

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, June 3, 2015 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

KNOWING AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD **How Does God Make His Will Known? – Part 2** *Various Scripture*

As we said last week, a lot has been written and said about knowing and doing the will of God. May Christian leaders, teachers, preacher and theologians have shared their thoughts and sometimes even their frustration with knowing God's will even in their own personal Last time we were together we shared a quote not from a Christian theologian or preacher, but rather from the real life Maria von Trapp of "The Sound of Music" fame, Maria von Trapp;

"It will be very interesting one day to follow the pattern of our life as it is spread out like a beautiful tapestry. As long as we live here we see only the reverse side of the weaving, and very often the pattern, with its threads running wildly, doesn't seem to make sense. Some day, however, we shall understand. In looking back over the years we can discover how a red thread goes through the pattern of our life: the Will of God." – Maria Agusta von Trapp

I want to share another quote this week, that once again comes not from a Christian teacher, preacher or theologians, but rather from a former president of the United States... one that I believe may be the greatest president this country has ever known, Abraham Lincoln. This quote comes from His presidency during the throws of the Civil War... at a time when He was trying to hold this country together, and lead this nation through great peril as brother was killing brother... truly one of the bloodiest periods in our nation's history. Here is President Abraham Lincoln talking about the "will of God" in the midst of the Civil War;

"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both 'may' be, and one 'must' be, wrong. God cannot be 'for' and 'against' the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party - and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaption to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true - that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By His mere great power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either 'saved' or 'destroyed' the Union without human contest. Yet the contest began, And, having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds." — Abraham Lincoln

- (1) What is this quote saying about God's will?

- (2) Do you agree or disagree with this quote/statement? Why or why not?
 (3) How might this quote help you in knowing and doing God's will?

Breaking Down the Abraham Lincoln Quote:

"The will of God prevails." – God's purpose and God's plan will not be thwarted... not by man, or man's designs. His will always triumphs, succeeds, win out. Even when the worst thing happens God is still on His throne, still in charge, and never caught off guard.

"In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both 'may' be, and one 'must' be, wrong." - Just because some claim God as being "on their side" or being "in the will of God" doesn't necessarily make it so. There have been many wrongs done in the name of the "will of God." Saying it, doesn't make it so. God's will, will not contradict the teachings of His Word.

"God cannot be 'for' and 'against' the same thing at the same time." - Indeed He isn't. How many travesties have been committed and atrocities propagated in the name of Christianity, the church and God?

"In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party - and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaption to effect His purpose." – The Prophet Isaiah records the very words of God in Isaiah 55:8-9, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.'" I think that God had a higher purpose than the war that was engulfing this country at that time and the enormous life of loss and property that was devastating this nation. Parties that were claiming God's blessing and His siding with them were perhaps like political factions today that are really more after power, control and wealth than any more noble ideal that set forth in "word only."

"I am almost ready to say that this is probably true - that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet." – God had a plan that was higher, nobler, more righteous, than any could imagine. His ways, truly are higher than our ways!

Let's briefly re-state these three things that we have stated in regard to our study, "Knowing and Doing the Will of God." These three statements have been very foundational to our study of our own discovery of God's will... reminders as we dig deeper into God's will.

3 Things to Remember About God's Will:

1. Even when our heart is right and our motives pure, the will of God is not always set forth in a crystal clear manner
2. God's will for your life is more concerned with how you love and live each day, than with what job you take, where you choose to live, or what house or car to buy
3. God's will is rooted in relationship... with Him

Our key take away statement for our study is an important reminder not only what God's will is truly about, but also what must ground our understanding of His will.

Key Take Away Statement: "***God's will is rooted in relationship... with Him.***"

WHAT GOD'S WILL ISN'T?

Again, in one of our key passages for our study the Apostle Paul wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these words in **Ephesians 5:17, “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”** It's as if Paul is telling us that we can be foolish about God's will... what it is and what it isn't. That is exactly what he is telling us. This has been our experience in a number of ways. There is an erroneous way that God's will is often looked at by some believers. We might call these, like Paul, the “foolish” ways of viewing God's will.

