

HOW TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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Let's Begin

Sometimes it's very difficult to make decisions we know to be God's will. In fact if we're honest, seeking to know God's will frightens us. We seem to have the idea God always wants life to be hard. As we will see today, making life hard is not what God is all about. Instead, God wants our life to be filled with love, peace, joy, and contentment. In short, God desires all of His children to have a full and meaningful life, overflowing with His blessings.

When we think of a full and meaningful life, however, we must not conclude life possesses no complications. Discovering the will of God appears at times like a maze through which we must walk. The assurance we have as God's children is His guidance through the maze.

The account of Paul's journey to Jerusalem provides an excellent opportunity to learn how to know the will of God for our lives. Paul was convinced God's will for him was to go to Jerusalem. His friends insisted going to Jerusalem would be a tragic mistake. Who was right: Paul or his friends?

Exploring chapter 21 together, let's follow the outline below as we consider how to know the will of God:

- I. Knowing God's Will Requires Our Recognition of God's Will (vv. 1-14)**
- II. Knowing God's Will Requires Our Resolution to Do God's Will (vv. 15-27)**
- III. Knowing God's Will Requires God's Revelation of His Will (vv. 28-40)**

I. Knowing God's Will Requires Our Recognition of God's Will (vv. 1-14)

The most important things in life pertain to knowing the will of God. The Bible says much about the will of God. We are to *seek* the will of God (Matt. 6:10), *surrender* to the will of God (Eph. 6:6), and *stand* firmly in the will of God (Col. 4:12). Nor is it correct to assume people do not desire to know God's will; they do. Young people especially are searching for God's will. In fact *recognizing* the possibility of *knowing* God's will is the first step toward *doing* God's will.

No one understood this principle more than Paul. As he was sailing to Cyprus (vv. 1-3), he had a lot of time to think about the commitment he had made to God, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me" (20:22-23).

Reflection Connection

How often do you think about the will of God? Can you say with a reasonable degree of confidence that you are following the will of God for your life? Explain.

There are *three aspects* about God's will to note. *First*, we must recognize God's will is real. He really has a plan for our life. Paul knew this (9:15) and therefore acted upon it. When the believer can recognize God's particular interest in his or her life, the will of God becomes more visible and easily discernible.

Second, we must recognize that God's will may be refused. God has a will; however, you and I have a will as well. Our inner will is an undeniable aspect of our being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26). Our will separates us from the animal kingdom. Consequently, God gave us power to choose, to plan. The power to plan was a daring move on God's part. Nevertheless, God wanted us to be free to obey Him.

The fact is, we can choose to leave God out of our lives. Many people plan their lives without a moment's thought about what God wants. Note, our ability to choose does



Reflection Connection

Do you think enough emphasis is placed upon knowing God's will? Why or why not? Name some ways through which people may be helped in understanding God's will for their lives.

not limit God's power. If God chose to, He could override anyone's decision or action about any particular incident. God is omnipotent (all-powerful). Nothing can change His power; nothing can challenge His power. Nevertheless, God chooses to suspend His power over us, allowing us to make decisions for ourselves, including decisions to leave Him out of our lives.

Third, we must recognize God's will is always right. If we choose wrongly, it is not because God led us in the wrong direction. Paul exhorts the believer to seek the perfect will of God, "I beseech you therefore, brethren...be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2). Whatever it is — teacher, housewife, doctor, businessman — God has something beautifully planned for you.

II. Knowing God's Will Requires Our Resolution to Do God's Will (vv. 15-27)

George W. Truett was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas for almost a half century. He once said, "To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge! To do the will of God is the greatest achievement!" Once we *know* the will of God we must be willing to *do* the will of God. In other words, we must possess a profound resolve to accomplish God's will once He reveals it. Obedience is non-negotiable in understanding the will of God.

The resolution to do God's will works in two different directions.

First, there is determination to do His will. While Paul was in Caesarea, a certain prophet named Agabus gave a stunning prediction about Paul. Nothing but pain awaited his immediate future (vv. 10-11). Luke then recorded his own response to Paul's insistence he continue to travel to Jerusalem, "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem" (v. 12).

Once we know the will of God we must be willing to do the will of God.

Paul's determination to follow God's plan for his life did not crack. He was determined — with an inner resolve — to accomplish what he knew God revealed. This is where many Christians hit a snag. In other words, once they know the will of God they're not sure they want to do the will of God. A question all of us must face is this: if God should reveal His will, whatever it is, would we do it?

Jesus gives us a key in determining to do God's will, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself" (John 7:17). The willingness "to do" His plan comes before the "knowing of" His plan. In addition, God's will is not something you *have* to do; instead, God's will is something you are *happy* to do. God's will is not to be *endured* but *embraced*. Embracing God's will opens the door to a fulfilled, contented life in Christ.

