

Discovering God's Will...For Your Life

Introduction:

For the next several weeks, our church will be focusing on Discovering God's Will. This Wednesday night at 7pm, we will start a mid-week lesson series that will delve more deeply into this study to figure out how we can know God's will in our lives. And then on Sunday mornings for a couple more weeks, we will look at God's will for certain major areas of our lives.

Most of us would agree that life is made up mostly by the decisions and choices that we make. Things we choose about our family: should I marry her or him, should I move out, should we have kids. And things we choose about our career, should I take that job, should I accept that invitation, should I move there or stay here.

And all of those decisions, and the results of those decisions make up our life. Who you are, is mostly a result of the decisions you've made.

Now, a lot of people will blame their parents, or their upbringing for who they are. If only my parents had done this, if only they hadn't done this, then things would be different. But we know the truth, and that is we make our own decisions, and then we deal with the consequences of those decisions.

Here's the problem: many of us have regrets about some of the decisions we've made in life. We look back over the course of our life and think about how different things would be if we had only made a different choice.

- The relationship we should have avoided
- the job opportunity we should have taken
- the purchase we should have waited on
- the college we should have gone to
- the party we should have stayed home from
- the child we should have handed back to the Doctor...there's some mistake here, this one's defective...

For some of us there are whole chapters of our lives we wish we could go and RIP out entirely, because of some really bad decisions. And if we knew then what we know now, maybe things could have been rearranged so that they would have worked out a lot better.

And this is what makes relationships difficult in the church. Because as you get closer to people and bond with people in church, eventually, they might learn about the regrets in your life. And people who avoid making commitments and connections in the church usually are afraid people will get to know the real THEM. If people knew me, they would know my regrets—I'm just not ready for that.

But it might surprise you to know that MOST of us are NOT living the dream. We are not living the life we would have imagined for ourselves years ago. We fall way short of all that we ASPIRE to be, because of some poor choices, some bad decisions along the way.

Some of you here this morning are with me: you think:

- I've made some bad choices in my life, and my goal is not to be dumb anymore about my choices. I hope somehow through church I can learn how to make better choices, and avoid the pitfalls I put myself in. If somehow God can help, or if by knowing more about Jesus and the Bible can help me avoid bad choices, I'm in. I want to know more."
- Some of you are thinking, "hearing from God...ooooohhkay. Twilight zone moment here. I don't know about this stuff."

Well, here's the good news: God cares deeply about the decisions we make, no matter what size they are, no matter how big or small. And He wants us to make good choices in our lives.

I want you to look at one key verse that we will memorize during the course of this series. Let's just start with the very last part and say it together.

Proverbs 3:6 "...He will make your paths straight."
Say that with me.

In other words God will direct your path, he will make your paths obvious. God cares about your life, and he cares what you decide, and he wants to make it obvious what he knows you should do.

Now, if you're like me, you're thinking: Okay, HOW do I know what God wants me to do? How do I know if God is telling me to do something? I mean do I just open the Bible up, and "Oh, David saw Bathsheba on the roof, so he slept with her..." Is THAT what God wants me to do? It's in the Bible, should I go sleep with another man's wife? No, no no.

Or you ask advice from one of our elders like Mr. Fenner what you should do and he tells you one thing. Then you come to me and ask what I think you should do and I give you completely different advice. Now you've got two Christians giving completely different advice, what do you do?!

How can we know what God wants us to know and do?

Well, God promises to make his will clear, he promises to make your paths straight, or obvious. And that's what we're going to be learning about together for a couple more Sundays, and for the next eight Wednesday nights as we discover God's will. I hope you will commit to being here.

In order to set the stage for this topic I'm going to need to introduce you to the basic framework of God's will. And we're going to hit some of this again Wednesday night just to make sure we get a good foundation. If you're taking notes I really recommend you jot these down.

What we need to explain first and foremost is that God's will is expressed in three ways in the Bible. If you were to look up every passage where God's will is expressed, it will pretty much fall into one of these three categories:

1. God's Providential Will
2. God's Moral Will
3. God's Personal Will

Providential Will

God's Providential Will are the things God is going to do no matter what. These things he's going to do regardless of our faith or our obedience. It doesn't matter what we think or feel, these are things God will do no matter what. Let me give you a couple examples.

Genesis 1:1, NIV "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

God was going to create the world no matter what, it didn't matter what we thought, we didn't even exist. God did it.

Here's another: Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

At just the right time, God sent Christ to be a baby in a manger. When he wanted to do it, when God decided. This was going to happen no matter what.

Now, it's important to notice that sometimes God invites individuals to participate in his providential will. God invited Mary to give birth to Jesus, I'm going to bring a Savior into the world, and I would like you to be his mother, and she accepts.

