

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

Purpose: To communicate the importance of seeking God's will and how to discern His will when making decisions.

Learning Objectives:

1. To understand God's desire to lead us in His will.
2. To understand the heart-felt commitment necessary to know God's will.
3. To understand the various sources to help us discern God's will.
4. To understand how to apply the "Sound Mind Principle."

Key Verses: Psalm 25:14; Ephesians 5:17

Note to instructor: Share with the class a time in your life when you needed to discern God's will. Did you apply what was taught in this session? What were the results?

INTRODUCTION:

Think of situations in your life when you wondered, "What is God's will in _____?" It could be what to major in college, career choice, spouse, what ministry to be involved in, what ministry strategy to do, etc. How do we discern God's will, especially concerning things not specifically written in the Bible?

Two helpful resources to read are "The Paul Brown Letter" by Dr. Bill Bright, and "Experiencing God - Knowing and Doing the Will of God" by Henry Blackaby.

Henry Blackaby writes in his book, "What is God's will for my life?" is not the right question. I think the right question is, 'What is God's will?' Once I know God's will, then I can adjust my life to Him. In other words, what is it that God is purposing where I am? Once I know what God is doing, then I know what I need to do. The focus needs to be on God, not my life!"

I. Discerning God's Will Is All-important to Those Who Desire to Walk With Him.

- God desires that we know and experience His will for our lives. Ephesians 5:15-17
- His will is good, pleasing, and perfect Romans 12:2b .
- God has a good plan for us. He causes all things to work together for good for us who are called according to His name. Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28.

II. Commitment to Do God's Will is Required.

Read Romans 12:1-8; 13:1-5; John 7:17

A wrong statement is "No Lord." We must commit to obeying God's will as He reveals it. In the process, we must already be obeying the authorities that God has established.

“The moment God speaks to you is the moment God wants you to respond to Him.” Blackaby

III. Sources for Discerning God's Will.

- A. The Bible. Psalm 119:105; 2 Timothy 3:16,17

The Bible is God’s already revealed will. It is designed to help you understand the ways of God. Then, when God starts to act in your life, you will recognize that it is God

- B. Prayer. James 1:5,6; Philippians 4:6,7

Sometimes answers come silently in prayer as God speaks to our heart.

- C. The Holy Spirit. Philippians 2:13; Acts 16:6-10; John 16:13

Submit to His direction.

- D. Godly Counsel. Proverbs 19:20; 27:17

Since love is often “blind,” this is good for those considering marriage. As you receive advise from others, realize that **you** are responsible for **your** decision.

- E. Providential circumstances: Seeing God at work.

- F. Our Desires. Romans 1:9-11; Psalm 37:4,5

Our desires must be evaluated under Christ’s lordship.

“When [God] teaches you the Word of God, sit before Him and respond to Him. As you pray, watch to see how He uses the Word of God to confirm in your heart a word from God. Watch what He is doing around you in circumstances. The God who is speaking to you as you pray and the God who is speaking to you in the Scriptures is the God who is working around you.”
Blackaby

IV. The Sound Mind Principle of Discerning God's Will.

2 Timothy 1:7, *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."*

This is especially helpful for decisions in areas that the Bible has no direct command or principle.

The term "sound mind" is also translated "discipline." The idea of discipline in this context means "the power to make godly choices in the face of other alternatives." Thus having a sound mind means that our thought process is being renewed (Romans 12:2) and is under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is far better than common sense.

Those with a sound mind possess the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:15,16) as a result of God's

transforming and renewing work (Romans 12:2). They are under the direction of the Holy Spirit by faith and thus receive wisdom and guidance from God. By contrast, dependence upon man's wisdom will lead us away from God's best for us because it is based on self-interest with an undue emphasis on emotions and chance circumstances.

