

HOW CAN I KNOW GOD'S WILL? Ephesians 5:15-17

Today, we come to the last part of our series on “More Big Questions About God, the Bible and Life”. We’re going to answer the question: How can I know God’s will? How can I know what God wants me to do with my life?

Life is a series of choices and decisions. Your success in life is largely determined by your decisions. You either make good decisions or you make bad ones. Because you’re a human being the possibility for failure in your decisions is quite high. We’ve all made a lot of real bad and foolish decisions. Some of you are probably facing some major decisions of your life. Questions about your career or your marriage or your future or your health and you don’t know what to do. You ask questions like, “Do I hold on or do I let go? Do I get in or do I get out? Should I make a move or should I stay still? Do I get married or do I not? Do I get unmarried or do I not? These are real issues and even after we make decisions, even with our prayer and asking God for help, a lot of times we second guess ourselves and torture ourselves after we’ve made the decision with, Did I do the right thing?

The Bible says that God wants you to know His will. He’s not playing games with you. He’s not playing cat and mouse, hide and seek, guess what’s behind door number three kind of thing. God wants you to know His will. *“Be very careful then how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”* (Eph. 5:15-17) God wants you to understand His will. He wants you to understand His purpose and His plan for your life.

You see, life is a journey and because of that journey God has given us three things. First, He’s given us a roadmap, that’s the Bible. Then He’s given us a

compass which is our conscience, which kind of guides us along. Then He's given us a personal guide which is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. He will actually guide you. When you're lost in a forest, it helps not to just have a map and a compass but it helps to have a personal guide who's been there. God says, "I'll help you." God wants to guide you more than you even want to be guided.

So what's the problem? You say, "I want God to guide me but I still get confused. I don't know what to do." Often the problem is we're looking for the wrong thing.

I want us to look at two questions: What is God's will? And How do I find it?

WHAT IS GOD'S WILL?

First, what is it not?

1. It's not a feeling.

This is the mystical approach to God's will and it appeals to all you right-brain people. You're out there looking for a feeling, looking for a sensation, looking for that ocean of emotion, that quiver in your liver. You may be looking for a supernatural sign. You want God to just kind of touch your emotions, pull that heartstring so you'll know exactly what to do.

The problem of course is that feelings are highly, *highly* unreliable. If you always just do what you feel like in life, you'll never accomplish anything in life. Feelings will guide you in the wrong way. Feelings can come from fatigue, from an event you've just experienced, something you read, something you saw, something you listened to, all kinds of stuff like that. They're very unreliable. You say, "But it feels right," but that doesn't mean that it is right. Feelings lie. The Bible says so. **Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things."** That means our hearts even play tricks on us. If I had listened to my feelings, I would never have married Bel. The day before our wedding, my feelings said, "Stop!" It was fear of the unknown. I was feeling afraid!

You don't rely on your feelings when you're trying to figure out God's plan for your life.

2. It's not a formula.

This is the mechanical approach to God's will and this appeals to all you left-brain people. You're so logical and rational. You've got it all figured out. You want to look for a formula. You want a recipe. The truth is, most books written on how to know God's will are this second kind of formula approach – Do this/do that. Presto and you've got a decision. Follow these 100 steps and you're guaranteed results.

But it doesn't work that way. We think it works that way because we've been conditioned by TV. TV's conditioned us that every problem can be solved in 60 minutes with dozens of commercials. So, we want instant results. We want everything to be easy. We want it all to be in a simple formula so it will instantly change my life.

One problem with the formula approach is that we think we've missed God's will when things are not working out right. We think "God has this plan and yet I blew it ten years ago. I made this really stupid decision. I didn't do the right thing. I'm paying for it still. For the rest of my life I must settle for second best because of the dumb decision I made 10 years ago."

You know what, it's not biblical. Not one place in the Bible do you see the phrase "second best." My Bible tells me that great believers often made enormous mistakes, major mistakes. And it doesn't say that God gave up on them. The Bible says that God doesn't give second bests. He does give second chances. Aren't you grateful for that? I am. There's nothing in the Bible about second best. If you think you married the wrong person, stop. That person is not second best. If you're married to that person, He or she is God's best for you! Amen? No second bests. But there's a lot in the Bible about second chances.

So God's will is not a feeling and God's will is not a formula. What is God's will then?

3. It is fellowship.

In other words, it is friendship and relationship with God. God says, "I want you to develop a relationship with Me." **1 Corinthians 1:9** "*God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" God wants to fellowship with you, to have a relationship with you, to be your friend.

There is very little in the Bible about the technique of knowing God's will. Very little. But there are hundreds and hundreds of verses that talk about developing a loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Why? Because that's the issue. God's will is a relationship. When you've got that down, the closer you get to Christ, the more intimate, the better you get to know Him, the less problem you're going to have with knowing God's will for your life.

When I first got married to Bel, I was at a loss as to what she wanted. That's why there was a lot of turmoil in our relationship in the first years of our marriage. But after 16 years of marriage and three kids, when she looks at me in a certain way, I immediately know what she wants. It's not what you think.

