

A Bible Study Concerning How We Determine God's Will In Our Lives

**“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”
[Ephesians 5:17]**

How do we know God's will for our lives? Is there some magic formula? Can we really know what God expects of us in every situation?

God's sovereign will versus His commanded will:

We must not forget that God's sovereign will is that which He predetermined before the foundation of the world. Those predetermined things will come to pass no matter what. Those whom God elected to be saved will be saved. Events that God desires to take place will take place (who has resisted His will?). No one can stop God from implementing that which is His sovereign will to perform. However, we can and do resist God's commanded will in scripture. We go against His will out of ignorance as well as willfully and knowingly. It is His commanded will in scripture that this paper will address.

To know God's will...

To be able to do God's **commanded will** requires knowing God and this requires a clean heart (Psalm 51).

How do we get a clean heart?

First of all, we need to have God's Spirit within us (by being born from above). To be able to know and do God's will we need to be a Christian and for that to happen we need a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 11:19).

2. As a Christian we need to know life's goal

It is to glorify God by being conformed to the image of his Son (Romans 8:29).

3. We need to understand what kind of attitude God desires of His children

Having the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-26).

Having the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:10-16).

Having the nature of a servant (John 13:3-16, Phil 2:6-8).

Having a repentant heart (Rev 2:16, 2:21, 3:19).

4. Knowing God's will requires knowing His Word (Psalm 119).

How do we know His Word?

By reading the Bible by ourselves and with others.
God's will is never contrary to His holy Word.

5. We need to listen to God and commune with Him in prayer.

How do we do that?

We can't hear what someone has to say if we don't stop to listen to them and sometimes that requires a special effort to go somewhere where we will not be distracted (Jesus often went up to a secluded place to pray)
His familiar statement "not my will but thine be done" was made in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

To do God's will...

1. To be able to do God's will requires a right spirit (Psalm 51).

What is a right spirit?

Having the desire to do the will of God when He reveals it to us. If we ask God for guidance we should be prepared to accept it and act on it when we receive it.

We need to have a clean conscience from the past. Guidance will always be hindered or misunderstood if there are still sinful things in your life that God has urged you to get right. How can He show you more if you have not obeyed the things He has already shown you? Unconfessed sin is a prime reason why many do not know God's will. It is the pure in heart who will see Him."
[Winkey Pratney, "Knowing God's Will", Last Days Ministries, (c)1983]

2. We need a willingness to be counted as fools for Christ (I Corinthians 4:7-10)

We need to be in the world but not of it, a peculiar people (Titus 2:14).

We need to offer up ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2).

We need to be willing to be hated by the world (John 15:18-19).

We need to be willing to suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12).

3. We need to always remember that our flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41)

We need to continually submit our earthly desires to God's eternal heavenly desires (Colossians 3:1-17).

We need to show the world that God's eternal kingdom is what is most important to us (Phillipians 3:7-14).

4. We need to have the greatest of gifts: love (I Cor 13)

When you read 1 Cor 13, look at it as if it was written about the kind of love you should have for God and remember that such was the kind of love in Christ that drew him to the cross on our behalf.

We must ask God to continually reveal the depth of His love for us so that we

can be obedient to Him out of a deep and genuine love and not out of fear or habit.

We need to put our relationship to God first always (Matt 6:33) and jealously guard our time alone with God.

We need to learn the benefits and blessings of giving in to the will of the one we love.

Likewise, we need to learn the problems of seeking our own way.

We must meditate on things above (Col 3:1-2) and on what God has in store for us in heaven someday (I Cor 2:9) so that this world will not distract us or lure us away from God and the work He has for us to do.

We need to understand the significance of being the bride of Christ and of the wedding feast of the Lamb when the bride is presented to the Son by the Father.

What is God's will?

Biblical statements about God's will, in general terms, include:

John 13:14-17 - "If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Luke 17:10 - "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

Matt 22:37-40 - "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Specific examples of God's will being stated in the Bible:

A synopsis of God's will regarding how to pray can be found in the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6).

A synopsis of God's will for family relationships can be found in Ephesians 5:22-31 and Colossians 3:18-21.

Practical guidelines for knowing God's will in a specific situation:

Make sure your will is open to God's will.

Search His Word for similar situations.

Consult with mature Christian friends.

Spend quiet time before the Lord listening to the Holy Spirit.

