

Lesson 18: Knowing God's Will

Identifying God's Will

“So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). Many believers desire to do God's will, but they struggle because they don't know what God's will is for their lives.

God's will can be divided into His general will and His specific will. His general will is always clear. We find His general will clearly revealed in Scripture. It is the determining of God's specific will that is most stressful for the majority of believers.

God's Specific Will

One thing is absolutely assured: no one has perfect insight into God's will. The soundest, most mature believers can and do make mistakes about God's will.

In determining God's specific will there are some absolutes that never change:

1. God does have a plan for your life (Jeremiah 29:11).
2. God's specific will is that we have a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:3-4).
3. God promises to give us wisdom if we ask Him and believe that He will give it (James 1:5).

Romans 12:1-2 gives prerequisites that we must honor before God's will is revealed.

God doesn't use burning bushes much any more to communicate with His people, but He does communicate through burning hearts—hearts that are in tune to His Word and hearts that love and worship their Lord Jesus Christ.

How To Know God's Will

Because Psalm 32:8 promises God's guidance while seeking His will, we must immerse ourselves in prayer and in the study of God's Word, first and foremost, in order to make decisions that are compatible with God's specific will.

However, every decision must meet at least two criteria: First, it must be compatible with God's Word (see Psalm 119:105). Second, it must be compatible with personal convictions.

Some decisions are objective enough to be eliminated on the basis of direct contradiction to God's Word (see Proverbs 8:10).

God will not lead in a direction that will violate His principles. For example, He would not lead you into a situation where you would incur a large debt through borrowing (see Psalm 37:21; Romans 13:8). So many times people believe God is leading them into an area, and He may be, but they lunge forward without getting His specific direction.

Christians are held to the highest standard, which requires constant input from the Holy Spirit (John 16:13) in order to keep their direction straight. This means that Christians are accountable if they defile their consciences by doing something they believe is wrong. This belief must be based on a firm conviction from God.

Even with the best discernment, it is possible to do things that are out of God's will. The key is not to let pride get in the way but rather, admit wrong and then submit to God's new directive. God has given each of us gifts, abilities, and talents to use in His service.

Many Christians make decisions on major issues based on what is called the "open door" philosophy. In other words, God would never let anyone do something wrong and therefore, if the door is open, I should go through it. This is often called the "open mine shaft" philosophy because a lot of Christians stumble down open shafts thinking God wouldn't let them fail. Too many Christians make decisions based on the "open door" philosophy: If God does not block it, it must be okay. Unfortunately, Satan can also open doors, many of which lead to destruction.

Finally, believers seeking God's specific will must be accountable to and listen to the advice of a few trusted men and women who are godly, who are wise in the operations of God's directives, and who are filled with God's Holy Spirit, that He has placed in their lives (Proverbs 12:15; 15:22). Believers must constantly ask God to evaluate their motives (Psalm 139:23,24) and be willing to change direction as He leads.

Conclusion

Even with the best discernment it's possible, and even probable, that Christians will do things at times that are out of God's will. In such cases, their attitudes should be to thank God for showing them what doesn't work and then get back to the task of discovering what does.

On the other hand, a sure way to step out of God's path is to compromise His Word or His will and then justify the action by looking at an obvious benefit the action brings. Satan is quite willing and able to bless any plan that serves his purpose rather than God's. Only by staying in God's Word, seeking strong godly counsel, and maintaining inner peace can a Christian avoid traps regarding His will.

Bible Study

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

You Are God’s Unique Creation. Have you ever marveled at how God, in designing our elegantly complex DNA, efficiently guaranteed the uniqueness of every person? No one—past, present or future—is like you. “Created...for Good Works”

Here we get a glimpse into God’s purpose for creating us uniquely. It was to equip us for “good works.” God hasn’t left us to wander aimlessly in the hope we can stumble across meaningful activity. Nor has He required us to accomplish good works for which He has not equipped us. The work of every follower of Christ

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus said in Luke 16, “What is highly valued among [people] is detestable in God’s sight.” Sometimes it’s hard to admit that there is a gap between the world’s values (or our values) and God’s values. Can you name some things that you’ve grown to value that have no currency in the Kingdom of God?
2. Ultimately, it was not Zacchaeus who asked Jesus into his life, but Jesus who asked Zacchaeus into His. What is significant about this reversal? Is that true of our lives as well? What difference does that make?

Prayer Focus

Lord, thank You for planning, creating, calling and equipping us uniquely. Help me walk in Your good works for me.

Lesson 19: Being Content

"But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment" (1 Timothy 6:6). Contentment, contrary to popular opinion, is not being satisfied with what you have. It is knowing God's plan for your life, having the conviction to live it, and believing that God's peace is greater than the world's goods.

We get trapped into a discontented life by adopting worldly goals. These goals always boil down to more...bigger...best. Scripture defines them as indulgence, greed, and pride. In our society it is not normal to "step down." Once a certain level of income (or spending) has been attained, it is considered a failure to step down. Is the concept of conservation and moderation really a loser's attitude? Not according to biblical standards.

