

**THE GENERAL WILL OF GOD**  
**How To Know The Will Of God**  
**Part 1**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

I'm beginning a three Sunday night series, To live in the will of God. You are here this evening because you want to do the will of God in your life.

We look this evening at the theme the General Will of God. Next Sunday night the Specific Will of God. Then two weeks later, the Difficult Will of God.

The General Will of God simply means this is God's will for every single person. He does have a specific course of action that he does want for us to take individually. But there are some aspects of the will of God that each of us as believers share in common. I want to look with you at two areas this evening about the General Will of God. One has to do with the foundational assumptions of the will of God. The other has to do with eight steps into the general will of God.

Foundation assumptions of the will of God. What are they?

These may sound very elemental to you but I think a discussion or teaching on the will of God without some elemental, basic foundational definitions would not be good. So we'll start with those.

The first one I simply this. You are known to God.

That is so simply it almost doesn't seem of value to say it. We all know that. But I want to take a moment to do more than know it on an intellectual plain. I want to work it into the deeper level of our consciousness.

Jesus describes being known of the Father in this fashion. Luke 12:6-7. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies. Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered." The Lord later goes on to say that he knows when a sparrow falls to the ground.

That is a mind boggling thing that God who created the tremendous expansions in nature would know his creation so well that he is aware when a sparrow falls to the ground and is aware of the value of something that is so very tiny in his creation. Of course the Lord here is arguing from the lesser to the greater. If God the Father is so aware of the minutest part of his creation is he not much more so infinitely aware of us.

How does God know when a sparrow falls to the ground? Is there a computer button in heaven that lights up? Somehow I don't think it's quite that way. In a manner that boggles me Jesus is saying God is personally aware of his creation. If he is personally aware of the minutest element of his creation he's aware of me. And when he knows me it's more than saying that he is somewhat aware that within the planetary system I am around.

I have an American Express card. I carry it because it is a convenient way of travel. It is a way of getting a cheap life insurance policy when you travel. American Express knows me. But they only know me in a very elemental sense. They know my number. They know my address. They

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know where to send the bill. They know where to send the second bill in the event they don't get payment for the first. They could care less what my age is other than am I a good credit risk. They could care less about my family. They could care less about my emotional circumstances, my financial circumstances other than to pay them. My physical circumstances. Anything about me they could care less. I am only known to them in the sense that I am a customer.

How does God know us? Does he simply know us in this mathematical way or does he know us far more than that?

Jesus is saying we are known by God. We operate on the principle on earth that the lesser person knows the greater but the greater does not have time to know the lesser. For example all of us know Jimmy Carter in the sense that we know who he is. But I don't know if any one in this room is known by Jimmy Carter. He certainly doesn't know me.

In God's way of doing things – and this is the incredible thing – he knows us better (and remember he's the greater) than we know him. When we begin to talk about the will of God for our lives we begin on the foundational basis that God knows us, God has a plan for our lives, God is individually aware of us. He knows better for us that we know for our own self.

Psalms 139 has put it so well. "For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Here is God himself in the scriptures saying before we even became aware of life, before we emerged from the womb God was aware of the making of our personality. In the genetic beginnings of our human life God was aware of the chromosomes and the genes that were merging to make up your unique personality and mine. He is the creator, redeemer God who is aware of us and knows us. That is a tremendous thing to start talking about the will of God. God knows me. God's aware of me.

A second foundational assumption of the will of God is I am known of God the scriptures also teach me I am loved by God.

Again that can simply be a matter that arises as a definition which reaches the head and a theological is nature. Or it can be a matter of the heart knowledge where we rest in the inner being of our Spirit knowing God loves us. When you realize that you are loved by someone and they have a certain plan for your life that's a tremendous thing then to be able to receive it. Because when you receive something from someone who loves you, you know it is meant with the best of intention.

Some people wrongly fight the will of God assuming that if God wills it, it must be something we don't want to do. What one loves for another, one also wants the best for them. God loves us.

