not be successful in the eyes of men. God's standard of success is different from that of the world, and we cannot serve both.
5. **If I stray too far from God's will, He won't be able to use me again** - God does not exempt us from the consequences and scars of sin, but this does not mean that He puts us on the shelf. When we acknowledge our sins He forgives and cleanses us (Psalm 51:1-13; 1 John 1:9) so that we can be used again in His service. Some of the heroes of Hebrews 11 were also great sinners.
6. **If I commit my life to God, He will want me to go to seminary** - God's best for a person is not always career ministry. For some it is, but most Christians are called to glorify Him in the context of "secular" employment. It would be just as wrong for them to go into professional ministry as it would be for those who are called into this form of ministry to leave it. There is no such thing as a part-time Christian, and we can honor Him in whatever context we are placed (1 Corinthians 10:31).
7. **I must have special confirmation before making important decisions** - If we observe the prerequisites and principles of guidance discussed in the earlier reflections in this study, we can be confident that God will not reward our openness and obedience by clouding the choices. We may not always have the subjective confirmation of peace about decisions that cannot be postponed, but this need not freeze us in our tracks. As we walk in fellowship with God, we can make the necessary decisions without anxiety.
8. **God wants me to respond to every need** - God can lead us by bringing us into direct contact with certain needs, but not every cry for help is a call from God. We can assume more burdens than we can carry and spread ourselves so thin that we become ineffective. We must be careful not to let the good become the enemy of the best. As Kenneth Boa said, "It is better to do a few things well than to multiply mediocrity."