

How Can I Know the Will of God?

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What is the will of God for me? This question is meaningful only for the person who believes in God. If a person believes that God is sovereign, that He is in charge, then the question of knowing the will of God is important.

As a believer, if I am doing the will of God, I will be blessed, and if I am not doing the will of God, I will not be blessed. This has meaning for one who knows that God is interested in everything concerning the individual. This means that God has a plan for me. How can I find out?

Again, this question is only proper for the person who is willing to obey! When I ask, "What does God want me to do?" one of the first things I must face is what has He already decided for me?

Where were you born? I was born in Canada, that is different than being born in Russia or China. God has already done that for me. What kind of family were you born into? I was born into a family that lived on a farm. It turned out I was born a boy. If I had been born a girl, believe me that would have been a different story. Among other things that are already decided is the culture into which you were born, your own temperament. Are you strong or weak? Do you learn easily, or does it take a bit longer? All these things matter, for you see, God's will is already operative in your life.

Until this present moment, God has kept you. He has had a hand in your life. Your school, the job or profession in which you are engaged are all under His sovereign hand. In this connection, let us ask the question like this: What is the issue before you in knowing God's will?

"Well, they are asking me to play the piano at the Sunday School. How can I know the will of God as to whether I should or should not?" First of all let me ask you this, have you had any training? God overruled all those things. Are you able to play the piano? That means that God has given you your fingers and He has blessed you with your body and has given you your arms. He has given you all the things that are necessary for you to manage this music that you call playing the piano. And if God fixed it that way that you would learn those things and you actually are trained to play the piano, it is possible He may want you to play the piano at the Sunday School. You see if you were to ask me on a given day, "Is it the will of God that I should play a piano in Sunday School?" I would ask you, "Do you go to Sunday School? Do you belong to a class that has a piano? Do they have a piano player now?" "No." Well then I will, ask you, "Can you play the piano?" "Yes." I will ask you, "Have you ever played the piano?" "Yes." "Well then adding all that up it looks to me like it is very likely God wants you to play the piano."

This may sound awfully simple to you, but let me tell you how this will work. Suppose a man were to come along who by some accident or misfortune had an arm cut off and he has just one arm. So he comes to me and he asks me, "Do you think it is the will of God that I should play the piano for the Sunday School?" I would say, "No, I do not think it is." He would say, "Why?" I would say, "In His providence, in the way in which He has controlled your affairs, He has turned you out in such a way that playing a piano is a physical impossibility for you. I do not think He wants you to play the piano." You see the course of your life and the things that have happened can have a definite bearing upon this. In other words your preparation and your past experience can fit you for this service that you are giving to the Lord.

Then we should go on to another thing, and I am sure some of you have been waiting for this. Now I bring in the importance of praying. For people who actually believe in God, who believe God has a will, who believe that God would want His will done and that He would bless those who would keep His will; and a particular situation opens up before them and they are willing to do His will, why not pray? Why not

bring all these things before the Lord in prayer, and ask His guidance?

When you are wondering whether or not a particular course of action is the way of God in your life, pray. Go along with God and get on your knees before God and speak out whatever you can by describing the situation. The question is whether to teach a Sunday School class. Can you? Yes. Is there a class that wants you? Yes. Have you been asked? Yes. All right. Then you are still not sure? No. Well, now go to the Lord in prayer. Bring all that before Him and ask Him to guide you.

I do not know how He will do it. He may bring things to your mind. He may indicate to you what the Lord has done for you, and you will think that you would do that for other people. He may bring to your mind that you are willing to do anything for His Name's Sake. There will be ways in which it will come to you. But prayer can have a very definite part in finding out the will of God. Remember this, you do not want to ask the will of the Lord in prayer if you are not going to do it. As long as you have in your mind's eye that there is only one thing, you want and you are going to ask the Lord for it, do not be surprised if you do not get it. Because, when you are going to come before the Lord in prayer, a humble yieldedness into the will of God and the willingness to take His will, whatever it is, will be a very definite contribution toward that answer.

