

"How To Discover The Will Of GOD For Life And Ministry"
(A Publication Of "The Inner-city Church Planting Mission")

Introduction: There is a very important and prevalent question that every follower of the LORD JESUS CHRIST is consistently asking. It is an important question because the answers to it can affect not only our whole life, but the lives of many around us. The answers to this question can also greatly affect the advancement (or hinderance) of GOD's glory and Kingdom. It is a prevalent question because it is a question that everyone of us faces many times during every single day.

The question is . . .

"How Can I Know What GOD's Will For My Life Is?"

How can I know what GOD wants me to do concerning the "major" decisions I must make (i.e. - who to marry, where to live, where to work, etc.)? Then also the "minor", everyday decisions I must make as well (i.e. - how long to sleep, what food to eat, what clothes to wear, etc.)?

This is what the following study is dedicated to. Discovering what the will of GOD is for me. Again, whether it be that important once-in-a-lifetime decision, or those seemingly insignificant decisions I must make everyday.

We will be studying many portions of Scripture in this series, as well as the principles that can be gleaned from them. However, the foundation Scripture will be Psalm 37:3-5, 7. It is in these four verses that we discover a clear "formula" for discerning the will of GOD for our lives.

- I. *"Trust in the LORD . . ."* (v.3)
- II. *"Delight . . . in the LORD . . ."* (v.4)
- III. *"Commit . . . unto the LORD . . ."* (v.5)
- IV. *"Rest in the LORD . . ."* (v.7a)
- V. *". . . wait patiently for HIM . . ."* (v.7b)

- I. *"Trust in the LORD . . ."* (v.3)

"Trust" = to have hope and confidence in someone

This is where discovering the will of GOD begins. With *"trust"*. Rightly placed *"trust"*. Not in a religion, a church, a creed, or a spiritual leader. Not in wealth, possessions, career, or fame. Not in our spouse, our children, our parents, or our government. But a *"trust"* (a hope and confidence) that is *". . . in the LORD . . ."*

There are two aspects to this *"trust"*. First there is the *"trust"* in relationship to salvation. We are all sinners in need of redemption. GOD has provided that redemption through the sacrifice of HIS SON, the LORD JESUS CHRIST. If we simply believe (*"trust"*) in this sacrifice, we will be saved.

"For GOD so loved the world, that HE gave HIS only begotten SON, that whosoever believeth (will trust) in HIM should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 3:16

Once we have put this initial "*trust*" in the LORD JESUS CHRIST for salvation, we are then ready to experience this next aspect of "*trust*".

This second aspect of "*trust*" has to do with our daily relationship to the LORD after salvation. In the context of discovering what the LORD's will is for us, we need this "*trust in the LORD . . .*" on a day-to-day basis. We need this "hope and confidence" that as we face the daily decisions (some "major" and some "minor"), in life, the LORD knows what is best for us, and as we put or "*trust*" in HIM, we are assured that HIS will should be our will.

*GOD's will should always be pre-eminent.

*Our will should always be secondary.

*GOD's will and our will should be one.

Why would we not want to put our "*trust*" in the ONE WHO knows the future as well the past and thus base every single decision we must make in life on HIS will, not ours?!

GOD

Past <-----> Present <-----> Future

You and I

GOD sees the past, present and future equally clear. We only see the past and the present.

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is." Jeremiah 17:7

The Scriptures promise us great blessing as we learn to put our "*trust in the LORD . . .*" in our decision making! However, too often we tend to leave GOD out of this process. Scripture has a sobering warning for us if we do . . .

"Thus saith the LORD, cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD." Jeremiah 17:5

The decision is ours. Do we include GOD in our decision making and indeed, make our will HIS will? Or do we proudly and stubbornly "go our own way" and thus have the curse of GOD on our lives and plans?

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge HIM, and HE shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3:5-6

II. *"Delight in the LORD . . ."* (v.4)

"Delight" = to have pleasure in someone or something

This is the next important principle in our "formula" for discovering the will of GOD for our lives. To *"delight in the LORD"* means that we enjoy getting to know HIM more intimately and what HE desires for our life. In the context of this study, it means that we enjoy spending time with the LORD for the purpose of discovering HIS will for the many decisions (great or small), we must make everyday in our lives.

