

# **Arbor Foundations**

## 22 – Discerning God’s Will

### **What is the Will of God?**

- **God’s Will of Decree, or Sovereign Will**

- This is what God has ordained. Everything that comes to pass is according to God’s sovereign decree. What God wills, will happen, and what happens is according to God’s will
  - Eph. 1:11; Matt. 10:29-30; Acts 4:27-28; Psalm 139:16; Prov. 16:1, 13; Daniel 4:35; Isaiah 46:9-10

- **God’s Will of Command, or Will of Desire**

- This is what God has commanded—what He desires for His creatures. If the will of decree is how things are, the will of desire is how things ought to be.
  - I John 2:15-17; Hebrews 13:20-21; Matt. 7:21; Deut. 29:29

### **What do we mean by “discerning the will of God”?**

- Common, but wrong perspectives
  - Figuring out the future (fortune-telling approach)
  - Finding the center of God’s will (bulls-eye target approach)
  - Following the correct pathway (divine-highway approach)

**An example of a WRONG APPROACH:** *Conventional understanding of God’s will defines it as a specific pathway we should follow into the future. God knows what this pathway is, and he has laid it out for us to follow. Our responsibility is to discover this pathway—God’s plan for our lives. We must discover which of the many pathways we could follow is the one we should follow, the one God has planned for us. If and when we make the right choice, we will receive his favor, fulfill our divine destiny and succeed in life ... If we choose rightly, we will experience his blessing and achieve success and happiness. If we choose wrongly, we may lose our way, miss God’s will for our lives, and remain lost forever in an incomprehensible maze. (Jerry Sittser, 17).*

- **BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

- **Don’t Worry; Seek His Kingdom – Love God and Be Bold (Matt. 6:25-34)**
  - *The question that God cares most about is not “Where should I live?” but “Do I love the Lord with all my heart” (Kevin DeYoung, 55) – Duet. 6:4-9; Matt. 22:37*
  - The will of God for our lives is that we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

### **What is the will of God for believers? What does seeking His kingdom & righteousness entail?**

- God’s will is that we live holy, set-apart lives (1 Thess. 4:3)
- We are to always rejoice, pray and give thanks (1 Thess. 5:16-18)
- We are to know God’s will so we can bear fruit and know Him better & bring Him glory
  - (Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 2:10) – It’s about *who* we are, not *where* we are. (Kevin DeYoung, 58)
- The will of God is to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:17-21)
  - God’s will is your growth in Christlikeness – to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ.

### **How does God guide His children in His will?** (Principles from Hebrews 1:1-2 – Jensen & Payne)

- God guides us by His invisible providence at all times (Eph. 1:11)
- God can speak to His people in many different ways, guiding them with their conscious cooperation.
- In these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son.
- God continues to speak to us by His Son through His Spirit in the Scriptures (Hebrews. 3:7; 4:12)
- Apart from the Spirit working through the Scriptures, God does not promise to use any other means to guide us, nor should we expect Him to.
  - **Don’t expect the unexpected, but also don’t reject God’s ability to intercede as He sovereignly wills.**

*In General God guides and directs his people by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and love the Scriptures. The Word of God is not to be used as a lottery; nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which detached from their proper places, have no determinative import; but it is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions to regulate our judgements and affections, and thereby influence and direct our conduct. (John Newton, quoted by J.I. Packer, 244)*

### **How NOT to discern God's will for decisions that are not sinful**

- In fear and timidity ... always worrying that you will disappoint or “ruin” God's will for your life
- Looking only for “Open Doors” – Don't be afraid to knock!
- Flee the Fleece (Judges 6:36f; Matthew 4:7)
- Radom Bible Passage Confirmation
- Confidence in Impressions & Feelings & Hunches (not to be embraced as “a word from God”)

### **Discerning God's Will – The Way of Wisdom**

- From Ecclesiastes

*This is the way of Wisdom: “Fear God and keep His commandments” (12:13); trust and obey Him, reverence Him, worship Him, be humble before Him, and never say more than you mean and will stand to stand to when you pray to Him (5:1-7); do good (3:12); remember God will someday take account of you (11:9; 12:14), so eschew, even in secret, things of which you will be ashamed when they come to light at God's assizes (12:14). Live in the present, and enjoy it thoroughly (7:14; 9:7-10; 11:9-10); present pleasures are God's good gifts. Though Ecclesiastes condemns flippancy (7:4-6), he clearly has no time for the super-spirituality which is too proud or too pious ever to laugh and have fun. Seek grace to work hard at whatever life calls you to do (9:10), and enjoy your work as you do it (2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 8:15). Leave to God its issues; let Him measure its ultimate worth; you part is to use all the good sense and enterprise at your command in exploiting the opportunities that lie before you (11:1-6).*

(J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 107).

- From Proverbs 2

- Store up God's command (Read the Bible; memorize Scripture)
- Turn your ear to wisdom (Seek and Listen to sound advice)
- Call out for insight (Pray to God)

**1). Walking the Way of Wisdom – Scripture**

- Romans 12:1-3 – Other passages to consider (1 Tim. 6:6-8; James 4:13-17)

**2). Walking the Way of Wisdom – Counsel**

- Proverbs 1:5; 12:15; 15:22; 19:20

**3.). Walking the Way of Wisdom – Prayer**

- Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 143:10; Matt. 6:9-13; James 1:5-6

### **SIGNIFICANCE: Practical steps to help us make God-honoring decisions.**

- 1). Search the Scriptures
- 2). Get wise counsel – seek advice from trusted & experienced persons
- 3). Pray without Pride
- 4). Make a Decision – Do Something. **Love God and Be Bold!**

\* Remember each day to: Live in the Present, be thankful – for everyday is a gift.

**Resources for Further Study**

- Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*
- Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God’s Will* (Moody Publishers, 2009)
- J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Guard Us, Guide Us: Divine Leading in Life’s Decisions* (Baker, 2008)
- J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1973)
- John MacArthur Sermon, *Taking the Mystery Out of Knowing God’s Will* <https://youtu.be/SGnHAqu9Geo>
- John Piper, “Knowing God’s Will” Topic Page, [www.desiringgod.org/topics/knowning-gods-will](http://www.desiringgod.org/topics/knowning-gods-will)
- R. C. Sproul, *Knowing God’s Will Lectures*, Ligonier [www.ligonier.org/learn/series/knowning\\_gods\\_will](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/knowning_gods_will)
- Jerry Sittser, *The Will of God as a Way of Life: How to Make Every Decision with Peace and Confidence* (Zondervan, revised edition, 2004)
- Tony J. Payne & Phillip D. Jensen, *Guidance and the Voice of God* (Mathias Media, 1997)