

Name: _____

Date: _____

Christian Leadership

How to influence the ideas, opinions and actions of others for Jesus Christ.

Lesson 11: Knowing God's Will (Day One) Choosing God's Will

In reading the gospels, I was moved by Christ's life and teachings to live a simpler lifestyle. The year was 2006 and my husband Anders and I were living in a townhome. We had sold our large house four years earlier when Anders joined CLI full time. We prayed and agreed that we should sell our townhome. Right after we placed the 'for sale' sign in the yard, God gave us a new vision for Christian Library International. The vision was for a mission center to train former inmates to become missionaries.

Anders and I would live on the property with the men and women that God was calling and would be training for full time missions. The program, designed for a two year period, would combine active ministry and academic learning. CLI's regular ministry of resource and Bible study distribution to the imprisoned would continue to operate at the mission center.

This is what I wrote at the time in 2007: "Today is Thursday and our movers are scheduled to arrive next week on Wednesday. We looked at an apartment around the corner from the CLI offices and went on the internet to inquire about rentals. It put me in a bad mood. It didn't feel right. What is God's will for us? Do we look for a rental as a backup plan or do we wait? What will we do with our furniture and clothes? Where do we live?"

This is what I wrote the next day: "This morning in prayer God revealed to me that part of our current situation has to do with writing this lesson. It is a real life drama of walking with God and knowing His will. I pray to God, Please just tell me what You would like me to do and I will do it. If You want us to look for a place to live, I will do it. If You want us to face the movers without an address and put our belongings into storage, we will do that also."

"But God is quiet or I'm not hearing correctly. You see I have a dilemma. Do I wait in faith or is this waiting a misuse of God's gift of wisdom? Perhaps I am not adequately using the reasoning and planning skills that God has given me. It does seem somewhat irresponsible not to make plans. We continue to pray." (*At the time I was originally writing this Lesson on Knowing God's will.*)

God has a will and He has given every normal functioning human being a will also. As a noun the word will means "the mental faculty by which a person decides upon and controls his own actions or those of others." It also means "that which is desired or determined." It is this second definition that we usually think about when talking about God's will. ¹

¹ Ehrlich, Eugene, Oxford American Dictionary, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1980.

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God is sovereign. He has the ability and the power to decide all things and control His actions and the actions of all people. Man's will works within the parameters (limits) that God has set up in creating the world. God alone is unlimited.

Our will is our command post for making decisions and choosing a course of action. This is what we call free will.² The will can override our intellect and emotions; it keeps us functioning as we wish. Our desires, determinations and decisions, however, must be in accord with the created order of time, space and circumstances.

In God's will He decided to give us the freedom of choice within His created order. We can choose to follow Him or not. We can choose His will for our lives or not. The Bible gives us a record of a variety of individuals who chose rightly or chose sinfully.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."^{NIV} Genesis 2:15-17

Read Genesis 2:15-17 and answer questions 1-5:

1. Who took Adam, the man and put him in the Garden of Eden? _____
2. Did Adam have a choice about being placed in the Garden? Yes No (Circle One)
3. Did Adam have a free choice to follow God's will in the Garden? Yes No (Circle One)
4. What was God's will for Adam? _____

5. What was the consequence of not following God's command, or His will? _____

Adam and his wife Eve chose not to follow God. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was not God's plan for them. They were forced to leave the Garden and eventually their bodies grew old and died. Their sinful choice has affected all mankind since.

6. Have you considered how the use of your free will may affect others? Yes No (Circle One)
- Joshua, a great leader of God's people knew the importance of man's free will. Before he died Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He reminded them of the LORD's faithfulness and exhorted (urged, encouraged) them to fear and serve Him.

² "The problem of free will assumed quite a new character with the advent of the Christian Religion that God has created man, has commanded him to obey the moral law, and has promised to reward or punish him for observance or violation of this law, made the reality of moral liberty an issue of transcendent importance. Unless man is really free, he cannot be justly held responsible for his actions, any more than for the date of his birth or the colour of his eyes. All alike are inexorably predetermined for him. Again, the difficulty of the question was augmented still further by the Christian Dogma of the fall of man and his redemption by grace. Among the early Fathers of the Church St. Augustine stands pre-eminent in his handling of this subject." Catholic Encyclopedia, CD-ROM

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But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."^{NIV} Joshua 24:15

7. Read Joshua 24:15. What choice did the Israelites have? _____

8. How did Joshua use his will in this verse? _____

The Israelites had the choice to serve God or idols. As much as Joshua wanted them to follow God, he could not change their hearts. In the secrecy of their homes they could set up shrines to false gods or practice other religions. Joshua could not control their will.

