

**Bible Study - Lecture XI**  
**Brookland Baptist Church**  
**Wednesday, October 21, 2020**  
**Presenter: James A. Jamison, D. Min.**

**Discerning the Will of God - Part III**

As we ended our study last week, Laird left us with two challenging questions:

- 1.) Do I really want to discern God's will, or do I want to get his sanction for my own? An amusing story is told of a minister who was invited to a church at which the salary was four times what he was already receiving; and, being a devout man, he spent many hours in prayer seeking to discern the will of God. One day a friend met the minister's little boy in the street and said, "*Well, what is your father going to do?*"

*"Well,"* said the little boy, *"Father's praying, but Mother's packing."*  
(Bigger is not always better!)

The father was saying to God, "*What wilt thou have me to do?*" and the mother, no less good-intentioned, was saying to God, "*This is what I am going to do. I hope you will approve.*" Discerning the will of God does really mean putting ourselves out of the picture-not choosing a way as his because it is unpleasant (we have dealt already with that fallacy), but certainly not going to the other extreme and saying, "*This is what I am going to do. Please approve, because I want so badly to do it.*" Who has had a situation like this?

- 2.) The second challenging question is this: Have I got the courage to do God's will when I discern it? Many people ask a great many questions as to how they may find the will of God, and every minister knows what it is to sit down with an inquiring person in order to find out the answer to the question. But most ministers have also had experience of those people who, seeing clearly the will of God, say, "*No, anything but that.*"

Another way to discern God's will for our lives is through the discovery and acknowledgment of our individual gifts and talents can be a great comfort and help in our quest to discover God's will for our lives. Knowing how God has gifted and "*shaped*" each of us can help us find our special place in Christ's family and the world.

A good beginning point is to read about the gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Next, we should ask ourselves some questions such as:

- 1.) What can I do that many other people cannot?
- 2.) What am I passionate about?
- 3.) What energizes me and gives me great joy?

Let us now focus on the case studies for this section

### **Key Scriptures**

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The key scriptures for this lesson remind us that trusting in the Lord is a wholehearted endeavor, not something we do just in times of trouble or confusion. Acknowledging God demands more than simple lip service to God's existence; it requires personal awareness of and obedience to God's ways.

## Key Concepts

- God can start with us where we are, and God has a way of showing us the path of his will. The greatest help available in discerning the will of God is reached when we deepen our friendship with God. Those who know God are the quickest and surest at discerning God's will.
- The way to discern God's will is to cultivate a relationship with God. The *"tools"* or *"methods"* we use may vary, but all people of faith practice some type of spiritual discipline in order to set aside time regularly to meet with, pray to, and honor God.
- Six of the *"numerous signposts that give us some direction"* are:
  1. Conscience: Listening to the lowly voice within our hearts that says, *"This is right; that is wrong,"* and that the path of God's will is the former.
  2. Common Sense: Using our God-given ability to make judgment. An insight based on a thoughtful assessment of the situation is more reliable than impulse. Yet, be forewarned that sometimes the will of God is the opposite of that which common sense would dictate. The will of God is sometimes what the world would call "madness."
  3. Advice of friend: Asking a wise friend who can give sound advice since he or she sits outside of the emotional setting of the problem.

4. Reading the Bible and great literature, especially biography and history: Few, if any problems we face have not been faced earlier by great men and women before us. Through seeking to see God's action in their lives, we may discern help for our own.
5. Voice of the Church: Bring the problem to a group of thoughtful, loving people outside of the situation and seek the will of God. A Quaker clearness meeting provides an example. This type of meeting is initiated to seek guidance for some individual's question be it for vocational clarity, premarital guidance, or even business decisions.
6. Inner Light: Listen for God to speak directly through silence and prayer. What comes to mind as God's spoken word should be validated through one of the other signposts, as it is sometimes difficult to distinguish from our own desires and God's will.

For further description of this type of guidance see "*The Discipline of Guidance*" in *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 150-62.

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Read the following case study and consider the questions that follow.

### **CASE STUDY #1: Peter's Story**

Soon, Peter soon is a full part of the family. He and his brother squabble over toys and ask for each other first thing in the morning. However, life remains very difficult. Renee repeatedly must decide life-and-death issues, like

whether to allow Peter to be enrolled in an experimental drug trial. After one particularly difficult hospitalization, Renee agonizes long and hard before determining to place Peter in the study, as the preliminary results point toward enhancing the immune system's ability to fight off one of the painful opportunistic diseases Peter has suffered from several times. She bases her decision on hours of conversation with committed friends, prayer, and a conviction that it is worth taking a risk to enhance Peter's immune system to ward off recurrent bouts of painful illness and thus upgrade his quality of life.

Still, at moments she wonders if she has discerned God's will.

