

## WHAT ABOUT GOD'S WILL AND MY DECISIONS?

PSALM 40:8, et al

How do you go about making decisions? Some years ago, an earnest Christian man was driving through Washington, DC when his car stalled out right in front of the Philippine embassy. He must have been wrestling with a decision to become a missionary, because he interpreted that event as a sign he should become a missionary. But where? The Philippines, of course! Then there was the woman who was pondering a trip to Israel. One night she was reading through the Holy Land tour information and the travel brochures. She noticed the flight was to be on a 747 jet. She woke up the next morning and saw 7:47 on her digital bedside clock. That confirmed to her she should take the trip to Israel. Both sound a bit sketchy to me. May I humbly suggest those are not the best ways to make decisions regarding God's will for your life!

We're in the midst of a series of messages on knowing God and His will. We've asked and tried to answer several questions. What is God's will? How can I know God's will? Does God speak to us? If so, how can I hear God speak to me? We've more or less dismissed the idea that knowing God's will for today or tomorrow is like using GPS – a global positioning system. God rarely provides explicit, specific instructions as we journey through life – turn right here, turn left there in 1 mile. Instead, He provides something equivalent to a compass. God provides a clear sense of direction that still requires me to trust in Him and obey Him each and every day.

Now today, I want you to think with me about God's will and our decisions – particularly major life decisions. For example, getting married, choosing a career, seeking a new job, buying a home, raising your kids, choosing a church home – those are all major life decisions. I'd like to offer some questions we should ask ourselves and answer before making decisions at that level of importance. This isn't some kind of divine formula. Knowing God's will just doesn't work that way. But it is one, effective way of pursuing God's will responsibly whenever we face those inevitable major decisions in life. Then, if we can honestly answer "Yes" to those questions, I suggest there are a few other things we can do as we live into God's will for our lives. So, let's get started!

### QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE MAKING A MAJOR DECISION.

First, am I willing to obey God before I even ask to know His will? That's a crucial question to ask and honestly answer at the very beginning of wanting to know God's will about a decision. Do you have an accepting and surrendered frame of mind regardless? No matter what God's will is, where it may lead you, what it may include, are you open, teachable, and available to God and His will? The right kind of heart attitude was captured in this statement by David, "I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart." (Ps 40:8 NLT) Difficulty in discovering and discerning God's will often surfaces at this very crossroads. Do I truly want to do God's will or my own will? All too often, our true inner attitude sounds more like this, "God, please show me Your will. Then I'll decide if I want to do it or not." Discovering God's will should never be a matter of idle curiosity for me: "Gee, I wonder what God thinks about that?" Before I even ask about God's will, my heart should be ready to

surrender to it and commit to do it. You might even have to say, “God, I’m not sure I’m ready to do Your will. I don’t know if I want to do it or not. But, I’m willing to be made willing!” That’s a good, honest place to start. Invite the Lord to change your heart if necessary and make you willing to obey Him even before you ask anything of Him.

Second, am I in fellowship with God? Did you know it’s possible to be a child of God but not be on speaking terms with Him? If you’ve had kids - or you are a kid - you know what I mean. Parent and child exchange some angry words perhaps because the child deliberately disobeyed his or her parent. Does the child stop being related to the parent? No, but there can be a disruption in the relationship. The same kind of thing can happen between you and God. Unconfessed sin will always disrupt your relationship with God. Now, it doesn’t mean you stop being God’s child, but it can certainly create some significant static in your communication with Him. If you truly want to know God’s will for your life, it just doesn’t make sense to keep on tolerating known sin in your life. What should you do, then? Confess that sin to God, turn away from it, and ask God for His help to stop committing it. The Bible gives us a very clear warning about how sin can disrupt our communication with God. It says, “If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” (Ps 66:18 NLT) But then it provides this wonderful promise, “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.” (1 Jo 1:9 NLT) A clear conscience is necessary to have the best kind of connection to God. And fellowship with God is necessary to understand God’s will accurately.

Here's a third question. Have I searched the Bible? God’s will is often found in God’s Word. God will never lead you to make a decision that contradicts a principle found in the Bible. So, when you need to make a major decision, that’s all the more reason to read and study your Bible. Most of us know we can look up specific words or concepts on Bible apps or in the back of study Bibles which enable us to learn more about what the Bible says on many topics. Let’s say you’re considering marriage. No, the Bible will not tell you if you should marry a specific person or confirm his or her name in some magical way. But if you look up the word “marriage” or other words related to it, you’ll find verses that provide important principles about marriage itself that God can then use to direct you in your specific situation. Or let’s say you’re considering a job change. No, the Bible will not tell you whether to accept a certain job offer or not. But if you study what the Bible says about work, you might well discover some principles God will use to guide you in your decision. Or let’s say you’ve been fighting a losing battle with stress lately. Studying the Bible on the subject of stress can yield important information. You can find principles, commands, examples, and promises you can apply to your life.

