

Lesson 10: Knowing God's Will

Introduction

When we become Jesus' disciples, He gives us a new way to find direction in our lives by revealing His will to us. As disciples we don't want to go our own way. We want to accept God's will for our lives because we know that His will is always the best for us.

The freedom to decide whether we want to do God's will or not is a gift from God. Before sin came into the world it was completely natural for Adam and Eve to do God's will. In doing so they were happy and content. But after they sinned, everything changed! They didn't see God's will as the foundation for their freedom and happiness anymore. They saw it as something that confined them and stood in the way of their happiness. Something developed in their hearts, which resisted God's will. In their fallen nature they were no longer free to do God's will. They were Satan's prisoners, enslaved "to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:26)

Jesus came to this world to save us from this fatal condition. He lived according to God's will and demonstrated that true happiness and genuine freedom are only possible when we live according to God's will. Through Jesus Christ it is again possible for us to know and do God's will.



Read the following Bible verses and jot down what Jesus said about Himself and God's will.

John 4:34: _____

John 5:30: _____

John 6:38: _____

John 8:29: _____

Jesus demonstrated to the whole universe that Satan's claim about God's will being a heavy yoke, which robs us of happiness, joy, and freedom is a lie. His greatest joy was to do His Father's will.

Quote #1

"As the Son of God lived by faith in the Father, so are we to live by faith in Christ. So fully was Jesus surrendered to the will of God that the Father alone appeared in His life." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 389)

Quote #2

"In the presence of the witnessing universe, He (Jesus) testified that it is a less calamity to suffer whatever may befall than to depart in any manner from the will of

God." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 121)

We are free to choose God's will because Jesus has redeemed us. God has promised to show us His will. Read the following promises!



Psalms 25:8-10: _____

Psalms 32:8: _____

Isaiah 30:21: _____

We can trust that God loves us and wants to lead us on a good path. God wants the best for us much more than an earthly father. (see Matthew 7:9-11) God's will is the best thing that could happen to us.

Quote #3 "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him." (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 479)

Quote #4 "God does not require us to give up anything that it is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. Would that all who have not chosen Christ might realize that He has something vastly better to offer them than they are seeking for themselves. Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 46)

God gladly reveals His will to us. It depends on us to accept His leading. For this reason Paul wrote, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:17) And Jesus said that only those "who do the will of My Father in heaven" will enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 7:21) He taught His disciples to pray, "Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven." **Yet how can we know God's will for our life? How can we know if God is speaking to our heart or if it is simply our own human thoughts?** The Bible doesn't give us a short, simple formula or a cleverly devised method. But it shows us principles that help us to know God's will. Let's begin with a basic statement from Ellen White in order to discover these principles.

Quote #5 "There are three ways in which the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others. How may we know His voice from that of a stranger? How shall we distinguish it from the voice of a false shepherd? God reveals His will to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. His voice is also revealed in His providential workings; and it will be recognized if we do not separate our souls from Him by walking in our own ways, doing according to our own wills, and following the promptings of an

1st Principle

Seek a personal relationship with God and completely commit your life to Him.



How can God lead us the right way?

Proverbs 3:5-6

The Bible is very clear about the basic prerequisite for God's leading in our lives, we must know Him and trust Him. If we want to know God's will, we first need to be interested in who He is. It doesn't have to do with knowing something about God, but rather knowing Him personally. The key to experiencing God's leading is to have a trusting relationship with Him. Knowing God personally gives us a much better feel for what His will is.

Solomon makes something else clear: "Trust in the Lord with *all* your heart." "In *all* your ways acknowledge Him." God doesn't want to lead us in just *one* area of our lives. He wants to lead us in *every* area. If we want to experience God's will, then it is important that we surrender every area of our lives to His leading.

2nd Principle

Follow what God has revealed to you in His word!

Nowhere does God reveal His will more clearly than in the Bible. When we are looking for God's guidance in a situation, our first job is to see if God has already said something in His word.



Through what did David experience God's leading?

