

KNOW GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE

Ephesians 5: 1-21, especially verses 15-21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Many questions surround the ever-present question, “How do I know God’s will for my life? How can I live with my conscience without going crazy? How do we know what the will of God is? How general is God’s will? How specific is God’s will? In what ways is God’s will always the same for every believer? In what ways is God’s will specifically ear-marked and sent special delivery to you or me? Should I throw out a fleece to know the will of God? Can I know the right person to marry, the right job to take, the right home to own, the right car to buy, or does it matter to God what kind of a car I drive? Is God satisfied with whatever I do as long as I pray and read the Bible every day, as long as I am faithful in church attendance, or as long as I faithfully testify the Gospel to those I meet? Does God have a specific plan for my life, or is that not true?

Many people see God’s will as hunting for a needle in a haystack, and others see His will as a legalistic plan that prohibits them to move without a special word from the Lord. God has and he occasionally does use very strange and unorthodox means of revealing His precious will. Yet, Gideon’s fleece is not God’s normal way to know His will. One fellow pastor years ago said he felt led to write out 25 questions that his “would be wife” would answer yes to. He spent a lot of time and money going out with different ladies who failed to meet the criteria. Finally, one young lady said “yes” his every question. He proposed that night and they soon married. I have no desire today to study the exceptional ways God may have worked to show His will. Today, let’s tap into the biblical basics of knowing the will of God. How do we know what is God’s will for us? Perhaps one question has been asked me most often, “How do I know the will of God?” Directed by the Word and the Holy Spirit, let’s explore seven indicators that we are finding, that we will find, or that we have found God’s will for our life.

GOD’S WILL IS A PROMISE WE CAN KNOW IN ANSWER TO PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY.

(I.) Turn with me to James 1: 5-6. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” Jesus confirms this promise in John 10: 2-5, when He said, “But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus promises us we can know His will as we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in our hearts to us. Jesus promised that after His ascension, He would send His Holy Spirit to make known God’s will for us. Listen to what Jesus said in John 14: 26. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” We need to claim this promise in prayer.

So how do we pray to claim the promise? Matthew 7: 7 is clear for us: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you.” In Scotland, in the town of Larges, in the mid 1860’s, one woman with a large family, lived in a small two room cottage. Her husband was gone all day as a laborer in the field. This woman, to help make ends meet, took in laundry from others to increase their income. With children all around her, and chickens that walked all around through the house, this woman became renowned for having God’s anointing on her and people dropped in to sit awhile, for the uplift it gave them to be with her. Her minister would often tether his horse by her door, when passing, and take a seat, and talk with her as she worked. One day, he said to her, “Good friend, you are always so near the Lord. How is it possible in your busy world to find time with God in quiet prayer?” The woman, with a look of surprise, laid down her apron, took a seat near her pastor, and said, “Ah, my pastor, that’s where you make the mistake. When I want to shut out my world, I sit down in this chair, and throw my apron over my head, and everyone knows I am in my tabernacle alone with my Lord for the moment.” Beloved, everyone of us who can read our Bible and get alone with God, can find our own closet, our own tabernacle where we shut out the world, and we claim God’s promise to show us His will and there, under our apron, or in our closet, He shows us His will. Secondly,

GOD’S WILL IS HIS WORD AND IS ALWAYS IN HARMONY WITH HIS WORD. (II.) Psalm 40: 8 testifies to us, “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart.” God’s will never, never, ever contradict His revealed Word, the Bible. God’s will and God’s law or Word are synonymous. When there is a contradiction in voices, one of the voices is not the Lord’s voice. In distinguishing the voice of God, this test of harmony is always crucial. God has no special directions for us when His direction is clearly mapped out in His Word. We go astray when we listen to an inner voice when the need is overwhelming that we need to study the Word, the Scriptures. I don’t need any extra voice from the Holy Spirit to tell me to remain married to my wife, and not leave her, or not to murder, steal, commit adultery, bear false witness, or covet. That is all covered in God’s ten commandments. God expects you and me to know and study His Word and then stand upon it firmly. I remember a lady who was so impressed with I Corinthians 3: 21, she made it her life verse. It reads, “So let no one boast in men, for all things are yours.” She used this verse to justify her stealing when she needed things. She said for a time she debated the voice, but decided to stand on it, that all things were hers. Peter warned against this kind of thinking in II Peter 1: 20, saying, “Knowing this, first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation.” We must not twist the Word to fit our own purpose. The Word means what it means in that context. Yet, be sure, stealing is still stealing and never justifiable even if you are standing on I Corinthians 3: 31. Thirdly,

GOD’S WILL IS THE SWAY OR DRAWING OF GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BELIEVER. (III.) Eph 5:17-18. We need God’s swaying, drawing power. “Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be(being)filled with the Spirit.