The key is, focus on God not guidance. The better you get to know Him, the less confusion you're going to have about what His will is. Get to know God and everything else becomes secondary.

So, God's will is having close fellowship with him.

Now, how do I know God's will? Let me share with you some principles from God's word.

If I want to know God's will, I must ...

1. ADMIT THAT I NEED GUIDANCE

Sometimes this is tough because we don't like to admit it when we're confused. Men especially don't like to do this. It is not in our nature to stop and

ask directions. The GPS was invented for men. That's why, when it comes to knowing God's will, it takes some real courage to admit it.

Psalm 25:9 *"He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."*

If you're arrogant, if you're conceited, if you think you've got it all figured out God's going to say, "Be my guest. Go for it!" But you'll find out sooner or later that you messed up. The godly thing to do is to pray about any decision you're going to make. Be it something you'll buy, going on vacation, career decisions, if you're single, going on a date, enrolling in a course. Admit you need guidance and bring your concerns to God.

2. ASK

James 1:5-6 *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."*

Notice in this verse, there are two keys to knowing God's wisdom. First you've got to ask the right person which is God. You don't ask your manicurist, your Uber driver, or just any person. You ask the right person, God. Then you ask with the right attitude – expecting God to answer. Have you ever asked God to lead you but you didn't really expect Him to? Sure you have. That's why you never got anything from it. You must ask expecting an answer. God honors faith. God promises wisdom.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is simply the ability to make decisions the way God would. Admit that I need guidance, Ask in faith for direction.

3. LISTEN FOR GOD'S RESPONSE

This is where a lot of us get off track. The honest truth is we're too busy to listen for God's response. We don't have the time. So we ask, then we rush right

in to whatever we were going to do in the first place and don't take time to hear what God might want to say to us.

We have to take the time to tune in and to listen because God is speaking. **Job 33:14** *“For God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it.”* The question is “How do I understand it? How do I tune in so that I can hear God's voice?”

In this room there are radio waves filling this room. You and I can't hear them because we're not a radio. It takes a radio to do that.

God has designed you and I to be able to tune into and hear His voice. Anything else in all creation cannot tune into God's voice like you and I can tune in and hear what He has to say. We were designed to hear messages from God.

How do you tune in? What are the channels that God uses? There are lots of them, but let me remind you of four of them. **These are the 4 ways God speaks to us:**

1. The primary way God speaks to us is through **the Bible**. The Bible is like your GPS or your smartphone. You mount this on your dashboard so you don't get lost. The same way with the Bible, you carry this with you through life so it shows you the next step to take – the right step to take.

That is why you need to read this book every day. Give it some undivided attention for ten to fifteen minutes of your day. If you're not having a daily devotion time of reading the Bible it's like you're taking the telephone connection with God off the hook and there's a busy signal all the time. This is very true in many of our lives. We do have this busy signal going. We have to keep this constant connection because God's will is found in God's word. It is 100% reliable. Unlike some of the other sources we're going to talk about that are not, this is 100% reliable. Take ten minutes each day, read through it systematically. I

suggest you read a little bit and go through one book at a time – books of the New Testament first.

Now, I know we're all busy all the time. But modern technology can be our helper. You can listen to a devotion and the Bible while driving to work or driving home. On my phone I have the **Our Daily Bread app**. It has an audio. So, I click it and listen while I drive. Or, I go to an app called **Bible.is**. It's similar to YouVersion but the audio is dramatized. So, you hear the voices of different characters and sounds of birds, water, whatever. It's very interesting. It's like listening to the radio and so you can imagine the scenes. Let me share an example. (Luke 24). Now, there's a video version, too. But I don't recommend that while you're driving. And please do all these touching on your phone before you start driving. Or maybe while you're in traffic.

But, of course, nothing beats having a quiet, solitary time with God. Make it a part of your daily schedule. Make listening while driving a supplement to that.

2. Another way God speaks to us is through **other people**. Like your home group leaders or teachers or preachers. Or anyone who is spiritually mature. Have you ever had the experience when someone is teaching or preaching and it seems like that person is talking to you or singling you out? And you wonder whether that person actually knows your circumstances or your secrets? Sometimes you feel like the message was tailored just for you. That's God speaking through that person. Because God knows what's going on in your life and wants to guide you.

I never shared this with anyone before in this church except with my wife but God spoke to me loud and clear through a preacher two years ago. That was the time when our church was going through a turmoil. The pressure was so heavy on me. I had many questions and doubts and fears and all I wanted to do was to give up and walk away. At the time it was a holiday and so I decided for my family to

just take a leave that Sunday. We went to New York. In my mind, when I come back, I'll hand in my resignation.

On Sunday, we attended Brooklyn Tabernacle. The preacher, Jim Cymbala, preached on Col. 4:17. It says, "Tell Archippus: 'See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.'" That hit me hard. Through Cymbala, God was just telling me to keep on, to persevere, to keep on doing ministry whatever the cost. Did Cymbala know my circumstances? Of course not. Although I thought I saw my wife talking to him before the start of the service.

God uses other people to speak to you.

