

Discovering CHRIS-TI-AN-I-TY

[Knowing God's Will]

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Study 1

Not My Will

Read Luke 22:41-43 and John 5:30

The scene is Gethsemane. What is supposed to be a week of remembrance and joy, as all of Israel get ready to celebrate the Passover, is a time of weeping and deep agony for Christ.

We find Him, here, praying to the Father. Christ was seen praying throughout the gospels, yet here we find Him with a new theme upon His trembling lips. It is the night before His betrayal into the hands of those who hated Him. The time of His death drew near.

Listen to His words; *"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me"*. Christ was to drink every bitter dreg of God's wrath as our substitute. God the Father was about to pour out His wrath upon the Son. He would turn His face away from His Only Begotten. He would desert His Well Beloved. Christ asks that the cup would pass, the terror of being without the Father for the first time in eternity is becoming too much for Him to bear.

Yet He continues; *"nevertheless not my will, but Yours, be done"*. Did you catch that? It is the note of a surrendered life and it is a sweet song to the Father.

We need to pick up something interesting here - there are two wills mentioned in verse 42; the will of Christ and the will of the Father; *"not my will, but yours"*.

While He was on earth, Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully Man. Taking on human flesh gave Him the same desires and instincts that we have (yet without our sinfulness).

While Christ prayed under the olive trees of Gethsemane His will to live was kicking in. The flesh did not want to die. The flesh has no desire for nails and whips and thorns and spears. His flesh was screaming out for survival. Yet, as fully God, He was resolved and determined to face the cross for mankind. After the episode of Gethsemane, having been ministered to by an angel, He set His face as flint and bore the torture and suffering He was ordained to enter into.

As believers we have two wills to choose from in each and every decision.

- The will of Self (which is simply the choice to continue in our selfishness - sin)
- The will of the Father

Like Christ, we need to enter into our own Gethsemane at each decision and cry out *"not my will but Yours be done"*. We need to die to our own desires, ambitions and plans. Consider these verses about what it means to be a follower of Christ;

[Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Matthew 10:38, Luke 14:27, 1 Peter 4:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:15]

The first key to knowing and doing God's will is dying to our own selfish will.

Study 2

Christlikeness

Read Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18

Fact One - The Gospel transforms lives. Fact Two - that transformation is the beginning, not the end [the new birth is followed by new growth]. Fact Three - there is a continual transformation. Fact Four - that transformation is a journey, not a destination [we will never arrive at complete transformation while on earth].

This lesson brings us to two very important words; justification and sanctification.

- Justification; the judicial act of God by which He both (1) pardons and (2) declares righteous the guilty sinner through Christ.
- Sanctification: the continual work of God by which He (1) sets apart the believer from the sinful nature and (2) continues to mould him into the image of Christ.

Although the big decision of life such as who to marry, where to work or study, where to live change our lives dramatically, there aren't many of these decisions to make. Most can count on their fingers how many of these big decisions they have had to make.

We tend to think, however, that these big decisions are the essential things we need to seek God's will over, while we get on with life day by day without considering the will of God. God would have it differently.

This is God's will for every Christian; being like Christ. While we are busy trying to discover God's will for the big decisions of our life, God is more focused on the day by day, small choices we make in becoming more like Christ.

It is the daily, moment by moment decisions that make us, that form our habits, that develop our character. It is the constant little decisions that slowly form us into the people we are.

As we become more like Christ, our decisions in the big choices of life will not be based on selfish desires but will be motivated by a desire to glorify God.

Study these passages to discover what we must put off and what we must put on through the power of Christ in our lives. Make a list. This list is a large part of God's will for you.

Rom 13:12-14. Gal 5:19-26. Eph 4:22-32. Col 3:8-25. Heb 12:1. James 1:21-22.