In that connection I could ask this other question, have you ever had any intimation that that is what God wants you to do? Have you ever had any dreams about it? Do you day dream about that particular thing? For instance, so far as this matter of playing the piano in Sunday School is concerned, did the idea ever occur to you? Now I know sometimes the Lord will suddenly open a door for us we never even imagined; but generally speaking you will find that He will in some way have tipped you off to what He wants you to do and it will come out in your thinking about it. You will have been concerned about doing this thing. In the question of teaching a Sunday School class, you may actually in your mind's eye see yourself teaching. You can even find yourself preparing to teach.

I can remember one time when a certain woman was asked to take a place of responsibility in the women's work. She thought she could not do it. She had felt that she did not have time. And so over the phone she answered, "I can't possibly do it; I have too much to do." She turned away from the phone, and as she turned away to walk down the hall, something fell right in front of her, a picture or something off the mantelpiece fell on the floor and smashed. She turned around, called up this nominating committee chairman on the phone and told her, "I'm willing to act as President." Does that seem strange to you? Let us review the situation. This woman was competent. She could well be a circle chairman. The church had these circles, and she was an active, interested member of that group. This woman, in the providence in her life, was wealthy; and she had a maid in the house. There were many, many ways in which she would not be tied up every moment of every day. She really would have the time to act in this capacity. She had all those things in mind; but she was not minded to do it. As she turned away from the phone, this picture fell and smashed in front of her. It jolted her. She saw the whole thing. She came right back and committed herself to it. And by the way, she was for several years afterwards an active circle chairman. Because I was her pastor, I know.

Finally in this whole matter of knowing the will of God comes the matter of the personal call, some inward feeling you have that this is what you ought to do. You may hear a voice about it but apart from hearing the voice you may have the inward conviction. It may grow on you, and you just feel in your heart this is what you ought to do. When you pray about it, it is strong. Every time you think about it, it is strong. Because this is the one thing that intrigues you, the chances are that that also will be in the will of God.

Being Led In The Will of God

As a Christian lives and makes decisions each day, could he expect the Lord God to guide him? How would He do it?

Let me direct your attention to a New Testament incident. In Acts 8:26 we have the incident of Philip being led to speak to the Ethiopian. "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south" Now we must pause for a moment. This phrase, "the angel of the Lord," remains obscure so far as we are concerned. We know that angels are creatures of God, but just exactly what kind of person this was we do not know. Was this a present form; something like the form of a man, like those angels that sat at the open tomb? Was it such a person as the disciples had speaking to them on the day of the Ascension when two men robed in white spoke to them? It does not tell us. The word "angel" means "messenger." It does not mean necessarily that this angel had a body. It is conceivable that the angel of the Lord would have been one who communicated this message to Philip in the Spirit. When it says, "the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip", the word "spake" does not necessarily mean audible words. It may have been audible words, but it does not necessarily mean that kind of thing. The communication could have been made through the Spirit. Philip could have felt in his heart this was what was being said to him. I am going to suggest to you I think it probably came to him while he was praying. He felt inwardly led, as if he had been definitely told what to do. "Arise, go toward the south." That is what he did. He got up and went. He had a definite intimation given to him that this is what he should do.

In verse 29 you read: "Then the Spirit said unto Philip." This brings us directly to the Holy Spirit. "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." Now while you are thinking about that, you might well keep in mind that it is a function of the Holy Spirit to take the things of Christ and show them unto us. It is not straining the matter at all to intimate to you that when the Spirit conveyed its guidance to Philip, He could have been taking the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and conveying it to Philip. In any case, "the Spirit said unto Philip." Here again "saying" is not necessarily audible words, the of thing other people could have heard. It does not mean a voice came from heaven. It could well be in his consciousness. "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." Now that was specific. There was another chariot there on the highway and Philip felt in his heart, in some way the idea was gotten across to him, that he was definitely commissioned to go there.

