

## Discerning God's Will

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About thirty-one years ago, we had to make a decision that was life-changing in many ways. For Sheila and me, it was the time where we sought the Lord and tried to understand what it meant in our context. We felt God calling us to 'full time ministry', and I use that in quotes because I recognize that each one of us is called to ministry. But this meant leaving our business in order to study. Our children were young at that time, 3 years and a year. It was a very difficult decision to make, but we had some godly people who spoke into our lives who also felt that this was truly what God was inviting us to do. There were also people who didn't feel comfortable with what we were doing and let us know that as well.

We sought the Lord's will in our lives. As I was looking at a ministry in music, I realized that we needed to go out of India, and applied and got admission into a college, United Wesleyan College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. They gave us a partial scholarship – tuition was paid for but we would have to come up with our room and board.

I remember going to the U.S.I.S (the American Library) and getting a thick book on scholarships that were available all around the world. I found 100 foundations that dealt with something like what we were looking at – theology and music. So, I wrote letters to every one of them and posted them. Then we waited for a reply. Some foundations wrote back; some didn't. but out of those 100, not one of them came back with a scholarship offer.

Then I remember meeting Rev. Fred Ray and his wife Naomi. Fred was Associate Pastor at the Bowen Methodist Church. I told him, "I think we need to give this up. It's not going to work. We haven't made any headway on getting funding and college sent me a note saying that they couldn't hold the scholarship any longer than a particular date." He said, "Well, just hang on! Let's take a call later today."

When we met him later that evening, he said, "Naomi and I spoke, and we truly believe that if we can get you to the US, God will take care of you from thereon, for all that He wants to do in your life. So, to that end, we are going to put up the money that you need for the first semester." They were missionaries in India and we knew that they didn't all that much money, but they were willing to put what they had because they believed that this truly was what God had in mind for us.

Sometimes, deciphering the will of God for us and our lives can be difficult. We come to God because we are ones who bear His name, and we believe that He has the best possible plan for each one of us. We ask, "Lord, what do I do in this situation?" whether it's in terms of the work that you are doing, whether it's time to take a break. You're at a crossroad. You are saying, "Lord, show me. Do I leave this and go somewhere else, or do I stay? Lord, what about a marriage partner? Lord, do You have somebody for me? Lord, would You show me who that is? Lord, which college should I go to, and which stream should I take?" All of these questions come up and we go to the Lord and we say, "Lord, would You bring clarity into my life, because I truly want to know what is Your will for me." We have learnt, as ones who bear His name, that outside of the will of God, there is no joy. So, we seek His will.

This morning I want us to look at some thoughts that I put together, that I believe have helped me over the years to make decisions, and also areas that the Bible affords us that will help us in knowing what is God's will in a particular situation.

## **Having the Holy Spirit**

This is most important in understanding God's will in the decisions, and we must make sure that we have His Holy Spirit. Why is that important? Because as 1 Corinthians 2:11 reminds us: *No one can really know what anyone else is thinking or what he is really like except that person himself. Similarly, no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit.*

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth and he says, "Brothers and sisters, here's an important principle. Let me give you an example of yourselves, of your own situations. You will not know what your neighbor is thinking about or your neighbor will not know what you are thinking about. Only you, yourself can know that because your spirit is within you and your spirit knows what you are thinking about, not anybody else. For example, I look at you all, and you seem to be listening to what I am saying. But it is quite possible that while you look at me, you are thinking about lunch, or whether you will be going home or to a restaurant. Or maybe you are wondering about what is going to happen tomorrow at the office or in school. I have no idea what you are thinking, but your spirit does.

That is what Paul is saying: Nobody understands you but your own spirit. Similarly, he says, God's thoughts no one understands, but God's Spirit. And if that were the end of his logic, then we would be in a very strange place. So, where does that leave us with knowing what God is thinking about, if only His Spirit knows His thoughts? But he doesn't stop there. He goes on to say: *And God has actually given us His Spirit* (John 1:12). So, if you've received Jesus as your Savior, then God gives you His Holy Spirit. How do I know that?

Ephesians 1:13-14 says, "He gives us His Holy Spirit, that is, Christ also brought you the truth which is the good news about how you can be saved." So, the good news came to you and me. Then he says, "You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised Holy Spirit to show that you belong to God." So, Paul is saying to the church at Ephesus, "God gave you His Spirit the moment you accepted the finished work of Jesus at Calvary, and appropriated it in your own life."

What does that mean? It means that we were all sinners. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death, which means that if nothing is done about our sin, your sin and mine, we are headed for eternal destruction. But God, through His incredible love, sent Jesus to die and pay that penalty (the wages of sin is death). He died for you and for me. He said, "I'll take that penalty on myself."

It's important that we take one step and understand what believing is all about. Believing in Jesus means that you are saying, "I understand that I have sinned. I understand that the wage of penalty is death. I further understand, Lord Jesus, that you paid that penalty and I believe that, and that penalty covers me. I appropriate what You did on the cross as work that was done for me so that I can be saved." Paul is saying, "When that happens, when we accept salvation, God immediately places His Holy Spirit within us." At that moment, He gives us His Holy Spirit.

