

# SERIES: DETERMINING GOD'S WILL IN OUR LIVES

## PART II: DOES GOD HAVE A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE?

By Pastor Matthew Woods



In part one of this series I suggested that God does in fact allow more than we can handle but He is not necessarily the source of those things that trouble us. I also mentioned that our sinful state keeps us in over our heads. I then, shared that regardless of the source of what we face the Lord makes it a point to provide grace to meet it such as with Paul's famous thorn in 2 Corinthians 12. God's will therefore is served when we lean into our challenges with confidence in the Lord that we can meet even the sharpest of thorns with grace. Our

challenges are bigger than we are but not bigger than the grace that sustains us. Paul himself boasted that when He is weakest God is doing His best work. The lesson is that we learn to depend on the Lord. This time however, we are looking at God's will from the point of view of another cliché that makes the rounds. It comes in variations like, "God must have a plan for your life." When making decisions does the Lord have a specific direction in mind? How do you know you are even on the right track?

### START WITH WHAT WE KNOW THE LORD WANTS

God wanted this. He wanted Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. It was the Father's will to allow His son, Jesus to be spit upon and punched in the face. It was the Father's will to allow the scourge to tear Jesus' back to shreds. It was the Father's will to allow the Betrayer to betray Jesus. It was the Father's will to allow the disciples to abandon Jesus, even deny Jesus three times. It was the Father's will to allow battle-hardened soldiers to callously nail another perceived criminal to the cross—they had done it before and death was their business. As the lots were cast for Jesus clothes it was the Father's will for Jesus to suffer the cruel words of the mockers. It was the Father's will to forsake Jesus as our sins saturated His person and darkness covered the land. It was the Father's will for Jesus to drink the cup of His wrath down to the very dregs. This is what God wanted.

It is not however what his mother wanted—no mother should have to see her son die. It was not what Peter wanted even when He was denying him. It was certainly not what the other disciples imagined when they gave up everything to follow Jesus. This was not the vision that most had in mind when thinking about a Messiah. I can just hear the disciples; "So, now what do we do?" "Do...?" "Hide in the upper room because there is nothing we can do."

This may not be what Mary or the disciples wanted but this was not only God's plan but God's will. The "will" and the "plan" are the same thing. Jesus says as much in John 3 when teaching Nicodemus. *"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent on a pole so shall the son of man be lifted up so that all who believe in him may have eternal life"* (John 3:15). The death of Jesus was what God wanted because it was necessary for us to have the forgiveness Jesus' death brought. This is what Jesus wrestled with in the Garden of Gethsemane. *"Father, if it is possible take this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done"* (Luke 22:42) It is now God's will that we know Jesus through His Word—this is what the Father wants most for

us and from us as stated in 1 Timothy 2:4. *“Our Savior wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”* Is this not part of why we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Father, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? Regardless, the fact remains from scripture that the plan of salvation is the same as the will for salvation. This makes sense. From Genesis 3 God made a plan and a promise to provide a Savior to fulfill His greatest desire for humanity which is to be saved from sin. It also reveals the loving character of our God.

### **“THE LORD DID SAY...”**

The will of any human being is an expression of one’s desire. When we write out a last will and testament we are expressing our final wishes; usually this means we define who we want to get our stuff when we die. When it comes to a Christian life the problem we face is that our will is still in bondage to sin and still resists the will of God. Our nature is always chafing against God’s desire for us to live holy lives. Paul refers to this internal battle in Romans 7 when he offers a very tongue tangling explanation: *“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.<sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.<sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.<sup>18</sup> For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.<sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.<sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. This is a problem that goes all the way back to the beginning when free will was still free.* Apparently when the sin living in each of us does its doing it leads to a lot of do-doing of the things that are contrary to God’s will—even for the great Apostle Paul who knows better--doesn’t always do better.

But how does one know what God’s will is in one’s life. Sometimes the Lord is explicit and specific. For example consider what happened in the Garden of Eden. From Genesis 3 we hear: *“<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,<sup>3</sup> but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”* Remember this was a conversation in a moment of perfection: Perfect memory and perfect recall. You tell me, was Eve aware of what God’s will is?

Now I realize that we do not have perfect recall but let’s look at a few examples of other things. Numerous times the scriptures tell us to avoid immorality especially sexual immorality (Ephesians 5:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9 to name a few). We have heard the command to avoid adultery. How are following these scriptures? Love and sex are not the same thing but many Christians act as though these scriptures no longer apply. Numerous places in scripture speak of speaking in truth and living in truth (Ephesians 4:15; Proverbs 28:13; 2 Timothy 2:15 to name a few). Are we always truthful?

The scriptures also speak of how God’s will is to keep our responsibilities to Him and one another. 1 Timothy 5:8 speaks of providing for our families. *“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* If you are part of the family you should be contributing to its well-being.

In parables like the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus makes it clear that we are responsible for our neighbor’s well-being. In fact if we do not act we are denying our own faith. And 2 Corinthians 5:10 *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”* We will answer for our actions. Truth be told when we know what we should be doing and do not do it we are responsible for our actions. Eve knew what God said and then put her desire for gaining wisdom above God’s will to keep them from falling.