Another time God says to Abraham, "I'm going to have a nation of people to myself, and I'm going to bless them, and I'm going to bless other nations through them. So, Abraham, get up and move to the town I will show you." And Abraham accepted.

Here's another passage, Revelation 20:11-15. In it God says that at the end of time, he's going to judge everyone in the world, and everyone who has ever died. And he's going to have a book called the book of life, and everyone's name that is written in that book will live, and everyone else will be cast away from him. That is going to happen regardless of our choices or whatever else. IT WILL HAPPEN. That's God's Providential will.

Secondly there's God's Moral Will.

These are the Thou Shalts, and the Thou Shalt Not's in the Bible. These are the things God has revealed through Scripture that he desires.

These are things you never have to pray wondering what God wants you to do.

- God do you want me to move in with my boyfriend? You don't even have to ask that because God has already clearly revealed the answer in his word. There's no discrepancy or ambiguity. God should we move in together, He's already revealed his answer."

1 Thes 4:3, New Living Tr., "God's will is for you to be holy."

God's moral will is for you to be holy, to not sin, and he's revealed to us the things we should and shouldn't do to be holy.

You never have to ask about moving in with your boyfriend, read on in the verse, "God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. 4 Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor."

- Or God, should I fudge these lines on my taxes? No one will know, and it would really help us out. And I mean, it's not like the government spends my money on godly things. You don't have to even ask the question, because God has already revealed what he wants you to do and not do in his Moral will.

In Mark chapter 12, some people asked Jesus, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" and Jesus told them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

One more. You never have to pray, "Lord, should I tell my friends about Jesus?" or "Lord, do you want me to help win lost people to Christ?" or "Lord, do you want our church to grow?" You never have to ask those questions, because God has already revealed that he wishes for ALL men to be saved, and we wants his disciples to go into all nations and make new disciples of Jesus. You never have to wonder if God wants our church to grow, in number or in maturity. The answer is ALWAYS yes, yes, yes.

God's moral will is all those things God has already revealed whether you should or should not.

1 Peter 2:15, "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."

God's Personal Will

God's personal will is all the specific questions you have about direction in your life.

- Should I marry her?
- Should I take this job?
- Should I move here?
- Should we take that offer?
- Should we move in with our family?
- How long should we move in with our family?
- Should I serve the church in this area, or that area?
- Should we buy this now, or wait until later?

And the list of specific questions can be endless.

Let me give you an example of this from Scripture.

1 Cor 1:1, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."

Paul believed that God called him in particular to be an apostle. He didn't want everyone to be an apostle, but his will was for Paul to be an apostle.

And let's face it, it's God's personal will we tend to be the most curious about. It's the decisions we make that we want God's help with. We want to avoid making bad decisions. But it can be hard to discern what God's personal will is: and that's why as a church we're spending several weeks on this. I truly hope you will come to the Wednesday night class to learn more about this.

Now, anyone know what this thing is?

It's a Plumb Bob.

Do you know what it's used for? Builders use this to get a straight line that's level up and down. And once this line is set, everything else is based off it. Mason workers, brick layers, they even do a horizontal line to get everything straight. But the basic idea is that everything else about the structure is based on this plumb line.

Well God's providential will and his moral will are like this plumb line. They set the basis for everything else in our lives. Everything within God's personal will for us is based off of those other things. God's Providential will and his moral will set the foundation for everything else that happens.

And here's the secret, okay, you need to get this:

The more familiar you become with God's providential will, and the more obedient you become to his moral will, the better you will be able to discern His personal will for your life.

This morning we're talking specifically about God's will for YOUR LIFE. So for just a couple more minutes I want to apply these things we've just learned to YOUR LIFE, and then we'll be done. Sound okay with you?

Alright, when it comes to God's Providential Will for your life, the things God will do in your life regardless of anything else, what do we know?

- First, you were born. Regardless of your obedience or faith, God chose when you were born. He used your parents, but it happened to be you and not someone else that was born.

- God chose who your parents were. And he chose the time and country where you were born.
- And no matter what, just like there was a day you were born, there will be a day when this physical life will be over, and you will stand before Him.

All of that, God has done or will do no matter what. It's his providential will in your life.

Now, what about His moral will for your life:

- Well, first and foremost, God's moral will, what he has revealed that he wants from can be boiled down to a couple things. First, He wants you to be saved according to the Bible.

2 Peter 3:9, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

And John 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

And so God wants you to accept His grace through Jesus Christ by believing in Jesus as Lord, and repenting of your sins, and being baptized into Him for the forgiveness of your sins.

- And once you've become a Christian, it's God's will that you obey his commands.