Saint Augustine, the fourth century church leader and father, had an allegorical interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Although it's allegory it bears a great deal of truth. He said that the man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves and was

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robbed was none other than Adam. Going down from Jerusalem to Jericho is descending from the heavenly to the earthly. So man created in the image of God descends from the heavenly to a mortal existence. He falls on the road. The man wounded on the side of the road is half-dead and half-alive and that describes Adam. He is half-dead in that he is dead to God. He is half-alive in the sense that he still wants to live and be related again back to God.

People start coming by on the road to help Adam – half-dead and half-alive. The priest comes along and he represents the law. The law cannot help half-dead, half-alive Adam. Or you or me either one. The law simply must pass by on the other side of the road. The Levite comes along. He represents in Augustine's view, the prophets. The prophets don't have any help for the man lying by the side of the road either except to remind him of the power of the law and how he failed to meet it.

Then the Good Samaritan comes along who is none other than Christ Jesus. He pours in oil, which is the anointing of his presence and wine. And then he lays Adam on his donkey. The donkey allegorically representing the burdened, sin bears capability of the Lord on the cross. He lays Adam, he lays you and me on his donkey, on his sin bearing nature on the cross.

Then he brings us to the inn, which is his church. He leaves Adam in care of his church until he himself returns. Believing that in the community of believers the love of the innkeeper or innkeepers will restore Adam back, or mankind back to the health God began to give him when Jesus put him on his donkey and carried his sins on the cross.

I like that kind of interpretation. It helps me get into that parable. It tells me that Christ really has loved me. That I and you are the persons wounded on the road of life, half-dead and half-alive. Dead toward God but reaching out somehow. And Christ has found us and loved us.

We are therefore loved by God. Loved by God the Father, loved by God the Son, loved by God the Spirit. As I have shared with you before, the fact that we are loved by God, Father, Son and Spirit – means that from God the Father I gain my sense of belonging. It is from the father that we feel love and our belongingness. It is from the Son that we feel our sense of worth – how can I ever depreciate my value if the Son has died for me. How can I ever say my life is insignificant, that it doesn't matter what I do, it doesn't matter about the will of God for my life because I'm so insignificant – the Son establishes my worth through his love. And the Spirit is there to remind me that I have the power to be all that God has for me. If God has a plan for my life then the Spirit's presence in me is such that he wants to give me the power to realize the will of God.

Next Sunday I want to especially focus in on this theme of the authority and the power of the believer. I believe there are a lot of areas and realms, which we as Christians have been given authority. It's one thing to have authority. It's another thing to have the ability to carry out the authority. The Holy Spirit is in our life so we might have the authority to really fulfill the will of God. I am loved by the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Loved of God.

So two foundational assumptions – that God knows me and God loves me.

The third foundational truth is this I and you are meant to respond to God. We're meant to respond to God's knowledge of us and his love for us.

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It is so critical that we give a response to the fact that God knows us and loves us. It's art of our life of praise. Either my life is my own to live and do as I please or my life is God's to be lived as he wills and pleases.

Romans 12:1-2 gives me a way that I am meant to respond to God in his foundational will for my life. Paul says "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God." That is the first response to the will of God. Receiving his mercy.

The first eleven chapters of Romans are doctrinal and the last five chapters are practical in nature. Paul takes eleven chapters establishing our wealth in Christ, our position in Christ before he ever talks to us about what we are going to do for Christ or how we're going to live for him. All that we are we owe to God's mercy. Although we were yet sinners Christ died for us. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All that we are given in terms of our position in Christ is because of what the Lord has done for us. We start out responding to the will of God by receiving his mercies. We receive our wealth from him.

Then Paul says we make the turn by not only receiving the mercies of God but he beseeches us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. The second step to responding to the will of God after receiving his mercies is presenting your body.

Paul uses a specific Greek tense to describe this that is very difficult in the English to pick up. We don't have a correlative tense to describe it. In order to translate literally what Paul is saying here it would be something like this: "Presented your body." We use the imperative in the present – present your body. We don't use an imperative in the past tense. The Greeks had a way of describing an action that was meant to take place not as a process but was meant to take place once and for all. An irrevocable kind of decision which happened and from which you look back and say, "Here is where it occurred."