It is quite possible that Philip was looking for an opportunity to serve. Philip was an evangelist, engaged in the matter of teaching and preaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. So it is quite possible that while Philip was travelling along this highway, he was actually thinking in terms of this. And when the direction was, "Go near, join thyself to this chariot," you can have in mind that this is the kind of man who is already looking for a chariot to go to, or someone that he could talk to. It is possible that, as he travelled, he was in prayer, and that this came to him while he was in the atmosphere of prayer. It is also possible that he was asking for guidance. He may well in his heart and spirit have been thinking all the way along, "What wilt thou have me to do Lord?" We should have in mind that the guidance that we are reading about came to a man like Philip, who was already committed to the Lord, already serving the Lord.

I want also to draw your attention to the prompt response. In verse 30 you read: "And Philip ran thither to him." This is the case of a man who was eager. His further procedure from here on shows intelligent action. We read in verse 35 for example: "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began, at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." He talked to him about Jesus of Nazareth. He told him how this passage he was reading in Isaiah was referring to Jesus of Nazareth, things of that nature.

In verse 39 you read: "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." He did not take him up in the sky. He did not catch him away as in a cloud, but He led him away. It is almost like He snatched him away. I think the picture would be that Philip very likely wanted to continue talking to this Ethiopian. Do you not imagine that with a new convert like that that Philip would want to talk more and more about the Lord?

Apparently the expression, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip," indicates direct intervention to guide Philip away from this man. All the way through this incident Philip is being led just as if someone reached out by the hand, took him by the hand and led him.

I think that the situation would definitely teach that to be led specifically by the Lord, a person must be committed to the Lord. In this incident of Philip, this was a man who was wanting to obey the Lord. If I am going to look for the Lord to guide me about some specific thing, some particular day, what do I do? What would I decide actually? I could ask myself this, am I already minded to do God's will? Am I in the way of doing God's will? To be "led away" as Philip was, I must be in the process of obeying. This call does not come to the disobedient. A person must be willing to respond. The Lord does not tell you what to do and then you decide whether or not you will.

In my own experience, I can remember very vividly when I was seeking the mind of the Lord in a very important time in my life. The first big issues that came up was whether or not I was willing to do the Lord's will. It was made very clear to me personally at that time, that if I was not willing to do the Lord's will, there was no point in asking Him. You know the Lord does not waste Himself that way. If I am not minded to do His will, there is no point in my asking Him what I ought to do. But if I am minded to do His will and am committed to do His will, already in it and already exercising my intelligence as best as I know how to be doing His will, then I should be aware that the Lord Himself is watching over me. Now Philip would be all those things. If you and I have trust in the Lord, are minded to do the things that are pleasing to the Lord, and so far as we know, are already doing, what the Lord wants us to do, and are active in this and ready and willing to respond, I think you and I could expect to be led. That is how it happened with Philip.

Being Led Into Unexpected Conduct

Would a Christian ever be led by the Lord to act in a way contrary to what he had previously considered wrong?

In the book of Acts, Chapter 10, we have the classic case of Peter being led to Cornelius. At this time the early Christians were all Jews and it was improper for a Jew to enter a Gentile's home. The Gospel had been preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and in Samaria. Now the Lord would have the disciples to bring the Good News to the Gentiles and Peter was chosen.

The story that unfolds in chapter 10 is very well known and I am just going to draw attention to it as far as Peter is concerned. Peter went up on the housetop, which was a kind of roof garden, to pray while he was waiting for his noon meal. We read in verse 9 that it was the sixth hour, which is to say, just at noon. "And he became very hungry and would have eaten." He was anxious to eat and was waiting for food. As you read on you will see that Peter had a vision. The vision was about food. In the vision he was directed to eat food that he would ordinarily have, as a Jew, considered unclean. Today we would say it was not kosher. You know that an orthodox Jew who is seeking to obey the principles of his belief would not eat food that was not kosher food. This was Peter's experience. Now in the vision, this food was let down before him as if it were on a big sheet and he was told to rise up and take some of this meat and eat it. His answer was, "No, I have never done that." This happened three times. Each time that this vision came with this food in front of him, he was told, "Rise Peter; kill, and eat." And Peter says, "Nay, I have not done it. No. That food that is there before me is from animals that are not proper. They are not kosher. That is not the kind of meat I should eat." And each time he would hear a word like this. "What God hath cleansed call not thou common." If God has cleansed it, don't you say it is not fit. Then it would go away. This happened three times.