God's ultimate design and desire for you is to continue to become like Christ through the little decisions made on a daily basis

Study 3

General and Specific

Read Romans 12:1-2 and 1Thessalonians 4:3, 5:18

Romans 12:1-2 tells us that by refusing to be like the world and instead allowing our minds to be transformed and renewed by God we will learn and experience the will of God which is good, pleasing and perfect. The verses in Thessalonians tell us that it is God's will for us to 1. Abstain from sexual sin and 2. Be thankful and joyful. We see here that God has a general will for every believer which is clearly revealed to us in the Bible.

God has two wills for each believer:

- His General Will - this is the will of God for every believer as revealed in scripture
- His Specific Will - this is the will of God for you as an individual

As we read the scripture we can see God giving commands for every believer to follow;

- Matt 28:19 (baptism) - baptism is the first step of Christian obedience.
- Heb 10:25 (church attendance) - God wants believers to gather together.
- 1Cor 11:23-25 (communion) - Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to remember Him.
- Mark 16:15 (evangelism) – we should all be proclaiming the gospel to the lost.
- 1Thess 5:17 (pray) - God wants us to pray to Him. He delights in the prayers of His people.
- 1Tim 4:13 (Bible reading) - God wants us to study and know the Bible.
- 2Cor 9:7 (Giving) - God wants His people to give to His work.
- Heb 13:17 (submission) - God tells His people to obey and submit to those in authority.

Children are to obey parents. Workers are to obey employers. Wives are to obey husbands. Members of the church are to obey elders.

These and other commands have been given by God to His children in His general will. The more you read the Bible and sit under good ministry, the more of God's general will you will discover.

Like the last study, we often want to know God's will for the big decisions in life, however, God would have us understand what His will is for us in every day life – His general will for each believer as revealed in scripture.

If you want to know God's will for your life, most of it will be found in God's word.

Much of God's will for you is clearly written down for you to read in scripture.

Study 4

Obeying Now

Read Exodus 40:34-38

A lot of people begin to panic when God doesn't reveal the next five years of their life to them. Sometimes family members, friends, colleagues, teachers and society itself demand an answer from us. There is the continual question of "well what are you planning to do next?" or "where are you planning to go after this?"

If you can get the principle of this lesson it will help you avoid a lot of agonizing and worry; *God doesn't always reveal the next ten steps ahead; sometimes He only shows us the next step to take.*

With the Israelites in Exodus 40, God didn't reveal to them all the steps they would take to get to their destination. He would just show them the next step ahead. They would wait until the pillar of cloud or fire moved and they would move. They trusted their God to guide them. He had delivered them from Egypt, He had provided water and manna for them in the wilderness - He would direct them.

The same is true for us as Christians; God has delivered us from sin, He provides for our physical and spiritual needs daily - He is not going to just leave us stranded without knowing what His path for us is.

There are a number of reasons why God doesn't show us the next ten steps:

- He wants us to walk with Him, not walk ahead of Him
- He wants us to rely on Him for all things, including guidance and wisdom
- He wants us to learn to trust Him on each step
- He doesn't want us to skip or miss a step that would help us grow and mature

Sometimes it might feel like God is being silent while you continue to cry out to Him for guidance. Listen - He is not ignoring you. He is allowing you to continue serving Him on the step you are on. Consider v37; sometimes God's direction for you is simply to continue what you are doing. He doesn't want you to move or do something new; He just wants you to keep doing what He has already told you to do.

Someday God will guide you on to the next step. He won't leave you without His guiding hand. For now, what you need to do is obey the step you are on. Consider where God has placed you now and what you know He wants you to do now - and do it. Keep on doing it.

God has your future in His hands; He knows the steps ahead. Trust Him and obey the step you are on.

1. The Word of God [Psalm 119:105]

God uses His word to direct His people. This is just one of the reasons why you should be reading the Bible every day. This is just one of the reasons you should try to attend your local church services as much as is possible. As in the previous studies, God directs His people through His word. Most of what God wants you to do is told to you already in scripture.

God's will can never contradict God's word. Does God want you to marry that unbeliever? Clearly not [2 Corinthians 6:14]. Does God want you to take that job position or go to that university where there are no solid churches to attend? Perhaps not [Hebrews 10:25].

