

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (13)
THE SPECIFIC WILL OF GOD
“SEEKING HIS UNREVEALED WILL”-Part One
Sermon 9/2/18

For the past several months we have been on a journey to discover the will of God as revealed in Scripture. We have seen some very specific things which God requires of us as well as some general principles on how we are to live our lives if we are to be obedient to Him. But what about those times when you need to know what God's will is and Scripture does not address it?

I am talking about the day to day need to know. We make hundreds of decisions daily which we do not bother God with. Should I eat a sandwich for lunch today or should I have soup? Should I watch TV tonight or read? Should I go for a walk or call my friend? God may teach us something as we watch TV or He may reveal something to us through what we choose to read. He may want us to exercise or he may prefer we reach out to a friend. God can and does direct even these small things, but in general we are free to choose to watch TV or read, take a walk or call a friend, eat a sandwich or have some soup. God is interested in the minutia of our lives but He does not wish to control every aspect of it. He gave us free will for a reason. Not every decision we make requires us to stop and pray for an answer.

In general we humans tend to ask for God's guidance on the bigger decisions in life. Should I change jobs? Should I marry his man or this woman? Should I move my family across the country? Should we adopt a child? Should I have surgery or just take some pills? Should I sell my house and move into an assistant living facility? Should I share a room or live by myself? These types of decisions are life changing and can impact not only us but our loved ones as well. Those of us who desire to please the Lord seek His will in these areas diligently until we get an answer. We tend not to make these types of decisions or move in any direction until we know what God desires for our lives.

If you maintain a close relationship with the Lord and walk with Him in daily obedience then you are used to hearing from the Lord and listening for His voice. You trust the Lord to direct your thoughts and willingly adjust your will to His. So making even difficult decisions is simply a matter of waiting on the Lord and not giving in to your own impulses, to peer pressure, or to the pressure of time.

Scripture does provide guidelines for us to follow when we need to make decisions, when we lack God's wisdom for direction in our lives.

According to James 1:5 and Matthew 7:7-11 God gives His wisdom to all who ask and He does so freely and without reproach. The word translated as “reproach” means without finding fault or without blame. He has no intention of making us feel stupid or ignorant simply because we are asking His advice. If we need to think it through He will help us think it through but he will not condemn or belittle us because we could not come to some conclusion on our own. On the contrary, He is very pleased when we ask for His opinion on something, when we are reluctant to move ahead without first consulting Him. Sometimes He answers quickly, sometimes He takes His time. But if we continue to seek after Him, continue to knock on heaven’s door, He will hear and answer our prayers.

JAMES 1:5

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

MATTHEW 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

From these verses we see that:

GOD’S IMPLICIT WILL IS THAT:

We Ask God To Reveal His Will To Us

We Keep Asking, Keep Seeking, Keep Knocking Until We Receive An Answer

I’ve had many occasions in my life to test these words of Scripture and have found them to be true and reliable. God does indeed hear our prayers and grants wisdom ask Him to reveal His will. We may have to ask more than once. We may have to seek after His will for a period of time before He provides an answer. But He will answer. When we trust in the Lord with all our heart and strive not to lean on our own understanding, when we acknowledge Him in everything we do, He does direct our paths.

There are, however, conditions to receiving an answer from God. After James speaks of asking God for wisdom he goes on to say this:

JAMES 1:6-8

“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

If we come to God for wisdom but we are unsure if He will answer then we cannot expect to receive what we ask of Him. We are of two minds. On the one hand we believe God hears, but on the other hand we doubt He will actually respond. This may be due to our own sense of unworthiness, of unconfessed sin, or of a faulty perception of how our heavenly Father responds to His children's requests. Whatever the reason it must be dealt with first before we can expect to receive an answer to our request.

Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction (or evidence) of things not seen.”* Verse 6 goes on to say that without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever comes to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. We come to God because we believe that He exists and that He will reward any and all who seek Him.

When we first became a Christian most of us started with very little faith, All we could do was say, “God, I don't know if You're real or not but if You are would You please reveal Yourself to me?” And what did He do? He answered our feeble cry for help and revealed Himself to us. This little bit of faith has now grown into a larger faith which expects more and asks more. Like the mustard seed, our fledgling faith has grown in to a tree of faith because of our increased knowledge of God and our life experience with Him.