Paul presents responding to the will of God in a foundational way as gathering yourself up all in one process and in one irrevocable act of will and decision making yourself available to God. And especially making your body available to God. We cannot send our spirits to do the will of God. Our body must be involved. Beginning with water baptism, right on through. That as a presented body is critical. There is nothing we can do in the will of God that doesn't involve our body in some way or another.

A presented body is the body made available to God in an irrevocable act. It's totally given. It's never ours again. The title deed has been handed over to him. We submit ourselves in a way to him that says God my body is yours to do as you will, to speak what you will, to hear as you will, to talk as you will, to go where you will, to be present with whom you will. But not outside of your will. This speaks to us in a response to God as a clear-cut act of discipleship. It's not the idea of the Christian life as being lived in sort of a process. It involves a clear sober headed commitment of our life to Jesus Christ and saying, All of me all belongs to you. It's yours. My body is presented. It's presented as a living sacrifice, left at your altar living and it's meant therefore to be my reasonable worship. It's an act that involves the mind. It's reasonable worship.

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With this presented body then comes a third step in responding the will of God and that's transformation by mind renewal.

“I beseech ye therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your body as a living sacrifice holy acceptable to God which is your reasonable worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That you may know what is the good, perfect and acceptable will of God.”

The word “present your body” is past tense. It means a definite point of action that happens. But the word “be not conformed,” and “be transformed” is present continuing action. In one act of dedication I present myself clearly, irrevocably to God. But my process of inner transformation is exactly that. It's a process. It does not occur overnight. The mind of Christ does not automatically begin to operate in us except through a process of time.

This having our mind renewed allows us to test and to approve God's will. Beginning to think the Lord's thoughts after him. As we test out and approve God's will – we'll be spending a good deal of time talking about this – we then find the perfect will of God. As Paul says we find the will of God which is good, acceptable and perfect. There's been some teaching in the body of Christ that has said God has three wills – a good will, an acceptable will and a perfect will. You can choose which of his wills you want. Do you want the perfect will for your life? Then dedicate yourself to God.

Others have put it this way. God has a perfect will and he has a permissible will. There are things he really wants you to do but if you don't do that he'll allow you to get by with certain things and he'll permit you to do certain things.

I think I can say it's based on Romans 12:2 that those words “good, perfect, acceptable” are three adjectives that all modify the same noun – will of God. God doesn't have option A, option B, option C. But God's will inevitably is good, it is acceptable, it is perfect or complete and mature. It brings you to your designed end. That's the meaning of the word perfect. It's to bring you to the purposes, which God wanted for you when you were created in the first place. So God's will in terms of it being good it is good to God and it is good to you. In terms of it being acceptable. It is acceptable to God and it is acceptable therefore to you. In terms of it being perfect or mature or complete. It's complete to God and it's complete to you.

That you may know. How? By being transformed in your mind.

How then do we renew our mind so that we can test and approve what is God's will? Eight steps to implementing our life's master plan. I'm going to go to a very familiar scripture, Matthew 5:3-12.

Here we have laid out before us Christ's master plan for knowing the will of God, the general will of God. The teaching is from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the first systematic teaching that Jesus gives on discipleship. Matthew 4 tells us that when Jesus began his earthly ministry he got underway three things. He began his healing ministry. He began his preaching ministry. He began his ministry of calling disciples. Then Matthew begins to illustrate what is involved in the making of a disciple by point us to what we commonly refer to as the Beatitudes. Christ's idea of the master plan of God's will for our lives.

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In these eight steps of God's general will for our lives the Lord places an emphasis and a priority upon being rather than doing. I want to submit to you that that is exactly in reverse order to how we often approach the will of God. I have in my own life looked at the will of God primarily from the standpoint "God, what do you want me to do? God, where do you want me to go?" It didn't take me long to begin to dream great dreams about where God wanted me to go and what he wanted me to do. I was concerned about the directional will of God.

