

**DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (17)**  
**THE SPECIFIC WILL OF GOD**  
**SEEKING HIS UNREVEALED WILL-PART FIVE**  
**“WHEN GOD SEEMS SILENT”**  
**Sermon 10/14/18**

As believers in Christ we look to our Heavenly Father to guide and direct us through the good and bad times of life. We seek after Him and listen earnestly for His voice in an attempt to be submissive to His will. That is why for the past several months we have been on a journey to discover the will of God. We have seen that Scripture reveals Gods will in general terms using words that apply to all generations of believers throughout history; but we have also seen how God can answer our individual cries for help by leading us to specific Scriptures, giving us dreams and visions, and by overwhelming us with His grace.

There are times in our lives, however, when God seems silent and we wonder why God is taking so long to answer our prayers. The answer to God's silence is both simple and complex. Let's start with the simple. James gives us two basic reasons why God does not answer our prayers.

JAMES 4:2-3

*“You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

According to James the first reason God does not answer our prayers is because we have not made our requests known to Him (Philippians 4:6). God indeed is omnipotent but He has made a condition to answered prayer. Answered prayer does not come by osmosis. We must first ask, and then He will answer. The second reason James gives for God not answer prayer is that we have wrong motives. We want to spend our requests pursuing our own pleasures. God provides for spiritual sustenance, not for fleshy indulgence. He will not answer prayers that seek to fulfill the desires of the flesh. If you have indeed prayed and God has remained silent, check your motives. You may need to change your request before God will reward you with an answer.

Here are the two basic reasons why God remains silent.

#1 – WE DO NOT ASK

#2 – WE ASK WITH WRONG MOTIVES

But what about the more complex reasons? There are moments in life when we earnestly seek after God's will with pure motives, pleading with Him day and night for direction, yet all we hear is sustained silence. We have decisions that need to be made and time is running out yet God appears to be unconcerned with our need for an answer. It's like He has His heavenly cell phone turned off. As Thomas Paine, one of our Founding Fathers said, *“These are the times which try men's souls”*; times when the God who has previously been prompt to answer our pleas for help, now seems purposely silent.

If you have personally experienced God's silence you are not alone. King David also experienced it. Known as a man after God's own heart he too expressed frustration over God's delay in answering His plea for help. We read about it in Psalm 13.

#### PSALM 13:1-2

*“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?  
How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day?”*

God did not seem to be answering David's prayer. This caused David to wonder if God had forgotten all about him. He questioned why all he was stuck with his own counsel when his heart was heavy with sorrow and longed for God's release and direction. He also wondered how long this silence would last. How long would it be before God responded to his prayers?

Scripture tells us to wait patiently for the Lord (Psalm 27:4) but what happens when we wait and God doesn't show up? How do we move forward when there is no clear path before us? What do we do when our ears are open to His voice but we hear no response; when our hearts yearn for direction but no sense of direction comes; when we too say, “How long?” “How long will You hide Your face from us? How long should we take counsel in our soul, having sorrow in our hearts all the day?” How long do we continue to petition God for answers when all we hear is silence? I believe the answer lies in our understanding of who God is, who we are, and what we are battling against when we seek answers to our prayers.

#### A STORY OF SILENCE

Let me tell you a story now of my own frustration with God's silence; a story where I attempted to discern God's will but had no inkling of what it was. A story where God seemed to purposely remain distant and aloof, very unlike what I had known Him to be in the past. In my previous sermons I talked about how I discovered God's will during and after the time I worked for Bank of America. But this journey of discovery takes place before I even started to work for the bank.

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

Securing jobs came fairly quickly. We were relatively young, eager to work, and there were many opportunities available. It was here that I first got a job at Bank of America as a teller. With the exception of my wife who needed to stay home with the kids, all of us had secured employment within the first few days of our arrival. Securing a home was a little more challenging.

All three families intended to live in the same house so we needed at least four bedrooms. We also needed a garage which was separate from the house which we could sound-proof so we could practice our music without disturbing the neighbors. Finding a house that met all of our requirements as well as a landlord which would allow musicians to practice in his home was a

challenge. But God eventually provided both the house and an understanding landlord. As I recall we did not even have to put up first and last month's rent, just a cleaning deposit. We moved into our new home within two weeks after arriving, each of us giving thanks to the Lord for finding us jobs and a home. We felt God had just confirmed that we had heard His voice correctly when we made the decision to move.

Though each of us had jobs money was still tight. My salary as a teller was \$600 per month before taxes and the rent on our shared home was \$625, so all three couples needed each other in order to make it financially. Wendy became the chief cook and housecleaner since everyone else had to work and we had young children. The house did not come with 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 then 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, about an hour west of us. 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 those months 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 you leave me no choice but to make my own decisions on what to do. So don't blame me if I mess it up. I gave You ample opportunities to direct me but You have remained silent. If I make a stupid mistake in what I plan to do don't blame me. It's not my fault You have remained silent. If You had answered my prayers for help I would not be making these decisions without You.”*

Now, 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 making decisions while he remained silent. Besides, I knew God already understood intimately how I was feeling. My thoughts were not hidden from Him. I felt it was better for me to express what He already knew I was feeling than to spend any time denying it. I knew God was big enough to handle any amount of frustration I had with Him.

By mid-September I had moved my family out of Southern California and into my mother's house. I was able to transfer my job at BofA to Northern California so I had no loss of income from the move. Because of the timing we had missed the start of school so Wendy decided to home school our kids at least for the first year after our move. We lived with my mother for about a year until we had saved up enough money for another rental. In the Fall of 1981 we were finally settled once again with a place of our own.