All of us experience times in our lives when our faith wavers a bit, when life overwhelms us and our faith is put to the test. But we must keep the words of James and Hebrews in mind as we seek after God. We must first believe that God will reward our efforts in seeking after Him and we must not doubt that God is able to hear and able to respond to our requests. Otherwise, as James say, we cannot expect to receive anything from Him.

GOD'S IMPLICIT WILL IS THAT: We Ask In Faith And Do Not Doubt

Let's assume now that we have come to God full of faith without any doubt and made a request of Him. Let's also assume the Lord has answered. How do we

know when we receive an answer that the answer we have received is from God? I say this because there are thoughts which come from the heavenly realm and there are thoughts which come from the earthly realm. For instance, Satan loves to plant deceptive thoughts in our head which parade as truth but are at minimum a distortion of it. It didn't work with Jesus but it worked surprising well with Adam and Eve. We humans are also capable of self-deception. We can convince ourselves of most anything if we put our mind to it.

People receive answers to prayer differently. Some hear an audible voice, others just get an impression. Some find their answer while they read Scripture or have a Scripture come to mind which they are convinced is the answer to their prayer. At times I have had dreams in which the Lord revealed His will to me. At other times I have had moments of complete clarity that came out nowhere in the midst of confusion. Sometimes a peace or calm comes over me which infuses my spirit with so much faith and trust that there is no doubt I have found the direction I sought and received the answer to my prayer. Most of the time I just simply "know". I have made a practice of listening for the Lord and I recognize when He responds, regardless of the method He chooses to use at any given time.

So when we receive an answer to prayer how do we know it is from God and not from some other source? What are the things that assure us that we are hearing from the Lord? What does God sound like? How do we know when He responds that it is His voice and not our own? How do we feel when we know in our knower that we have received an answer to our prayer? Is there a peace, a conviction, do we have "ah ha" moments? How do we know the answer we have received is God's answer?

Then general answer comes from Matthew chapter 7 where Jesus says,

MATHEW 7:9-11

"What man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

From this we understand that God will not give us just anything simply to satisfy our request but rather will answer specifically and it will always be a good answer. There will be no tricks or last minute "bait and switch" games going on with God. When we ask for a fish He will give us a fish. Now we may have asked for a small fish thinking a can of sardines would be nice; but God reserves the right to provide more than we asked. In the case of the fish He might answer with a larger

order, for instance a large chinook salmon. It's still a fish, but a much larger fish. God loves to give good gifts to His children so He may give us more than we have asked but He will never give us less.

The other principle at work in God's reply to our request takes us back to James chapter 3. It is here that James reveals the principle at work whenever we receive an answer from God.

JAMES 3:17

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

When God answers our prayers they will be full of purity and peace. What He reveals will be gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits. His answers will be unwavering and without any hypocrisy.

When we know the basic principles of how God responds to the prayers of His people then we can know for certain that God has responded to our requests. Do we have a sense of peace with His reply? If not then that answer is not from God. If there is any impurity in the reply it cannot be from God for His wisdom is first of all pure. Does mercy dwell within His answer? If so God is in the midst of that answer. Does the answer you receive vacillate from day to day or moment to moment? If it does then it is not the voice of God for God's answer is unwavering and without hypocrisy. Does His answer make sense? Is it reasonable? If not then it is not God speaking.

When we are filled with peace we can be assured that we have heard God's answer. When the answer is gentle and reasonable we know we have heard from the Lord. So look for the peace which comes from above. Look for a gentle answer to your request. Look for reasonable answers. Expect mercy and good fruit to come forth from God's reply. If you are overwhelmed with the fullness of God's mercy then you can be assured that you have heard is the genuine article. It is the voice of the Lord.

As we develop this idea further I want to give you some examples from my own life of how I knew I had heard the voice of the Lord in answer to my prayers. These come from three different sources. The first answer came from the Scripture, the second came from a dream, and the third answer came from an overwhelming sense of the fullness of God's mercy. I will only speak of one of the one that came through Scripture today. I will save the other two for next time.