Jesus in this lesson in stepping in to the general will of God, his master plan for our life, is saying that from God's point of view, his priority for our life is not directional or locational. He is not first of all concerned what direction you're going to take. He's not concerned what location you're going to be in. At first he's not interested whether you're going to live in California or Kalamazoo. At first he's not concerned with whether you're going to be a missionary to Africa or whether you're going to be a bricklayer. At first he's not concerned with that at all. Of course we would like to know that. We get frustrated – Lord why don't you show me your will sooner? It's because he has other items on his agenda first. He's not concerned first about locational or directional will. He is concerned about inner development. Being. He says if you will be the kind of person that I want you to be then you will go where I want you to go and you will do what I want you to do. But if you don't be the kind of person I want you to be then when you get where I want you to go you won't be the right person in that place. You won't be doing what I want you to do in that place because your inner attitude and your inner life and your character will be out of focus and wrong.

I am convinced that there are many people in the body of Christ who are directionally and locationally in the will of God but who are in their being out of the will of God. Therefore messing up the whole master plan for their life. That is why I'm starting out with the general will of God. It's the least sensational. I've got some great steps next week helping you with knowing where God would want you to go and what he wants you to do. I think they're tried and true, can be proved in scripture. But I'm far more concerned this evening to lay this foundation. Don't get all caught up in that. Begin to look at your life – Am I being the kind of person God is calling me to be.

Jesus time and again in this section of the beatitudes promises us blessing if we will be at work developing as a response to transforming our mind if we will be at work developing the character that he wants. He says blessed to us.

To live a blessed life does not mean to live a life that is dependent upon changing circumstances or changing feelings. We so often locate happiness as belonging to location or belonging to feelings. But Jesus is saying blessing is that which carries God's approval. These are the characteristics in your life, which God approves. And as you're doing them they will bring within you a corresponding well being that will be enough to carry you through sorrow or pain success or health, loss or gain, grief or laughter. Blessing.

Let me just make sure again that I articulate what blessing is. Blessing foundationally means two things. This is what God approves. And therefore because God approves it, it brings a corresponding response of joy and inner well being in your life. As you develop these qualities of character for the general will of God for your life you will find God's approval which brings

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the consequence change and joy and peace in your heart. Which will stand you in good stead no matter where you are, no matter what you're going through. This is mind renewal.

What are the eight steps to the general will of God?

The first one I would simply call Jesus' general will for our lives in mind renewal is first of all that all of us are standing in the place of need. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God." He is telling us through this that if we are going to experience his will for our lives then it comes from us feeling before him that we don't really have the answers for our life. That we really don't have the agenda. We really don't have the program at all. Blessed are the poor in Spirit.

In the Greek language there are two kind of words here that can be used for "poor." One is the word, which many of us know full well. The poverty of the student. Or the poverty of the minimum wage. Poor to the extent that you're poor. You can't get all the things you want, go half the places you want. You're lucky to scrape by and have enough food on the table. But you're getting along. That's a certain kind of poverty.

There is another word for poverty – the person is so poor they're destitute. They don't have anything at all. If somebody doesn't help them quick they're going to drop! That kind of destitute poverty for example is the kind of poverty that the people are living under in Cambodia and Laos and so many parts of the world. A destitution that is so acute, so grievous that they are beyond solving their own problems. If you are a poor person in the first category you can keep on going indefinitely – inconvenient but you can live on a minimum wage. Somehow you can do it. But if you are destitute you cannot keep going unless someone superior than yourself comes with aid and rescues you.

Jesus says this about discovering his master plan for our life – that we don't begin with the kind of psychology cult that is around today which says develop ego strength. He's not saying put on a big brave front and go out and challenge the world. He's saying when you come to know my will for your life begins at the place of absolute dependence upon me. Recognizing that without me you're not going to get an inch along the road of discipleship. Begin with absolute total and destitute poverty.

This obviously applies to conversion. It's how we get into the kingdom. We declare at the beginning of our walk with Christ, I don't have anything to bring.

The whole lifestyle of the kingdom progresses from the attitude of destitution. The paradoxical balance between realizing that the Spirit gives us confidence and ability. Balance on the other hand that we literally have nothing to offer. Poverty before God, compounded and complimented by richness of ministry to the power of the Spirit to others. No ministry in the spirit, no ministry to others ever takes place on a sustained basis unless it comes from a heart that has been humbled and poor before God. And says, Lord, you get the honor and the glory. Poverty before God.

