

How Can I Know God's Will?

Selected Passages

Series "Reset"

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I hope you've had a great weekend. We have two more weeks in our *RESET* series, and then we are on to studying the book of Ephesians – that will take us all the way up to the summer. I'm getting VERY excited about walking through what is referred to as one of the "prison epistles" of the Apostle Paul. That series begins in two weeks.

Today, we are tackling the fifth of our "must answer" questions as we start 2025. Can you believe we are already a month and a half into the new year!

The question we're answering today is a question that as a Pastor, I am asked probably more than any other question in some form or fashion.

When someone comes in to visit and there is a choice before them...a decision they have to make...there is a fork in the road so to speak, what they are really wanting to know is the title of the message today:

How Can I Know God's Will?

Now, we've all asked this question at one time or another in one way or another. It's college chapel season, and I have the privilege of being on several campuses this Fall. I was on the campus of Lipscomb University this past week in Nashville, will be at Ouachita this week.

Juniors and seniors in high school are wondering what college should I attend? What major should I plan to study? Some are graduating college and wondering what is God's will for this next phase of my life?

- Where do I move?
- What job do I take?
- Which company or organization will I work for?

Any sincere follower of Jesus wants to know and do the will of God!

We want to know, is this the person that I should marry? Are we supposed to have more children? Is now the time to retire? Or to make a move professionally?

These are ALL important questions. How do you know God's will? Is it possible to discern?

illus. Magic Eye – Do you remember the "Magic Eye" art that was popular in the 90's. You couldn't walk through a mall (dating myself there! Bring back the greatness of malls!) without seeing these

You remember how these worked, right? You have to stare at it long enough and all of the sudden an image will pop out at you. If you stare at this one long enough an image of a boat or something will pop out. I don't know...never could see those things!

Well, some of us think of God's will as being like magic eye art. You've got to work to find it...you want to see it...but for some reason it's just not working for you. You wonder:

- "Is my focus off?"
- "Is this a joke?"
- "Is finding God's will just for the super spiritual?"
- "Why can't I seem to discover or know or at a minimum be confident that I am walking in the will of God?"

If you've ever felt this way today's message is for you. Now, there are three statements I want to make right up front about God's will that come straight from the pages of scripture.

1. God's will can be known and obeyed

Eph. 5:17 – “**Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is.**”

Later in (Eph. 6:6), he instructs those that were bondservants to “do the will of God from their heart”. If we could not know God's will, we would never be instructed to live by it...to seek to understand it!

The will of God can be known and obeyed. We're told in:

1 John 2:17 – “**And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**”

Jesus said in **Mark 3:35** – “**For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.**”

So, God's will can be known and obeyed. Now, there are several qualifications for this. For the will of God to be known AND obeyed, there is a “checklist” that MUST be adhered to.

I am leery of EVER giving checklists in church. I don't like it because if you are good legalist like me, you will run with that checklist and do exactly as told, but if you're not careful everything can be checked off from an outward standpoint, but the inward heart is being neglected...this was the Pharisees!

They knew how to check off a list, but inwardly they were shrinking. Jesus told them one time, “the outside of the cup and dish look good, but inside it's dirty and needs to be washed.”

So, I give this checklist with caution, but truthfully, if you are NOT able to checkoff what I'm about to give you, you will NEVER be able to know or obey or walk in the will of God.

I'll just call this checklist: “**Qualifications of knowing and doing the will of God**”.

Qualification #1 – You must be saved (i.e. born again)

ONLY children of God will long for the will of God in their life. The desire to know and do God's will is planted in us by the Holy Spirit at salvation.

1 Cor. 2:14 – “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”

In order to understand the things of the Spirit (which includes the will of God) one must be born of the Spirit! And if you are wondering:

- “Is it God's will that I be born again?”
- “That I be born of the Spirit?”
- “That I believe in his gospel by faith?”

The answer is - ABSOLUTELY it is God's desire for you to be saved!

2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

God desires for you to be saved and to grow in your faith.

1 Thess. 4:3a – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...”

In order for us to know and do the will of God, we must first humble ourselves before him, turn from our sin and by faith trust and follow him – this is salvation.

We will NEVER be able to know, discern or follow the will of God if we are NOT his child. And we do not become a child of God simply by being created by him. We become his child when we receive him by faith.

John 1:12-13 – “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

So, qualification # 1 of knowing and doing the will of God – we must be saved. We must be in a right relationship with God through his son, Jesus.

Qualification #2 – You must be surrendered to the Holy Spirit

It is possible to be saved but not surrendered! It's possible to be in a relationship with the Lord but be doing your own thing...be going your own way. The old school term for this is: “backslidden”.

