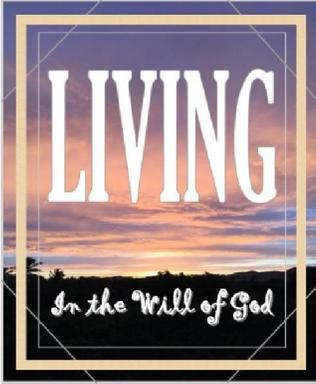


Living in the Will of God



As humans, don't you find it's kind of normal for us to think we are good with God as long as things are going well? Don't we tend to associate that God is blessing our choices so we must be living within His will? But in reality that may not always be the case. Take **Psalm 50:21** for instance, God says, **"These things you have done [disobedience, slander, thievery, associating with adulterers, lying, etc.] and I have kept silence; you thought I was just like you."** These were not living within His will, but because all was going along without a large lightning bolt striking them, they thought all was well with them and God. On the flip side, it's also natural that we might question that we're living in His will if things begin going wrong, or trials come. But that's not always the case either. Christ Himself endured incredible

hardship, and He was always in the will of the Father. So, how do we know we are good with God? What does it mean to live in the will of God?

This line of thinking began when I was reading the beginning of the book of Colossians. Paul identifies himself in 1:1 by saying he is **"an apostle of Jesus Christ BY THE WILL OF God"**, (emphasis mine) causing me to stop and ponder, "what am I, and by whose will is that?" I don't think Paul spoke those words flippantly, it wasn't a title that he wrote without thought. It was after all, a title of authority. He was an apostle because GOD made him an apostle. It was a dramatic change in direction when Saul encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus. Not only was his name changed, but his way of thinking and behaving had to alter. His life would never be what he thought it was going to be, ever again. He started off on that journey ready to do battle against those who belong to the Lord, but before he had gotten too far down the road, the Lord turned on the light, so bright that it blinded him, only to help him see more clearly what God's plan was for him. God had a calling for Saul's life, and becoming Paul the apostle, his words reveal humility in the same breath as establishing his authority to address this group of believers in Colossae. He is an apostle for no other reason than God made him so.

Let me ask this, What are you? And by whose will is that? How would we fill in the blank:

I'm a _____ by the will of God. The question sure has me thinking.

If we belong to Christ, having accepted His salvation, then there should be no doubt that God has a calling on our life. Being in His will is vital if we are to accomplish all He has planned for us. **Ephesians 5:18** tells us to **"not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit"** and the word for filled means *saturated to the point of control*. In other words, if we are going to be in His will we must be under the control of the Holy Spirit living and moving within us. No longer I who live but Christ living in me. Living by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

Over the past couple years I have spoken to so many of my friends who all say the same thing, "life is not what I would have imagined it would be at this time in life." "Things are not as I expected them to be." "I never saw this happening in my life." We all know those who have endured marital conflicts - some have divorced; many have encountered financial stresses that have left bank accounts and emotional storehouses bankrupt; some have had to deal with the loss of a child; there are those having to be caregivers to a permanently injured child, or an aging parent. Others simply move away to far off islands. Life is different. Life is NOT what we had pictured it would be at this time in our life. There's been a whole lot more heartache than we anticipated, there have been disillusionments, and even, helplessness.

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Truthfully, none of it should have caught us unaware, for we were forewarned. The book of James tells us to expect these kind of things, to not be surprised by "divers temptations", "various trials", "trials of many kinds". We were warned, but somehow our minds didn't picture it looking quite like this. I Peter talks about making sure we're suffering for righteousness sake, and not because of our own sad choices.

As a believer, we can know that there are reasons for everything that God allows or does, there is nothing left undone; nothing left to chance because there is no "chance" where God is concerned. Providence, yes. Chance doesn't exist with an omniscient, all knowing God. He already had a contingency plan in place when circumstances altered where we thought our life was going, and in fact, it's not even a contingency plan with Him because He already KNEW it would be this way. **Proverbs 16:9** tells us, ***"The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."***

I must say, the one constant, the thing each of us can count on, is God is faithful to bring us through. Our eternal God, who is our Creator, our Father in Heaven, saw every bit of what would take place in our lives before we were even born. He knew, and there is no surprise to Him that our life looks as it does right now. He knew every choice that we would make, and exactly what the consequences of those choices would be. He knew every health issue, every conflict. He knew every obstacle we would come in contact with, and He chose to allow them, to somehow use the twisted circumstances of this sinful world to shape and mold us into the image of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

When I look at Christ's image, I see He is one that conformed to the plans God had for Him, that image is one that relied solely on the Holy Spirit for His next step, His next word. That image is one that completely and wholly was devoted to doing nothing but what the Father designed for Him to do. He was living in the will of God. That is the end game after all, is it not? Ephesians 2:10 says, ***"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them."*** To walk in obedience to a loving Father who prepared plans for us to walk in before the foundations of the earth.

Perhaps you, like me, can relate to feeling like King David, called a man after God's own heart, and yet, he lived in sin most of the time. His actions did not always match up with his heart's desire because his flesh got in the way. When we read Hebrews chapter 11, what some call, "The Hall of Faith", we see every single one of them that are held up as pillars of faith were also fallible, sinful people. What a blessing to know that God can change us, God can still use us, in spite of it all. He has a calling for us to live out. Even though it may not look anything like what we thought it would look like.

Living in His will comes at the cost of obedience. Let's not talk platitudes here, we're talking, saying "No" to the flesh. No to anything that is outside of what He Himself would do. I can tell you this, God loves to bless obedience, so I'm not sure why we fight it so much. Perhaps, like a child we want our own way. We think we know better what will make us happy, or accomplish what is in our best interest. Like a child, we are often wrong about what that is.

A friend and I were discussing how much is effected by our perspective, how we perceive things to be, or expect them to be. If we choose to look at our circumstances from a human view point we could get discouraged quite easily, but if, instead, we look at this life being allowed by a loving God to shape and mold us into something "perfect and complete, lacking nothing" as described in the book of James, then our perspective is altered, and what was once an unbearable situation can become something with great

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purpose, and great hope! Enduring becomes easier when our perspective is on the eternal outcome versus the immediate physical discomfort.

So, back to the question - What are you? and by Whose will is that? Are we living in the will of God, or are we willfully living? Paul was only changed when he accepted his circumstance and submitted to whatever God would have him do. My prayer is that we would be even quicker to accept and walk in the plan He designed for us, so that we can faithfully live in His will.

Father, we don't always understand the circumstances of our lives, but we can know that You in Your omniscience have already purposed it for our good. How You accomplish that is what makes You God, for You alone, know the beginning to the end, and are masterfully weaving all the pieces together to create something that will bring You glory. How wondrous that is! Help us to walk within Your will, to be who You have designed us to be. Never let us get away with the impertinence of thinking we know what is best, but help us to allow Christ to live in us, Your Spirit to direct us. Thank You for being so merciful and gracious to us, who are so undeserving. May we walk in Your will today, and always.

Some verses from the devotional:

I Corinthians 3:16

Acts 9-10

Acts 17:28

Romans 8:28; 12:1

Galatians 2:20

Ephesians 4:1

Philippians 1:6

James 1:4-5