Whatever God's will is, the Spirit will sway us, and draw us toward God's will. Nevertheless, know for certain that there are competing sways and drawings in our life that are not from God. In Ephesians 5: 18, Paul warns us not to be foolish in trying to understand the will of God, by succumbing to alcohol. There is a strong sway and drawing from the bottle, but that sway will make a total waste of our lives, dissipating our flesh, our mind, and our spirits. Instead of being drunk with wine, God calls us to be filled, swayed, or drawn with the Spirit. The Greek verb, to be filled, is in the present imperative tense, meaning a continuous replenishment, an ongoing state of being filled. We well could translate, "go on being filled," "keep on being filled with the Spirit, or be being filled." I have a timer set on our garden that goes on every night, or I would have no garden at all. Our garden must be, being filled every day. With the Holy Spirit, we must never allow our lives to become parched from lack of time in the word, or in prayer and meditation.

God doesn't have a special word about staying married. God tells us in Malachi 2: 16, "For I the Lord God, hate divorce, and putting away." God's will in I Corinthians 7: 12-13 directs us as believing spouses not to send our unbelieving spouse away. The Scripture says in both verses that if that unbelieving spouse wishes to remain, "He should not divorce her," and "She should not divorce him." Yet, on who to marry, how do we decide? We need to know we are under the sway of the Holy Spirit. How do we know who the right person is? In Ephesians 5: 19, in context with not being drunk as our sway, God speaks of three sways He ordains. (1) God ordains the sway of good and godly psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Watch out if your potential spouse has no interest, nor is ever moved to joy or tears with the songs of Zion. Eph. 5: 19 (2) God ordains the sway of continual thanksgiving. (Eph. 5:20) Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Beware of a potential spouse who is ever critical, always griping, and is without a thankful spirit. (3) God ordains the sway of a mutual submissive spirit to one another. It matters not how handsome or beautiful that potential spouse is. If the husband to be is narcissistic, and it's all about him, and he never admits sin, or can submit in your relationship, and demands control at all times, run, run, as fast as you can. If the wife is narcissistic, and justifies her every move, cannot confess sin, and cannot submit in your relationship, run, run, as fast as you can. God's will does have a sway and drawing. God's will is musical, thankful, and is a mutually submissive swaying of believers. This drawing of us with cords of love is not a driving of us, a cultic control of us, for none of us are non-persons, to be driven as cattle. We are sheep of His pasture. God leads us, draws us, and woos us like a Bridegroom courting His Bride. 4thly,

GOD'S WILL IS THE RULING OF CHRIST IN OUR HEARTS AS

BELIEVERS. (IV.) Isaiah 30: 20. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide Himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right or left." My favorite passage about God being the umpire of what is in or out of bounds with Him is found in Colossians 3: 15-17. We read, "And let the peace of Christ

rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Verse 15 says, “Let the peace of Christ rule, literally, be the umpire, the one who blows the whistle when we step out of His will. Paul speaks of 5 whistles. The whistle of no peace (1) When God’s peace is not present, His whistle is. God rules in our hearts, and He blows His whistle when we are out of bounds, unless we have hardened our hearts, and are deaf to His checking whistles. The whistle of others in the body of Christ (2) Indeed, every believer has been called in one body. God uses the body to blow His whistle. Beware if others in the body tell you, “You are stepping out, or staying out of the will of God, you are out of bounds.” Get back where you belong today.

The whistle of no thanksgiving within. (3) Three times in verses 15, 16, and 17, there is God’s whistle if you are not thankful. Read verses. Don’t marry without God’s triple thanksgiving in your heart. Don’t settle for warm blood, or say, “I’ll change him or her.” No, we won’t. Rather wait for God’s gift that sends you into a flood of “Thank You, thank You, thank You, Jesus! The whistle of having an indifference to what the Word says. (4) Verse sixteen says, “Let the Word of Christ dwell richly. If your potential spouse, whether the man or the woman, is unteachable, unable or unwilling to be taught or admonished by you or you by them, it’s not God’s will. Run, run, as fast as you can. (5) The whistle of personal sovereignty, saying, “I will do what I please, what I want to do. If what we want to do, cannot be done under the sovereignty of Jesus, stop now. It’s not God’s will. Don’t make a motion at our second quarterly meeting, unless you have prayed over the motion. God says, “He who believes will not make haste, or be put to shame.” Paul quotes this phrase in Romans 9: 33 from Isaiah 28: 16. Fifthly,

GOD’S WILL IS A GUIDING OF HIS INNER VOICE THAT IS TESTED AND IS HIS VOICE, FOR SURE. (V.)

I John 4: 1 is how we test God’s will. We read, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” God does use this method at times, but always test it. (1) It can be a clear impression, but it must never be in contradiction to scripture. (Acts 8: 26) Philip had an angel of the Lord tell him, Acts “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. It may be a dream or a vision, but it cannot be in contradiction to the Word. God does use this method at times, but always test it. (2) It can be a conviction of duty, not in contradiction to sound judgment in the Word. (Acts 16: 9) shows that when God forbade Paul to go to Mysia or Bithynia, Paul had a dream in the night with a man in Macedonia standing and urging him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (3) It can be a calling or leading not in contradiction to the checkings, and leadings and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Acts 16: 7. Many years ago, my dear brother, Pastor Robert Armitage, had a religious band wreck their vehicle just south of Bloomington near where he lived,

He gave them his home to stay in overnight, and they had a pleasant time together. Their name was, “The Cooking Mamas.” He asked me to go and meet them on Saturday, in hopes I would have them sing on Sunday. When they came in, my spirit within was troubled, so I asked them the most important question of all, “Who is Jesus?” They were an evangelistic musical team for the cult, “The Way International.” They did not believe Jesus was God’s Son. I told them they were a cult, and they could not sing on Sunday. They immediately began to curse me and swear at me. Thank God, I listened to God’s inner voice within. 6thly. Sixthly,

GOD’S WILL IS HIS LEADING IN WHICH HE MIRACULOUSLY OPENS A WAY FOR US TO DO HIS WILL. (VI.)