This is what was wrong with the Laodicean church. They did not stand any more in the place of need. They said I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.

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I know when the Lord is dealing with me with the Spirit of self-sufficiency. He draws up the things that I lean on and depend on for my sense of security. Wipes them out and tells me again, George get back to the place of poverty.

Jesus says “Those who are poor in Spirit, they’re given the kingdom of heaven.” They’re destitute and look what they get in exchange for their destitution – the kingdom of heaven. We know kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are interchangeable terms. Jesus says those who stand in the place of need get the kingdom of God. The rule and authority of God are free to me only when I declare that I’m standing in the place of need. Humility before God. Someone has said if God couldn’t allow a proud angel in heaven he won’t allow a proud preacher on earth. I think it describes our general attitude in life whether we’ve got it put together and really leaning on the Lord. Standing in the place of need is an attitude that’s the general will of God.

The second step into the master plan of God’s will in terms of our character is simply this: sorrow over sin.

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. Here Jesus is saying to us that we are to develop a feeling for the sin that has been in our own life that was a part of our original poverty. A feeling beyond that for the needs of others and a feeling for the needs that are in the world. He never tells his disciples to put on the public relation façade. He doesn’t say, Go out and show the world how happy you are. Get a grin on your face and keep looking happy even when you’re not because it’s important. But on the other hand he doesn’t approve us going around with frowns. But he’s saying something about our inner spirit that the kingdom is serious business. That it involves being concerned for others, that it’s sorrow too deep to be concealed. That it’s moving in a way that does not allow ourselves to be isolated from pain. A person who is a non-grieving person is person who by and large has isolated himself or herself from human need. When we’re around human need inevitably we’re going to see the terrible devastating effects of Satan and sin and sickness and disease and holocaust and we’re going to be moved by it in our spirit. God wants Christians whose hearts are tender and who bleed for the needs of others. Blessed are those who mourn he says.

Of course Jesus demonstrated this in his own life. The scriptures note three times that Jesus wept in his life. He stood at the tomb of Lazarus, John 11:35. He wept for one man’s loss. He did not isolate himself from that person’s pain. He did not take it lightly. He wept over a city, Luke 19:41. As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city he wept over it. And Hebrews 5:7-9 says during the days of Jesus’ life on earth “he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.” The Lord exercised mourning in his life through loud cries and tears.

I have a theory as to how Jesus called the twelve to be his disciples. We know that Jesus had a rather large company of people who followed him. At one point in his ministry he decided to narrow that group down to a smaller company of twelve. Luke says, “He called to him his disciples from whom he chose twelve whom he named apostles.” If you will put together Matthew 9 with Luke 6 this kind of scenario unfolds. At the end of Matthew 9 Jesus is looking at the great crowds that are surrounding him. He tells the disciples “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore for the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into the harvest.” What is the Lord demonstrating here? He’s demonstrating this second quality of sorrow for our sin. Sorrow for other people. Unwillingness to isolate himself from their needs.

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He's saying, "Oh, disciples, the group of you. If you will only realize the pain and the loneliness and the lostness that's in the world. The problem is not that there isn't a great humanity to reap the blessing of the kingdom. The problem is with workers."

The problem is not that people are hardened to the gospel. The basic problem is that there is a shortage of people whose heart has been moved in the pattern that Jesus is speaking of. Who want to take responsibility and who are unwilling to isolate themselves from human needs. Jesus says "Pray you therefore the Lord to send laborers into the harvest."

Then we go to Luke 6 and Luke tells us that after that event Jesus went up into the hills to pray and he continued all night in prayer to God. When it was morning he called to him the disciples from whom he chose twelve. In other words when Jesus said to the disciples "You pray that the Lord send laborers to the harvest." Then he goes and prays and he spends the whole night in prayer. Then when morning is come he calls out of the group the twelve.

One of the questions I want to ask the Lord when I see him is this, Was that final selection process one in which you observed out of the whole mass of disciples that followed you twelve who took you seriously and went out and prayed that you would send laborers to the harvest.