The primary means that GOD has given us to get to know HIM more intimately and thus discern what HIS will for our lives is as well, is HIS written Word. To *"delight in the LORD"*, is to *"delight in (HIS Word)"*! Many questions concerning GOD's will for our lives will be answered as we simply spend time reading and meditating in HIS Word on a day-to-day basis. For example, if we are wondering about whether to purchase something on credit and we know that the Scriptures tell us not to (Proverbs 22:7b; Romans 13:8a), we will not go into debt. If we are contemplating marriage to a certain individual, and we discover they are not a follower of JESUS CHRIST, Scripture clearly warns us not to marry that person (see II Corinthians 6:14-17).

Another "tool" GOD has given us to discover HIS will is prayer. Prayer is not only us speaking to GOD, but also GOD speaking to us. It is us, in the quiet, secluded times of prayer, listening to HIS *". . . still small voice"* (I Kings 19:12), to give us direction concerning a particular matter. If we are facing a truly "major", life-changing decision in our lives, and we really need to discern what GOD's will is in that matter, we can also combine the Biblical exercise of fasting with prayer. There may be times where we just do not seem to "hear from GOD" through the usual means. Many have found that after prayer and fasting, clear direction was given!

As we *"delight in the LORD"* more and more, and spend time getting to know HIM more intimately through HIS Word, prayer and sometimes fasting, our *"fear of the LORD"* grows. Scripture tells us we then discover more of HIS wisdom and receive more of HIS understanding (i.e. - to know HIS will for our lives).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the HOLY is understanding." Proverbs 9:10

Scripture is very clear in warning us of the consequences when we do not *"delight in the LORD"* in seeking HIS will! King Saul is a tragic illustration of this . . .

"So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the Word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it, and inquired not of the LORD, therefore HE (i.e. - the LORD) slew him and turned the kingdom unto David the Son of Jesse."

I Chronicles 10:13-14

Notice from our original Scripture (Psalm 37:4), the truly amazing promise that GOD gives us as we learn to *"delight in (HIM)"* . . .

". . . HE shall give (us) the desires of (our) heart."

(see also Psalm 1:1-3; Matthew 6:31-33; I John 3:22; 5:14-15)

Why can GOD make such an amazing promise? Because if we are concentrating on "*delight(ing) in (HIM)*", our "*desires*" will be HIS "*desires*"! If we are concentrating on "*delight(ing) in (HIM)*", our will becomes HIS will!

GOD's will and "*desires*" are always much higher and wiser than ours!

Our will and "*desires*" should always be in submission to GOD's!

III. "*Commit . . . unto the LORD . . .*" (v.5)

"*Commit*" =to give one's self, life, future, plans and will over to GOD

In the ongoing "process" of discovering what the will of GOD is for our lives, this third principle is very important. To "*commit (our) way (i.e. - our whole life) unto the LORD*" means that we place everything having to do with our life, whether great or small, in HIS hands. It means that HE, not us, is in control. This would certainly include our will and the many decisions that we must make everyday in our lives.

My possessions	My family	
My ministry	My career	
My education	My will	My time
My words	My goals	
My desires	My thoughts	
My recreation	My music	
My sinful habits		

To "*commit (our) way unto the LORD*" is a daily exercise. Even though we give ourselves (including our will), over to GOD, we still have the tendency to "snatch them back" off the "altar". This is why JESUS instructs us . . .

"If any man will come after ME, let him deny himself (i.e. - say no to his will and yes to GOD's), and take up his cross daily and follow ME. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life (including his own will) for MY sake, the same shall save it." Luke 9:23-24

JESUS HIMSELF . . . the PERFECT MAN . . . God in the flesh, struggled with this! The night before HE was to die on that cruel cross of Calvary for the sins of mankind, HE struggled with desiring HIS own will over HIS FATHER's (see Matthew 26:36-44). Yet the FATHER's will prevailed. For in the end HE prayed . . .

". . . nevertheless not as I will, but as THOU wilt." (v.39b)

Notice the wonderful promise the Scriptures give to us as we "*commit* (our) *way unto the LORD*". They promise that . . .

