

THE SPECIFIC WILL OF GOD
How To Know The Will Of God
Part 2
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We all come to the Lord and ask him for his will for our lives. We believe he has a will for our lives or we wouldn't come to him with that question.

In times past in various ways you disclosed your presence to your people in other centuries, cultures and ages. You now throughout the world pour your Spirit upon all flesh. Each member of your body, each son and daughter of yours might discover the purpose for which you have sent each of us into the world. Lord, as we give our hearts to that this evening, to planning out what is your will for us, I pray that we'll have a remarkable sense that the Spirit of God is upon us. That we'll have within our hearts a rising up and an embracing the reality of your presence and the knowledge that you are here this evening through the written word and the preached word to speak to us and to give us a sure and steady path on which to walk. We ask that Lord, now in your name, confident that you by your Spirit will confirm your word to our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tonight we are looking at the theme, the Specific Will of God. Last week we looked at the General will of God. We tried at that time to lay the platform to say that it's no good asking God what you're going to do, what he wants you to do, or where you're going to go unless you're beginning to discover and implementing in your life what God wants you to be. That being is far more than doing or going. We said at that time that you can be actually in your life in the right place, doing the right thing but still be out of the will of God if our character and our inward life is not being made conformed to the will of God.

My view of the will of God has changed dramatically over the years I've been a Christian. My perspective of the will of God when I was as young person was something to the effect that the will of God was largely unknown. And that it is up to me to somehow discover that unknown will of God. I have come now to believe that the will of God for our lives is basically 95% known and maybe only about 5% unknown. I say that from the vantage point that we know what God wants for our lives in terms of his will by simply looking at the pages of scripture. Every time we pick up the scripture and it speaks to us about the development of character of God in our life and the personality of Jesus Christ we're discovering the 95% factor of the known will of God.

When we said the disciples prayer or the Lord's prayer, we prayed already six features of the known will of God. It is his will that his name be hallowed – sanctified among us. That his kingdom come. And that his will be done. And before we even begin seeking our own will for our lives we must begin by seeking his purposes. We only know how to properly ask for ourselves when we have come first of all with our heart centered on God and say to him, "God, what do you want? Where is your heart? Where is your purpose?"

I'm convinced therefore, and we'll get in a little of this tonight, that praise and worship is the foundation for discovering the will of God. Because it is only when we begin to enter into the heart of God that God then begins to disclose to us the 5% of his will which to us is unknown, that is where we are going to go and what we are going to do. This simple phrase might be of help to you. Be in the will of God today and you will be in the will of God tomorrow. Don't so

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much be concerned about five years from now or ten years from now, will I by that time have discovered the will of God for my life? If you are in the will of God today you will be in the will of God tomorrow as you faithfully serve Christ. The principle is guaranteed to us by the scripture. Jesus said and he said it numerous times not just a one saying only kind of thing, "To him who has more will be given." You have heard me dwell on that scripture. You know that it's not necessarily an economic philosophy of Jesus. That is an educational philosophy of Jesus. It is the old kind of thing that happens when you set down to take a music instrument, practice it. You become more able to handle it better. To him or her who has more will be given.

Be in the will of God today. Be right in your heart. Have your sins forgiven. Walk in fellowship with the Lord. Keep growing in Christ. Keep learning of Christ. And it's going to be ok. There's nothing to fear. It's a step at a time.

The Lord by and large in his kingdom does not call us to make great leaps. He calls us to continue to take steps, one after another. The Christian life therefore in the scriptures is so often called a walk. That's exactly what it is. It's not a crawl and it's not a run. It's a walk, one step after another. Be in the will of God today and you will be in his will tomorrow.

Having said that as a precondition, let me go tonight to five ways to receive guidance when you face a decision. When you actually come to that time and you say, I don't know what to do. What should I do?

I'm going to lift the material this evening from my examination of Acts. I don't know. There are perhaps other ways to receive guidance. But I have found these five. Maybe others have more. Maybe less. I've found these five to be checklist in my life. I will be very candid to confess to you that these are not principles. They lie in my notebook that I pull out once in a while when I'm teaching on the will of God. These are the indicators by which I make decisions. If I'm facing a change of some kind or a decisions of some kind I with the Lord work through this checklist. God, what are you saying to me through these ways.

The ways that I give them are not necessarily in order of priority but maybe in the order by which we experience them. That is, we start out looking for something to happen and we wind out as a last alternative when everything else has been exhausted and hasn't worked what do we wind up doing. Tried everything you know and you wind up saying what is there left for me to do.

Let's start with the one we all think we would be the most satisfied with if God led us in this way on a regular basis. The principle of guidance which is supernatural revelation.