Write down pros and cons of a specific action and alternative actions you plan to take.

Examine what you wrote down in the light of God's will in Scripture.

Determining God's will - a self-examination:

In Ephesians 5:17 above we are *commanded* to understand what the will of

the Lord is. We will see that our ability to obey this command is a function of how much we study the Bible and how much we learn from our studies. God expects us to apply what the Bible says, to individual situations in our lives as noted in the self-examination below.

1. Is what I am planning to do in agreement with scripture? Have I searched the Bible for guidance?

Psa 119:105 - Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

Psa 119:5 - O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

Psa 119:24 - Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

Psa 119:30 - I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

Psa 119:133 - Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

2. Have I prayed for wisdom about the decision I am struggling with?

Matt 6:9 - After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Col 1:9 - For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Php 1:9 - And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

3. Will my actions show that I am conformed to Christ? Am I planning to do something that would delight God? Rom 8:29 - For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren

John 8:29 - And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

1Thes 4:1 - Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

2 Tim 2:4 - No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

4. Will I be honoring God and will my decision reflect that I am putting God first in my life?

John 8:50 - And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth.

Matt 6:33 - But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

5. Will I be benefiting the body of Christ or harming myself?

1 Thes 5:11 - Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

6. Will I be in agreement with the advice of mature godly Christians?

Prov 11:14 - Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

7. Will I be doing something that will renew my mind or pollute my mind?

Rom 12:2 - And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

8. Will I be showing people that I have a humble, servant-like attitude?

Rom 12:3 - For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ...
Matt 23:11 - But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.
12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

9. Will it be something that leads me closer to God and will it reflect His holiness in me?

1 Thes 4:7 - For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.
James 4:8 - Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

10. Will I have perfect peace about what I am planning to do?

Isaiah 26:3 - Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

11. Will my actions show others that I am an uncompromising, heavenly-minded man or woman of God?

1 Tim 4:12 - Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.
John 13:15 - For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.
1 Pet 2:21 - For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps

12. Will I be indicating to others that I have a hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Matt 5:6 - Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
1 John 3:10 - In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.
1 Pet 2:24 - Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

13. Is my intention to really please God and put Him first or are my motives selfish?

Matt 6:33 - But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you

1 John 2:15 - Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

14. Is the purpose of my actions or plans to bring glory to God?

2 Cor 10:17 - But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

1 Cor 10:31 - Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Col 3:17 - And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Col 3:23 - And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men

1 Cor 6:20 - For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

15. Could it be that I am having trouble seeing God's will because I am resisting God's efforts to purify my heart?

Matt 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Psa 66:18 - If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me

Matt 5:23 - Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

16. Am I dealing with the sins in my life that God is revealing to me or am I running from God's will like Jonah did?

Prov 3:6 - In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. 7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

17. Am I really prepared to accept God's will and act on it? Have I counted the cost?

Luke 16:10 - He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Luke 14:28 - For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

18. Am I ready and willing to be counted as a fool for Christ and to suffer persecution for His sake?

1 Cor 4:10 - We are fools for Christ's sake ...

Matt 5:11 - Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

19. If I am undergoing hardship or some trial, would God be glorified if I was delivered from it right away or if I endured it patiently a bit longer?

2 Cor 12:9 - And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

20. Am I redeeming the time and being a profitable servant by what I am doing or planning to do?

Eph 5:15 - See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Titus 3:8 - This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

21. Am I concerning myself with things that only God can know?

Matt 6:34 - Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW ABOUT GOD'S WILL FOR US?

A. People in the Bible did not know God's will for everything:

Paul regarding his plans to visit to Corinth:

1 Cor 4:19 - But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

B. Even if we attempt to do something that is in agreement with scripture, it may not be God's time:

Eccl 3:1 - He hath made every thing beautiful in his time ...

C. There are specific things that God does not wish us to know. He just wants us to love Him and to trust Him to care for us.

Rom 11:33 - O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

D. God wishes to bless us as we do His will:

Deut 28:1 - And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: 2 And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. 3 Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. ... 9 The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. 10 And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.

Summary:

God's will for us is always in agreement with His word. He does not spell out every decision for us. Rather, He expects us to have communion with Him through prayer and through an intimate knowledge of the scriptures so that we will make decisions in our lives based on our knowledge (as imperfect and as incomplete as that may be) of His commandments in the Bible.