In the same way, the Christian leader cannot force people to follow Christ. Like Joshua, you can seek the Lord, set a good example, teach, exhort and hope, but ultimately it is their decision. They have their own free will to follow Christ when the Holy Spirit moves within their life.

But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.
^{NIV} 2 Chronicles 26:16

9. Read 2 Chronicles 26:16. King Uzziah started out seeking God and His will for the people. God had given him success and his fame spread as far as the border of Egypt. But after Uzziah became powerful what happened? _____

King Uzziah became arrogant with his own self importance. He decided that he could take control of the way things were run. He didn't need to follow God's plans and laws. After all he was the king.

They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God."
^{NIV} 2 Chronicles 26:18

10. Read 2 Chronicles 26:18. What seems to be the motivation of the priests who confronted Uzziah? _____

The priests, the leaders of the temple, warned the king that he was out of God's will. He was not following God's desires and plans for the way the altar of incense was to function (Numbers 16:39-40). Although God had made Uzziah the king over Israel, he had overstepped his boundaries. In this case the priests were courageous leaders confronting the king with the truth of his sin. It seems that they were truly concerned about God's will and the well being of their king.

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King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house--leprous, and excluded from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.^{NIV} 2 Chronicles 26:21

11. What were the consequences for King Uzziah seeking his own will and not God's?

King Uzziah lost his leadership position. God could not trust him to follow His plans. Therefore He removed him from His presence and chose another to govern the Israelites. This is a good reminder to us that God does control or move people according to His plans and purposes (Exodus 4:21, Ecclesiastes 2:26, Psalm 115:3). Our free choice in no way hinders God's sovereignty.

Personal Application:

Read Matthew 6:10 and 2 Chronicles 26. Ask God to speak to you through these verses.

What did God say to you? _____

What did you say to God in response? _____

Lesson 11: Knowing God's Will (Day Two) Forsaking Our Will

God does not tell us everything that He desires for us and for the world. This is sometimes called God's secret will.³ We could not possibly comprehend or understand it all. Just think of parents telling their one year old about certain career choices or how the earth rotates around the sun. Well, we are always that one year old to God. The vastness of His decisions and rule over the universe is absolutely phenomenal.

You also have a secret will. You may or may not disclose certain events or plans that you have for your life to other people. Of course you can't hide anything from God. He knows all your thoughts and motivations (Hebrews 4:13).

God keeps things about our own lives secret for various reasons. He may keep future events that affect us hidden in order to strengthen our faith, keep us from needless worry, or to keep us

³ Grudem, Wayne, Systematic Theology, Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids MI, 1994, pgs 211-215.

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focused on the work before us. Not knowing what will happen next in our lives can keep us humble and wholly dependent on YHWH Yireh (The LORD Provides).

God does have revealed will. The Bible is a record of God's desires and plans for us. Many decisions in our personal life and for the saints come under the heading of God's revealed will. He wants us to know how to follow Him in all matters, great or small.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable,⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.^{NIV} 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3a. It is God's will that you should be _____

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3b-7. What are some examples that Paul gives us of a life of sanctification (holiness, consecration, dedication)? _____

3. How do God's will and His sovereignty work with our free will and our dependence? _____

First and foremost, God has complete control over all creation and whatever He decides or purposes to do, it will be done (Isaiah 14:27). Therefore God's plans for our world and creation will prevail. If He calls a person to do a job and that person refuses, He can make that person do it, or simply call another. The man or woman who is made to do a particular job and does not do so willingly, forfeits any reward or approval by God. God's overall plans will not fail. However, we may fail to answer God's call and pay the consequences. For example, God desires everyone to come to repentance, but not everyone will (2 Peter 3:9, Matthew 5:29-30). God has a good plan for everyone, however, not everyone will do what is necessary to partake of those plans (Psalm 40:5, Galatians 1:6).

There are various reasons why Christians do not follow God's desires and determined plan. First, he or she may not believe God has their best interests at heart. They do not trust God. Second, they may think that they have a better plan than God. They prefer having control. Third, their knowledge of God is lacking. They haven't spent enough time reading and studying God's Word to know Him and what He requires. Fourth, there is a lack of commitment. They know what they should do but won't make the effort.