Why does He do that? Paul says, “It is like a down payment.” It’s just like us going to buy something, but not having the money. How is that possible? The Holy Spirit can come into us, but if we don’t give the Spirit of God access to every part of our lives, then He doesn’t, and isn’t able to control our lives. When we become Christians, God doesn’t take away our will. Our will is our right to choose. And even with the Holy Spirit within us, we can choose whether to give the Holy Spirit control or not. We can choose that. We can say to the Holy Spirit, “I’d like you to be very present in my life when I come to church on Sunday, but on Monday, you stay home and I’m going to work.” And the Holy Spirit will stay home, because your will is in charge.

So, what must we do in a situation like that? We need to be able to give full access to the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 5:18 says: “*Do not be drunk with wine, but be ye filled with the Holy Spirit.*” In other words, again Paul is saying that it’s important that there’s a filling of the Holy Spirit in your life. but we wonder – if I already have the Holy Spirit in me, why is Paul saying that I have to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Imagine a glass of water which is full of yourself, your will, the decisions that you have made, your sins, the things that you do – all of that is in this glass; your life and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has only a little space because the glass is filled with everything else that is you. However, as we progress, God begins to speak to us and says, “That addiction that you have – I need to work with that. That’s something that you need to get rid of.” And if you are obedient to the Spirit of God, and you confess and ask Him to cleanse it, then that place that the addiction had in your life is emptied and the Holy Spirit fills it. That is the process of sanctification that we go through our entire lives. God continues to work in us every day pointing out to us the things that have no business co-existing with Him, with His holiness. He says, “Here’s an area – maybe you get angry too often, maybe you tell lies every now and then and think it’s alright, maybe you’re doing something against My Word. You’ve got to deal with it.” And every day we listen to the Holy Spirit and say, “I’m sorry for that. Will You forgive me?” Then He cleanses us and the Holy Spirit has a little more of our lives. That is why Paul says, “Be filled! Not half a glass, not one-third of your heart, but be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let every part of you be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The interesting parts of that line are:

1. It’s a command. God is not saying, “Oh! By the way, be filled.” No. God is saying, “You’ve got to be filled.” It’s in the imperative. You have no other choice. If you bear His name, if you are a Christian today, then you have to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There is no other option.
2. It’s in the passive voice which means that you and I cannot do anything about being filled. The only thing that you and I can do is empty ourselves. So, we empty ourselves of things that are in total discordance with God’s plan, God’s will. And as we empty, we allow and open ourselves up and say, “Lord, would You fill me?” That is what it means to be in the passive. We give Him an empty place and wait for Him to fill us.
3. It’s in the present continuous tense. This means that it is ongoing, that I continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is not a one-shot deal. We get the Holy Spirit into our lives, and then He continues to fill us as we move through life and we see things through His eyes. He changes us from glory unto glory as He does a refining work in us, as He changes things in us, making us a more sanctified holy person as He continues to fill us each and every moment of every day.

We offer ourselves up to Him when we realize that there are things within us that are inconsistent with His Word. So, we give Him that access into our lives.

Revelation 3:20 – *“Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man hear My voice, let him open the door and I will come in and sup with him and he with Me.”*

That particular verse often gets taken out of context, but it is actually in the scheme of the church at Laodicea. Jesus is talking to the church, which makes us wonder why He is outside the church. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if you hear My voice, open it and let me come in.” the church is you and me, and Jesus stands outside the areas of our heart, saying, “Let me in. Here’s an area that I have no access to. I want to come in. I want to make this an enriching experience for you.” He waits for us to give Him the opportunity to come in, to open the door and say, “Lord, would You come in and take that area of my heart?” We need to give Him access. We need to make sure that we have confessed sin so that there’s emptying of those things that are of the flesh, so that then He can fill us.

### **Listen to the Lord**

Beloved, very often we come to a point where God has revealed His will to us, and when we hear that, we say, “Oh my goodness! No, this is not for me. This is too challenging, too hard. I don’t have the resources for it, not right now. I can’t do this.” If we truly seek His will and want to know what it is, then, when we hear it, we need to be obedient to His will as well.

Romans 8:14 – *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, are the children of God.*

So, if you and I are called, we know that we are children of God today, then we ought to be led by His Spirit. There is no alternative; we have to be led by His Spirit.

As I bring this to a close, I want to alert you to the fact that there is one person who doesn’t want you to understand or follow the will of God. And that is the evil one. He exists to make sure that God’s will is not done in your life. He exists for that very purpose, to try and trip you up, to do whatever he can to make sure that he undercuts your relationship with God or creates doubts in your mind so that you will not do His will. That is Satan’s agenda.

I want to give you a couple of ways in which Satan will do that, so that we are aware of his wiles.