God tells us in His Word, in I Thessalonians 5: 24, “Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will do it.” If we are ruled by our reason primarily, many of our thoughts will stand against the will of God. Many golden opportunities for God have been missed because we have failed to promptly obey the voice of God. Sometimes God gives multiple chances for us to revisit a disobedient response, but it is not often. The longer we hesitate to do God’s will, the harder it gets. Delay deludes us from obeying. Yet, there are times when we had better hesitate when we think we know God’s will, but there is no open door. God does not push square pegs into round holes. We need to quit pushing if God is not opening a way. It is important to persevere when God so urges us, but it is also true that we must not be unwilling to take no for God’s answer. God’s no may be temporary, or it may be permanent. Some no’s may be a matter of timing, some may be a matter of waiting for God to do a work in our hearts or other’s hearts. God never told Moses to tell the Israelites to pack up to leave until the last moment after the 10th plague of the death angel striking the firstborn sons of Egypt. To get ready earlier would not have been God’s will. Yet, when it was time to cross the Red Sea, God miraculously made a way. Where God leads, miraculously, the door opens. As I was meditating on God’s miraculous ways, I thought of my favorite spiritual songs about God saving marriages. It’s Steve and Annie Chapman’s song: “God Still Moves.” How I wept for you. 7thly,

GOD’S WILL IS A CLEAR LIGHT DIRECTING US WHEN WE WAIT FOR THE LORD. (VII.)

Psalm 119: 105 and 130 show us how God directs us. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path...The unfolding of Your Words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.” In all doubtful areas, God wants us to wait for His peace, His clear direction, His light. The moment we are sure we have His light, we need to yield immediately in total obedience. Obedience always brings peculiar risks and dangers. Yet, if God’s light is there, we must not be deterred from surrender to His will because of the dangers. No biblical writer speaks so much of God guiding with His light as Isaiah. Let me have you turn with me to two examples. Isaiah 8:17-20 and Isaiah 58: 7-12. Often beloved, this light never comes on until we close the door on our sin and repent. God only turns the light on for the obedient. I close with Rosalind Goforth’s story as a missionary to China (1864-1942) While traveling, she came to Weihufu, and stayed in the house of an elder, a doctor, Dr. Fan. At the end of teaching at the Mission Boys School, Mrs. Fan asked Rosalind to come quickly to pray for a boy

dying with tuberculosis of the lungs. The boy was foaming at the mouth and his face had an ashen look of death. We gathered to pray. Rosalind prayed for the boy's mother and asked God to give the boy dying grace. As Rosalind left, she heard in her spirit, "James 5: 14, "Call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him." The words seemed to come in a flurry, in a hurry, but Rosalind could not work up any faith to pray for the dying boy. Faith or no faith, Rosalind blindly obeyed God's inner voice. She told Dr. Fan and he refused to do it. He said, "The boy is dying. Leave him alone." Now Rosalind gained courage and she said, "Dr. Fan, I have no faith to believe for this dying boy to be healed, but if I go home without obeying God's voice, I will utterly miserable, and conscience stricken. Dr. Fan relented and called the church elders. The elders, family, and many friends all gathered, and they anointed the boy with oil and the elders prayed. The elders asked Rosalind to close in prayer. Rosalind prayed but with very little faith—just mostly for the family and the mother. The boy was carried home, and Rosalind left the next morning for Changte. One year later, Rosalind returned to Weihufu. She asked Mrs. Fan, "Did that boy die?" She felt within the sadness of her lack of faith. Mrs. Fan said, "Why, no. the young man is quite well and helping his father." Two years later, Rosalind returned to speak to the women in Weihufu. A photographer knocked on her door and gave Rosalind a number of pictures from the day of her speaking the day before. In Chinese, he said to Rosalind, "I see you do not know me, Mrs. Goforth. She admitted, "No, I have never seen you before." The photographer smiled and bowed, and said, "I am the boy your prayed for three years ago. I have never forgotten you." Rosalind could not describe her feelings at that moment. "Glad, yes, but oh, so sad and humbled!" Then she saw a glimpse of God, this mighty missionary did. She saw His infinite love and patience with her, His faithless channel to work His miracle. And in her mix of sadness and gladness, the light came on for her, as she recognized God uses us even when we blindly obey Him without faith.

I know I have left thousands of questions unanswered, but I urge us all. God has given us light today. His light is His will! Walk in it. Walk in His light. And now, as Paul said in II Thessalonians 3: 5, "Now the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ." That is God's will for all of us—love each other, and wait for His soon return. Delight to do His will! Amen.