I have a feeling that the twelve who were called apostles were the very ones who acted in obedience upon what Jesus said – be moved, have sorrow for others, move out. And when the morning was come he chose to him those who were beginning to pray for his will and not isolating themselves from human pain and need.

Sorrow over sin, brokenness, a willingness to be touched by others. Feeling the need of others. This is God's general will for our lives.

A third step into the master plan of the general will of God for our lives I would simply call gentleness with the discipline of submission.

That is how I would translate the word "meek." "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Meek. What an insipid word that is! What does it mean to be meek? Obviously to be a gentle person. Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew, "I am meek and lowly of heart." He means by that a certain kind of gentleness. But more importantly I think meekness in its root idea carries the concept of the discipline of submission. The word in the Greek was used in various ways. It was used to describe a horse that had been broken. Prior to the horse being broken it was free to roam the wilds and do its own thing. It had great power but its energy was unchanneled. When it was captured, when it was broken and trained it then became what could be called a meek horse. It was disciplined, submitted to discipline. All of its energies was still there, all of its power was still there but it was going in a direction that had purpose. That's the meaning of the word meek.

Or it could mean a person who was a balance between two extremes. A person who on the one hand was neither a penny pincher but on the other hand was not careless in their use of money and throws money away. Someone who is in the middle. In between – balanced, disciplined, controlled.

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Jesus as a general will for our lives is asking in us that we begin to develop gentleness and a discipline of submission to his will and to discipline in general. It's no wonder that the meek are going to inherit the earth. If meek meant timid, milquetoast, weak, insipid these people are going to have a terrible time when the earth is given to them. But that's not the idea of meek. Meek is controlled, gentle. Someone has said steel inside of velvet. It's the iron will of character and purpose and determination that is clothed in a personality that can be touched.

A fourth step into the general will of God for our lives as Jesus teaches it is satisfaction that can only be found in Christ.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied.” What do you long for the most? Here Jesus is saying Make longing for righteousness your principle aim. We know from the apostle Paul that righteousness is really found when we have come into Christ and are clothed with his righteousness.

Two kinds of wrong searches. One is the Christian's wrong search. The Christian sometimes may be searching for blessedness. Or searching for happiness. That is in contrast to a search for righteousness. A search for righteousness means that we are moving in a direction where our lives are completely submitted to Christ and we're not simply seeking our own self and our own welfare. If I make my principle aim the search for happiness then I move outside of God's general will for my life. If I make my principle aim a search for being in right relationship with God and a right relationship with his purpose for my life then I cannot be disappointed. I can accept what comes to me because I sought him.

The idea of righteousness simply means a straight line against which all things are measured.

There are terrible things secondary in our lives when we pursue wrong goals. If we make a secondary goal a primary goal we become extremely disappointed. If I am happier with a secondary goal I am out of the will of God. I somehow have already gotten a goal in mine that is different from the foundational goal, which brings blessedness in my life. I have begun to look to some exterior ulterior kind of thing.

Year ago I had in mind a particular goal that I wanted and I worked like crazy for it for a number of years. And I didn't get it. My whole energy had been bent in that direction and when it came time God said no. And you know how I felt toward God? I was teed off! “How can you do this to me God? I've served you faithfully. I've done everything you wanted me to do. I'm a pretty good person. I deserve this. Other people in your kingdom are getting what they want and getting their prayers answered. When it comes to me you do *this* to me. Forget me for a while. I'm going to do my own thing for a while!” I was mad at God. I stayed mad at God for a year. I wouldn't talk to him for a year I was so mad.

I realize later in my life why he didn't let me have that particular goal. He had something more in mind. If I had reached that goal I'd have gone off in a direction that he didn't intend for me at all. But the point that I learned was when I made a goal all consuming and put God on the line and say God if you don't do that then forget it! I have failed in the primary goal of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I cannot be disappointed in that. The Lord will reward the searching of my heart for communion and communication with Him and doing his will when I'm moving in the center of his personality and will I cannot be disappointed.