Reflection Connection

Think deeply about your own concern for the will of God in your life. Do you have reservations about following through with God's will after He has revealed it? What reservations, if any, would you have? Be prepared to candidly discuss your thoughts with the entire group.



Second, there is a dedication to do His will. No substitutes are acceptable in place of His will. Unfortunately, the devil runs a bargain shop, offering many cheap but tempting substitutes for doing God's will. Sometimes he even offers something good when God wants to give the best. In addition, Satan often offers shortcuts, a tempting detour off the path God has provided.

For example, young men and women are tempted with short-time temporary romance instead of long-time, genuine love expressed in marriage vows. The devil offers temporary relief from stress and pleasure through alcohol and other drugs instead of permanent solutions and spiritual growth through prayer and faith in God.

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God's will cannot be *bought*. Rather, God's will is *bestowed* upon the one who sincerely inquires by faith to discern God's will. The question we must answer concerns whether we are willing to dedicate ourselves to God's will. Are you? Am I? Whatever the cost, we must be willing to say, I will do the will of God.

III. Knowing God's Will Requires God's Revelation of His Will (vv. 28-40)

Thus far, we've learned not only does God's will require our *recognition* of knowing His will, but also our *resolve* to do God's will. Nevertheless, unless God is pleased to *reveal* His will to us, we can neither know it nor do it. The good news is, God is a God who specializes in revelation. He desires not to hide His will but to fully reveal it to the one who diligently searches for it! Jeremiah wrote, "And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (29:13). God personified as wisdom said, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17). God's heart is to reveal Himself.

Paul was a man on a quest to do God's will no matter the cost. Luke recorded the tragic scene when Paul arrived at Jerusalem, "And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all *men* everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place...and hath polluted this holy place...And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul...and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul" (vv. 27-32).

Three clear and unmistakable *revelations* concerning God's will are available to all of us. *First, we are saved through Him.* God has made provision for all (1 Tim. 2:4). No one anywhere exists whom God doesn't want saved. Why would He not desire all to be saved? He sent His Son to die for all, did He not? (1 John 2:2). According to Scripture, all are included in God's great provision — high and low, good and bad alike (John 3:16). For preaching an inclusive message, Paul was beaten almost to death (v. 35).

The fact remains God doesn't want anyone to go to hell (cp. Ezek. 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). Yet He does not prohibit people from choosing hell (Rom. 6:23). They go

Reflection Connection

How far do you think modern Christians would go in insisting on doing God's will? Do you think average church members would place their lives on the line as did Paul? Why or why not?



because of the stubbornness of their own will. If you aren't saved, it's because you won't be saved; you *will not* to be saved (John 5:40).

Second, we are sanctified in Him. Paul writes later, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). Our standards come from God's Word. We do not take our marching orders from society. There's no way around it: there is a negative side to the will of God. That is, Christians must learn to say no. We must learn to say no to anything which would defile us or bring reproach upon Jesus. Daniel is the perfect example for the believer. He "purposed in his heart" not "to defile" himself with the portion of the King's food (Dan. 1:8).

Sanctification literally means a "setting apart." Thus, sanctification implies separation. Our body is God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19). As God's dwelling place we are sanctified — set apart — for Him.

Third, we are to serve Him. The greatest adventure in life is to serve the Lord. Why? Because of three specific reasons. First, God calls us to a specific *position* of service. David was a lowly shepherd boy; but God issued a call to be King over His people (13:36). A person might apply dozens of times to different places before a job is secured. Not so in God's Kingdom. There will never be a sign in God's window which says, "Not Hiring." A believer will never hear the words "no opening" from God. God has a position for you.

In addition, not only does God call us to a specific *position* but also provides us with a specific *place* of service. What Paul had determined to do was fulfilled when he stood before the Jerusalem mob, "And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee?...I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying" (vv. 37-40).

Paul was permitted to testify as to how Christ saved him and wanted to save the entire Jewish nation. Nothing takes the place of being where God wants you to be.

Finally, God assures us of *purpose* in our service to Him. It may not be apparent at first. However, it will become clearer along the way; we will understand God's will. He promises to reveal Himself to the person who seeks. If we're serving Him, we can leave the purpose up to Him.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse 15, the translators offer us an interesting phrase pertaining to Paul's traveling to Jerusalem, "took up our carriages." When my grandfather was a boy, he often was carried places in a horse and buggy. But he never carried the horse and buggy! The four-word phrase translated "took up our carriages" is actually a single word in the Greek — "*episkeuazo*." No other place in the New Testament is the term used. It literally means "to prepare." Thus, Paul was simply "getting ready" to travel from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Wrap Up

Finding the will of God is really a misnomer. God's will is not lost. Instead we may just not be listening to His instructions. God promises to reveal His will to us if we'll seek His heart, and, once we know Him, determine to obey Him. May the Lord Jesus Christ guide us on our adventure in understanding and doing the will of God.