". . . HE shall bring it to pass . . . " (Psalm 37:5b)

What is the "*it*" in this statement? Our will . . .our desire . . . as we give these completely over to the LORD. GOD can make this wonderful promise because if we are truly "*commit*(ting) (our) *way* (including our will) *unto* (HIM)", our "*way*" will become HIS "*way*"! Our will becomes HIS will!

IV. "*Rest in the LORD . . . "* (v.7a)

"*Rest*" = to be quiet; to be still

We now come to the fourth principle in our "formula" for discovering the will of GOD for our lives. If we have indeed followed the first three principles, this fourth "step" will be a powerful reality.

Let us assume that we are facing a major decision in our life. Perhaps a move to another city, applying for a new job, or contemplating who we are to marry. We are sincerely attempting to follow the first three principles of . . .

- 1.) "*Trust*(ing) *in the LORD . . . "*
- 2.) "*Delight*(ing) . . . *in the LORD . . . "* and,
- 3.) "*Commit*(ting) . . . *unto the LORD . . . "*

It is then that Scripture admonishes us to "*Rest in the LORD . . . "* Not to be anxious and worried about what the LORD's will might be. Not to fear that we might be making the wrong decision. But "to be quiet" and "to be still", assured that GOD is at work and that HE is working out HIS "perfect will" in that particular situation!

The most important indication that we are truly "*Rest*(ing) *in the LORD*" in relationship to facing a decision in our daily lives is, if we can sincerely conclude in our own heart that we will accept whatever way the LORD leads concerning that particular situation. Concerning moving to another city, we are "*Rest*(ing) *in the LORD . . . "*, if we are totally at peace whether GOD says, "Move" or "Stay". Concerning applying for a new job, we are "*Rest*(ing) *in the LORD . . . "*, if we are totally at peace with GOD saying "Yes" or "No". Concerning contemplating who to marry, we are "*Rest*(ing) *in the LORD . . . "*, if we can accept GOD's will concerning that potential mate, whether HE says, "Yes" or "No".

One of the fruits of the HOLY SPIRIT is "*peace*" (Galatians 5::22). We "bear" this "*fruit*" in our lives as we totally surrender to GOD and HIS will. Indeed, this "*peace*" literally floods every part of our spirit, soul and body! Being in GOD's "perfect will" is not a struggle and a fight, but a quiet "*Rest*" and assurance that HE is leading us in HIS paths!

V. ". . . wait patiently for HIM . . ." (v.7b)

"wait" = the implication this word carries is of "a long and lingering hope, still expecting and earnestly desiring, though (up until now) with delay and disappointment." (Wilson)

Of the five principles in our "formula" for discovering the will of GOD for our lives, this one is definitely the most difficult to follow. We have sought GOD's will in a particular area of our lives or in making a particular decision. We have diligently and explicitly followed the first four principles of . . .

- 1.) "Trust(ing) in the LORD . . ."
- 2.) "Delight(ing) . . . in the LORD . . ."
- 3.) "Commit(ting) . . . unto the LORD . . ." and
- 4.) "Rest(ing) in the LORD . . ."

We are now absolutely sure that we know GOD's will in that particular area of our lives or in making that particular decision, but now GOD tells us to "wait"! Not only to "wait", but to "wait patiently for HIM" to act concerning that particular area or decision! And as our definition for "wait" implies, it may be "a long and lingering ("wait"), . . . with delay and disappointment."

There are many reasons why GOD may desire for us to go through a time of "wait(ing) patiently for HIM . . ." to carry out HIS will concerning a matter. Listed below are some very significant examples . . .

1. to teach us patience
2. to teach us faith
3. to teach us self-control
4. to draw us closer to HIM
5. to cause us to re-evaluate our priorities

GOD knows that we may never learn these important virtues until we have been brought through this "school" of "wait(ing) patiently for HIM..."

The Scriptures are full of illustrations of those who were brought through this sequence of . . . 1.) discovering GOD's will; 2.) going through a time of waiting; then, 3.) seeing GOD's will become a reality. Following are just several examples . . .

1. Abraham waiting 25 years for a son (Isaac)
2. Jacob waiting 7 years for a wife (Rebecca)
3. The nation of Israel waiting 40 years for the Promised Land

Whenever Scripture admonishes us (more than once) to do something, GOD is especially emphasizing the importance of following that admonition. Over thirty-five times the Scriptures encourage us to "wait for" or "wait on" the LORD! Following are but a few . . .