That's a good way to receive guidance for a decision isn't it? Supernatural revelation. God has basically three ways he can reveal himself or in the scriptures he has supernaturally revealed himself to people in decisions.

One is through a personal appearance. A theophany. A God appearance. God manifestation. We find this in the New Testament in Saint Paul's experience. The Damascus road, Acts 9. Jesus revealed himself to the Apostle Paul and he staked his apostleship on the fact that Jesus Christ had personally appeared to him. That's one way to receive guidance. Jesus puts in a personal appearance.

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A second way to receive guidance is through some manifestation and supernatural revelation. Some manifestation of God in a supernatural fashion.

Let me relate an incident in the Old Testament where this is the case. Moses and the burning bush. He has a supernatural manifestation. Goes by a shrub in the desert which is burning but not being consumed and a voice speaking out of it.

If you're walking along the beach and all of a sudden some driftwood catches fire without a match and a voice begins coming to you out of the driftwood after you've examined it and found there is no hidden speaker in it and one of your friends isn't playing a trick on you, that's a manifestation.

A third way that supernatural manifestation occurs is through angels. Phillip for example in Acts 8:26 is in a revival at Samaria. He has no thought of going anywhere else. An angel comes along and says, Get on the road to Gaza. He takes him down there to meet one single individual. Isn't that odd of God? You'd think that God would put the priority on the crowd. No wonder he has to send an angel. Any evangelist, give him a choice between one person and the crowd, it's going to take an angel to get him to the one person. Supernatural revelation.

I would like one of those. That would be easy to know the will of God. I want to plum that with you for a moment. We have I think a rather naive and false view of discovering the will of God. If only we could get a supernatural revelation then it would all be said and done. I'd like to present to you some of the problems you're going to go through if you get a supernatural revelation.

Let's talk about angels. Angels do not in the New Testament give lifetime commissions. So if you are looking for God to send an angel to you and say, Here's what you're going to do the rest of your life, an angel is not going to tell you that. That is not a New Testament character of God's guidance. That's not to say it could never occur. It's just not a biblical phenomenon.

When angels give guidance in the New Testament it is of limited duration. The presence of angels is especially evident in moments of dire emergencies.

Angels do contradictory things. You can't plan it out and say when an angel appears he's always going to do this. Let me show you how an angel comes. We've already noted that an angel gives temporary guidance to Phillip in Acts 8. We note too that angels give guidance in jailbreaks. Acts 5:19. All the twelve apostles are in jail. Acts 12:7 Peter is in jail. An angel comes and gives him guidance by getting him out. Peter doesn't even know where to go. An angel finally parks him in front of John Mark's mother's house. Limited guidance. Gets him out of the trouble.

But when Saint Paul is in a storm, Acts 27:23, he's been in a storm for 14 days and an angel comes to him and he says to the crew the next day, "Last night an angel of God, whose I am and who I serve stood beside me and said, don't worry. Nobody's life is going to be lost." That is strange. This reason. Previously in Acts, angels got people out of jams. But in this case the angel got in the jam and simply stood with him. Just gave him comfort and didn't get him off the ship.

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How odd of God. You look at how God does things and he is totally unpredictable. The angel is sent by God just to tell Paul everything is going to be ok. The ship is going to crack up but nobody's going to be lost. But it was guidance of a kind. It was an assurance to Paul that God was guiding and God was in it. He hadn't stepped out of God's will and everything was going to be ok tomorrow. That direction allowed the protection of all the prisoners on board. It kept everybody from being killed that was a prisoner. A word from an angel of the Lord.

If you have an angelic revelation to you then be content with the fact that it's probably going to be strictly short duration, limited kind of thing. It is going to be connected with a dire emergency in your life.

Two things about appearances and manifestations.

We think if God would only appear to me in a supernatural revelation I'd never doubt and I would instantly obey. But I would like to put before you that the evidence of scripture is that appearances and manifestations require the response of faith. You can walk away from the burning bush saying, I've been out on this desert sand too long. I'm hearing voices. There's no empirical evidence there. You could take it as an illusionary experience.

Paul on the road to Damascus, Acts 9. He hears a voice, sees a blinding light. No one else hears the voice. They hear a sound. There's a difference in the testimony. Evidently the crowd with Paul hears sound but they don't hear articulation. Only Paul hears the articulation. Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? To the rest it just sounds like a muffled roar. Like a radio not in focus.

Paul is struck to the ground by blinding light. He's got reason to get up and say, when you're traveling to Damascus in the middle of the day you should have sense enough to pullover about 10:00. You shouldn't be so stupid as to keep looking at the sun. If you keep looking at the sun what you're going to do is have this crazy experience of thinking your enemy is speaking to you.

