

## Session 3: Discerning God's Will

### WCR Summer Elective: God's Will & Making Decisions

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." James 4:13-15*

Discerning God's individual will can be a confusing challenge. Christians desire to be in God's "perfect will" and yet knowing what that looks like specifically can be difficult. Often we have several good choices that do not violate any of God's principles like: where to live, what house to buy, what career to follow, who to marry? How much freedom does the believer have in making these decisions? How much time should be spent trying to make non-moral decisions? Maybe we are spending too much time worrying about the future? How do we know which choice is best? Is the Devil really in the details of every decision?

#### 1. Wrong ways to go about discerning God's will

a. Fleeing God. One of the most unfortunate ways Christians use to discern God's will is to follow the example of Gideon. Gideon did not trust God's direct command and used a fleece to demand that God show him a sign (Judges 6). Putting God to the test is always a bad idea. Demanding God to respond to your test is even worse (Matthew 4:7).

b. Random verses. The Bible is not like a "Magic 8 Ball" that can be shaken and the right answer pops up. It is discouraging to hear of Christians letting the Bible fall open and pointing to their finger on a verse that will determine God's individual will for their life. Using random Bible verses out of their context is a misrepresentation of Scripture. The Bible provides great discernment for decision making when it is studied appropriately. The Bible is our most useful tool for discerning God's will, but it can easily be abused.

c. Heart-felt impressions. Sometimes we just want to "go with our gut feeling." But gut feelings can be very subjective and we have to be careful not to interpret impressions or hunches or "gut feelings" with God speaking. Don't assume an impulse is a voice from heaven. Now being led by the Holy Spirit means that God works through our minds, but we also need to remember that our "hearts are deceitful and wicked, who can know it."

d. Open and closed doors. This may be good thinking if we see an open door as an opportunity, but we can't always assume God has opened the door and we must choose to enter it. We also must be careful to think a closed door means that God's answer is "no." Nor should we do nothing just because there aren't any doors "open." We don't want to use this as an excuse for laziness or complacency. Don't let open or closed doors give you an excuse to take the easy way out.

## 2. The better way to discern God's will

Kevin DeYoung writes, "God's will is not an unexplained labyrinth whose center we are suppose to discover, God's will is much simpler than this conventional approach. The will of God for our lives is that we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. The most important decision we face is the daily decision to live for Christ and die to self."

Gary Friesen, in his important book, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, discusses a better way when making decisions. He encourages the Christian to utilize the following resources:

- a. The Bible: filled with guidance and principles that help with countless decisions
- b. Circumstances: the place, setting and options that are available to you.
- c. Common sense: applying Godly wisdom and following your moral conscience and it is being transformed by God's Spirit.
- d. Personal desire: Not selfish or self-centered desire, but Spirit-led desires when a Christian is seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness.
- e. Godly counsel: Godly men and women who are mature in their faith and rich in life experience (Proverbs 24:6)
- f. Prayer: Asking God the Father to grant you wisdom and discernment for making decisions. Confessing your trust in God's sovereign will and help for making decisions about His individual will for your life.
- g. Inner witness of the Holy Spirit: the indwelling presence of God's Spirit that teaches and illuminates Scripture. The Spirit convicts and directs a person through the conscious mind. The Spirit brings peace within the heart when a person is abiding in God's will. (Col. 3:15)

Understanding the freedom the God gives when making decisions that are moral and not restricting by the Scriptures is important.

Using a combination of these resources results in the Christian gaining wisdom for making decisions. The way of wisdom is the better way.

We must trust in God's will of decree, be taught about God's will of desire and then train ourselves to make decisions about God's will of direction based upon what God has given us.