"I waited patiently for the LORD and HE inclined unto me, and heard my cry." Psalm 40:1

"The eyes of all wait upon THEE, and THOU givest them their meat (i.e. - their desires) in due season." Psalm 145:15

"And therefore will the LORD wait, that HE may be gracious unto you, and therefore will HE be exalted, that HE may have mercy upon you, for the LORD is a GOD of judgement, blessed are all they that wait for HIM." Isaiah 30:18

"The LORD is good unto them that wait for HIM, to the soul that seeketh HIM. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." Lamentations 3:25-26

"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie, though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Habakkuk 2:3

A very important caution and warning should be emphasized at this point in relationship to waiting for GOD's will to be revealed. It is concerning the evil enemy of all saints . . . the Devil. Scripture warns us that Satan is a liar (John 8:44) and a deceiver (Revelation 12:9). One of his methods in getting CHRISTians to fail is getting them to be impatient when it comes to waiting for GOD to carry out HIS will for their lives. GOD has clearly revealed HIS will to us concerning a particular matter in our lives. However, as we learned earlier, GOD may then decide to wait for a period of time before HE actually makes HIS will a reality, whether it be a number of days, weeks, or even years. It is during this time that Satan will attempt to get us to "hurry" GOD's will along in a foolish and humanly way. This is why Scripture warns us . . .

". . . he that hasteth with his feet sinneth." Proverbs 19:2b

A powerful but tragic illustration of this is Abraham and Sarah "waiting for the LORD" to bring them a son. GOD had promised them a son in their old age. However, instead of "wait(ing) *patiently for HIM* . . . " to act, they "took matters into their own hands". They had Abraham have a son by Sarah's handmaiden Hagar. Yes, this brought them a son (Ishmael), but not GOD's way! When GOD did eventually bless Abraham and Sarah with their own Son (Isaac), twenty-five years after the original promise, conflict erupted between Sarah and Hagar, and Isaac and Ishmael. We still see the tragic results from this "hasty" self-will today (thousands of years later), in the present Arab-Jewish conflict!

The wise child of GOD will remember that if there is any doubt about a particular decision he is needing to make . . . he will wait! If there is any pressure for him to make a decision, especially a major decision in his life . . . he will wait!

Other Scriptures And Principles Concerning "Discovering The Will Of GOD"

A. The Importance of consulting others.

"A wise man will hear and will increase learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." Proverbs 1:5

"Where no counsel is, the people fall, but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Proverbs 11:14

The above Scriptures are clear in admonishing us of the importance of going to others for counsel when we are seeking to discover GOD's will in a particular situation, especially in relationship to making major decisions.

GOD is certainly our number one "*counselor*". As we have seen earlier in this study, HE uses HIS Word and prayer as the primary means to show us HIS will. However, HE also puts others around us that HE uses to help us discover HIS will as well. Following are some examples and their order of importance . . .

1. Our authorities
 - a. husband (see Ephesians 5:22-24)
 - b. parents and grandparents (see Ephesians 6:1-3)
 - c. employer (see Ephesians 6:5-6)
 - d. pastors and spiritual leaders (see Hebrews 13:17)
 - e. government (see Romans 13:1-5)
2. Our siblings
3. Our brothers and sisters in CHRIST who know us well
4. Others
 - a. doctor if we're ill
 - b. auto mechanic if our car breaks down
 - c. etc.

The wise CHRISTian will realize and accept the fact that GOD has ordained these authorities and "*counselors*" in our lives and thus will also realize and accept the fact that HE will often choose to give guidance and clear direction through these authorities and "*counselors*", especially concerning the major decisions we must make in life. As we avail ourselves of these other "*counselors*" in our lives, we also experience great freedom and peace from knowing that the decisions we're making are not just based on our limited perspective, but from the broader perspectives of others as well.

B. The importance of considering circumstances.

They should not be our primary means in discovering GOD's will for our lives, but yet considering the circumstances surrounding a particular situation can be very helpful once the other "steps" that we have studied have been followed.

An incident in the life of the Apostle Paul illustrates this principle very well . . .