Paul could very easily have walked away doubting that experience on the road to Damascus. He didn't have an experience like the 12 in the room gathered where he had the chance to touch the wounds and the like. It was a special revelation of Christ but it was one in which Paul if he wanted to walk a way from that and chuck it up to "I don't understand it. It's beyond me." It's explained that probably Paul had an epileptic fit on the road to Damascus. People can explain these things away.

I think this is an important point. Appearances and manifestations require the response of faith. They're not just all of a sudden so overpowering that you can't say no. You can say no and walk away and doubt the whole experience.

This is crucial for people who want God to prove himself by making some divine manifestation to them so overpowering in their life that they don't have to exercise faith at all in him.

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is." That's the precondition. There's no ability to force God in a box. We're not in the position to force God in a box at all. God will reveal himself but he will only reveal himself to people who are walking in obedience to him. Not

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people who are trying to put him to the test in a false kind of way. There's a difference between proving true the Lord in our experience and testing the Lord from the standpoint of an idolatrous heart that wants God to prove himself when he has so clearly spoken in his word, through his people and in the Spirit. What more can he say than to you he has said.

So if you are going to wait for the guidance of God and have some supernatural experience which will forever confound you and which you will never doubt. Even if you have a divine revelation it is going to be one that you and walk away with and chalk up to some inner mystical experience that wasn't God at all. You have to exercise faith if you have a divine revelation.

Thank God for the divine revelation, by the way. I don't want to demean it at all because those can be extraordinarily powerful experiences. Supernatural manifestation is great, fantastic. But don't make it more than the scriptures make it.

One other thing I want to warn you about appearances and manifestations. You say, if God would just call me to do something in the kingdom with a supernatural revelation and manifestation that I would never forget that would be a Moses experiences, a Paul experience, I'd follow him to the ends of the earth. Let me tell you what's involved if that happens.

My hypothesis is that every person in scripture who got a special appearance or manifestation of God it resulted in great cost to them. Their missions were so incredibly difficult they needed a special revelation to always anchor them. Moses got his special revelation. But how many of us would want to take on the responsibility he was called to take. Paul got a special revelation. But how many of us at retirement would like to spend the rest of our years in prison facing executed and ultimately beheaded for our faith.

The apostles got a special revelation but how many of us want to end our life in martyrdom. Everyone that got a special manifestation and revelation to the best of my knowledge paid for it with an incredible cost of commitment.

The prophets were this way. Many of the prophets had unique powerful manifestations. But all of them paid a tremendous cost.

Up front, when you pray for divine revelation or visitation and you get one get ready. God has something real special in mind for you.

That's one way of getting guidance. I check that off first. Wait on the Lord. Lord do you want to some way manifest yourself to me in supernatural form.

A second way of guidance is what I would simply call worship.

There are a number of components to worship. Worship may be in terms of our individual worship to the Lord as we are praying or reading the scriptures or meditating on his word. In other words, direction can come as we corporately worship in a group such as this or in a small group with other believers. God can reveal a course of direction.

Let me list some things for you from the scripture. God can guide us in times of prayer. Acts 10:9 Peter went up on the rooftop to pray at noon. He got clear direction from the Lord in a

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vision. I'm not so sure that that vision was in the nature of a supernatural revelation. It appears to be more in the nature different from Paul's thing on the road to Damascus. It is more inward in character. It's a vision. Without that moment of prayer, if Peter hadn't made himself available to go up on that rooftop to pray he would be unready to receive the visitors that the Lord was sending from Caesaria, from Cornelius. Because Peter was at the place of prayer he was in the position to have God speak to him, to have his whole life altered and the whole course of the church was altered because Peter was in a place of individual prayer at noon on a Joppa day. Incredible.

You read Acts and you get a feel for that. I can't adequately communicate to you the importance of Acts 10 in terms of the Christian church. It was the turning of the road. It was a key intersection that Peter was in a place of prayer, to receive direction.

When Jesus faced key moments in his life he prayed. Luke 6:12 before he called the 12, he spent all night in prayer. In those days he went up into the hills to pray and he continued all night in prayer to God. When it was morning he called to him his disciples from whom he chose 12. That final selection was proceeded by an intense time of prayer. He prayed before he faced that decision.

Again he wanted to get away and spend some time in prayer. So he took with him Peter, James and John and went up into the mountain to pray. As he was praying he was transfigured before them. A very special thing happened to Christ as he was praying. Again, it was the turning moment in his ministry because for a moment the disciples caught the glory of the Lord as he was on the way to the cross.