3. A third way that God speaks in our lives is through **impressions**. Ideas, hunches, insights, dreams. God can speak in that way. But you have to be careful because the impression or dream you have should always match what God says in His word. If you're not careful, you might say "God told me to go to Taco Bell and not McDonalds. He must want me there for a reason." Maybe it's just your stomach wanting Taco Bell because you had McDonald's last night.

Let me give you a suggestion on this, for you who are facing a decision right now. Tonight, before you go to sleep, the last thought in your mind, think, "God, what's the next step? What do You want me to do? What's Your answer on this one?" Then just go to sleep and leave it in His hands. Oftentimes, in the morning you'll wake up and the answer will be there in your mind, the impression that He wants to give.

4. There is a fourth way that God speaks to us. It is the most common way that He speaks to us. One that we're all familiar with. He speaks to us through our **circumstances** and especially through the circumstances that create pain in our lives. God is speaking. He leads us on the right path if only we'll listen. But if we can't listen to the difficulties in life. If we don't tune in, we're bound to get off the track in our lives.

If you think about Apollo 11, you'll realize that they didn't just point the thing in the right direction, shoot it, and hope it got there. There were constant course corrections along the way to get people to the moon.

The same thing is true in my life and your life. If we're going to live a life of significance, God's got to work these constant course corrections in our lives and one of the things He uses to do that in my life and yours too, is the circumstances that come into our lives and the pain that comes into our lives. Sometimes He's going to lead you in ways that you don't understand. Which brings us to the next point.

4. TRUST GOD WHEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND

Proverbs 3:5-6 says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

If you do the trusting He does the willing. When you don't understand when God's telling you to do something, this is a test. It is an obedience check. And if you're going to grow spiritually, God is going to take you through obedience checks over and over in life. He'll ask you to do something that humanly does not seem to make sense. It's a test. He's testing if you'll trust Him. He's testing if you'll obey Him.

The great example of this is the story in the Old Testament when the children of Israel had finally been set free from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and Moses leads them out into the desert and they come up to the Red Sea and there are mountains on either side, an ocean in front of them and the Egyptian army in hot pursuit behind them. They're in God's little cul-de-sac. Talk about a dead end! They start to doubt and wonder and say, "Did we miss God's will? Did we hear God right? We thought He wanted us to leave in freedom. We thought Moses was the man we were supposed to follow. We thought we'd made the right decision.

Now look! We're going to get killed! It would have been better for us to stay slaves in Egypt rather than get annihilated here on the edge of the ocean." But God had them exactly where He wanted them to be. He was testing them. It looked impossible but God had not made a mistake.

Later, the Psalmist said, "*Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.*" (Psalm 77:19) God was leading them although they didn't know it. God never makes a mistake.

That reminds me. Have you been to Fantasyland in Disneyland? There is a ride called Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. It is a suspenseful ride. You get on a little car and it jerks you around and it looks like you're going to go into a wall but all of a sudden the wall becomes a door. Then you go toward another wall and it becomes a door. Back and forth.

That's a parable of life. You may be at what you think is a dead end. "We're never going to get out of debt! I'm never going to get out of this problem! Things are never going to work out! My dream is never going to come true!" Etc. You think you're at a dead end. Right now it may look dark and it may look depressing and you may feel defeated and it may seem like a mystery to you but if you will trust in God, at that point, as you trust Him and as you move ahead in faith and as you keep growing, God will make a pathway through the middle of the ocean. And the waves will part.

5. ACT ON WHAT I ALREADY KNOW TO DO

The truth is, you already know a lot of things God wants you to do. So why haven't you done it? God is not obligated to give you Step Two until you've already done Step One. Some of you keep saying, "I want to know God's will for my career, my marriage." and God's says, "Let's get to the basics. Are you reading your Bible? Are you in a small group? Are you tithing? Are you praying to Me? Basic things." You say, "But I want to know about..." God is not

obligated for Step Two until first you start doing what you already know to be the revealed will of God for your life.

Here's my question to you: What do you already know to do but you haven't done yet? What's your next step?

Perhaps, God has been wanting you to spend more time with him in prayer. Or in the study of his Word. Being more faithful in your tithes or becoming regular in your home group studies. Maybe, becoming more involved in ministry or joining a ministry. Perhaps, you've been putting off becoming a member of this church or being baptized.

It could be anything. God says do it. Don't delay. Do what you already know to do. In the end, it all boils down to having a close, intimate, personal relationship with Jesus. To know God's will, first you have to have fellowship with Jesus. How do you that?

Simple. Make him your Lord and Savior. God knows you're lost without him. He knows that without his guidance, you are lost in your sins. You are driving a car not knowing where to go or maybe you know but you don't have a GPS and you've lost your way. Let Jesus be your guide.

Sin prevents you from knowing God's will. But Jesus bore your sins on the cross. He died because he loves you so much and wants you to enjoy eternal life. If you just ask forgiveness for your sins, he will cleanse you, forgive all your sins and accept you in his family. And he will always be your guide in life. Yes, Jesus died but he rose again to let you know that you too will rise again when you die.

God's greatest will for you is to have fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.