Now up till then I am not sure that Peter had learned anything, but now I want you to see what else happened. While he was thinking on it, there came to him this truth. He was given to understand that several men would come up to the door asking for him. He was told to go with them, asking no questions. So as it turned out, they came to the door, just the way in which he had seen in the vision, and under the circumstances, he went. I want you to notice however that he took with him certain witnesses. We understand that he took several men with him to watch, because he was going to go to the home of a Gentile which is not a proper thing to do. He went to the house of Cornelius and in the course of their relationship he began to tell him about the Lord Jesus Christ. As he told them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius. Peter then said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" And he went ahead and baptized the Gentile. We all recognize that that was the opening of the door of the Gospel, you might say, to the Gentiles. These were the first Gentiles that believed. In it all Peter had to be made ready and willing to go to the house of the Gentile and preach to him, contrary to his natural feeling. He was led to go. This is in answer to the question which was raised at the beginning. Is it possible that I might be asked to do something I gave never done before? Is it possible I might be led to do something that I would not have considered right for me to do before? The answer is "Yes, this is possible."

This is the kind of guidance that the Lord will give to those who are responsive to Him. He is personally directing them. This is the way it was with Peter.

Now notice this situation with reference to Peter. You will remember that Peter was under orders to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The Lord Jesus after His resurrection, before His Ascension, had told the disciples that they were to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Peter had this in his heart and mind. He knew that this was the mind of God. At the particular time that this happened, Peter was currently obeying the Lord. He was down there in Joppa teaching and preaching. He was being used to win people to the Lord. At the same time Peter was unconsciously bound by tradition to having nothing to do with the Gentiles. There was nothing spiritual about that. It was a social tradition. It was a custom that the Jewish people had developed in the course of their history, and he, being a Jew, continued to have it. This actually would hamper the exercise of himself as a minister of the Gospel.

The Gospel was intended for everybody. This is now about to be revealed to the whole world but it is going to be revealed through Peter's conduct; that the Gospel is for everybody including the Gentiles. Here is a man, Peter, who has the Gospel in his heart. He is the one that can share with other people, and he is going to be led to go to the Gentiles which ordinarily he would not do. He was under a negative restraint that he did not know he had. He did not realize that deep down in his heart he was subject to this restraint and that he had definitely, as it were, been conditioned not to do this kind of thing. Yet this social restraint that he had would have kept him from carrying out the Gospel as it was planned.

Another thing to notice about this is that Peter was hungry and wanted to eat. Some psychologists will notice right away, "Well, there it is. He had a vision about food. That is natural. The Lord follows it on through." I expect many times people without any spiritual significance, when they are been hungry, have dreamed about food. I expect that anybody that would be dying of thirst, in the time that he was asleep, would possibly be dreaming that he had plenty of water to drink. This is not irregular and it would show that the Lord is using a very normal process in this case, a natural psychological process. Nothing is wrong about that.

Peter received specific evidence of the authenticity of the message. You will remember that when he saw this vision three times, each time the word was said, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common." But at that time, Peter did not know what it meant. Now he is told, "Several men are going to come to the gate asking for you." Sure enough they appeared. Now you see that would give him a feeling of the authenticity of the whole revelation of everything that had been happening. It would tie down to

something actually real, like it was. He did not recognize the meaning of the vision even then. He knew he should go with these men. He went with these men and took six men with him so that they would be able to testify that he had done only what the Lord led him to do. It was not until he was speaking in the house of Cornelius and the Holy Spirit came on those people that he recognized the meaning of those words, "What God hath cleansed, call not thou common." Here God had given the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles, and although it was the Jewish custom to say that the Gentiles were not clean, that they were not fit company, God had blessed them. Therefore this must be the truth. The significance of what he had seen and heard in the vision came upon him with conviction when he was actually involved in it.