There’s a certain attitude towards God’s Word we need to have each and every day, but especially when faced with major life decisions. “Oh, how I love your instructions! I think about them all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are my constant guide. Yes, I have more insight than my teachers, for I am always thinking of your laws. I am even wiser than my elders, for I have kept your commandments.” (Ps 119:97-100 NLT) Knowing God’s Word makes you wiser than

your enemies, gives you more insight than your teachers, and provides more insight than you get just by living a long time. That's an impressive list of promises, isn't it?!

Fourth, have I prayed for God's wisdom? Now, prayer seems like a really obvious thing to do if you want to get God's guidance about some major life decision. But have you actually done it? Have you literally prayed about it? Do you even commit five minutes a day to asking God what you should do when you're faced with a major life decision? I simply remind you of what the Bible itself says to do at this very point. "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking." (Jam 1:5 NLT) Remember, also, that God respects persistence when it comes to prayer. That's one way He knows if you're serious about what you're asking. Don't just ask once about the same issue. Keep on asking! Apparently, Jesus thought that was the right approach because it says this about Him, "One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up." (Lk 18:1 NLT) The Bible also says, "Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers." (Eph. 6:18 NLT)

Fifth, have I gotten all the facts? God gave you a brain. Use it. Knowing God's will doesn't mean ignoring what God's already given you to help you make important decisions. God has given you the ability to weigh the pros and cons of a course of action or some decision. So, work it out. Don't follow the poor example of people who kind of throw up their hands and say, "I just go with the flow. I just let the Holy Spirit lead me." Sometimes people are simply too lazy to get all the facts and then apply good old fashioned reason and logic to their decisions. God never asks us "to kiss our brains good-bye," so don't! Check everything out. Get the whole story. Investigate. Do your research. Ask the right questions. The Bible recommends, "Get the truth and never sell it; also get wisdom, discipline, and good judgment." (Pro 23:23 NLT)

In this same vein, it's important to ask whether a course of action just simply makes sense or not. If you're a man who feels like God has called you to serve the poor and actually live with them, you should think twice about marrying a woman you like very much but whose idea of hardship is staying overnight in a budget motel. If you're a woman who finds joy in interacting with people at your job – you're an extrovert - you might want to think twice about accepting a job that leaves you in front of a computer alone eight hours a day. God made us creatures who can think. He guides our minds as we think things out in His presence. Thinking well honors the Lord.

Sixth, have I sought out godly counsel? I like the story of a businessman who hired a golf pro to help him improve his game. They went to the golf course together. The businessman told the pro he wanted him to help him improve his technique. So, after every swing, the golf pro would offer suggestions about changing the businessman's stance, the direction he looked, and his overall approach to the game. But every suggestion resulted in an objection. The businessman – who was a successful CEO of a major corporation – insisted his way of swinging the golf club was just more comfortable. Before long, the golf pro began agreeing with him. Now, another golfer was watching this exchange with great interest. After seeing the businessman pay the

pro and the pro walk away with a giant grin on his face, the man approached the golf expert. He asked him, "What happened? In the middle of the session you just began to tell him whatever he wanted to hear." Here's how the golf pro responded. "You know, I've been at this long enough to know what people want. That man wasn't paying me for my advice. He was paying me to be his echo."

Rejecting or avoiding the opportunity to get and follow through on advice when it comes to major life decisions is not a sign of maturity or healthy independence. There are always going to be people who know the Bible better than you do, who know human nature better than you do, who know what questions to ask better than you do, and who know your own strengths and weaknesses better than you do. So be on the lookout for people who know God authentically, who live godly lives, and then ask for their advice. The Bible says, "Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success." (Pro 15:22 NT) Godly counselors are one of God's greatest gifts to you.

Here's a final question you might ask when you're trying to navigate through some major life decision. Have I examined my own desires? It's important to prayerfully ask yourself these questions, "What do I want? Why do I want it?" Have you asked yourself those first six questions and honestly been able to answer "Yes" to all of them? You're willing to obey God regardless? Yes. You're in fellowship with God? Yes. You've searched the Bible? Yes. You've asked God for wisdom? Yes. You've gotten the facts? Yes. You've obtained godly advice? Yes. If so, then God can also use your personal desires to direct you towards His will. Yes, it's true our desires have been corrupted by sin, so we have to be on our guard. Well and good. But, God can also transform our desires, work through them, and then direct us to do His will.

The Bible says, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires." (Ps 37:4 NLT) The order there is important. First, take delight in the Lord – who He is and what He's done. The more you focus on God, the more you can be sure your desires are godly, good, and in keeping with God's will for you. On the one hand, yes, it's a mistake to make personal happiness the be and end all for doing anything. You know the attitude. "God wants me to be happy, so I'll go ahead and do what I want to do even if it's contrary to the Bible." No way! On the other hand, it's just as much a mistake to assume God is in the business of making you unhappy. God does want to bless your life. God does want you to enjoy your life with Him. After all, God is a loving Father. If you have kids or grandkids, don't you want to bless their lives and see them experience the best things of life for all the right reasons? Of course! God, your Heavenly Father, is like that, too! Jesus put it well, "So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him." (Mt 7:11 NLT) Now, if and when we can answer "Yes" to those questions when we're faced with a major decision in life, then let me suggest the following....