Before Calvary he prayed. He spent the night in Gethsemane. Mark 14:32. He prayed before that key moment. In fact he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, thy will be done.

We often in regard to prayer, pray, Thy will be done in a sense different than the one Jesus prayed it in. We pray Thy will be done from the standpoint, "God, I don't know what your will is but whatever it is get it done." Jesus in Gethsemane prayed the prayer thusly, "God, I know it is your will to go to the cross. Remove this cup from me but thy will be done."

When Jesus prayed, thy will be done, he already knew what God's will was and he was struggling with it. He was struggling with the Father's will. So often we pray from the standpoint, Flip a coin, God, and whatever side it lands on that's your will. That can be a way of receiving guidance as we'll see later tonight.

Prayer before decision. And the Lord can put something in our heart. Give us an inward vision, an inward awakening, an inward realization, inward undergirding and strength.

Another way of receiving guidance in worship is through the word. Usually in regard to receiving guidance through the word the word has application for the general will of God and not his specific will. That is as you open the Bible you don't generally find a verse that says, go to New York City and be a witness. Or, Marry John Doe. Often we try to use the scripture to get specific guidance don't we. The most frequent way and the way that was originated about two and a half centuries ago to open the Bible and where ever it opened that was God's word for you. God sometimes works through this Russian roulette application of his word. That's all it is.

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When you flip your Bible open, put your finger down on a passage and expect God's specific guidance, you are playing spiritual Russian roulette. Once in a while God dramatically gives guidance to people that way. Most times he does not and most times you're going to be scratching your head saying what does this passage mean? And the meaning will never become clear.

I would suspect that there are people here who have had the experience that at one time they have landed on one and it's been a great ballast in their spiritual life.

Another way in regard to worship and receiving guidance is through corporate seasons of worship. That is when the body gathers together. When a group of praying and worshipping Christians gather together for guidance and for just worshipping the Lord. Acts 13:1-2 is a key passage in regard to corporate worship and guidance. The prophets and teachers at Antioch were worshipping the Lord and fasting. "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate Paul and Barnabus for the work which I have called them to.'"

Notice: their gathering together was for the purpose of worship and fasting, waiting upon the Lord. As you begin to worship the Lord and focus on him the Lord will inevitably turn your attention to his world and to need. You cannot concentrate long on God until he begins to concentrate your heart on the world. Because that's where his heart is. That's why it's so important to worship the Lord because we don't ever see our world aright unless we see the Lord. Only he sees the world aright and only he truly bleeds and hurts for the world. "They were worshipping the Lord and fasting and the Spirit said, 'Set apart Barnabus and Paul for the work which I have called them to.'"

How did the Spirit speak in that particular occasion? Did all of a sudden a voice come in the room and people start looking up? Where did that come from? Probably not that way.

When the word is used in scripture, the Spirit spoke, it is generally in association with a prophetic word from the Lord. No doubt one of the pastors or teachers at Antioch under inspiration of the Spirit suddenly speaks out and says, "Here is what the Lord says, 'Set apart for me Barnabus and Saul to the work which I have called them to.'"

Notice, God had already called them. But there is sometimes in the will of God, really three things – the will of God, God's time, God's way. Sometimes he reveals his will before he reveals his time or his way. There's a period of delay between them. Many years before when the Lord first appeared to Paul he knew that he was to be an apostle to the Gentiles. But years had past. It had not yet been the time and he did not have the way. But now the Spirit, speaking through a word of prophecy, says set apart for me Barnabus and Paul to the work I have called them to. Already God had called them.

Now the body through worship is confirming it. Wonderful way to receive guidance.

This experience has led some by the way to an emphasis on individual prophecy. Some have sought to receive guidance from the Lord through individual prophecy. Somebody comes to you and says, "Here is what the Spirit says to you, 'Go do this! Go marry this person.'"

What do we say about those kinds of times of personal prophecy? I want to put a footnote on that. From time to time in the body of Christ that does come up. People have made terrible mistakes on the basis of not really understanding what personal prophecy is all about.

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I want to relate a case in scripture where personal prophecy was turned down. Acts 19:21, the occasion is Paul's trip to Jerusalem. He has finished his three missionary journeys. He's ready to go to Rome. But before he goes to Rome he's going to head back east to go to Jerusalem. The reason why he wants to do that, Acts 19:21, after all the great evangelism at Ephesus his last stop of the third missionary journey, after all this happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem. That's his goal. Then in Acts 20:22 a little later time he's saying farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church at Miletus as he's on his way to Jerusalem. He says this to them. "And now compelled by the Spirit I am going to Jerusalem not knowing what will happen there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me." Two things going on. The Holy Spirit compelling me to go to Jerusalem. And the Holy Spirit is telling me that everywhere I go hardships and imprisonment are facing me. That's the strange conflicting guidance he has from the Spirit.