Some “Foolish” Ways of Looking at God’s Will:

1. **Looking for God's will as if it were buried treasure** – It is as if in approaching God's will we are assuming God's will is something that is lost, therefore we must try to find it! Why else do we act as if and say that we have to try so hard to find it? We were looking for God's will as if it were buried treasure. But that doesn't really make sense. Wouldn't God want us to know His will? Why would He hide it from us? It is as if we were assuming God is some kind of Cosmic Easter Bunny who hides the eggs and occasionally says, “You're getting warmer.” Sometimes we stumble onto them, but we never know whether we've found them all or not. This is not God's will... but often how we treat it.
2. **Looking for God's will to be revealed in a dramatic experience or sudden revelation** – Many well-meaning and sincere Christians assume God's will or must be revealed in a dramatic experience or sudden revelation. A voice that says “Go on the Mexico trip this summer” or “Ask Sarah to marry you.” We look for some sensational happening or great sign in the sky that will tell us this or that is God's will. I don't ever want to limit how God speaks to us, and certainly He can speak any way He chooses to. He might write his will for you across the sky. He is certainly more than able to do that if He wants, but in my experience that is not usually the way God chooses to communicate, and most likely you will not find God's will. Most likely you will waste a lot of time staring at the stars to tell you and not time really seeking out God's will for your life and you will miss it altogether.
3. **Looking at God's will as something to be afraid of** - Some think of God's will as something to be afraid of. Someone might say, “I am so afraid that God is going to send me to the back side of Africa if I surrender myself to His will!” Another might say, “I hate spiders and humidity so I just know God's going to send me to some equatorial jungle in South America.” That is not how God's will for our lives works, and is an extremely poor way doctrinally and theologically to view our God, who loves you and only wants what is best for your life. He is not some Cosmic Killjoy sitting around trying to figure out what would make your life most miserable and that is what He will tell you to do. That is foolish!
4. **Looking at God's will as noting but circumstances** – Some think of God's will as nothing but circumstances or the happenstances of our life. “I've been offered a job there, so it must be God's will.” Or, “He asked me out, so it must be God's will,” or “The bank approved my loan application so it must be God's will.” That actually is a very “fatalistic” view of God and His will and also extremely hard-hearted and uncompassionate. It is if to say to one who has just tragically lost a loved one, “Well, that was just God's will!” or to someone whose child was just been diagnosed with an incurable disease, “Well, it must be God's will!” God doesn't work that way! As someone has said “Don't blame God for human irresponsibility!”

In other words, life circumstances are often not controlled by God, but rather are the product of a fallen world and the consequences of sins entrance into it. God's will cannot be relegated to just happenstance or consequences.

WHAT GOD'S WILL IS?

Is God's will mainly about lots of personal details, including school, job, who to date or marry, where to live, etc.? Or is it about something more? I think the Bible gives some clear answers. Let's look at what we can know about God's will based on Scripture (the Bible).

11 Facts About God's Will Based on God's Word:

1. **God's primary will for lost people is that they turn to Christ and be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:3-4)** – Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:9, “⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” And Paul, likewise says in 1 Timothy 2:3-4, “³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”
2. **Once we're saved, God has a further will for our lives (Ephesians 2:8-10, Mark 3:31-35, 1 John 2:17)** - There are certain things he wants us to do and not do—He has actually laid out for us certain good works to do to His glory as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10, “⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God's will is something for us to do, not just to believe or affirm. Jesus said in Mark 3:31-35, “³¹Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³²A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ ³³‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. ³⁴Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!'³⁵ Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.’” And later we read in 1 John 2:17, “¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”
3. **Because God loves us, his will for us is in our best interests (Matthew 16:26, Matthew 25:21, 1 Corinthians 7:35** - Where God wants us is the very best place to be, the only safe place. So you're far better off in that equatorial jungle inside of God's will, than in the safest imaginable location outside of God's will. What is to God's glory is also for our good or as Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, “²⁶What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” I love Matthew 25:21, “²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’” As Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 7:35, “³⁵I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.” In other words we must always know that God has our best interest at heart. If God wants you in that jungle, you wouldn't be happy anywhere else!
4. **God wants us to know his will (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, Psalm 119:105)** – God is not cruel. Because he loves us he gives us his Word, the Road Map, so we don't have to grope in

darkness. I love how Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, “⁹ However, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’— the things God has prepared for those who love him—¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” Remember the Psalmists words in Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