For these reasons and others, **there is a constant challenge: Do I do God's will or my own?** Following God's will not only brings you rewards in heaven but an abundant life now (Revelation 22:12, Romans 6:22, 14:17). Nevertheless, the route going through God's will may

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be painful. In those times when you feel that your heart is going to break, it is tempting to either try and change or tweak God's plans or think that you misread God's will altogether.

When Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) trusted Jesus at seventeen, he offered himself to God's service. He heard God's call to go to China and knew that was God's will for his life. He gave up a comfortable life style and began serious Bible study as well as learning the Chinese language.

Hudson met and fell in love with a lovely music teacher. They were engaged and his cherished hope for two years was for her to share his life in missionary service. But then came the challenge. Her father decided that he did not want his daughter to go to China. The young woman didn't really want to go to China either. They both urged Hudson to stay in England where they could have a good life and serve the Lord together as a married couple.

Hudson really wanted to marry this young Christian woman. He could have easily justified his decision and tried to serve the Lord in England. Certainly there was a lot of Kingdom work to be done right there. Love between a man and a woman is a strong emotion. He was in great pain and sorrow. But he met the challenge and chose God's will, he chose China.

He wrote of this experience, "Yes, He has humbled me and shown me what I am, revealing Himself as a present, a very present help in time of trouble. And though He does not deprive me of feeling in my trial, He enables me to sing, "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."...Now I am happy in my Savior's love. I can thank Him for *all*, even the most painful experience of the past, and trust Him without fear for all that is to come."⁴

Mr. Taylor was Founder of China Inland Mission and is often referred to as 'the father of modern missions.' When he died in 1905 he left behind 849 missionaries and 125,000 Chinese Christians. It has been said that the Christianity that exists in China today is due largely to the efforts of this one faithful man.⁵

As a leader, your job is to help Christians see that following God's will is always the right choice. Satan is always ready to tempt you and those whom you shepherd to take the way of the flesh. What feels good must be right. Why would I *feel* this way if this wasn't the way God wanted me to go?

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.³⁶ "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."^{NIV} Mark 14:34-36

4. Read Mark 14:34-36. Jesus said to his disciples, "My soul is _____ with _____ to the point of _____"

5. In your own words explain how you think Jesus felt the night before he was crucified?

⁴ Taylor, Dr. & Mrs., Hudson's Taylor's Spiritual Secret, The Bible Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 1989.

⁵ Christie, Vance, Hudson Taylor, Barbour Publishing, Inc, Uhrichsville, OH, 1990.

Recall from Lesson One that Jesus is our Model. Hudson Taylor followed our same Model. This is why Hudson did **not** say, "I'm in love and thus God must not care where I serve Him." Hudson did not try to justify his love and desire for this young Christian woman as his wife. Hudson knew in his soul what Jesus expected and what His Savior had done for him on the cross.

Jesus did **not** say, "I am so overwhelmed with sorrow so my Father must not really want me to go to the cross." Nor did He say, "I'm God's only Son and He wants me to be happy and free from pain." If Jesus had relied on His human feelings we would still be in our sins.

Hudson followed Jesus in forsaking his human will. When we choose God's will, we are forsaking our own. That means that we are giving up or renouncing what God has given us a right to have. In other words, He gave us free will but as Christian leaders we forsake it in favor of His plans and purposes. **A note of caution**, keep all truths in balance. Not all of God's plans for you will be difficult. As you develop a heart like His, you will joyfully choose rightly.

6. Are you struggling with following God's will for your life? Y N Circle one. Please share.

Personal Application: Memorize: Mark 14:34-36

Lesson 11: Knowing God's Will (Day Three) Rewards for doing God's will

The first and incomparable reward of choosing God's will is intimacy with Jesus. Your relationship and closeness with God is the hallmark of a Christian leader. The temporal things that you give up are nothing compared to living in His presence (Philippians 3:8, Genesis 15:1).

Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."^{NIV} Matthew 12:49-50

Read Matthew 12:49-50 and answer questions 1-2:

1. Jesus says: "For whoever does the _____ of my _____ in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

2. What point do you think Jesus is making? _____

Jesus loved His mother Mary (John 19:26-27); God had called her to nurture and raise Him. Yet when she and the family came looking for Jesus, He made it clear that whoever acts in accordance with God's will has just as much importance and intimacy. Indeed, in this case His disciples had moved spiritually into this close, familial position and his biological family had moved down a notch.