When he says, "I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me," he's evidently talking about personal prophecy. He'd go into a church and one of the prophets would stand up and say, "Brother Saul, thus says the Spirit. Imprisonment is ahead of you, my brother." And Paul's saying everywhere I go the Spirit's warning me that imprisonment waits for me. But he says I'm compelled in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem.

In Acts 21:4 he comes to a town called Tyre on the Phoenician coast to the northwest of Jerusalem. There prophets at Tyre through the Spirit urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. That is, he says I'm compelled in my spirit to go. And other prophets have only warned of imprisonment. But now some prophets at Tyre are saying "Don't go. Thus says the Spirit, 'Paul. Don't go to Jerusalem.'"

This is new. Other times the prophets had only warned him that imprisonment awaited him. But now some prophets are saying, "Don't go. Thus says the Spirit, don't go!"

There's one other key verse that comes in. Acts 21:11-12. Paul's still moving toward Jerusalem. Now he's 60 miles a way. He's at a town called Caesarea. Then a mature prophet meets him by the name of Agabus who previously had predicted a famine and was right. He comes over, Luke says, to us. He took Paul's belt. Tied his own hands and feet with it [quite a symbolic action] and said, 'The Holy Spirit says in this way will I bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the gentiles.'

Note what Agabus does. He doesn't say, "Paul, thus says the Spirit, 'Don't go to Jerusalem.'" He says, Thus says the Spirit, 'This man will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles.'

Paul went ahead and went. The disciples tried to get him to stop. But he went ahead and went. What's going on here? Some people are standing up in the congregation saying, "Thus says the Spirit, don't go." Others are only saying, "Imprisonment awaits you." What is the real case?

The real case is that Paul ultimately before God is responsible for his decisions not any prophet who's telling him what to do. The fact is in the early church he was getting conflicting advise from the prophets. Especially at Tyre. They did one step beyond anybody else. Which suggests to me that the people personally prophesying can sometimes let a word from the Lord be carried to an excess and inject a little bit too much of their own emotion into it.

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I think that personally what happened at Tyre was the Spirit was saying to the saints at Tyre what he was saying everywhere else: tell Paul imprisonment awaits him. But the prophets at Tyre heard it and perhaps weren't mature enough with the gift of prophecy, got a little bit of their own love for Paul involved in it and said, "Thus says the Spirit, 'Paul, don't go!'" And it wasn't that at all. And Paul had to resist that word of personal prophecy and keep true with the Spirit's compelling in his own life.

That is a critical point to make because God has not turned the control of your life over to anybody else, even if it's a prophet. In the sense that you're responsible for your direction. Persons can come to you with a word from the Lord especially in terms of the general will of God and you're under instructions to obey the word of God. Persons can come to you in terms of personal prophecy and say, Thus says the Lord, do such and such. But in the ultimate analysis God has made you the custodian, the administrator, the executive of the estate of your own life and soul. You are responsible to God not somebody else. That's why in the inner being you've got to confirm that word. If what somebody says to you doesn't agree with what God has revealed to you either put it in suspense or don't obey it. Be persuaded in your own heart.

God, I'm aware, speaks to us when we pray individually. When we gather together as Christians we're not play acting. The Spirit of God really is present and he really is speaking to his people. And he really is sharing things with us. It may only be one service in a lifetime but at one point or the other I believe that most of us get some sense of mission and calling in some phase of corporate worship. Whether it's a small group or a larger congregation. Worship – waiting on the Lord corporately or as an individual body so that the speaker might speak.

So when I'm looking for guidance is there a personal revelation from the Lord – a manifestation, an angel, a revelation. Am I getting any sense through worship as I pray, read the word, engage in corporate worship of any kind. Am I getting any sense of direction? If the answers on those two are no or maybe kind of a mixed bag I go to the third.

What are the circumstances? That is the third way we receive guidance – by looking at our circumstances. Several instances in scripture how God guides through circumstances.

The circumstance in the early church is believers get to feuding with one another. If you believe the early church was perfect you haven't read the book of Acts. Certain members of the Christian community called Hellenists thought they were being neglected because they were Greek speaking Jews, Greek culturized Jews and that the Hebrew Jewish widows were better treated. They had a great big problem in the church. That was the circumstance.