Psalms 119:30-35: _____

Psalms 119:59: _____

Psalms 119:105: _____

God leads us through His word

The Bible is God's primary source for revealing His will. Paul wrote, "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Let's get something straight, sporadic reading of the Bible isn't enough to know God's will. Those who only read the Bible when they have a problem won't profit much from it. God doesn't want to give us instant solutions. He wants to constantly mold us with His word, so that we can get a clear feel for His will. Therefore it is necessary that we spend time in His word everyday. Let's be clear about something else, reading the Bible doesn't just have to do with accumulating knowledge about the Bible. If you want to experience how God leads through His word, you have to apply it personally. It's important that we ask ourselves the following questions during our daily Bible study:

- Is there a promise that God is giving me?
- Is there a warning which applies to me?
- Is there an example which I can follow?
- Is there a principle which I can apply in my life?

In Hebrews 5:14 it says: "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who *by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*" When we regularly study God's word and apply what we have discovered, we can evaluate many things without having to brood about them for a long time.

When we have to make a specific decision and seek God's leading in the matter, we must first ask ourselves if God has already said something about it in His word. For example we could ask:

- Is there a commandment that applies to my situation?
- Is there a principle which I can apply to my situation?
- Is there an example in the Bible which I can learn from?

In many situations these questions are enough to get a clear answer of God's will. For example, if someone wonders if they should attend training or accept a job that requires attendance on Sabbath, he/she already has the answer. (Except for occupations where sick or elderly are cared for.) If someone asks if he should marry a non-believer, he/she has a clear answer from the Bible. (see 2 Corinthians 6:14-18) We could find many examples in which the Bible gives us clear answers, if we honestly seek God's will. The commandments, principles, and examples from the Bible are the guidelines by which God wants to lead us.

There are some statements in which God's will for us is explicitly expressed:

- God wants us to have eternal life. (John 6:40)
- God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect. (Romans 12:2)
- God wants our sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4,3)
- God wants us to be joyful, to pray without ceasing, and to be thankful. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
- God wants every person to be saved. (1 Timothy 2:4)
- God wants us to silence ignorant people by our good works. (1 Peter 2:15)
- Ultimately all of God's commandments express His will.

While making specific decisions we have to ask which way corresponds with God's

revealed will and which way doesn't. When God has already shown you in His word His will for a specific situation, you don't need to think about it anymore, ask anyone for advice, or even to continue to pray for God's will. There is only one thing left to do, His will!

The Writings of Ellen G. White

As Seventh-Day Adventists we have another source that reveals God's will to us. The writings of Ellen G. White deepen and substantiate what the Bible tells us. God revealed a great deal about His will through dreams and visions. Ellen White wrote about many areas of life: faith, education, character development, friendship, marriage, finances, prophecy, end times, evangelism, and much more. When we study these counsels we will love Jesus more, appreciate God's word more, and have a clearer understanding of God's will.

3rd Principle

Be determined to do God's will!



Which prerequisite does Jesus give for knowing God's will?

John 7:17



Why did David want to know God's will?

Psalms 86:11

Getting to know God's will is not simply an intellectual exercise. Whoever wants to know God's will, must ask him/herself, *"Do I really want to do God's will? Even when it contradicts my will?"* Getting to know God's will only makes sense when we want to follow it.

We often ask for God's will in order to find out which way is best for *us*. We want to walk the path that is the most beneficial. This is natural and basically not wrong. But we must first ask, *"What does God want? Which way is best for Him?"* When we are only looking for answers to *our* questions and guidance in *our* life situations, we won't get an answer from God. But, when we seek *God* first, then and only then will we receive guidance. David prayed, *"Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day."* (Psalms 25:4-5)

What motivates us to know and do God's will is also important. Do we do it to earn points with God or to be rewarded? Do we do it to avoid punishment?



What was David's motivation to do God's will?

Psalms 40:8: _____

Psalms 143:10: _____

David *delighted* in doing God's will. He didn't want to give God his second best. He wanted to give Him the best. He didn't want to barely satisfy God. He wanted his life to be pleasing to God. Many questions are cleared up when we sincerely ask God, "Lord, what do you like the most?"