- 1) In Daniel, we see a vignette of what happens when we pray. In chapter 10, Daniel is praying because he realizes that the 70 years of exile are over. He prays, “Lord, what do we do now?” We read that God heard his prayer and answered it immediately. But Daniel didn’t get the answer to that prayer immediately. This passage tells us that, in the spiritual realm that we know so little about, as the answer was coming down, it was stopped by the prince of the kingdom of Persia. He stopped God’s answer from reaching Daniel for 21 days. During that time, Daniel continued to pray. Here we see the power of prayer. By praying for another 21 days, another angel, Michael, was sent from heaven to overcome this prince of Persia, and then the answer came down to him.

But the angel said to Daniel, “From the first moment or day that you prayed, God heard and God answered. But Satan tried to stop the answer from coming.” So, remember not to quit praying while you are waiting for the will of God, because Satan will want to pre-empt it, to stop it from coming.

- 2) He can make you believe lies about yourself and about the will of God for you.

Some years back, both Sheila and I were ministering to a lady, and as we were worshipping together, she suddenly began to manifest. We knew that there was some demonic activity going on. So, while we continued to worship, I was trying to get this demon out. In the course of doing that, I asked the demon, “What right do you have to stay in her?” I was just trying to get to the root so that we could take out that root by the power of the blood of Jesus. The demon answered, “She believes my lies.” She had gotten to the point where she believed everything that the evil one was telling her about herself – that she was useless, she had no worth, she was not a daughter of God.

Satan will come to you and try to tell you those kinds of things – you are never going to accomplish that, think about your past, you think you have the wherewithal to do that? That’s not meant for you, it’s meant for somebody else. Those are the lies that Satan will come and tell you.

Our responsive reading in the morning service was just affirmation about who we are.

*You are all children of God.  
You are all God’s handiwork.  
You are all forgiven.  
You are all a new creation.  
You all have been reconciled.  
You are all heirs of eternal life.  
You all live by faith.  
You are all co-heirs with Christ.  
You are all blessed in the heavenly realms.  
You are healed.  
You are all strong.*

That’s who we are and Satan will try to undermine that and make you think that you are worthless, that you cannot follow God’s will for your life.

- 3) He can even create favorable circumstances that lead us to believe that this is the right path. He can even create circumstances that will make us believe that this is either the right path in following him or the wrong path in following God.

I was telling you how we sent out those 100 letters and got no reply. I thought that maybe this is not what God wants us to do, because there is no funding to take the next step. If we had stopped with that, it would have ended. But we went and spoke about it to someone, and he brought another perspective in. so, yes, he can make your circumstances look like this is what you should or should not be doing. Then we stop short of God’s will.

- 4) He can use people, even close friends, to mislead you. These people seemingly have your best interests at heart.  
You remember when Jesus was telling his disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, that He must suffer, die and be raised again on the third day, Peter took Him by the hand and said, “Stop this talk. This is not right. don’t talk like this.” And some of the harshest words in scripture are reserved for Peter, when Jesus says to him, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

Satan can use people who are close to us to also try and undermine us. So, we need to take the words of good friends or people we respect to the Lord and ask Him how to process the information that we have.

## **God's Peace**

After doing all of the above, we then have to go back to God with an understanding that we have gleaned from knowledge, from the Word, from friends, and say, "Lord, is this what you want me to do?" There must be something that lets us know that this is the way that we must take.

God's will and God's peace will always go together. What is God's peace? It is the peace that passes our human understanding. It really may not make sense but within my spirit, I have this sense that this is what we need to do.

Sheila and I visited Asbury after I'd finished my undergrad studies. We were wondering what our next step should be and we knew we had to come to Asbury even though we didn't know how we were going to make it. Everyone was telling us to apply to other seminaries. But we were clear that this was where we needed to go. While we were still at Houghton college, we had visited Asbury and we sat in their chapel praying. And God confirmed something for us. We clearly felt that this was the place that God wanted us to be. In fact, when people asked me what if I didn't get into Asbury, I replied that we would be going home. That was clear. God's will and God's peace are never, never away from each other; they go hand in hand.

So, as you think about decision-making – maybe you're going through a time where that is front and center of your life. Should I do it or should I not? Remember:

- Make sure the Holy Spirit is within you
- Make sure that the Holy Spirit has access
- Make sure that you are completely filled so that things of the flesh are not going to pull you away from what God wants.
- Be aware that Satan will try to stop you.
- Above all, take it to the Lord and say, "Lord, seal this for me with Your peace that passes my understanding of this situation and this circumstance and help me make the right decision."

Let's pray together. I'd also like to pray for those of you who maybe at this point in your life, are struggling with a decision that needs to be made and you need help with that. If you are, would you stand where you are and in closing, I would like to pray for you.

Heavenly Father, on these precious ones who are Yours; Master, they bear Your name. they are Your children bought with such a heavy price that You paid. These are Your children and they stand here just wanting to know what Your will is for their lives at this particular junction. Lord, would you do what you need to do, Master, to lead them on the right path, for them to know clearly what is Your will. Then would You empower them with Your Spirit that they may be able to follow in that plan that You have for them. Lord, I pray for an outpouring of Your Spirit right now on each one. In their spirits, let them know that You have seen, You have heard them and that You also want them to know Your will for their lives. So, Lord, confirm to them what they need to hear. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.