For the Christians in the room, we know what it is to live in a state of being backslidden. And in this state, we may KNOW the will of God, but we won't do the will of God – NOT when we're backslidden.

Oh, there may be flashes of good deeds, but we won't constantly bear fruit if we are not abiding in the vine (John 15)!

The only way we will do the will of God in a continual and consistent way is to be totally surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit in our life.

Illus. Experiencing God: The subtitle? Knowing and Doing the Will of God. In the workbook, it talks about people who did great things for God – they were all normal people – what made the difference? Surrender. Consecration.

Henry Blackaby – “The truth is he is able to do anything He pleases with one ordinary person fully consecrated to him...Don't just look for God to reveal His will so that you can decide whether or not to do it. Look for Him to reveal his will so that you can do it.”

That's a surrendered life! “Rights off my life...God, you own it! Your will over mine.” – sounds a lot like Jesus, doesn't it? “Not my will, but yours be done.” I want what you want!”

Only one who is fully surrendered thinks this way! I'm reminded of the words of Paul in:

Gal. 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

In order to know and do the will of God, we must be saved. We must be surrendered to the Holy Spirit – it's him living his life through us...he is our “Counselor” and guide along the way. It's us listening to his still, small voice as we go throughout each day.

And how do we hear the Holy Spirit's voice so we can be fully surrendered? This is:

Qualification #3 - You must be submissive to the Word of God

I've got a book in my library called, *The Will of God, is the Word of God*. And it's true! Look, when the Holy Spirit speaks, 99.99% of the time, he's NOT going to be speaking something new!

99.99% of the time, the Spirit's voice is simply reminding you of something that is already in his Word. The Spirit's voice is an echo of the Word of God AND this is why it's imperative that we get alone with God everyday with an open Bible so that we can learn what the will of God is.

Again, it's not like "magic eye" art. God's will is in black and white. For example...it's in God's Word that we read:

1 Thess. 5:18 – “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

It's spelled out pretty plainly right there. The will of God is for me to give thanks to the Lord in ALL circumstances!

- In uncertain times, we give thanks.
- In the unknowns of life, we give thanks.
- In illness, we give thanks.
- In sickness, we give thanks.
- In good times, in bad times...we give thanks.

This is the will of God, and it's spelled out for us in scripture. What about:

1 Peter 2:15 – “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”

Again, right here in black and white. What's the will of God? To do good! This verse is in the context of Peter urging believers to remember that this world is not our home. He's reminding them that as believers, we are sojourners...exiles...and therefore we are to do good, submit to authority and not living in the passions of the flesh.

Often times when we pursue God's will it is going to look very different from the world. God's will is often times going to push us in a way that does not make sense according to the world's standards. We get this from being in God's Word.

We'll look at this verse in just a moment in greater detail but recall Paul's words to the believers in Rome.

Rom. 12:1-2 – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

How will we be able to discern the will of God that is good, acceptable and perfect? By renewing our mind? How do we renew our mind? By giving it to God's Word.

Knowing the will of God, is knowing the Word of God and doing the will of God is simply living under its authority. I can't stress this enough!

Knowing and doing the will of God will NOT happen apart from being submissive to the Word of God – this is what the Holy Spirit takes and uses to show us and guide us in the choices we make each day.

Qualification #4 - You must be surrounded by wise counsel

My gosh...I could give you so many proverbs that go along with this point. Here's one just for time's sake.

Prov. 11:14 – “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.”

We all need people in our life that are saved, surrendered to the Holy Spirit and submissive to the Word of God so that we can lean on them and listen to them when needing to make a decision that we may not be clear on...that we need wisdom on.

Now, MOST of the time, IF we are saved, surrendered and submissive, we already KNOW what to do, it just helps to have people who are saved, surrendered and submissive to affirm what we're thinking...pray with us...stand by us as we make the decision.

Illus. Life groups – No way could we mention being surrounded by wise counsel and not mention the importance of Life Groups. It's here that we can help have people in our life speak truth and help us discern the voice and direction of the Lord.

These qualifications help us know and do God's will. God's will can be known and obeyed. Secondly:

2. God's will is good, acceptable and perfect

Rom. 12:2 – “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Underline those phrases in your Bible – God's will is:

- good (excellent/honorable) ...
- acceptable (well-pleasing) ...
- perfect (complete)...

This needs to be highlighted here – while God's will is good, acceptable and perfect, NOTICE what it does NOT say!

It does NOT say God's will is safe, easy and comfortable. Take special note of that! Sometimes we think if something is tough...or the call we are hearing is to something that is out of our comfort zone, then it can't be from God! Don't be so sure!

Sometimes doing the will of God is difficult! Sometimes doing the will of God is dangerous and comes with a cost!