Mary and her adult children were not coming to Jesus in God's will but in their own will. They incorrectly thought that Jesus was "out of His mind" and wanted "to take charge of Him" (Mark 3:20-21). Perhaps they were concerned about the family's reputation or perhaps they were truly anxious about Jesus' health. Whatever the reason, the result was the same: they were trying to prevent Jesus from accomplishing God's purpose.

3. What apostle also tried to keep Jesus from God's will (Matthew 16:23-28)? _____

4. Can you share a time when someone tried to keep you from God's will because they thought they were trying to protect you? _____

In God's economy, one must die to self (John 12:24-27) to gain the reward of close and intimate relationship with the Lord. That means standing up to anyone, including family members who would keep you from doing God's will. No matter how loving their intentions may be, we must not let them deter us from God's purpose.

The second reward of choosing God's will is successful work. You and the people that you lead want to have a positive and fruitful life. No one wants to labor for nothing. A farmer doesn't want to toil in the fields day after day and never harvest anything.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."^{NIV} John 15:5

5. Read John 15:5. How do you bear much fruit (have meaningful Kingdom work)?

We can do no work in our Father's will outside of abiding or remaining in Jesus. Following Jesus and His commandments is God's will. Like branches need the living union of the vine to produce fruit, we need the living union of Christ to accomplish anything of lasting value.

The third reward of choosing God's will is assurance. Even though outward circumstances may seem frightful or devastating, you know that God is working through them all for your good. You have been called according to His purpose and you will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

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And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

^{NIV} Romans 8:28-29

6. Read Romans 8:28-29. When you choose God’s will for your life, what promise or assurance do you have when things look bleak? _____

The fourth and final reward of choosing God’s will is an excellent plan for your life now and a glorious eternal future. Although we are highlighting four rewards, you may think of others. Pray and thank God for these and all rewards that He has graciously given to us.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."^{NIV} Jeremiah 29:11

7. According to Jeremiah 29:11, the LORD has plans to _____ you and not to _____ you, plans to give you hope and a _____

Specifically this verse comes from a letter written by the prophet Jeremiah to the surviving elders, priests and the people carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. But it still speaks the truth of who God is and how He acts. It is still true for you and other Christians.

Personal Application:

Read and mediate on the following scriptures: Psalm 19:9-11, Proverbs 11:18, Isaiah 40:10, Matthew 5:11-12, Ephesians 6:7-8, Hebrews 11:25-26, Revelation 22:12.

Share with another Christian what you learned about rewards. What was his or her response?

Lesson 11: Knowing God’s Will (Day Four) Resources for Discerning God’s will

If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.^{NIV} John 7:17

Jesus tells us that we have a choice to follow God’s plan or not. God does desire a certain course of action for our lives. It is a holy desire designed for our good and God’s glory. His plan for us is centered on His Son Jesus Christ. We are to trust and follow Him daily.

Jesus invited, indeed challenged His listeners to investigate His teachings. The same is true

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today. He invites everyone, no one is excluded, to investigate His life. If anyone has the right heart he or she will see the truth of Jesus' message.

Jesus lived to honor and bring glory to His Heavenly Father. In knowing God's will for your life it is important to be honest with yourself. Do you want people to think well of you or do you want people to think well of God? **Make sure that in seeking God's will that you choose all courses of action that put the spotlight on Him.** This also includes simple everyday tasks!

When making a decision, ask the question, "Who will receive the glory for my actions?" This is helpful in discerning God's will for your life. Choose plans that will bring the most glory and honor to God. Your selfish nature might not like it, but your spiritual nature will bloom!

1. Do you sincerely want to do God's will? Yes No Sometimes (Circle One)

Explain: _____

2. What do you think would keep you from totally embracing God's plan for your life?

3. How do you think asking the question, "Who will receive the glory for my actions?" will help you remain in God's will? _____

It is important for a leader to be in God's will and also to help others understand and seek His will. Let's look at four spiritual resources that *work in concert* (harmony) to help us know God's will. They won't come as a surprise to you, but the ways of God always bear repeating.

First, God gives us the good Spirit to lead and guide us; we are not alone. **We will never be alone again.** The Spirit can help us with all decisions including guiding us in our thoughts, motivations and behaviors (Psalm 138:8).

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--
^{NIV} John 14:16

4. Read John 14:16. When you are seeking direction and have to make a decision, who is your constant, powerful and permanent helper? _____

Second, God has given us the gift of communicating with him in prayer. Asking God what He wants you to do is always the best place to begin (Psalm 143:10). Thank YHWH for the ability to talk with Him and trust that through grace you will remain on the right path. He is always faithful to answer those who truly seek Him.