In 1976 my mother was admitted into the hospital with a brain aneurism. My wife was scheduled to go into the hospital a few weeks later to give birth to our second child through a C-section. I was out of a job at the time and took responsibility for the care of my two year old son. At the same time we had to leave our previous rental and move into a new rental. I spent my days driving between two different hospitals and dropping off my son at his aunts while I did so. In the evenings I would visit my wife and mother again then pick up my son and bring him to our new home.

It was a very stressful time for us all but especially for me. My mother had to wait 13 days before they could operate on her and even then the prognosis was not good. If she even survived for thirteen days the surgery was extensive and could leave her with permanent damage. She could be paralyzed, she could lose her ability to speak, she could lose her eyesight. These were some of the things which they warned us about. There were others.

The night before my mother's surgery was scheduled I put my son to bed and began to pray. I told the Lord all the things the doctors had said could happen to my mother and I told Him I did not want any of those things to be true. I wanted life for my mother with no aspect of death touching her body.

I was so overwhelmed with my emotions and so desperate for an answer from the Lord that I decided to do something which I had not done before nor have I done since. I asked the Lord for an answer to my prayers and then closed my eyes, opened my Bible up at random and stuck my finger in the book. When I opened my eyes I saw that my finger landed on this verse from Psalm 21. *"He asked life of You, You gave it to Him."*

I was blown away. I had just asked for life and the Scripture I point my finger at said He would give it to me. He would grant my request. Had God just answered my prayer? Dare I hope that my mother would actually be perfectly healthy after her surgery? It was against all the doctor's odds but it was exactly what I had been praying for.

Because I so badly wanted this to be true I wondered if I was reading into the Scripture something which the Lord was not saying. So I decided to do the same thing again. I closed my eyes, opened my Bible at random and pointed my finger once again at a verse. This time when I opened my eyes the verse said, *"You have given him his heart's desire and You have not withheld the request of his lips."* This was from the same Psalm as the previous verse. It was at this point that I stopped

considering this wishful thinking and began to think maybe God was really going to answer my prayer exactly as I had asked him to do. I did not have long to wait.

My mother was in surgery for 13 hours. She stayed in the hospital for several weeks after that before they released her. She left the hospital on her own power. She was not paralyzed, she could speak and see and hear and had no other complications from surgery except a droopy eyelid. Even this corrected itself within a month. My mother suffered no ill effects from her surgery and lived another 23 years. My mother was living proof that God answers prayer. And God used His own word to confirm to me that He had heard and was granting my request.

As effective as it was for me at that moment in time I do not recommend pointing your finger at random verses in the Bible as a means of determining the will of God. Hearing God's answer to your prayers is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of faith. Our position with God, our acceptance of His favor has been guaranteed by our faith in Christ's redeeming work for us. We can approach the throne of grace with boldness and favor. We do not have to struggle with knowing what His will is.

While He revealed it to me at that time through opening my Bible at random and pointing my finger at a verse, God was merely accepting me where I was at that point in my life. I believed God could hear me. I believed He could answer me. I just was so emotionally drained and so desperate to have Him answer my specific prayer that I needed something extraordinary to convince me that God was going to answer my prayer just exactly as I had asked.

I could relate to Elijah who, after a mountaintop experience with God, found himself running away from Jezebel because she threatened to kill him for what he had just done. Thirsty, hungry, and exhausted He stopped by a brook in the wilderness to rest and plead with God for an answer to his prayer. God met him there but first provided ravens to bring him food. After he became physically revived God sent him to the top of a mountain to wait for the answer to his prayer.

While he waited a great and strong wind rendered the mountains, breaking in pieces the rocks before him; but the Lord was not in the wind. After that there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire there was a sound of a gentle blowing. And the voice of the Lord came to him through the gentle wind.

Answers to our prayers can be dramatic but most often they are more like the

one Elijah heard. They come from being quiet and listening for the still small voice of the Lord whispering to us through a gentle breeze. When we quiet ourselves we can hear the Lord speak. The Lord said, *“My sheep know my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (John 10:27). We can hear the voice of the Lord. We can recognize Him when He speaks. Jesus guarantees that. We simply need to be confident of that fact and rest in that assurance.