Obeying and following the principles of God's word through daily study will really help you in knowing what God wants you to do.

2. The People of God [Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 20:18, 24:6]

It is good and wise to ask godly men and women in your life for counsel. They may have noticed something that you didn't notice. They may be able to see things from a perspective you didn't think of.

Your church elders are responsible for shepherding you, teaching you, equipping you. Make sure to speak to them about the decisions you are considering. They can help pray for your decision and offer you advice from scripture on the decision you are making.

It is good to have a list of men and women you know you can trust to give you wise and godly counsel, ask them for advice, write down what they say, and balance it all with the word of God.

3. The Peace of God

When the word of God seems to be directing you somewhere and you have weighed up the godly counsel it is a good thing to search your heart and consider your motives; Do you have peace about this decision? Are your motives for making this decision pure? Or are they selfish?

Of course, you must be wary of the fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9) and while you may have a regenerated heart, the flesh will still be seeking in its own will. This is why it is important to keep following the principles of study 1-4.

4. The Hand of God

Is there a door opening that seems to be leading toward a certain path? Or, has a door closed, indicating that there is a certain direction that isn't God's will for you? If God is calling you somewhere, He will make the way open and provide all the needs for the way ahead.

Study 6

Rebekah

Read Genesis 24

This study takes us back over 4,000 years to the city of Haran of Mesopotamia where Abraham's brother and family lived. Abraham has sent his servant over 700 miles to find his son, Isaac, a wife.

- Abraham, the aging patriarch who is concerned about finding a wife for his son
- Eliezer, the servant of Abraham who is sent to find a suitable wife
- Isaac, the son of Abraham, he is forty years old, and is mourning his mother's death
- Rebekah, the daughter of Abraham's nephew, she is a young and beautiful woman
- Laban, Rebekah's brother, the head of the home

v1-9 Abraham sends Eliezer. v10-27 Eliezer meets Rebekah. v28-48 Eliezer meets the family. v49-60 the marriage is agreed upon. v61-67 Rebekah travels and meets Isaac.

The Word of God [v1-9]

1. Abraham knew Isaac needed a wife because God told him that Isaac would be the funnel for the Abrahamic covenant and that there would be many descendants. 2. Abraham knew that God didn't want his son to marry a woman from the idolatrous Canaanites surrounding them. 3. Abraham knew that Isaac should not go live in Haran. Abraham, then, was obeying the principles of what he knew of God's word as revealed to Him in Genesis 12:1-7, 13:14-17, 15, 17, 22:17-18.

Advice from Others [v28-34, 50-52, 60]

The servant explains the whole story to the family of Rebekah and they all offer their say. Rebekah doesn't go without first checking with the people she trusts what they think about it all. Laban and Bethuel answer that this whole event has "come from the Lord".

The Peace of God [v54-58]

In v52 the servant worships the Lord and from v54-58 Rebekah is asked if she would tarry or not; she doesn't, she knows that God has "prospered her way". Both of their hearts are in line with the worship and will of God.

The Hand of God [v10-27, 35-49]

The servant asked God to do a big thing; he asked that God would work out the circumstances so that the servant knew instantly what God's will would be in this situation. The amazing events that took place, plus his obedience to his master, led him to know what God's will was.

Notice the words of the servant in v27; 'I being in the way the Lord led me'. The servant was walking in the way of obedience and God continued to direct His steps.

God wants to direct you, He wants you to know His will, patiently seek it as you seek Him.

Study 7

David

Read 1Samuel 24:1-8, 26:1-12, 30:1-8, 2Samuel 2:1-2, 2Samuel 5:17-25

David was a "man after God's heart". He loved the Lord and sought to be in His will. We'll briefly visit 5 incidents of his life where he sought the Lord's will.

1. Opportunity to Kill Saul [1Sam 24:1-8]

David is hidden in the cave that Saul decides to enter into. In v3 the circumstances point toward slaying Saul, after all Saul was trying to slay him. In v4 the advice from others was to take this opportunity and they even used God's name. However, David knew this was against the word of God. He didn't go through with the slaying of Saul - Saul was God's anointed.

