

# Knowing God's Will

By Dr. Stan Fleming

How do we know God's will? It seems impossible at times, but then again, to a toddler, some things grown-ups do would be impossible for him or her. But a father can train a child to have more and more understanding as he or she matures. Knowing what pleases the father comes through experience.

Discerning God's will has to do with (1) our relationship, (2) our maturity, and (3) the complexity of the decision.

First—Relationship with God: People who do not have a close, intimate relationship with God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) will have a much harder time discerning His will with regard to a certain activity or direction than one who is close. They may want to know God's best for them regarding a career, spouse, place to live, relational problem or a need but feel like God isn't telling them. Why? Because the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23) not those who simply have questions but do not wish to commit to a covenant relationship. Jesus said that the will of the Father is to give eternal life to all those who believe in Jesus (John 4:40).

Paul told us that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1st Tim. 2:4). So initially, God's will for each one is relationship. It is life with God! Second—maturity in Christ: Once we live in Him, the Father's will for a newborn Christian will be to thrive, grow, and learn to walk; but the older ones, He teaches to run, ride a bike, and do more mature things in His school of the Spirit. Some people think that God wants to control them and tell them every little thing to do, such as what color to paint the wall or what to eat for breakfast.. Yet, God gives choices and even learning to choose will train us.

Part of the beginning of training for a child has to do with obedience. "How far can I ride, Father?" we ask. "Stay near here for now until you ride well," He answers. The Father nurtures and teaches us to obey because He loves us and knows what is best. Jesus obeyed the Father in all things. He said, "not as I will, but as You will" (MT. 26:39). We must submit our will to God.

A stubborn, strong-headed child must have his / her will broken (not the spirit but the will) in order to pre- pare that child for maturity and all the demands of responsible living that come with maturity.

The Bible literally says some things that are the will of God. Here are some examples:

- All should repent to God (Acts 17:30;1st PT 3:10)
- We should renew our minds in Christ (RM 12:2)
- We should stay sexually pure (1st TH 4:3)

If one has not repented (turned to God), renewed his / her mind, or is sexually impure, God's will for that one is written. Wanting to be soft towards God, having our mind like Christ, and being pure before Him gives right perspective for maturity. Growth!

It should seem obvious that the commands of God are His will. Jesus commanded, "love one another" (John 15:17). This is His will. There are also principles of God found in the Bible that express His will. For instance, the author of Hebrews says that feeding upon God's principles and words of righteousness as revealed in Scripture is like solid food for mature believers and gives discernment between good and evil (HB 5:12-6:2).

Maturation has to do with learning faithfulness in the little things that God asks us to do (MT 25:21). In the parable of the talents, Jesus said that this is how one becomes a ruler in God's kingdom. Being consistent in the little things that God asks you to do helps make you a leader in knowing what He honors. God asks new believers to learn faithfulness in things like prayer, bible reading, serving others, giving, working through problems in a righteous way, etc. These teach us God's will because they train us about God's perspective of things - how He thinks!

God teaches us by different methods during different seasons because He wants to broaden our understanding. In my early Christian experience, I once asked a wise, elderly woman who was mentoring me about an important choice I had. Her words have remained with me all of my life. She said, "Stan, when you have a choice, consider the one that gives you the most peace in your heart; that will normally be the Lord's path for you." Third—the complexity of the decision. To a newborn everything seems complex, and it is, but a mature Christian has learned to navigate through spiritual circumstances which reveal knowledge, understanding, and wisdom about His ways and thus, His will. For example, a mature Christian has grown through prayer and reading God's Word to know that God wants him / her to worship the true and living God, marry in the

faith, witness for Christ, seek all of the spiritual gifts and the fruit of the Spirit, attend, participate in and tithe to a local church, give to the poor, quickly resolve conflicts with Christians, raise a godly heritage, treat others kindly, protect right doctrine and the people of God, etc. These things and more are revealed gradually as God teaches us in His school.

Don't be overwhelmed! God guides us through. He schools us, tests us, and then lets us make choices to see if we have learned. Whereas He often tells little children exactly what to do, He entrusts an older one to do what is right.

For instance, suppose a brother asks you to be involved in what you deem to be a questionable activity. He sees nothing wrong with it and asks you to pray about it. Well, if you are spiritually young, the Lord may quickly warn you to stay clear from such a thing through counsel, a check in your spirit, a dream, a timely sermon, or some other means. Yet, if you are a mature Christian, you have learned—on one hand—not to judge a brother (Mt. 7:1-2), but—on the other hand—to spiritually judge all things (1st CR 2:10-15). The Lord has poured wisdom into your life and He wants you to use it. As you pray, the Lord might not say “yes” or “no.” He may ask, “What do you think?” You say, “Lord, it is a carnal activity.” He says, “What will you do about it?” You respond, “Well I would like to expose the problem in a right way (1st Cr. 3:1-4; Eph. 5:11), but also rescue the brother (Gal. 6:1). Then God gives you advice about how to do that. This is more complex than a simple yes or no on the will of God.

The complexity of knowing God's will is also seen in my recent adventure in the Spirit. I spent over five months trying to discern God's will for something. My wife, Kathleen, was right there with me. It took many prayerful moments because the decision involved our family, ministry, church, friends, relocation, finances, and desire. I finally knew God's will, or at least the beginning of it. He distinctly revealed it to me. In this experience I am learning (once again) that it is not all “yes” and “no”. At points in this spiritual adventure, I sense the Lord responding with a “yes” or “no”. Yet, there are also choices that I have the privilege and responsibility to make based upon what I have learned. I ask the Holy Spirit's help on the difficult or important decisions because He sees what I do not. He is “the Helper” according to John 14:16, and He loves to help us with our needs.

God desires (1) to have relationship with you, (2) to raise you up into maturity, and (3) to help you discern His will even with complex decisions. Your job is to obey, listen, trust, and acknowledge Him (Pr. 3:1-6). He has your best interest in mind.