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Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ^{NIV} Philippians 4:6

5. Read Philippians 4:6. You do not need to be anxious about seeking God's will. Why?

The Third resource that the Lord has given us to know His will is His Word. The Bible contains God's loving rules for living here on earth. God recorded His words to help us know Him.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ^{NIV} 2 Timothy 3:16

6. Read 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is _____ - _____ and is useful for _____, rebuking, _____ and training in _____

In many cases we don't need to ask God His will about a certain subject. He has already told us what to do in the Scriptures. Of course this is where biblical interpretation becomes critical.

7. What if a person within your center of influence came to you and said, "I have become a Christian but my spouse refuses to believe in Christ. I think God is leading me to divorce my spouse and become a missionary." What advice would you give this person?

God will not lead someone against His Word. If there is a conflict with what we think God is saying and what His Word says we must continue to pray. You cannot build a ministry or seek service to God through a sin. If, in the above example, God is calling this person to become a missionary, it will be in God's timing and not by seeking a divorce or deserting a spouse. In the case of the Christian wanting a divorce to become a missionary, God has already spoken through the apostle Paul on this subject (1 Corinthians 7:12).

As you read and study Scripture, you will find an answer to what should be done in most circumstances (Psalm 19:10-11, 119:11). I say most, because sometimes you will be faced with two seemingly Christ honoring alternatives. Your journey ahead has a fork in the road and all paths seem good. The question becomes: which is best? Which one is God's path for you?

It has been my experience and other Christians also testify that God often gives answers in Scripture. Certain verses will stand out in a way that we know that God is speaking to us through that verse for our particular situation such as for instruction, encouragement, direction etc. God will do this through Christian books, radio, television, other people or circumstances. Recall God got Balaam's attention through opening the mouth of his donkey (Numbers 22:21-35). Don't try to limit how God may want to reach you, but do use wisdom and discernment. This brings us to our **fourth spiritual resource**: wisdom and understanding.

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For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.^{NIV} Colossians 1:9

8. Read Colossians 1:9. Paul is praying for God to fill believers with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual _____ and _____.

I shared earlier about our moving situation that needed a timely decision. We had prayed, sought the Holy Spirit's help, studied Scripture and we still didn't know exactly what we should do. Anders and I believed that God wanted to provide land for the CLI Mission Center and certainly didn't want to do anything that would reveal a lack of trust in God.

There are times when we don't seem to hear directly from God as to our next step. If there is not a time element involved, we can patiently pray until our answer becomes clearer. Deadlines tend to color this process. This was one of those times for Anders and me.

First, we had to trust God that He was leading us, whether we were aware of it or not. Second, we needed to faithfully use the wisdom and understanding that He has given us. Therefore, at 1 PM the day before the movers were to arrive, we felt it was time to look for a place to live. We prayed and decided that it would be wise to look at an apartment near our offices.

I got in the car and drove to the apartment complex that we passed every morning on our way to work. It was too expensive and didn't fit within our budget. However, the leasing agent referred me to another, 7 minutes from CLI. At 3 PM I called Anders to see if anyone had called about donating land. No one had called so at 4 PM Anders and I signed the lease. The movers arrived at 8 AM the next day.

Anders and I are confident that we are in God's will. We are praying for the salvation of those living, working and visiting at our new apartment complex and have 'prayer walked' the grounds with a good friend. We also mailed a gospel tract to every one living there.

We are still praying and trusting God for the CLI Mission Center. We are confident in the choices that we have made and that we are in His will. God has given all Christians the spiritual resources needed for knowing His will.

10. Are you confident that you are in God's will at the current time? Why or why not?

Be encouraged! God knows your heart. He is working in you right now so that you may be like Jesus in doing His will. He is helping you so that you will desire His good purpose. If you are currently out of God's will, you can confess, repent and immediately get back on the right path.

for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.^{NIV} Philippians 2:13

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Personal Application: Discuss knowing God’s will with one or more Christian friends. The goal is to share information for God’s glory. Please share your experience:

What were you able to share and what did you learn from the experience? _____

Lesson 11: Knowing God’s Will (Day Five) Exercising your free will

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer 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.

^{NIV} Romans 12:1-2

1. Read Romans 12:1-2. How can you use your ‘free will’ to know God’s will?

As a verb, ‘will’ means to exercise or put into effect one’s willpower. Your will is the command post of your body. You desire and determine how you will think and act in any given situation. When we desire and determine to stop being shaped by the world and to be changed by the renewing of our minds, then we will be able to discover and interpret God’s will.