God's Plan for Contentment

Although many Scriptures teach about the dangers of material riches, God's Word does not teach that poverty is the alternative. God wants us to understand that money is a tool to use in accomplishing His plan through us. For Christians ever to find true contentment, some basic guidelines must be established.

1. Establish a Reasonable Standard of Living.

Since there is no universal plan that is suitable for everyone, this must be a standard established among husband, wife, and God. Just having an abundance is not a sign of God's blessings. Satan can easily duplicate any worldly riches. God's riches are without sorrow and for bringing others to salvation.

2. Establish a Habit of Giving.

Above the tithe God wants Christians to be involved with the needs of others. Every Christian family should be directly involved with the needs of another family. There are many Christian organizations that act as a funnel for such funds. If you can't be personally involved, this is the best alternative. "At this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack' " (2 Corinthians 8:14-15).

3. Establish Priorities.

Many Christians are discontented, not because they aren't doing well but because others are doing better. "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you' " (Hebrews 13:5). Too often we let the urgent things take priority over the important things.

4. Develop a Thankful Attitude.

Thankfulness is a state of mind, not an accumulation of assets. Until we can truly thank God for what we have and be willing to accept that as God's provision for our lives, contentment never will be possible.

5. Reject a Fearful Spirit.

Dedicated Christians get trapped into hoarding because they fear the "What if?" of retirement, disability, unemployment, or economic collapse. Obviously, God wants us to consider these things and even plan for them, within reason. When fear dictates to the point that giving to God's work is hindered, foolish risks are assumed and worry becomes the norm rather than the exception. A Christian must consciously reject this attitude of fear. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

In Conclusion

Contentment is knowing God's plan for your life. Therefore, seek God's will for your life. "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). Then we must trust God's promises. "The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Bible Study

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat." 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Work Is Not the Consequence of Sin. Before sin ever entered the world, God assigned work to Adam. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). Making Adam God's manager was an honor that gave him purpose.

The curse of sin made work harder (Genesis 3:17-19). It also poisoned our attitude toward it. But it never poisoned its purpose or value as a gift from God. He participates with us in our work. God gave "skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work" (Exodus 36:1). "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven (John 3:27). "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Discussion Questions

1. Are you content? Do others see you as being content?
2. Does the way you spend money show the world that Jesus is your treasure? Would a non-believer be persuaded to consider the matchless worth of the Son of God by the way you handle your money?

Prayer Focus

Lord, thank You for the gift of work. Help us remember that we are working for You.

Lesson 20: Dedicate It to God

You have been blessed by God. He has given you life, and if you are a Christian, He has given you salvation through Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit to comfort and guide you. Those are the things that should be at the top of your list of God's blessings, but the Lord has given you so much more.

Everything God has given you should be dedicated to Him. And this worksheet was created to help you do that. Print it out and record on it all the gifts you have received from the Lord. The form has several categories for you to use in making your list. This is done to get you to think about some of the different types of gifts you have been given.

- **Spiritual** – Use this category to list spiritual milestones, such as your salvation; spiritual resources such as God's Word; and spiritual gifts, such as service.
- **People** – Use this category to list by name the special people in your life God has given you, such as your family, friends, teachers, or neighbors.
- **Finances** – Use this category to list money God has given you in the form of cash, savings, or job skills.
- **Things** – Use this category to list special possessions God has given you, such as a clothing, a car, or computer.
- **Activities** – Use this category to list all the activities God has given you the opportunity and ability to do such as going to church, working, learning, exercising, or enjoying entertainment.
- **Blessings** – Use this category to list special blessings God has give you, such as where you live, the freedoms you have, or your employer.
- **Miscellaneous** – Use this category to list other gifts that don't fit into any of the other categories that you want to dedicate to God.

Before starting your list, pray and ask God to help you carefully think through each category. Take as much time as you need to complete your list, but commit to working on it regularly. You will use it in your Dedication Service to God.

Dedication Service to God

When you are finished making your list of gifts, hold a Dedication Service to God. If you are doing this as an individual, make this service part of your personal quiet time with the Lord. If you are doing this with your family, make this service part of your family prayer/meeting time.

Open the service in prayer and thank God for all the things He revealed as you worked on your gift list. Praise the Lord for His grace and for the love He has shown you through these gifts. Ask His blessing on the dedication service.

After the prayer, read out loud 1 Chronicles 29:11-12, Psalm 24:1, and James 1:17. Acknowledge that God owns everything and all gifts come from Him.

Maintain a prayerful attitude. Referring to your worksheet, start with the first category and say the name of each gift listed under it. Then, verbally dedicate it to God, release it into His service, and ask that He use it to fulfill His purposes. Repeat this process for each of the seven categories on the worksheet. If you are doing this with your family, allow each family member to dedicate each item on their worksheets.

Then, read out loud Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8:6, and 1 Corinthians 4:2. Thank the Lord for making you a steward of the gifts He has given you. Ask Him to help you be faithful in using the gifts for His glory.

Finally, read out loud Psalm 100. Close the service with a prayer of praise. If doing this with your family, allow each family member an opportunity to individually praise the Lord. File your worksheets in a safe place. Review them regularly and repeat this dedication service annually.