### **Considerations**

1. Put yourself in Renee's position. You are the parent of a child with a life-threatening disease. To whom would you go for advice? How would you reach such a decision?
2. Once a decision has been made, what would you do to follow through with the decision in a faithful and ethical manner?
3. What do you do if a close friend or family member opposes your decision?
4. Weatherhead says, *"God does not encourage us to see too far ahead. One simply must accept the fact that one has no idea where the road one is treading is going to lead."* Is Renee making decisions too far in advance? Should she wait? Why is it helpful to think through difficult decisions before the moment of crisis, tragedy, or death?

For further inquiry, look up these scripture verses:

- Psalm 42 (deep calls to deep)
  - Psalm 63:1-8 (seeking God)
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Read the following case study and consider the questions that follow.

### **CASE STUDY #2: The Story of Ed and Trina**

Ed settled into his hometown practice and remarried. His new wife did not feel called to missions, thus Ed never applied for missionary service. Trina went on several short-term mission trips and as a result was offered a two-year position overseeing a pediatric clinic in a developing nation. She is torn, as she loves working as an emergency room physician. Most of her friends encourage her to go overseas, as this has been a long-term dream. Her church promises financial support.

Trina reads all she can of early medical missionaries and is especially moved by the late-eighteenth-century story of Ida Scudder, the daughter of medical missionaries who did not want to be a missionary like her parents. One night Ida was asked by a Brahmin, another Hindu, and a Muslim to help deliver babies in difficult childbirth situations. They refused help from her father, as custom prohibited close contact between women and unrelated men. Early the next morning she heard the village drums heralding the news of death. Each of the women she had assisted died during the night. Ida then felt called to prepare for medical missions to help the women of India. Ida spent more than fifty years in medical missions in India and established a modern medical complex in Vellore.

After reading Ida's story, Trina dreams about three people coming to beg for her help—a homeless man, a battered wife, and a child injured in a car accident. All three had been emergency room patients for whom Trina had cared. Trina decides to remain at home in her present job. She now believes that her mission field is right in the community where she lives.

She wonders if she has discerned God's will.

### **Considerations:**

1. Put yourself in Trina's position. You are offered an opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream. Who would you go to for advice? How would you reach such a decision?
2. Once a decision has been made, what would you do to follow through with the decision in a faithful and ethical manner?
3. What would you do if a close friend or family member opposes your decision?
4. Weatherhead says, *"God does not encourage us to see too far ahead. One simply must accept the fact that one has no idea where the road one is treading is going to lead."* Is Trina making decisions too far in advance? Should she wait? Why is it helpful to think through difficult decisions before the moment of crisis, tragedy or death?

For further inquiry, look up these scripture verses:

- Romans 11:29 (irrevocable nature of God's call)
- Romans 12:4-8 (use of gifts)
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (the ministry of reconciliation)

Read the following case study and consider the questions that follow.

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### **CASE STUDY #3: Trinity Church**

Just before Easter, an early morning fire destroys the sanctuary of Trinity Church. Thankfully, no one is hurt, but the many groups that use the building are dismayed. The building is adequately insured, and now church leaders again must decide whether to rebuild or use the money to relocate to another part of the city. When the fire investigators file their report, they conclude that an arsonist started the fire. This leads many to conclude that the church needs to move to a safer neighborhood. They reason, *"The church has already dwindled, perhaps the fire is just God's way of giving us the resources to relocate to a place where a larger congregation could be built up."* Others counter that the dire needs of the neighborhood are precisely the reasons they should rebuild on the same spot.

The church leaders call the church to prayer and study for a month, to better understand the mission of the church. At month's end, they call a community-wide meeting to get the input of neighborhood agencies and groups. Then the church gathers for what the pastor calls a *"body-life meeting."* At this meeting everyone is invited to share what they learned during the month-long study of the mission of the church. When all who wish to speak have spoken, the minister directs everyone to sit silently together for a lengthy period of silent prayer.

Lastly, a written vote is taken. When the votes are tabulated, a clear majority has voted to rebuild.



A few vocally wonder if they have discerned God's will.

## **Considerations**

1. Put yourself in the position of a member of Trinity Church. What would you do if your church suffered a disaster? To whom would you go to for advice? How would you reach such a decision? Would you participate if your church leaders followed a similar process to the one described above?
2. Once a decision has been made, what would you do to follow through with the decision in a faithful and ethical manner?
3. What would you do if a close friend or family member opposes the decision? What if you were one of the few who voted to relocate?
4. Weatherhead says, *"God does not encourage us to see too far ahead. One simply must accept the fact that one has no idea where the road one is treading is going to lead."* Did Trinity Church make a hasty decision? Should they have waited? Is it good to determine the mission of the church after a disaster? What if the church is rebuilt and the congregation remains small. Have they done the right thing?

For further inquiry, look up these scripture verses:

- Galatians 5:16-25 (walk by the spirit)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11-24 (Christian life together)