5. **God's will is that we be sexually pure (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, 1 Corinthians 6:18)** - As Paul says it in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, “³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control your own body^[a] in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.^[b] The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” This extends to fleeing from temptation. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, “¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.” It also includes keeping our bodies from impurity. It also includes keeping our minds pure (Matthew 15:19-20; Matthew 5:28; Proverbs 4:23; Psalms 119:37; Philippians 4:8).
6. **God says those who don't know his will are unwise, and it is God's will that we be filled with and controlled by his Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-18)** – Listen to this quote from pastor, preacher and author of several popular Christian books, **Francis Chan**, “It is easy to use the phrase 'God's will for my life' as an excuse for inaction or even disobedience. ... My hope is that instead of searching for 'God's will for my life' each of us would learn to seek hard after 'the Spirit's leading in my life today.' May we learn to pray for an open and willing heart, to surrender to the Spirit's leading with that friend, child, spouse, circumstance, or decision in our lives right now.” Here is Paul's words again in Ephesians 5:17-18 that we have been looking at, “¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” James 1:5 says we don't have wisdom because we don't ask for it—so prayer is critical in seeking and living the will of God. When we are controlled by the Spirit, we show it in certain ways. We will not commit the acts of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-21), but will produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
7. **When in God's will, we'll participate in worshipping the Lord, teaching each other, giving thanks to God and serving others (Ephesians 5:17-33) -**
8. **God's will is that we live in submission to God-given authority to a certain extent (1 Peter 2:13-15)** – Listen to 1 Peter 2:13-15, “¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.” Wow! We submit to God-given authority so that others may see our willingness to humble ourselves as servants.
9. **It also means we recognize God as our highest authority and put obedience to him above obedience to men (Acts 4:18-20)** - Listen to Acts 4:18-20, “¹⁸ Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’” Submit to man's God given authority over you unless it goes against God. Its God first, man second!

10. Sometimes God's will is that we go through difficult times (1 Peter 3:17, 1 Peter 4:19) –

This is a very interesting verse in 1 Peter 3:17 where Peter writes, “¹⁷For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” What is he saying? That sometimes God's will is that we go through difficult times even suffering, to accomplish his purpose in us and through us. Peter goes on to say a little later in his letter that for this reason we should not be surprised by suffering. Listen to 1 Peter 4:19, “¹⁹So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

11. The Bible is the revealed will of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Colossians 3:16) -

If you want to live in his will, then “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” as Paul says in Colossians 3:16, “¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” Fill your heart and mind with the Word of God, trust in his empowerment to obey Him, and confess and repent when you disobey and fail. If you do this, you will be living in the will of God. God's Word is God's inspired and revealed will of God for you as Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Summarizing Statement:

“The will of God is not wrapped up in the details of what we do, but the character of who we are in relationship to God through Jesus Christ.”

It is not just the large choices, but the daily small choices that cumulatively build us into who God wants (wills) us to be. God cares about the little things and his will can include details, but these are secondary. What is primary is that we choose to follow his clear direction in spiritual and moral arenas. Then all the details fall into place from there.

A Good Verse to Follow: Psalm 37:4

“Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart”

Augustine said, “Love God and do as you please.” Because if you're really loving God, you want to do what pleases Him.

HOW DO I FIND GOD'S WILL?

When I was a young man, I seemed to continually wrestle with knowing God's will for my life. I wanted more than anything to follow His plan. Interestingly, now that I'm “older” I still wrestle with doing His will in my life. I have come to learn that this is not just something that a young person does early in life; it is a lifelong pursuit in order to stay in the exact center of His plan. So, then, how can we know God's plan for our lives? Over the past thirty years that I have been in ministry, I have discovered eight vital keys to knowing God's will. Here they are