I will share next time how God can sometimes speak through dreams and how He sometimes confirms His will through an overwhelming sense of mercy. I will also talk about times when God seems not to speak at all - when He seems especially distant – and what we can learn from such times. But let’s close by reviewing what we have learned today about God’s will.

#16

GOD’S IMPLICIT WILL IS THAT:

We Ask God To Reveal His Will To Us

We keep asking, Keep Seeking, Keep Knocking Until We receive An Answer

We Ask In Faith And Do Not Doubt

#17

GOD’S IMPLICIT WILL IS REVEALED AS BEING:

Pure, Peaceable, Gentle, Reasonable, Full of Mercy and Good Fruits,

Unwavering and Without Hypocrisy

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let me tell you a story of frustration; a story where I attempted to discern God's will but had no inkling what it was.

In 1979 my family and I moved to Southern California to pursue a ministry in Christian music. Two other couples went with us, our drummer and his wife and our guitar player and his wife. We were the only couple with kids. Our son would soon turn 5 and our daughter would soon turn 3. None of us had jobs nor did we have a place to live when we moved. But all of us were certain that God wanted us to move. So we each packed up our belongings and moved. We stayed in a KOA camp at first while we looked for jobs and housing.

All three families would live in the house so we needed at least four bedrooms. Since we needed to practice music in the home we also needed a garage

which was separate from the house which we could sound-proof to avoid any complaints from the neighbors. Finding a house that met all of our requirements as well as a landlord which would allow musicians to practice music was a challenge. But God eventually provided both the house and an understanding Landlord. We moved into our new home within a week after arriving.

Securing jobs for all of us also can fairly quickly. Before we moved into the house each of us, with the exception of my wife who needed to stay home with the kids, had secured employment. Each of gave thanks to the Lord for finding us a home and a job. We felt God had just confirmed that we had heard His voice correctly when we made the decision to move.

Though each us had jobs money was still tight. I got a job at Bank of America as a teller. The salary had just been raised to \$600 per month before taxes. The rent on our shared home was \$625. Wendy became the chief cook and housecleaner since everyone else had to work. We did not have a refrigerator but after a month or so we were able to save up enough money between the three couples to buy a used refrigerator. Up to them we used an ice chest and bought food and ice daily.

The purpose for our moving to Southern California was to break into the Christian music ministry. But we soon learned that was not an easy thing to do. Though the Jesus Movement was in full force and Christian music was becoming increasingly popular, we were very little fish attempting to swim in a pool that was already full of very talented musicians. We had some connections in the industry but these were not enough for us to actually make a dent in our dreams.

Eventually one of the couples decided to leave and move back home. That was devastating news financially for the remaining two couples. As cheap as our rent seems to us now, the combined income of the two remaining couples could not cover the rent and utilities. We too had to move. Wendy and I helped the other couples pack their things and move, one into a U-Haul trailer and the other into a small apartment in Burbank. Wendy and I could not afford to rent a house on my salary alone and since she could not work with two small children to care for we were left in a quandary as to what to do.

We had friends who lived in Ventura. They invited us to move in with them until we could find a place of our own. I decided to stay in the job I was at and commute to work from Ventura which took me an hour and a half each way because of traffic. Sometimes I even had to use our friend's car to make the drive as my car was not always reliable. It was not an ideal situation but it worked for us as a temporary solution.

We lived in our friend's home for approximately four months. During this time I diligently sought the Lord's direction as to what we should do. I knew we could not continue to impose on our friend's hospitality but I also knew that my salary alone was not enough for us to live on. I was in a catch-22 situation. We couldn't stay where we were but neither could we afford to leave. I simply did not know what to do.

I prayed daily. I prayed earnestly. I prayed expectantly. But no answer came. I prayed patiently and diligently believing in time the answer would come. But it did not. I described that time as a time where the heavens seemed to be made of brass. My prayers could not get through. It was as if God had shut the doors of heaven and left me to my own devices. I was hurt and disappointed in God. I knew He cared but He seemed not to. I knew He answered prayer but it seemed He remained silent. I began to wonder, where was this God in Whom I believed? Why wasn't He answering me?