Now notice, for our own selves, such guidance is rare. It is only for such which are already obedient. If you are already doing the will of God and moving forward in it, you could expect some such guidance as this. It is verified by events. Peter was brought along in the will of the Lord by certain events that corroborated the guidance that he had.

Now I have another incident in the Book of Acts that I will remind you of how Paul was traveling along from Caesarea to Jerusalem and how people came and told him not to go. You will remember that a certain prophet by the name of Agabus warned him not to go. These prophets came at different times. They came to Paul and told him that by the Holy Spirit they foresaw that Paul was going to have trouble. I personally think that this would happen while they were praying. This man, Agabus, took Paul's belt and tied his own feet together. He hobbled himself, and then he showed himself in this dramatic fashion. In this object lesson, he showed himself to Paul and everybody else and said the Holy Spirit told him that "the man that owns this belt is going to be tied just like this." He would be hobbled, he would be put in the stocks, he would be actually made a prisoner. Agabus was warning him not to go. There were others who did the same thing at this time.

What they saw was real. Paul did have trouble; but he was not in this world to save or spare himself, but to obey the Lord.

As we seek guidance, we cannot go by how we feel, or by circumstances. We could be misled, as was the captain and ship's crew. Look to the Lord; stand on His Word and promises. He is always with you and will never leave you.

Discovering The Leading Of God

Would a Christian always know what God wanted him to do?

Acts 16:6-10 details an incident as Paul searched for God's direction. Now the story itself is quite clear. Remember who Paul was? Paul was not only a man who believed in God and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, but he was a servant of God. He was a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He was a man who had had wonderful answers to prayer, and a man who had had personal fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This was a regular daily experience with Paul.

Here is the way the story unfolds. Paul and a company of others were on a missionary journey. "Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." The story seems to be at this point that while they were wondering where to go next, they were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia.

"After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." Here you have the same idea. "The Spirit suffered them not" – He would not let them go into Bithynia. How did He do that?

The reason I am asking this question is that you and I, especially if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, can realize that if Paul was led that way, we could be led that way. Here is Paul on missionary work. He is traveling and he wants to go forward. We have already seen two places he could not go. He

was forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia (that is in Asia Minor). Then he wanted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered him not.

"And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." Incidentally this was the first entry into Europe. You will remember they went to the city of Philippi and there Lydia believed, and afterwards the Philippian jailor.

Now let us see what we can learn in this incident. A person trusting in God may not know where to go next. You can come to that point where you do not know which way to go. Paul was an obedient servant, a praying man, but he did not know where to go next. Yet, the Lord was faithful and showed him.

Another thing I want to draw your attention to is that a person trusting in God and obeying Him may be minded to go in a direction which would not be in the will of God. Now here is Paul wanting to serve the Lord. No doubt about his mind. No doubt about his heart. No doubt about his intentions. He evidently had planned to go into Asia Minor, but it was not what God wanted him to do. He was a good man, a faithful man and he was in the will of God in general things. Then he decided that he wanted to go, "he assayed to go into Bithynia." I expect as they figured it out, they thought to themselves, "That is a good field." "But the Spirit suffered them not."

I want to draw your attention to another thing. A person trusting in God like the Apostle Paul will not proceed where God does not approve.

A person trusting in God will receive guidance. Paul had a vision. I am certain that all of those present prayed. Their direction was made known to Paul; he shared it with the others. So they "assuredly gathered they should go there."

We may not have a vision, but God in Christ through the Holy Spirit will direct our path as we are faithful in prayer, in the study of His Word and quietly listen as God speaks to our spirit.