That circumstance created the need for deacons. Because there was need for a deacon as a circumstance Stephen pops up. We would never have Stephen and probably never have the apostle Paul because Paul owes his spiritual birth to Stephen and Stephen's message, which he was never able to cleanse from his heart. It remained as prick in him until the day he gave his life to Christ. We would have never had Stephen, never had the Apostle Paul, never had 13 letters of the New Testament. We'd probably never had the book of Acts since Luke was an associate of the Apostle Paul. We could have probably torn out most of the New Testament if it hadn't been for the circumstance of a quarrel in the early church, which created a need for deacons which rose Stephen to the top.

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There are four times in Acts there are what is called “we” passages. Most of the writing of Acts is in the third person – they went there, he went here... but every once in a while you come across a passage that says we did this, we did this... That means the author himself is involved in the action. He is no longer reporting it as a person who wasn’t there. He was there.

There’s an intriguing thing that happens. This “we” person in Acts is picked up at Troas and becomes a member of Paul’s second missionary trip team and is dropped off at a city called Philippi. Paul goes on with the rest of the second missionary journey, goes on with the third missionary journey without this character “we” who we now know as Luke. At the end of his third missionary journey he’s getting a large collection together for the saints at Jerusalem and he’s already with his traveling team to go back to Jerusalem and take the collection. Then somebody makes a plot in his life. He’s in south Greece, in Corinth. He gets wind of a plot. He tells the other guys, “You go on ahead. They’re going to stab me on the ship. You guys go on ahead. I’m going to slip up north by myself.” Paul slips away. Slips up north and at Philippi picks up this person called “we” and all of a sudden this person is saying, “We sailed from Philippi to Troas. We – Luke.

I want to put before you the hypothesis that the reason why Luke joined Paul on that trip was because there was a circumstance of an assassination plot on Paul’s life. Luke would have never been on that trip were it not for the assassination plot on Paul’s life. But because there was Paul went north, met Luke at Philippi, Luke came down to Palestine. Paul was imprisoned two years in Palestine. Luke was not a Jew at all. Not a Palestinian. He had time in those two years to do the background research, which became our book of Luke and Acts. He’d never had time to do the research had he not been with Paul in those two years as I would reconstruct apostolic history. I think it all came because somewhere, some nut had a plot on Paul’s life and Paul said I’m going up to Philippi. He picked up Luke. And we have Luke and Acts together. Luke wrote more of the New Testament than even Paul in terms of actual words.

Would we ever had Luke-Acts if there hadn’t been an assassination plot on Paul’s life – circumstance.

I found by the way that every time the devil tries to defeat the church or us God meet him with a greater counter address.

Circumstance in my life – glasses. As a child of 8 years money was not an ever-present quality in our home. Glasses were expensive. Eight-year-old boys go out and they break their glasses. It only took me breaking my glasses once or twice to realize my parents were dead serious about Do not get involved in any kind of roughhousing. When you play basketball take your glasses off. What did that do in my life? It kept me out of contact sports and it got me into books. Why am I a teacher today? Why is my deep love and interest in education and in the word and in study? I think it got started with glasses. Circumstances.

I don’t believe there’s anything such as coincidence. I believe it’s providence. God does arrange our paths. The circumstances are the manifestation of his ordinary presence.

I think what happens in circumstances is best described in Proverbs 16:33 that the early church used in making decisions. Acts 1 they had a spot to fill – Judas’ spot. They didn’t know who to

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choose. They had two top candidates. They were at a loss as to who to choose. So they cast lots. Whatever way the lot falls that's what God wants. That's the English equivalent of saying, We've got a vacancy in the apostleship. Judas has left, we have two top candidates. We don't know which one God wants. We're going to cast lots. That's what the early church did. That's how they made the decision. One instance but they made it. And they based it on Proverbs 16:33 – the lot is cast into the lap but the decision is whole from the Lord. Circumstances.

God's guiding you through your parents or lack of parents. Through your education or lack of education. Through your family or lack of family. Through your church or lack of a church. Through your abilities or lack of abilities. God guides. These are not accidents. These are part of you. Why is it that Paul is such an incredible apostle? Because in the background of the circumstance of his life he was born to Jewish parents, trained as a rabbi, encultured in Hellenistic Greek world, a citizen of Rome and speaking and writing three languages. Able to move in culture. God redeemed all those circumstances in his life. God guides through circumstances. Not necessarily exclusively. The circumstances are usually joined with some other thing. But don't underrate the circumstances in your life. Circumstances. They're part of God's will for you.

Another way, a fourth way to receive guidance, is confirmation of other believers. What do those who walk with the Lord say about me? What do they believe God has put upon me? The will of God is never simply a solitary kind of thing. It's inevitably confirmed by others.