A. Steps to making a sound mind decision.

1. Pray for wisdom (James 1:5,6).
2. Be sure you are walking in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). This includes doing what you already know to be God's will. Why should God reveal His unknown will when we're not even doing His **known** will? This also includes being faithful in the small things (Matthew 25:21). God may want to adjust your life and character in the smaller assignments in order to prepare you for the larger ones. God develops character to match the assignment. Give God the time He needs to do this - for your sake and for others (remember Joseph in prison in Egypt).
3. Determine the options in the decision.
4. Search the Bible for any relevant principles and commands.
5. Collect available information and godly counsel on each option.
6. Review these "key questions":
 - a. Why did Jesus come? Luke 19:10 *Seek and save the lost.*
 - b. What is the most important experience in your life? *Trusting Christ as Savior.*
 - c. What is the most important thing you can do for others? *Introduce them to Christ.*
 - d. In light of the above, which option in this decision will **best maximize** my ability to help fulfill the Great Commission?
7. List all options with the pros and cons (for and against) of each.
8. Trust God for His wisdom, evaluate the options and make a decision according to His promises in Psalm 37:23,24 and Proverbs 3:5,6.
9. Do not depend on feelings: God promises wisdom not the feeling of wisdom.
10. Take steps to act on your decision by faith. Sometimes a step of faith may be to wait on the Lord ("*Don't just do something, sit there!*") How do I know if I'm to move or wait? **Cultivate your intimate love relationship with the Lord.** The key is **relationship**, not method. Planning is OK, but don't let it replace God. **Let God interrupt your plans at any time.**

Here are a few thoughts from Henry Blackaby:

Jesus wants us to watch Him and adjust our life, goals, and plans to Him and let Him accomplish His plans through us.

“At the time God was about to deliver the children of Israel, the important factor was not what the will of God was for Moses. The important factor was the will of God for Israel.” Blackaby p. 21

“Let’s use Noah for an example. What about all the plans he had to serve God? They would not make much sense in light of the coming destruction, would they? Noah was not calling God in to help him accomplish what he was dreaming he was going to do for God. You never find God asking persons to dream up what they want to do for Him. We do not sit down and dream what we want to do for God and then call God in to help us accomplish it. The pattern in the Scripture is that we submit ourselves to God and: 1) we wait until God shows us what He is about to do or 2) we watch to see what God is doing around us and join Him.” Blackaby p. 28.

“Understanding what God is about to do where you are is more important than telling God what you want to do for Him....You need to know what God has on His agenda...” Blackaby p. 31.

“He does not simply wait around in order to help us achieve our goals for Him! He comes to accomplish His own goals through us - and in His own way.” Blackaby p. 81.

B. Demonstrating the Sound Mind Principle using the pro-con (for-against) chart.

<<See attached example p.8>>

1. List each option along with all pros and cons.
2. Ask the two questions below to help evaluate the value of each item listed on their "Pro/Con" chart from God's perspective.
 - a. For each item in the Pro column ask, "Will this help to fulfill the Great Commission?"
 - b. After you go through each column ask, "Which of these options do you believe will **maximize** your impact in helping to fulfill the Great Commission?"

NOTE: The Sound Mind Principle is based on the truth that God's will is that we be in the place of **greatest** contribution to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

V. Potential Misunderstandings in Determining God's Will.

Well-meaning Christians sometimes rely on methods not based on faith (Romans 14:23).

A. The open door policy: Taking the first option to present itself.

This is not always good because it is walking by sight and not by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).

B. The closed door policy: Assuming that a "closed door" means the option is not God's will.

This is not always good because God may want you to trust Him to move a mountain or “open up the Red Sea.” Sometimes God closes doors (Acts 16:6-11). But don’t rely on “hit or miss” - chance. Difficulties are a part of the Christian life. Don’t give up pursuing God’s best.

- C. Looking for a dramatic experience to indicate God's will.

This is the exception rather than the rule. The normal way is to walk by the Spirit - by faith. Matthew 16:1-4 - seeking experience denies the principle of faith. Remember the train diagram.

VI. Proper Perspectives in Seeking God's Will.

- A. God desires to reveal His will more than we desire to know it (Psalm 32:8,9).
- B. If we are walking in the Spirit, it is not unusual for God's will to be in line with our desires (Philippians 2:13; Psalm 37:4; John 15:7).
- C. If we are walking in the Spirit and sincerely desiring to do God's will, we have assurance that God will always lead us according to His perfect plan (Psalm 25:12; Psalm 37:5,22,23). We don’t have to fear that we will “miss” the will of God. If our heart is right and we’re walking in the Spirit, He will direct.
- D. God is not obligated to reveal His will for our lives all at once. He will tell you what you need to know.
- E. ► **God's will is primarily a relationship with Him, rather than a place or job** (Psalm 25:14; John 15:14,15; Colossians 3:23). Knowing God’s will depends on a quality love relationship with Him. Don’t let planning and methods replace God. If we want to know the will and voice of God, we must give time and effort to cultivate our love relationship with Him.
- F. God's will for our lives always reflects His love for us (Psalm 145:8,9; Jeremiah 29:11). To know God’s will, you must be absolutely convinced of His love for you. There will be difficulties, but God promises to work things out for good. Never forget, **“God loves you and He’s in control.”**

VII. Summary and Application.

- A. Summary.
1. We must first know and following God’s already revealed will in His Word. His “unrevealed” will never goes contrary to His revealed will.
 2. The reason many Christians fail to walk in God's will is that they are not first willing to make the commitment to submit to His Lordship.