Sometimes the problem is *not* in knowing God’s will, but in following through with it. When we offer our bodies as living sacrifices, what happens when God accepts our offering? We are going to be called into obedient service and given glorious opportunities to serve the King. Will we choose to serve or choose to flee?

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."^{NIV} Jonah 1:1-2

2. Read Jonah 1:1-2. How do you know that God’s will was revealed clearly to Jonah?

But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.^{NIV} Jonah 1:3

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3. Read Jonah 1:3. Did Jonah know God's will for him? What was his response?
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Jonah did not like God's plan and thought he could run away from Him. This is still true. Sometimes we may procrastinate or try to ignore God's call on our lives. The work may seem too difficult, dangerous or unattractive to us for one reason or another.

4. How do you think you would respond if the LORD commanded you to arise, go to Iraq and begin preaching against the wickedness of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda⁶? _____
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This would be a dangerous assignment. Without the LORD's divine intervention you would be quickly exterminated by this group. Of course as a Christian leader, you would also be telling everyone of Jesus Christ and of His death and resurrection. This would have the regular Moslem population of the city against you also.

Jesus tells us not to judge others (Matthew 7:1-2) and this includes biblical characters. We really do not know how we would have responded given the same set of circumstance. So let us not judge the prophet Jonah or others whether in or out of the Bible, but let us learn from them.

He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."^{NIV} Jonah 4:2

5. Read Jonah 4:2. What is the reason Jonah gives for running away from the LORD's will? (If you are not familiar with the whole story of Jonah, read all 4 chapters.)
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Nineveh was located in Assyria, an enemy of Israel. Jonah was not happy that God would show mercy and goodness to their enemies. When God called Jonah, he knew that God might relent from pouring out His wrath on the Ninevites, even though they were a cruel and ruthless people.

6. Do you think Christians struggle with showing love and mercy to their enemies? Yes No Sometimes (Circle one)
7. What are some ways that you could help yourself and others to have the compassion and love
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⁶ **Al-Qaeda** (also **al-Qaida** or **al-Qa'ida** or **al-Qa'idah**) (Arabic: القاعدة *al-qā'ida*, Translation - *The Base*) is an international alliance of militant Sunni Jihadist organizations. Its roots can be traced back to Osama Bin Laden and others around the time of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.^[1] Al-Qaeda's objectives include the end of foreign influence in Muslim countries and the creation of a new Islamic Caliphate. Al-Qaeda has been labeled a terrorist organization. Source: Wikipedia Online

of Jesus? _____

Remembering how much we have been forgiven is always a good place to start (Luke 7:47). When we recognize the goodness and mercy of God in our own lives and how we have been rescued from eternal damnation, our hearts begin to soften towards others. We can also pray for ourselves and others. *Lord O Lord help me to have Your love, compassion and mercy. Make me a forgiving person. Make everyone I know be conformed to Jesus! Amen.*

In order to be like Jesus and do what He would do, we need to spend time in the four Gospels. They are clear and straightforward. Do you ever wonder what we, as the church would look like if we focused all of our energy in following Jesus?

Perhaps the reason we don't focus in this way is because Jesus' teachings go against our prideful and arrogant flesh. It is much easier to argue and take doctrinal positions than to kneel before the King for His will. His will keeps us humble. Our will keeps us haughty. Now please understand, we are not saying that doctrine is not important, but to keep in mind that all doctrine is based on Matthew 22:36-40. Read Luke 11:37-52 and John 21:21-22 for perspective.

Jonah was given a second chance to comply with God's will. Of course, he had to be swallowed by a great fish, but he did preach against Nineveh and the whole city repented. Although Jonah was not happy about the outcome, God was pleased to save this great city (Luke 11:29-32).

God may give innumerable opportunities for you to conform to His plans. On the other hand, God may only give you only one opportunity to act (Psalm 115: 3, Daniel 4:35). His plans will not be thwarted and He can very easily raise another for His purposes (Esther 4:12-14).

But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.
NIV Psalm 33:11

Personal Application:

Mediate on Psalm 37:23-24, 55:22, 147:11, Romans 8:26-27, 12:1-2 and Jude 1:24.

After mediating on the above verses what would you tell someone who is overly anxious about missing God's will? _____

Next: Lesson 12: The Leader's Fire of Holiness
Rev 7-2010