How did Timothy find the will of God for his life? Supernatural revelation? Not so far as we know. Did he find it through worship? Partly but that was later on when hands were laid upon him the Spirit spoke to him. How did he find the will of God for his life? Paul came along and said, Timothy, I want you to follow me. And that agreed with what Timothy was feeling in his own heart. He followed Paul. Timothy would have no calling of God on his life except someone in the body had confirmed it and all the other brothers in the region where Timothy lived agreed with him.

John Mark found the will of God for his life because Barnabus had faith in his capabilities and nourished those capabilities until they came out to be tested.

Leadership in the church is confirmation of other believers. The gift of leadership. That's why Paul tells Timothy "Don't lay hands suddenly on anyone." This is instruction that bears on Christian leadership. Don't appoint anybody to a job until you thoroughly know them. Make sure that you confirm the calling. I've made some mistakes over the years as a pastor in my rush and zeal to get people to worship God of not adequately waiting to lay hands. Then ultimately situations get jammed up and people get hurt because we haven't waited to have the confirmation of other believers.

There is no such thing as a self-called person. I may have a call from God in the ministry but I don't exercise that call unless you agree. If you don't agree with me that I have the gift of teaching I teach to empty pews. If you don't agree that I have a call to pastor I'm not the pastor of this church. Simple as that. You must confirm my calling. We must confirm one another's calling.

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Every place of ministry in the body of Christ must have the confirmation of other believers. The appointment, the laying on of hands at least in a spiritual sense. Agreement. We would be better off in the body to more adequately listen to one another and be authentic and honest with one another. Speaking the truth in love that we might build one another up.

I think this can apply to persons who want to exercise a ministry that more mature persons in the body of Christ really feel that person doesn't have that gift but they have a really good gift in another area. Then sometimes the judgement of people is wrong. Sometimes who looks like they're going to be a looser winds up a great winner. God will work that out.

I think there is in the body of Christ sometimes a great clustering toward everybody doing the same thing rather than realizing diversity. Being content on the calling God has placed on our life as confirmed by other people.

I think for example persons in the New Testament like Dorcas. Dorcas had the ministry of good works. She made things for people. What if somebody had tried to persuade her to have a teaching ministry. "If you want to be content with God's second best just keep on making those garments for the poor people. But if you want to know God's best get into the speaking ministry and the seminar ministry. That's where God wants you!"

No, God's best for her life was to keep doing what she was doing. She would have been a misfit in the teaching ministry.

Peter as an apostle began to do such great miracles that people began bringing the sick and laying them in his shadow that they would be healed. Wow! The other apostles were doing miracles but their shadows weren't having any effect. What if the apostles said, "I think God's discriminating. I don't have the shadow ministry. I'm going to quit laying hands on the sick until I get the shadow ministry."

When Kuhlman came along God really I believe gave her the gift that people would just fall down. I don't understand it. I think there are some things I don't understand. It doesn't bother me. But everybody seemed to have to have the slain in the Spirit ministry to prove their credentials. You weren't an evangelist, you weren't a healer unless people got slain in the Spirit. Some people got so excited about this that they began the *shoving* ministry.

Contentment with calling. What's God called you to? Confirmation of other believers doesn't negate personal choice. It's affirmed and encouraged. Some cases corrupted by the counsel and input of other believers.

A final way of knowing the will of God. I hope you're beginning to see that making decisions is not just one thing. Some of these things can go together and be a factor. Like circumstances and worship and confirmation can all work together on a particular decision.

I put before you a fifth choice. When I run out of options I always come down to this choice as the last choice. I call it personal choice. Principle of dominion. When God created man he said, "I'll give you dominion, authority." It's the ability of growing maturity in Christ where the Lord trusts your judgment. When my children are younger I make all their decisions. As they get older they make the decisions on their own. As they grow older and more mature more and more

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decisions are entrusted to them. Including the final decision that's the hardest to entrust to any young person if they make that decision and that is who to marry if they marry. Hopefully she'll seek my approval but ultimately that's her decision. Hopefully she'll seek my confirmation. But it's her decision. If I have done a good job that's a decisions they can make with intelligence. Personal choice.

I think God feels that way many times about us. He's saying, It's ok to mature. It's ok to realize I've got confidence in you. But I'm not looking for you to go out and do something stupid. I'm looking for you as I've revealed my general will to you, as you're moving in my general will I trust you. What do you want to do? What's your decision? If the Lord's said I'll give you the desires of your heart, what desires are there. Since ultimately I think all desires come from God anyway, are born of God, my desires are his desires, his desires are my desires.