### #3 – GOD IS TESTING US

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 is and a firmer commitment to follow Him no matter where it lead. 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 remains silent to test us to see what is in our hearts. In the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy God speaks to the children of Israel about their journey through the wilderness and reveals why He tested them.

#### DEUTERONOMY 8:2-6

*“You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you*

*would keep His commandments or not...*

*“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years...*

*“Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.”*

God will purposely test our resolve to persevere by faith in spite of the circumstances we find ourselves in. Satan would have us give up; to quit the race and follow our own path. But that is not the purpose of God’s silence. His purpose is to see what we will do when faced with adversity. He wants to reveal to us the depth of love or the depth of resistance we have towards Him.

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 our own wisdom or the wisdom of God? Will we rely on our own thoughts or will we rely on the word of God? Will we choose sin or will we choose faithfulness?

Silence can test a person’s faith and test a person’s commitment. I know my faith was tested when God kept silent toward me. But I came to understand that I was being tested and I was unwilling to fail that test. As long as we inhabit a body of flesh we will continue to experience a battle of wills – ours against our Maker. The book of Galatians tells us that the body of flesh we inhabit constantly wars against the Spirit of God dwelling within us (Galatians 5:17). It is a battle we all face daily; a battle that will not go away until we exchange our earthly body for a heavenly one.

#### #4 – GOD IS FIGHTING FOR US

Because we tend to look at life from the perspective of earth it is easy to lose patience and seek immediate solutions to life’s problems. But God has an eternal perspective. He sees what has occurred, what is occurring and what needs to occur before an answer to our prayer can be delivered. Sometimes there is a spiritual battle preventing us from receiving an immediate answer to our prayers. The book of Daniel provides a good example of this.

Daniel had a disturbing vision which he did not understand so he prayed to the Lord for wisdom. But as he waited the answer did not come. So the Scriptures say he mourned for three weeks and did not eat any tasty food; neither meat nor wine entered his mouth, nor did he use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed. But on the twenty-fourth day of the month, three days after his fast ended, a mighty angel of God came and said to him:

DANIEL 10:12-14

*“Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this (vision) and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words...”*

*“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.”*

What appears to us as God’s silence is in reality the result of a battle happening in heaven which is preventing us from receiving God’s response. The answer to our prayers may be sent immediately but they do not arrive when we expect them to because there are angels battling in the heavenly places over our answer. Satan resists God’s will and will do anything to delay our receiving it. Knowing this we must persevere and not give up seeking God’s answer to our prayers. God does hear and does answer. We may just have to wait for His reply. Jesus reminds of this in Luke 11:9-13.

LUKE 11:9-10

*“So I say to you, ask and keep on asking, and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking [persistently] receives; and he who keeps on seeking [persistently] finds; and to him who keeps on knocking [persistently], the door will be opened.” (AMP)*

That does not mean that waiting on God is easy to do. When you are under a deadline and you need an answer right away it can be very frustrating to hear silence instead of direction. But God has a reason for His season of silence. It took me a while to work through my confusion regarding God’s silence toward me but I eventually came to understand that in His silence God was testing me to see whether or not I would remain faithful to Him. My answer may be delayed but my answer was already on its way. It was just being delayed because of warfare in the heavenlies.

Though I was angry and frustrated with God for several months after I moved into my mother’s home, I worked through my disappointment and came to the realization that I was still in love my God, still desired to worship Him, and still wanted a close relationship with Him. Even in His silence there was no one like Him. As real as His silence was, His grace and mercy were even more real; they overrode my disappointment. 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 Psalm 139. 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. As I read it I felt it perfectly captured my thoughts and emotions as I endured God's silence so I put music to it and made it into a song which I will sing in a minute.

If you too have felt the sting of God's silence my hope is that this song will remind you that you were never alone. God did not abandon you to figure something out on your own. He was always there, guiding and directing your decisions; perhaps testing you, waiting for you to make a decision that would reveal what was in your heart; but always ready to make good out of the bad things that happened to you (Romans 8:28). This song reminds us that there is no place we have gone or ever will go that God is not already there waiting for us. It's called "Where Can I Go?"

### WHERE CAN I GO?

Where can I go where You will not find me?  
And where from Thy presence can I flee?  
Even if I ascend to heaven You are there.  
And if I make my bed in Sheol, behold You are there.

If I should take the wings of the dawn  
And if I should dwell where no man has gone  
Even there Thy hand will lead me to Thy Spirit's care;  
And Thy right hand will lay hold of me, all my sins to bear.

If I should say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me  
And the light will be like night all around me."  
Even the darkness is not dark to Thee  
And the night is as bright as the day.  
For darkness and light are alike to Thee;  
Your love they cannot stay.

So, search me, O God, and know my heart.  
Try me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there be any hurtful way in me  
And lead me in the everlasting way.  
For my desire is to follow You  
And do all You say.

Words based on Psalm 139:7-12,23-24; Music by Dan Burris, © 1980 Dan Burris,  
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NOTE: After giving this sermon I was asked if I thought I had made the right decision in moving back to Northern California from Southern California. In His silence was God directing my thoughts after all so the decision I supposedly made independent of Him was in reality His will for me? Did I make the wrong decision? Should I have stayed in Southern California and tried to work it out?

My response was this: In hindsight I did not think it mattered whether my decision was right or wrong. I knew God would make all things work together for good regardless of what decision I made, so I was free to make whatever decision I thought was best for my family.