As spring came to a close and the summer months drifted by I knew I had to make a decision. Things had to change. I could no longer wait for God to give me direction. I needed to make a decision now. As I pondered where we could go the only housing option open to us was to move back home and live with my mother who had recently been divorced. She had a large three bedroom home with a swimming pool and plenty of room for the kids to play. I called her and she agreed to let us come, at least until we could save up enough money to have first and last month's rent for a place to live.

The last conversation I had with God before I called my mother went something like this.

“God, I have asked and pleaded with you to give me direction, to tell me what I should do regarding our living situation. I have not heard a word from you. Perhaps I am hard of hearing but I have had a genuine expectation that You would answer my prayers. Since you have remained silent I don't want you to blame me if I make a wrong decision. I gave You ample opportunity to direct me but You have not. So don't blame me or punish me if I make a stupid mistake in what I plan to do. I gave You Your change now give me mine. And don't punish me because it's your fault that I am making these decisions without You.”

I don't normally talk to God like that but I was pretty upset with Him and did not want Him to punish me for His silence. Besides, I think God already understood

and knew intimately how I was feeling. My thoughts were not hidden from Him. Better to express what He already knew than to spend any time denying it.

My mid-September I had moved my family back home and into my mother's house. I was able to transfer my job at BofA from Southern California to Northern California so I had no loss of income from the move. We lived with my mother for about a year until we had saved up enough money for another rental. Because we had missed the start of school Wendy decided to home school our kids at least for the first year or our move. So we were settled once again with a place to live and a steady job.

Over the next several months as I worked through my emotions and the disappointment I felt over God's silence I realized that I was still in love with Him. I still believed in Him, I still worshipped Him, and I still wanted a close relationship with Him. So I cried out to my God and said,

“Father, You once asked Your disciples if they wanted to leave You as some of the others had done. Peter replied, Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Well Lord, I want You to know that I too do not want to leave You. As upset as I have been with You there is no other place I want to go. There is no other One I trust. You and You alone have the words of eternal life and I am not going anywhere. Even if You never answer me again I will still pray to You, I will still trust You, and I will still obey You. I recommit my life to follow You even in the silence. I am now and will always be Your child.”

Shortly after this prayer I read one Psalm 139. As I read it I felt it perfectly captured my thoughts and emotions so I put music to it and made it into a song. It speaks of God's omnipresence and His ability to see us no matter where we go or what we do. We cannot hide from God. Circumstances cannot hide us from God. Even our own anxieties cannot keep us from being seen by God. His love is that great and that deep. Not even the darkness we find ourselves in from time to time can dim the light of God's great compassion and love for His children.

I had to go through some dark times, some uncertain times, where I questioned God's love and care for me and my family. But I came through the other side with a better understanding of who God was and a firmer commitment to follow Him no matter where it lead.

I want to close today's sermon by singing this song. Perhaps you too have gone through some dark times where you questioned God's care for you; times where you wondered if God was even up there at all. Perhaps you thought that you

were so lost that God could not find you; that you had strayed so far He no longer cared.

Let me assure you that God cares. If He seems silent it is not for lack of caring. He sometimes tests us to see what is in our hearts. He wants to reveal to us the depth of love or the depth of resistance we have towards Him. Silence can test a person's faith. Silent can test a person's commitment. I know my faith was tested when God kept silent toward me. But I came to understand the test and I was unwilling to fail.

Satan would have us give up; to quit the race and follow our own path. When God seems silent it is usually at the junctures of life where we have come to the end of one road and need to embark on another. What seems like silence is merely God holding His breath waiting to see what direction we will take, what decision we will make. He is humbling us, testing us to see what is in our heart. Will we let faith guide our path or will we let doubt cloud our judgment? Will we make decisions using own wisdom or the wisdom of God. Will we rely on our own words or will we rely on the word of God?

What other principles can guide us in making our decision (James 1:6-8; Philippians 4:6-7)?