2. Opportunity to Kill Saul Again [1Sam 26:1-12]

Saul was out to kill David again. David and his warrior snuck into the camp in the dead of night and stood over the sleeping king. In v7 the circumstances point toward slaying Saul and in v8 the advice from others said the same as the previous scene, using God's name again. Yet, as before, David knew this was not what God wanted.

3. Under Pressure [1Sam 30:1-8]

David, before he was king, had a large band of warriors with their wives and children. Returning from the Philistines to their home they discovered that the enemy had come and taken the women and children into captivity and burned the city. The warriors were so distressed that they spoke of stoning David (v6). With the pressure on, David could have looked at the circumstances (v1-5) and pressure from others (v6) and acted according to these. Yet, he didn't. David sought the word of God before he acted (v7-8).

4. Shall I Go Up? [2Sam 2:1-2]

Saul has been killed in battle along with his sons. David was anointed long ago to be the king. Surely it was now time to go up and take the throne, after all, the circumstances pointed to it. Yet, he sought God's will (v1). He asked two questions; Shall I go up? Yes. Where to? Hebron.

5. Keep Enquiring [2Sam 5:17-25]

The Philistines eventually heard that David was now King over all Israel and not just Hebron. They come up to face him in battle. Once more the circumstances suggest facing them head on in battle. Yet David seeks the word of the Lord (v19). After defeating the Philistines they came up again a little later. At this point David may have simply thought about how he had sought the Lord before and was told to go up, so he would go up again. Instead, however, David seeks the Lord and God gives him a new command (v23-24). Imagine if David hadn't asked the Lord the second time!

The amazing thing about David seeking the Lord in all of these incidents is that he did it when it already seemed like the obvious answer was there. In each scenario, the circumstances and advice from others told David to do something, but without the word of God David would never do it. David wanted to be sure he was doing God's will.

Study 8

Without Direction

Read Joshua 7:1-7, 9:1-16, 1Kings 12

There are believers who live their lives without seeking God's will. They forget or ignore the fact that they are no longer their own. They forget or ignore the fact that God's plan for them is better. Here are three accounts where the people acted without seeking God's will and without good counsel.

1. The Town of Ai [Joshua 7:1-7]

Joshua and Israel waited for the voice of God in chapter 6 (6:2-5). God asked them to do something that didn't make sense on a human level, but they obeyed and they won the victory over Jericho. Notice what is missing in chapter 7:1-7. In verse 3 they acted with pride from the victory before and didn't seek God in anyway. Only after they lost the battle and lost 36 men did they finally seek God (v6-7). God then told Joshua the reason why they lost to Ai; there had been sin in the camp. If Joshua had sought God's guidance first, he would have been able to deal with the sin before the battle and 36 lives would have been saved.

Not seeking and doing God's will doesn't just hurt you, it can hurt others.

2. The Gibeonites [Joshua 9:3-16]

The Gibeonites were inhabitants of the land of Canaan. God had told the Israelites to destroy all the inhabitants from off the land because of their wickedness. The Gibeonites played a trick on Joshua. They dressed up as though they had been on a long journey and told Joshua that they came from a far land. They asked that they could enter into a league with the Israelites. Joshua and the Israelites believed their trick. They didn't ask God; "the men asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord" [v14]

Joshua made a league with them, swearing that they wouldn't hurt them and three days later they discovered that the Gibeonites were actually from Canaan. God knew who the Gibeonites really were, but Joshua didn't ask God.

3. Rehoboam and Jereboam [1Kings 12]

Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, grandson of David, has become the king of Israel. He was asked by the people to give them a lighter yoke [v4]. He asked his father's counsellors about what he should do [v6-7]. Instead of listening to their good advice he sought the advice of his friends [v8-11]. Their advice was bad, but it sounded good. When the people came back after three days he answered them the way his friends told him to [v12-15] and the people of Israel forsook him [v16-19] making another man their king [v20]. Rehoboam should have listened to the counsel of the older, wiser men.