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In fact Jesus promises this. He says, “They shall be satisfied.” Look at your life for a moment. What are you saying, If I only had *this* I’d be happy. Any of you saying that? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness they cannot be disappointed.

A fifth step into the general will of God is as Jesus puts it, taking on the shame of others.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.” This is very closely related to the concept of mourning. In fact, if you look at the beatitudes closely I think you can see sort of an ascending scale. Begin with poverty one of the results is in the fifth beatitude – you will begin to take on the shame of others. You’ll begin to realize that others stand in need. Taking on the shame of others. Being merciful. I have some thing I could take some time to develop but I won’t. I’ll mention them. There are four parables that Jesus gives that relate to the theme of mercy. Luke 10, the Good Samaritan. Taking on the shame of others who are in need and helping those who are in need. Matthew 18, the parable of the two debtors. Jesus is talking to us there about extending mercy in terms of practicing forgiveness. You’re forgiven much by the Father. Forgive the person who doesn’t owe you a great deal. Another parable is Luke 16, the rich man and Lazarus. Jesus condemns a person for failing to practice mercy. Then Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats. Where the Lord condemns us for doing the small, unremembered, nameless acts of mercy and of love.

It’s striking to me that Jesus is not so much wanting us to do great things in the kingdom. He is wanting us to do small things greatly. It’s the things that we might tend to overlook because we think they’re insignificant. Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting those who are in prison, extending mercy. Grace, someone has said, is getting what we don’t deserve. Mercy is that we don’t get what we do deserve.

Taking on the shame of others.

A sixth step is in the master plan of God’s will for our lives. It’s once more in the theme of standing in the righteousness of God. Not simply being satisfied with that which can only be found in Christ. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness. But standing in his righteousness. “Blessed are the pure in heart, Jesus says, for they shall see God.”

I used to think that was impossible. How could you ever be pure in heart? If you’ve ever done any soul catharsis you know after you’ve confessed all the sins in your life there are still more to go. Martin Luther ran himself ragged trying to confess all within him. He just ran out of time to confess them. How can you therefore be pure in heart?

I would link the sixth beatitude with the second – those that mourn. Begin to be cleansed and pure. The act of grief in our life over what has happened to us and to others is a purifying thing. It’s washing. We can see only what we’re able to see. The only way we can really see God is through the purity of heart that the Lord gives us through our own forgiveness and our standing in him.

The average person can only see so much of God. Give a person who is walking in the forgiveness and the cleansing of God, the searchlight of scripture, the telescope of scripture God begins to be seen. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

## **THE GENERAL WILL OF GOD**

### **How To Know The Will Of God - Part 1**

How do we become pure in heart? I found in my own life that the Holy Spirit is at work in developing this. I think that the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life is much like the tear duct gland in the eye. When an impurity gets in my eye and begins to obscure my vision and make my eye smart, God through his creative process has so designed it that the tear duct gland releases some fluid and begins to try to wash away that imperfection that has come across my eye. That tear duct will not rest or be content until it has flooded that eye to try to remove that impurity. The pure in heart in the scripture are those experiencing the flooding presence of the Spirit as he washes the impurity away from our life. Standing in the righteousness of his purity.

A seventh general will of God for our life is making peace. Blessed, Jesus says, is the peacemakers for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus does not commend the peace lovers. He commends peace doers. Peace makers. Here Jesus is talking to us about this question. How do you handle the difficult relationships of life? Are you a peacemaker? Do you have peace with god? Do you have peace within yourself? Are you at peace with those whom you are around?

The Lord here is not talking about people who set around a conference table and negotiate their way through problems by compromising away their principles. He is calling for disciples who have been reconciled in their heart and who no longer have anger and hostility and are being transformed out of that in their mind.

I think of persons who have shared their anger and hurt and even their hatred at persons who have really wounded them in life. You know who has the power to hurt you the most? The person who has been the closest to you. A stranger really can't hurt you all that much. Except physically. It's the person you are closest to. It's what Jesus said of Judas. "He who ate with me has lifted his heel up against me." Where we are most in need of making peace is in that precise arena of our life where we feel hurt and wounded by the person who has had the close personal relationship with us. And who extend in the name of the Lord an attitude, which is forgiving.