Quote #6 "Those who feel the constraining love of God, do not ask how little may be given to meet the requirements of God; they do not ask for the lowest standard, but aim at perfect conformity to the will of their Redeemer. With earnest desire they yield all and manifest an interest proportionate to the value of the object which they seek. A profession of Christ without this deep love is mere talk, dry formality, and heavy drudgery." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 44)

4th Principle **Seek quiet time with God and ask Him to guide you.**

We live in an age when everything has to be done quickly. Sometimes people want to experience God's leading quickly, but their lives are too loud and hectic to hear the small, quiet voice of God. (1 Kings 19:12) God invites us to come into the quiet so that He can show us the way. Our personal quiet time, where we seek God in prayer, is a special opportunity for God to reveal His will to us.



How did David experience guidance?

Psalms 143:8

Quote #7 "In all who are under the training of God is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, "Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 363)

David prayed in the quiet for God to reveal His will. "Cause me to know the way in which I should walk." In Psalms 86:11 we read, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth." God wants to take the lead in our lives. But He needs us to perseveringly ask for guidance so that we are aware of our dependence on Him.

5th Principle **Pay attention to doors that God opens or closes.**

God also uses circumstances to lead us. He opens some doors and closes others. People who we have gotten to know, experiences which God has given us in the past, things that we have learned, talents that we have received from God, can all serve as guides. All of these things could be God's leading to prepare us for new challenges. When we look back at all the things that we have learned in God's

school, then we see indications as to which duties God wants to give us today and tomorrow. On the other hand, we sometimes experience closed doors that make it impossible for us to continue on a certain path. This can mean that God has closed a path so that He can lead us to a better one.

But beware! Not every open door is God's call to go this way. Sometimes we are approached with duties or opportunities, which aren't God's calling. The fact that we are called by people to an assignment because they need someone like us, doesn't automatically mean that this call is from God. Not every need is a call! On the other hand, problems and obstacles on a certain path aren't proof that God doesn't want us to continue on that road. Sometimes they show us that God is leading us in this path. Paul experienced this too: "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries." (1 Corinthians 16:9)

6th Principle Ask wise people for advice.

The Bible shows repeatedly that God uses people to lead other people. God leads wherever believers counsel with each other. (see Proverbs 11:14; 15:22) When you have to make an important decision, find people who know and love you, who value God's word and the writings of Ellen White, and who personally have a close relationship with Jesus, people with spiritual discrimination. They often see important aspects that you overlooked.

But we must be cautious! We don't need to ask people for advice when God has already made His will clearly known. This could lead us astray from the right path. Plus we can not place our responsibility to seek and do God's will on people who we ask for advice. Read the following statement from Ellen White.

Quote #8

"But we are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. If we come to Him in faith, He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Our hearts will often burn within us as One draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch. Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue. And they will receive not only wisdom, but strength. Power for obedience, for service, will be imparted to them, as Christ has promised." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668)

7th Principle Use your common sense.

Sometimes we are confronted with a situation, where there are multiple paths to choose from. Perhaps we have received no clear directive from God, even though we have applied all the previous principles. This can only mean that God is asking us to use our common sense.

God wants to lead each of us individually and specifically in our small and large daily decisions. But this doesn't mean that He has planned every detail for us. God created us with the ability to think, to analyze, to weigh different points, and then to decide. And He wants us to use these abilities. Someone once said, "The good shepherd leads his sheep to the right pasture, but he doesn't tell each sheep which blades of grass he should eat."

When God wants to, He can guide us very specifically and in detail. But usually He

marks a framework and within this area of good He lets us freely choose between several good alternatives. God's plan for our life often includes more than one good alternative. It is important to understand this so that we aren't disappointed by our false expectations, because God doesn't provide us with every detail.

Ellen White often encourages us to use our common sense, because she knew that God also leads us through this medium. She often speaks of "sanctified reason" and "common sense", which we should use in making decisions.

When we have several alternatives in front of us, it can be very useful to write the following on a piece of paper:

- The pros and cons for each alternative
- The consequences for each alternative
- The priority of each argument

When we do this prayerfully and with a sincere heart, God will help us choose a good path.

8th Principle Take responsibility and make a decision!

The Bible makes one thing unmistakably clear, we have to make decisions in life. It is a privilege, but also a responsibility! God wants us to take responsibility for our lives and actively shape it through making good decisions. Refuse to be a person who keeps going in circles because of a lack of power to make decisions!

When God has clearly shown you what you should do, or through the application of the preceding principles you have decided which way is best, make a decision and go forward. One day you will look back with a thankful heart at how God has led you.