8 Vital Keys to Finding God's Will:

1. **Walk with God** - For starters, if you are interested in knowing God's plan for your life, then you must learn to walk with God. You need to develop a relationship with Him. Remember we said that "*God's will is rooted in relationship... with Him.*" Christianity is all about relationship rather than just religion. And so you must cultivate your relationship with God. You must seek to know Him and not just seek to know about Him. You will cultivate that relationship best by spending time in His Word, taking time for prayer, and taking every opportunity you can to be involved in church and small group Bible study opportunities. When you seek these disciplines in your life, God will begin the first steps to revealing His plan to you. ***Proverbs 3:5-6 "5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."***
2. **Surrender your will to God's** - Many times when we say we are seeking God's will, what we are really wanting to say to God is this: "OK, God, here's what I'm planning to do. Now I need you to rubber stamp this, all right?" I must tell you that this is not really effective in finding His true will. Before God will begin to reveal His will to you, you must be committed to doing whatever it is that He desires for you to do. God will likely be slow to show you His plan if He knows you will likely not do that plan anyway. ***Romans 12:1-2, "1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*** Jesus was willing to die for us, so shouldn't we be willing to live for Him? When we surrender to Him, that is when He really begins to direct our steps.
3. **Obey what you already know to be God's Will** - Many people seem to want to know what God's plan is for their lives, but they overlook the fact that 98% of His will is already delineated carefully through His Word. God is very clear about many, many aspects of His will. For instance, it is clearly His plan that we abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3). If we do not obey the things that God has shown us clearly to be His will, why would we think He would reveal any further information regarding His plan for our lives? Obedience is an important first step.
4. **Seek godly input** - One key component to finding God's will is to seek the input of godly advisors in your life. If you don't currently have 3-4 godly mentors, then I would highly recommend that you seek them out right away. Think of it this way: you should understand that you are basically a composite of the five people you spend the most time with. So, then, it is vital that you choose those five people well. If you choose to surround yourself with godly advisors, they will be instrumental in helping you discern God's plan for your life. But if you surround yourself with people who are far from God, your hope of finding His best for your life will be greatly diminished. ***Proverbs 11:14, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety."*** The church is designed to help you greatly with this. I would encourage you to be in church every single time the doors are opened. The more you involve yourself with a community of believers, the greater your chances will be of finding godly men and women who can help you discern God's will.
5. **Pay attention to how God has wired you** - God has created you to fulfill a specific role in this world. There is no one else who can achieve completely what God has purposely created you to do. The Apostle Peter gives us this admonition in ***1 Peter 4:10 "As each one has***

received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

God has gifted every one of us to perform a special mission for which we alone were created. How amazing is that? Wow! So, when you seek to discover God's will for your life, pay attention to how He has gifted you. His plan for you will always be directly related to the gifts that He has bestowed upon you. The great news is that you will automatically be good at whatever it is that He has called you to do!

6. **Listen to God's Spirit** - I experienced a major turning point in my own prayer life when I learned simply to shut up while I was praying. That may sound odd to you, and it seemed odd to me at first. You see, I used to do all the talking when I prayed to God. But then, several years ago, I read Bill Hybel's book, **Too Busy Not to Pray**. That book completely changed the way I approached God through prayer. Since reading that book, I have added a significant component to my prayer life: listening. I take time to listen to what God might have to say to me. Practically, the way I go about this is to bring a notepad with me when I sit down to pray. Then I write out what God is saying to me. As I meditate on this you will be amazed at what God is telling you. His voice will become very clear to you. Often, God will start flooding my heart with ideas and information regarding one or more of those questions. I write as fast as I can as He speaks to my heart. What a glorious experience that is to sense His Spirit on me, guiding my thoughts and words. Through experiences like this, He has shown me many times with great clarity what His will is for my life. I long for those experiences when He speaks to me like that. Those times are truly life changing. **John 10:27**
My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.
7. **Listen to your heart** - In addition to listening to the Spirit, I also recommend listening to your heart. To understand my point here, consider the following passage, **Psalms 37:4-5** "**4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.**" (NKJV) I love this passage, because it shows me that, when I am walking with the Lord, He will actually let me do many really cool things that I actually love to do! When you are close to Him, He actually begins to shape your desires so that you desire the things that He has already called you to do. So then, His plan actually becomes a super-exciting adventure. I always have the most fun in life when I am doing God's will. And that is because He shapes my "wanter" to want to do the things for which He has actually created me.
8. **Take a look at your circumstances** - God often clearly demonstrates His plan for our lives by lining up circumstances in obvious ways. And He also shows us what His will is NOT for us to do in that same way. It is not His will for you to take the job that is not offered to you. If you are 5' 6" tall and weigh 125 lbs., it is not likely that God has created you to play professional football. Over the years, I have discovered that God is pretty good at opening and closing doors. He even did that for the Apostle Paul and his entourage in Acts. Take a look at this passage, **Acts 16:6-10** "**6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.**" So, even Paul had to face closed doors in his ministry. God often uses closed doors to show us clearly what He does NOT want us to do. And He also uses open doors at times to show us

what He DOES want us to do. Of course, this does not mean that every open door is definitely God's plan, but it does help to give you some basic direction.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

The next time you begin to ponder God's plan for your life, I would encourage you to mull over the above eight keys. Use these principles to help you to hone in on His plan... HIS WILL. And when you seek His will earnestly, you will find it! Dr. Charles Swindoll says, "*Your call 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.*" It may be that our biggest problems in knowing and doing God's will is indeed the distractions and other things that divert our attention and keep us from seeing what God is making clear. Knowing and doing the will of God may not be as difficult as we have made it after all. It is remarkable clear. It is our vision and ability to see that needs to be sharpened.