In Acts 16, the Apostle Paul is in the midst of his second missionary journey with his fellow-workers Silas and Timothy. They are progressing North "*. . . through Syria and Cilicia . . .*" (15:41), when apparently they feel it is GOD's will that they go East into Asia. However, Scripture tells us that they "*. . . were forbidden of the HOLY SPIRIT to preach the Word in Asia . . .*" (16:6). It is then that they continue West when they "*. . . came to Mysia . . .*" (16:7a). It is here they apparently feel that it is GOD's will that they go North, Scripture telling us that "*. . . they tried to go into Bithynia, but the SPIRIT suffered them not*" (16:7b). It is then that they "*. . . came down to Troas*" (v.8). It was in Troas that they were led in a clear way to take the Gospel into Europe (see vv. 9-12).

C. The importance of fasting with prayer.

GOD has given us this powerful tool that can greatly aid us in discovering HIS will for our lives, especially concerning making "major" decisions. Unfortunately, it is a tool that is largely neglected and ignored by the CHRISTian family, but yet has been used by GOD to give clear and precise direction to those who have used it, especially when it has been combined with fervent prayer.

Following are two Biblical examples of men of GOD that used this tool to discover GOD's will when facing "major" decisions in their lives:

1. Jehosaphat

"And Jehosaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."

II Chronicles 20:3

2. Daniel

"And I set my face unto the LORD GOD, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Daniel 9:3

D. The importance of repentance from sin.

Scripture is very clear in warning us that our sin obstructs GOD from being able to work in our lives. This is certainly true when it comes to discovering the will of GOD for our lives as well. However, GOD is always gracious and merciful to HIS people, and when sin is truly confessed and repented from, the "channels of communication" are again open, and GOD is able to show us HIS will for our lives!

This progression is given to us many times throughout the Scriptures. One of these is found in Psalm 32 . . .

1. Sin confessed, repented of and forgiven

"I acknowledged my sin unto THEE, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD, and THOU forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah."
(v.5)

2. guidance and direction given

"I (the LORD) will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go, I (the LORD) will guide thee with MINE eye." (v.8)

E. The importance of distinguishing between GOD's perfect and permissive will.

When we speak of GOD's "perfect" will, we are referring to GOD's highest standard. That standard for which HE desires all of us to discover and attain. When we speak of HIS "permissive" will, we are referring to that lower standard of which HE allows us to experience, although it was never HIS "perfect" will.

GOD's "perfect" will was that Adam and Eve had never sinned (see Genesis 2:15-17). GOD's "permissive" will was that HE allowed it to happen (see Genesis 3). GOD's "perfect" will was that Abraham and Sarah wait for GOD to give them a son (see Genesis 15:1-5). GOD's "permissive" will was that HE allowed them to carry out their own "plan" and will, and they had a son through Hagar (see Genesis 16). GOD's "perfect" will is that all people be saved (see II Peter 3:9). GOD's "permissive" will is that only a few will choose this salvation (see Matthew 7:13-14).

The Scriptures are full of examples of GOD's perfect and permissive will. Sadly, the results were always the same for those who chose the latter . . . sin, sorrow and destruction! It is the same for us today. GOD has HIS perfect will chosen and planned for each one of us and for each detail of our lives. However, so many times we settle for that lower standard of HIS permissive will because of our pride, impatience and rebellion. The tragic results are always the same . . . sin, sorrow and destruction!

"(GOD will give us our) request, but (send) leanness into (our) soul." Psalm 106:15

Conclusion: Everyday, everyone of us are faced with decisions we must make concerning what to do and what not to do. Some of these decisions are "major" life-changing decisions. Some are the "minor" everyday decisions. Every decision however, no matter how great or small, is important to GOD. These decisions are important because HE knows everyone is of significance. Every decision we make, to that some degree, will affect us, those around us and even to the Kingdom of GOD!

Scripture admonishes us to . . .

". . . be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the LORD is." Ephesians 5:17

GOD wants us to know what HIS will is for every detail of our lives. HE has given us HIS Word, prayer, and those other "tools" noted above to show us. As we follow HIS Word through the guidance of HIS HOLY SPIRIT and avail ourselves of these other "tools", HIS will for us becomes perfectly clear.

"Our FATHER WHICH art in heaven, Hallowed be THY Name. THY Kingdom come. THY will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:9b-10