Illus. Right Now – Trite, Not True – “You’re never more safe than when you’re in the will of God” – FALSE!!! We can be right in the middle of God’s will, and it be the most dangerous place on earth!

- Daniel was in the middle of God’s will and found himself in a den of lions!
- Job was in the middle of God’s will and lost everything...
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were in the middle of God’s will and was thrown into the fire...
- JTB – no man born greater of a woman – he was right in the middle of God’s will, and he was imprisoned and beheaded...

Paul – right square in the middle of God’s will – AND right square in the middle of danger...of losing his life.

God’s will may call you out of your comfort zone - probably will from time to time! This is one of the ways God tests us! God’s will may cost us sometimes – probably will. It may even involve suffering.

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Being in the middle of God’s will may not be safe at all. I want this to be an encouragement to you though.

If you find yourself in the fire because you are doing the right thing...if you find yourself in danger because you are obeying the voice of the Holy Spirit – don’t think that God is mad at you or has abandoned, you! It may just be proof that you’re right where God wants you!

AND, if doing the will of God is hard...be encouraged because Jesus is there to help you accomplish what he calls you to.

Heb. 13:20-21 – “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Sometimes his good, acceptable and perfect will, WILL be the opposite of safe, easy and comfortable. This is how he develops and strengthens our faith, and this leads me to the third point about God’s will.

1. God’s will can be known and obeyed (qualifications)
2. God’s will is good, acceptable and perfect, even if it’s not easy, comfortable and safe (ask any missionary that has left home and gone somewhere to take the gospel)

3. God's will is more about who you are than what you do

For some, this is going to be the most freeing part of the sermon. When we think about God's will, MORE often than not, we think about what we should be doing – and that's important. As previously mentioned, we are to DO the will of God.

However, when you read scripture, you find that God is not so much interested in what we do as who we are.

In other words, he cares WAY more about developing our character than he does calling us to do something – mainly because he knows if our character is in the right place, he can trust us to be in the right place and do the right thing.

I was talking to my Kelsey about this message, and she's been listening to my buddy, J.P Pohluda. And she pulled up a quote on her notes he said I guess in a sermon or podcast. It goes right along with what we're saying about God caring more about who we are than what we do.

J.P. Pohluda – “God cares more about the how and why more than the what and where.”

See, the “how and why” has to do with character...it has to do with motive...what's going on, on the inside. And when it comes to the will of God MUCH more is said in scripture about God developing our character and faith than specifically what he wants us to do in life.

In fact, as we close this message out, I'm going to make a statement, I'm going to give you three verses, and then draw something out on this screen here that I think...that I hope will free you up as it relates to the will of God.

Here's the statement: **If you are saved, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, submissive to the Word of God, and are surrounded by friends that are (wise counsel), do whatever you want and you will be in the will of God.**

Now, that's a BIG statement. But I believe it's true!

You say, “Okay, Pastor, but what about decisions or choices or circumstances that I'm confronted with, and they are not spelled out in scripture...they aren't in black and white? I get God's will is most about my character, but what about the decision to:

- Move my family?
- Take that job at a different company?
- Go to that college?
- Marry that person?

What about those types of decisions? I want to make sure I'm in God's will and doing God's will as it relates to those things.

Well, I stand by my statement. Look at it again: **If you are saved, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, submissive to the Word of God, and are surrounded by friends that are (wise counsel), do whatever you want and you will be in the will of God.**

Let me give you three verses to also memorize and filter the will of God through:

Matthew 22:37 – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

1 Corinthians 10:31 – “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.”

Hebrews 11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Okay...so you have the statement. Here are the verses. When it comes to the “grey areas” of life...decisions you have to make...choices you are confronted with...a fork in the road, and scripture does NOT explicitly speak to it!

Make sure you are saved, surrendered, submissive and surrounded by friends that are and do whatever you want...if you’re still looking for clarity, then look at those verses I just gave you and ask yourself?

? – In making this decision am I exhibiting and being motivated by:

- a love for God...
- the glory of God...
- and faith in God.

If so, move forward. This is (Rom. 12:2) “testing to be able to discern the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Let me work it out for you like this.

You say, “Pastor, I don’t want to mess it up! How can you? You love Christ...you are making a faith decision...you are doing it for his glory. How can you mess up! You will be in the middle of the bullseye! You say, “Pastor, is that God’s will? I say, yes! How do you know? Because you made the decision!

Illus. marriage - This ain’t no fairy tale! This isn’t Cinderella, Princess and the Frog! Make a decision!

And when you who are saved, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, submissive to the Word of God and surrounded by friends who are too...and when you funnel everything through a love for

God, the glory of God and faith in God – are you kidding me?

God will make it right square in the middle of the bullseye ensuring you are right in the middle of his will. This is how you can know God's will.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.