Think of the importance of this. Suppose directionally in the will of God, God calls you to do something really dramatic in his kingdom. Suppose he called you to New York City and put you down in the middle of some incredible tenant like complex where there are 100,000 people living in a single block and not a gospel witness any where around. Suppose that you stay there and begin to witness and people begin coming to the Lord. Before five years, 40,000 people in that 100,000 block area have come to Christ. All of a sudden the word gets out – dynamic lady evangelist of New York City has led 40,000 people to Christ. Think of the TV talk shows, the books, the appearances. The attention would be incredible.

But suppose at an earlier age the lady and her mother had a parting of the ways that was bitter and hurtful and never healed. It's remained a rupture in their relationship all these years. I believe it's possible for God to use people greatly and for them to still have ghosts from the past. I've seen people who God's used in a great way who were in some areas of their life not too perfect in their character. Can that girl ever be completely in the will of God even if she's led 40,000 people to the Lord? If she's not moving in character in making peace? The importance of the peacemaker. Washing the relationships with peace.

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Sometimes peace extended may not be peace received. All you can do is extend peace. If the other person will not receive it then as Jesus says you must turn your back. You've done all you could.

The last thing that Jesus says in terms of moving in his master plan for our lives is a willingness to bear the cross. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What has amazed me about these beatitudes is the first reading they are tremendously deceptive. Nothing very dynamic; ordinary things of life. But Jesus is saying when you begin to adopt a lifestyle like this when those ingredients of my master plan are working in your life and you're integrating them in your personality then get ready to bear the cross. You are going to be a person not well received by persons who refuse that kind of lifestyle. In other words the Lord says there is a connection between pursuing God's will for your life and finding the way difficult. There are external pressures and persecution that will come against you from all kinds of subtle ways that will attempt to knock you off from the lifestyle that God has called you to. It is hard to stand up under pressure. Any young person, whether in Christian school or public school, knows what peer pressure is all about. When you adopt a different way of doing things it's tough.

Living the kind of lifestyle the Lord has for us is not the common thing, not the ordinary thing. But we through these lifestyle changes become more concerned about winning the Lord's approval than the group's approval. Not that the Christian is out to alienate people. But that there is something magnetic about the quality of becoming the character of Christ that inevitably as Christ attracted the opposition of the peer group, so there is that sense of following the call of Christ in our life makes us determined whether we are going to go for the approval of others or the approval of Christ. When we go for the approval of Christ we always must be prepared to bear the cross. Jesus says those who are persecuted for righteousness sake theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The beatitudes, these characteristics of life, are all part of the plumbing of our motor. When all the clamps are on everything functions fine. They're meant to be interconnected. But leave one of them unclamped and when the atmosphere gets pressurized all the water comes gushing out. Jesus wants the disciple who is looking at the whole of these things, not to be concentrating on one. But is saying move in developing these responses in your life that as you develop these responses you move in to His lifestyle and become the person He is calling us to be. That is a foundational look for me at the general will of God. It's getting some foundational assumptions right first of all. God knows me, God loves me, I'm meant to respond to God by living through his mercies, by presenting my body to him, by transforming my mind. Here's how my mind is renewed and transformed so that I can walk in the will of God. The battle is an inward spiritual battle. I begin to develop these things in my life and then I become ready to be the kind of person God can use. God has the freedom to call us but not until we look seriously at his master plan for all of us in community.

We leave this place Lord, this evening to go to various responsibilities this week. To school, to work, to home. In each place the character of our life will be shaped and tested. Lord, I pray for us all. That we may all of us hunger with all of our heart to know your will and do it. You Lord long with all of your heart to reproduce your character in our life to show us what it means to be stripped of everything and stand in poverty before the Father and then come to a place of spiritual power and authority because we have identified who it is that

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really sustains us in life. Teach us all of these things on far more than an intellectual plain. At the very deep level of our experience God work in us to do your good will and your own pleasure. May we be people in whom there is a constant openness to see your creative hand at work. Stamp your image deep on our heart is our prayer. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.