Here's where making personal choices we still want to cop out often. We want to use what Christians call fleeces. "God, I really don't want to make this decision. I still want you to make it. You haven't had revelation. You haven't given me an angel. I haven't gotten any sensations in worship. Nobody's told me what to do. I don't have the right circumstances. I still don't want to make the decisions. I want a fleece." And you set up this intricate scenario that if all these things fall in place then you'll do what God's telling you. That's a fleece.

It never fails when you set up a series of conditions two or three will work out and one of them won't. It'll still leave you confused. Never fails.

The only time fleeces are used in the Bible is in the case of Gideon. And when he used them it was because he didn't have faith. He knew the will of God and didn't want to do it. That's why he used the fleece. He really acts out of faithlessness. That's why the fleece is there. Fleeces are many times a cop out. God in his mercy even uses our copouts. I've known Christians who have put out fleeces and God has marvelously worked out the wildest fleeces. But that is out of his great generosity and love. I think he's more pleased when we come with seasoned and mature judgment.

Where does a person make a personal choice in scripture? There are numerous examples. A key one is Acts 15:36. At the end of Paul's first missionary journey after the Jerusalem counsel, sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Remember the first missionary journey began with the Spirit said, "Separate apart for me." Now Paul is simply saying, "Let's go back and visit the churches." That seems off hand. It seems a reasonable thing. They started churches they need to go back and visit them and see how they're doing.

So they go. Here is where the implementation of the general will of God in our life is so critical. When we're moving in the general will of God we become capable of making a wise decision like that. The Lord sometimes says to us in regard to a decision, the bottom line in this is two questions: what do you want to do and what do you *ought* to do? Sometimes these two things don't match up. They need to agree. What you ought to do and what you want to do must agree if you're going to make the personal choice.

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I don't get all bent out of shape about the will of God. If you get out of the will of God you're going to be dashed to the ground. I believe that God is redemptive. And even if we step out of his will somehow he can heal us and get us repented and get us back in.

There are decisions we face as a Christian where the Lord is simply saying to us, What's in your heart? When you've lived a lifetime and you stand before me, what do you want to be able to say to me? I gave you the life, what do you want to be able to say? What's on your heart?

My counsel would be just keep walking through the open doors God provides as you move in the decision, the person choice matter. Keep moving through open doors. Don't ever set still and close yourself in a room and say I'm not getting out of this room, God, until you reveal yourself. Just keep moving through open doors. Keep trying doors.

That's what Paul does in the second missionary journey after he decides to go visit the churches. He visits the churches then he says I want to go to Asia. (The present Turkey.) As he heads out for Asia the spirit says, No you can't go to Asia. Paul says Ok I'll go to Bythinia. The Spirit again says No. Paul by that time has two companions with him. He's walking. He's walked 600 miles and the Spirit's saying don't go to Asia. Don't go to Bythinia. He doesn't know where he's going. He keeps walking.

That's kind of a dumb thing to do, by the way. No person would set out as missionary and not know where he's going. He got as far as he could walk – the Sea. Then God interrupted with a vision "Come over to Macedonia." That was the greatest missionary journey ever. He had just kept walking. A door closed. He didn't stop he just kept walking. It's the principle that you cannot guide a bicycle when it's standing still. You only guide a bicycle when it's moving. Any one who's ever tried to guide a standing still bicycle, knows it doesn't work.

As you make these personal choices don't be staggered at long periods of silence, when God isn't communicating to you. That's typical of the will of God. He gives you a flash of insight and then expects long period of obedience without any reinforcement on the divine revelatory level. That happened to the wise men. They saw a star in the east then it disappeared. They had followed it thousands of miles. They walked out of faith and obedience until the star reappears.

God always comes through in the bottom of the ninth.

Three things in regard to the will of God: the feelings, the heart, the mind. Feelings are least important in the sense that feelings are only good for a time. It's ultimately the heart, the decision making part of us coupled with our mind which is reinforced by our feelings. If you make decisions on the basis of your feelings you're going to make a lot of bad decisions. Emotions grow hot and cold. But if you make decisions from the center of your will – God what's right? What's right for my life? What can I live with? What can I stick with? Volitionally from my will. From my reason. Then as I make those decisions, Lord, you'll give reinforcement that I need.

Proverbs 16:9 says, "In his heart a man plans his course but the Lord determines his steps." Isn't that great? You plan the course but the Lord determines the steps. Proverbs 20:24 "A man's steps are directed by the Lord."

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Often a decision is not simply based on one of the above factors but on a combination of them. I found these to be a helpful outline pattern of determining the will of God in my life. These are the options. Psalm 31:3 “Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name, lead and guide me.”