### **IF I CAN ANSWER "YES" TO THOSE QUESTIONS, THEN...**

I can make my decision in faith. As the old saying goes, there is a time "to fish or to cut bait." A time comes when you have to step out in faith, move ahead, and go for it. Yes,

you might still have some doubts and a lack of certainty; nevertheless, you move forward in faith. Someone might say, "Well, how can I be completely sure when it's God will?" In most cases, you will never be absolutely 100% positive you're doing God's will. If you were that sure, you wouldn't have to live by faith. The Bible does say, "It is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him." (Heb 11:6 NLT)

What if I make a decision thinking it's God's will and it turns out to be a mistake? Personally, I believe God would rather have you make a mistake in faith than just do nothing in doubt. God is fully capable of overruling your mistakes and weaving them into the full tapestry of His will for your life. God is never thwarted by your mistakes in life or mine. God is never challenged by your errors in judgment. We've all made mistakes. We've all failed. We've all sinned. If God isn't bigger, greater, and grander than all of that, then why bother talking about the benefits of doing God's will? There's a wonderful promise revealed in this Scripture, "The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand." (Ps 37:23-24 NLT)

They don't fly the space shuttle anymore, but you can bet it had a multi-million dollar guidance system built into it. But it wasn't worth much to anyone until the space shuttle left the launch pad. It was worthless just sitting on the ground. Only when the shuttle began to move did the guidance system go into action. Even the biggest ships at sea are steered by a relatively small rudder. Just a fraction of a degree can change the direction of the ship by thousands of miles. But the rudder is useless unless the ship is in the water and moving. God won't guide your life or steer your course if you never get around to putting your life in gear. So get moving. Do what you know to be the will of God. Start serving Him in some way. Find a ministry here and do it. Ask God to show you a person who needs Jesus or needs your help and develop that relationship. Do what you know to be God's will and the rest will fall into place.

If I can answer "yes" to those questions, then I can allow circumstances to confirm God's will. People sometimes refer to God opening or closing doors. It's probably based on a verse in the Bible that says this about Jesus, "What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open." (Rev 3:7 NLT) Think of that verse as referring to doors or circumstances over which we have no control. Doors of opportunity can often open at just the right time. Or they can close for some unknown reason. It's not so much that we should use circumstances to find out God's will for our lives. If we do that, we can often read into those circumstance whatever we want to read into them. Instead, circumstances can often confirm God's will after you've stepped out in faith and made a decision to move forward in life.

If I can answer "yes" to those questions, then I can put all my trust in God and relax. Aren't you glad God is far more interested in you doing His will than you are in doing it? Trust Him to show you His will in His time. If you are trusting in Him and obeying Him, it becomes God's responsibility to reveal His will to you. It's been observed that you and I have a tendency to put our trust in the blueprint instead of putting our trust in the

architect. Meaning what? We just aren't going to get a clear set of plans – a blueprint - for living every day of our lives or even for every major decision we need to make. But we can live each and every day being confident in the Architect of our lives. Is there a more wonderful promise in the Bible than this one? “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.” (Pro 3:5-6 NLT) That promise assures me I can live my life in godly relaxation when I put my ultimate trust in God not only for eternal life, but also for life's major decisions. It tells me I'm not limited by my own pathetic, puny foresight or wisdom. It assures me I don't have to have it all figured out on my own. What I do need to do above all today and every day is to trust and obey!

In October of 2019, Bert terHart boarded a 40' ocean worthy sailboat and set sail from Victoria, BC. His objective was to become the first North American to ever circumnavigate the globe by himself using only a sextant, pen, paper, and almanac for navigation. On July 28, 2020, after 267 days at sea, he sailed back into Victoria having accomplished his goal. While on the open seas, he faced extreme weather, 12' to 14' ocean waves frequently, unforeseen ship repairs, and severe sleep deprivation. But in spite of all those dangers, he was dubbed “the safest man on Earth.” How could that be? When terHart set sail, we had never heard of Covid-19 or words like "social distancing," "flatten the curve," "shelter-in-place," or “self-quarantine.” And while he was on the open ocean, terHart was safe from all of it. Medically speaking, he was indeed the safest man on Earth! Following Jesus and discovering His will for your life often means a journey into uncertain seas. This often tempts us to procrastinate. Put things off. We delay as we wait to feel more certain and safer. In a recent interview, terHart shared what he hoped to accomplish by his journey. “I wanted to inspire people to take that first step forward. Once you take that first step, the next step is easier, and the step after that becomes easier.”

How can we be sure major life decisions are the will of God for us? Well, ask those questions we identified today. And if you can honestly answer “yes” to all of them, then in faith take the first step forward. The next step will be easier and the step after that easier still. Trust and obey. Put all of your trust in God and relax. You are never safer than when you're in the will of God. In fact, you are the safest man or woman on Earth.