The very first way to know God's will for our lives is written very plainly in the Word of God. Romans 12 sums it up well when it says, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."* Read and digest the Word like it was your next breath. When we are struggling to find the will of God in our lives the first step is written down. Prayer alone is not enough if you need true wisdom. You must become familiar with the wisdom of the Word which expressly states God's will for us--to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. It is by the grace of God that I can even say this. God's grace is with you. God's Word is in itself an expression of God's desire for you to know Jesus fully. Often however, our sinful nature distorts our will and listens to the lie and temptation which Satan uses: "You shall be like God...God is holding out on you. You have a right to get what you want out of life!" God is not holding out on us. It is we who hold out on Him and then blame Him when it turns out badly.

### ALWAYS THE CLEVER TRAP

An antique mousetrap displayed at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) has proven that it may be old, but it's not obsolete. The 155-year-old contraption was recently found with an unfortunate mouse trapped inside, according to a MERL blog post.

The mousetrap, first patented in 1861, has rusted, warped metal bars and a faded label that reads "Perpetual Mousetrap," aptly adding that it "will last a lifetime." Apparently it's capable of lasting even longer than that.



The trap, on display, wasn't baited, but that didn't matter. It's designed to work via a seesaw mechanism that uses the pest's own weight to tip it, sealing the mouse inside. It's a simple mechanism, that is noted to be "timelessly effective."<sup>i</sup>

Satan is completely opposed to the will of God and uses the same timeless trap he has always used...and found effective. 1 John 2:15 warns us *"Do no love the world or the things of this world."* If we turn to the idols of this world then Satan can spring his trap on us. Idols are anything we love more than the Lord. Therefore, the greatest temptation is to get us to focus on ourselves; money, comforts, expending energy to control or manipulate someone or something to suit our personal desires, and ultimately chasing anything that makes "me" happy. He finds our deepest weakness, holds our secrets sins over us to motivate us to hide from God in our own personal gardens of failure. And then Satan works to convince you to defend your sin by insisting it's your life to do what you darn well please. Know anyone that's thought this way?

Satan's goal is to get you to stop thinking about what God has said and focus on your personal desires as though your desires are always the best standard. Satan's job is to get you to be purely emotional, to be irrational and impulsive—to doubt God's character in the process. Usually, fear or anger become part of this picture so that we feel justified in our rebellion, convinced that we are in some way actually doing something just. Then hurting others or ourselves is also justified often causing relationships to crumble and a community unravels. In fact, one of Satan's biggest lies is to convince you that if you are successful and happy then God's will is always being done. This thinking puts happiness and success on par with God's will. Satan wants us to create idols of these things and then follow them. Problem is, idols always demand sacrifice even if that sacrifice is your relationship with your spouse, your relationship with your church, and especially your relationship with Jesus. If Satan can get you

to doubt God's character then maybe he can convince you to doubt the plan too. He is opposed to the God in every way.

The good news is God's will is done whether we agree with the Lord or not. It is done no matter how much Satan chaffs against or acts to undo it. Nowhere is this more true, then in the cross. Evil men crucified Jesus for selfish reasons and in so doing they served God's desire for the cross to pay the penalty for sin. We also know that in our weakest moments Jesus seeks out the lost, or as in the case of Adam and Eve, he goes searching for the lost when they try to hide—in order to bring grace in the weaknesses.

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### **IF...THEN...**

The Lord seems to offer a choice to His people which is marked with the formula "If...then..." even though the word "then" is implied. For example, in Deuteronomy 28 as Moses addresses a new Israel poised to go into the Promised Land we see the formula. If the Israelites obey the commands of the Lord (then) the people will be blessed and if they do not follow His commands (then) they will curse themselves. Even though "then" is implied the formula applies. Jesus finishes His Sermon on a Mount in the same style in Matthew 7. He says, "If anyone hears these words of mine and puts them into practice (then) he is like a man who built his house on the rock. If one does not put them into practice (then) he is like a man who builds his house in a place vulnerable to the shifting sands of the seashore and it will crash with a great crash." (Paraphrased). The actions of the people lead to a result that will bless or curse. We reap what we sow—we've been taught this by the Lord Himself.

### **CONCLUSION: THE PLAN FOR OUR LIVES STARTS BY APPLYING THE WORD TO OURSELVES**

Can we say we really don't know what's God's will is—at least His primary will? The Lord spells it out more than we often give Him credit for. If as Christians we read His Word, then we at least know that His will is to save us through Jesus Christ. We also have a better sense of God's character—gracious, loving, generous, forgiving, and kind.. We also learn about ourselves --that our sin is regularly warring within our conscience to resist God's will in our lives. In this we discover our weaknesses and learn how to defend them. The benefit here is knowing God's intention for us. He wants for us to be saved—think about that. Our heavenly Father wants us to succeed in the highest way. As we read the Scriptures we know that God's desire is for us to know Him completely, fully, and... eternally. It stands to reason that when we are commanded to follow His will He has our best interest in mind here on earth as well. Does God have a plan for you? The answer is yes. But how individualized does His plan for me or you go? Does one exist specifically for me or you? That's the question for part III.

Coming Up:

**Series: Determining God's Will in Our Lives**

**Part III How do we determine God's will when making decisions?**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://blogs.reading.ac.uk/merl/2016/02/03/155-year-old-mouse-trap-claims-its-latest-victim/>