John 15:9-10, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Now, we don't have time to read and list everything God has told us to do as his people. But this is something you don't have to wonder about. God has already revealed what is right and wrong, what is good and bad, and it's our responsibility to become familiar with those things and obey them.

And keep in mind that everything God has told us to do, every command is given in His wisdom. And what that means is that obeying God's word will always bring about what is best for us. God has our best in mind, and he has your best in mind. And as we learn what the Bible calls us to do, and as we do those things, then we will be within God's moral will.

Now, when it comes to God's personal will for our lives, it's different for every person. And over the next few weeks we'll learn more and more about how to discern it for ourselves.

But remember, the more familiar you are with what God is doing in the world, and the more obedient you become to the things he has already told us to do, then the more clearly you will be able to discern His will in the decisions of your life.

I'd like to look at one more passage that deals with the Moral will of God for each one of us that will affect all of our decisions. And if you and I will be wrapped up in this, then it's going to make it so much easier to know what God would have us do in the decisions of life. It's found in Luke chapter 14.

God wants you to be sold out to him completely. Luke 14:25-27 "Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

What does that mean? I mean, isn't Jesus all about love? I mean, didn't he tell us to love one another? Why does he say we have to hate our parents and our family? Why hate our own lives?

Well, I believe the answer is wrapped up in the first of the 10 commandments. The first commandment is not don't lie or don't murder, or don't covet. It's not even to honor your parents. The first commandment is "you shall have no other gods before me." In other words, our God wants no competition. It's not that he wants just to come first in our lives. He wants no competition.

My wife expects the same thing of me. She wants no competition. What if I told her one day, "Exie, you're first in my life. You're the first woman on my list. But I also have a second and a third woman here on the list. You're number one, but right after you comes this other lady." Do you think my wife would be okay with that? Of course not. If I said that to her, she would send me to see Jesus that day.

That's because my wife wants no competition. And that's the same thing our God wants.

And yet, I've known Christians who say, "God, you're first, and then my career." Or "God you're first, and then sports." Or "God, you're first, and then my kids." Or "You're first, and then this, and this, and this. But sometimes I wonder if God really is first....in fact I wonder sometimes if God is even on the list..."

Jesus said, "Unless you love me so much that everything else completely pales in comparison, then you CANNOT be my disciple. Not you will have a hard time, or that you will barely be His disciple, you cannot be.

Jesus says unless you carry your cross, you cannot be His disciple. And I know all this is hard teaching. But this is the real Jesus. Sometimes Jesus would turn to the crowd and speak some hard truth, and he speaks it to us, too. Here's what He means about carrying your cross.

When people in Jesus' day were carrying crosses, that means they were being executed. They had no future. Their life was over. And they weren't giving orders. The soldier who put the cross on their back gave them orders to walk here or there, and they went. And they had no future.

And there is a very real sense in which a Christian's life is over the day they give their lives to Jesus Christ. Their old life is over, and their new life is completely surrendered to Jesus. And as Christians, we aren't the ones giving orders or making plans for our life. We are going to go and do wherever and whatever Jesus asks of us. No matter what it is.

In Revelation chapter 3:15-16, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

God wants you to be completely sold out to him. He is literally sickened by people who claim to be Christians, but who have never really given up control of their lives and accepted His will instead of their own.

Friends, I've been there. I've been a lukewarm believer. Believe me, you never want to be. There is no hope in it, there is no peace, and there is no joy. And I have to remind myself on a regular basis to completely place God first in my life. I depend on his grace. How about you?

I read you a passage from Proverbs earlier, I'd like to read you the entire verse now. Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In ALL your ways acknowledge him. Then...He will make your paths straight.

In all your ways, in other words, in everything you do or say, be surrendered to God. Be completely sold out to Him. Don't try to lead your own life, don't just try to do what makes sense to you. Don't just lean on your own understanding. That leads you nowhere. But, be yielded to Jesus Christ, and He will give you direction. And it will be the best life you could ever have.

If you've got a decision coming up, and you want to know what God wants you to do, make sure in the other areas of your life where it's OBVIOUS what He wants you to do, that you're doing it. If you want to know His will in one area, make sure you're obedient to him in all the other areas of your life. And then you will see more clearly which way to go.

Where will God lead you? What path will he put you on? I don't know. But I know one thing, it begins with accepting Him as your Savior. And admitting that just like me and everyone else, you've made some bad decisions, and you've messed up. But starting today, you will lean on Christ and not yourself. And not only will he cleanse your sins through baptism, but he will give you a new life, with new direction.

Are you ready to know God's will for your life? It starts with a relationship with Christ. You come this morning.

© 2008 Friends in Fellowship Christian Church. All Scripture references from New International Version, unless otherwise noted. Significant portions of this message contributed by Andy Stanley's "Discovering God's Will" sermon and lesson series.