3. We need to faithfully pursue the excellent means God has given to discern His will (**Bible**, prayer, Holy Spirit, counsel, etc.).
4. Discerning God's will is an act of faith involving a "sound-mind" decision based on all the information He has given.
5. We make the decision and act on it by faith, trusting God to have given us wisdom and active direction.
6. Discover God's will as you grow in your love relationship with Him.

B. Application.

1. Review these concepts and evaluate your heart commitment and willingness to walk in God's will.
2. Begin to make decisions using the Sound Mind Principle.
3. Read and use the Paul Brown letter which summarizes this content.

Note to instructor: Ask if anyone in the class has any questions or comments about what they read. Then go into the Discussion Questions.

Discussion Questions:

1. What sources has God given us to help us discern His will?
2. Explain the "Sound-Mind Principle."
3. How has this session helped you to better discern God's will?
4. Are you presently in the midst of making a decision in which you are trying to discern God's will? If so, what do you need to do to more effectively discern God's will?
5. Do you have a friend or family member who is seeking God's will in a decision? If so, what would you share with him/her?

“DISCERNING GOD’S WILL” WORKSHEET

1. BUILD THE FOUNDATION - Develop an intimate relationship with the Lord through time in the Word, in prayer, and in worship.
2. Commit the decision to the Lord and pray for wisdom - Psalms 37:5; 16:3; James 1:5-8
3. Work through the internal and external factors and look for agreement and confirmation. (Harbor lights illustration)
4. Move out in faith towards primary option(s) and watch what occurs in the internal and external factors (moving car illustration).

INTERNAL FACTORS

1. Convictions and reasoning based on truth - 2 Timothy 1:7
 *Pro & Con Chart
 *Key Q’s - Which option will most glorify God?
 Which option will I be most effective in seeking and saving the lost?
2. God-led personal assessment of gifts, skills/abilities, and character.
3. The peace of God. Colossians 3:15
4. Impressions from the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:22-23
5. God-given personal desires. Psalms 37:4; 145:19
6. Special supernatural guidance or call (the exception) - Acts 10

EXTERNAL FACTORS

1. Relevant Biblical principles and commands
2. Mature, godly counsel Proverbs 11:14; 12:15; 15:22
3. Oneness with mate Genesis 2:22-24
Genesis 21:12
4. Providential circumstances (The unseen hand of God at work) Genesis 50:19-20

SUPERSTRUCTURE

FOUNDATION

DEDICATION OF LIFE TO GOD AND HIS GLORY	GOD’S WORD AS PRIMARY SOURCE OF AUTHORITY	SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE
Romans 12:1 1 Corinthians 10:31 2 Corinthians 5:9	Romans 12:2 Psalms 119:105 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Hebrews 4:12	Ephesians 5:18 Galatians 5:18 Ephesians 3:16 Romans 8:4, 14
TOTAL COMMITMENT	A COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL VALUES AND PRIORITIES	SPIRITUAL BREATHING
CONFIDENCE IN GOODNESS OF GOD & HIS WILL ROMANS 12:2; JEREMIAH 29:11		

LAW/POLITICS		GET MASTER'S DEGREE		JOB AS ENGINEER		CHRISTIAN MINISTRY	
PRO	CON	PRO	CON	PRO	CON	PRO	CON
Open field for evangelism	Many more years of school	Higher salary	More school	High salary	Limited time for ministry, fellowship	Full-time for goal	Limited salary
Able to effect Legislation	No guarantee of success	Greater credibility	Parents not too positive	Parents happy		Best opportunity for training and spiritual growth, ministry	Parents confused!
Position to open doors for gospel	Limited time to serve God, have family, etc.	Profs recommend it	Cannot help my brother through school	Help pay for brother's education		Can help some with my brother	
Parents approve	Limited time for personal growth, fellowship Cannot help my brother through school			Open field for evangelism	Discipleship is difficult		

Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con	Pro	Con