In v25-30 Jeroboam, the new king, took the wrong counsel and God later condemned him for it.

Study 9

Seek and Obey

Read Jeremiah 42-44

Sometimes the trouble is not that we don't know God's will, but that we don't want to do it. Perhaps we don't understand why we should do something. Perhaps we can't handle the cost of obedience. Perhaps we would rather do our own will.

Jerusalem has been taken by the Babylonians [Ch34-38] and the governor of Jerusalem has been assassinated by a man called Ishmael [41:2] who brought many people into captivity. They are saved by a man called Johanan [41:11-14] who plans to enter Egypt to find a place of safety for the people [41:17.]

1. Requesting God's Will [Ch42:1-6]

Before Johanan takes the people into Egypt, he finds Jeremiah and asks him to find out what God's will is. He wants to know where to go and what to do [v3]. Notice their words in v5-6; they promise that they will do whatever it is that God tells them to do - whether it is good or evil (dangerous), because "it may be well with us, when we obey" (v6).

- Johanan formed a plan, but he sought God's counsel before acting on the plan
- Johanan said he was prepared to obey God no matter what the price or consequence
- Johanan said he knew what God wanted them to do would be for their well being

2. Receiving God's Will [Ch42:7-22]

Jeremiah brings the message to them. He tells them that if they stay in the land God will bless them and protect them [v10-12]. He tells them that if they go to Egypt they will experience famine and sword and death [v13-19]. What God is asking seems strange. Egypt looks safe and Judah looks dangerous. Yet God tells them that Egypt is dangerous and Judah is safe.

3. Rejecting God's Will [Ch43:1-7, 44:11-14]

As soon as Jeremiah had finished the people accused him of speaking falsely [43:1-3]. They didn't like what they heard. Their promise of obedience was empty. They then take the people to Egypt [v4-7]. God had a good reason for telling them not to go to Egypt; He was going to send the Babylonians to Egypt. That is why He told them to stay in Judah.

What a tragedy. These people had sought God's will and discovered it. Yet they didn't like what they heard and acted against it. Didn't they know that God had a plan? Didn't they realise that God knew the future? Didn't they trust His promise to protect them? Would they only obey God if He met them on their terms?

You must learn to trust God. You must learn that He is a God that loves you deeply. You must remember that He knows the future - and you don't. He knows what is best for you - you don't. You must come to the realisation that God is the Source of all Wisdom - you aren't.

Study 10

When God Says No

Read Acts 16:6-10

Why would He even say no? Doesn't He love me? Why would He give it to others and not to me? Does He love them more than He loves me? Is it because they are better than me? Doesn't He understand my needs? My desires? My dreams? Doesn't He care? - these questions, and many others, are the questions of the heart amongst those who hear the word 'no' from God. But they don't have to be!

God has three answers when we ask for something or ask if we should do something or go somewhere; yes, no and not yet.

When God says "no", it is not because He doesn't love you, it's because He does! It's not because He doesn't understand you, it's because He does! It's not because He doesn't care, it's because He does! God says no because He has something better!

1. Paul's Plan [v6-7]

Paul planned to go East. It looked, to his mind, like the path was opening up in that direction. The gospel was spreading and East looked like the best path to take.

2. God's Plan [v8-10]

God had other plans. He didn't want them to go East; He wanted them to go West. God knew better. God had something better.

Consider these verses;

"...no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" [Ps 84:11]

"there is no want to them that fear Him...they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing" [Ps 34:9-10]

"He that spared not his own Son...how shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" [Rom 8:32]

If God says no it is because He knows that the thing you are asking for, or about, is not a good thing. It might be good for someone else, but at this time, it is not good for you. When God says no, it is because He has a better plan for you. That plan will involve sacrifice, pain, trials - like every other believer - but it is still a good plan.

One more verse;

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" [Romans 8:28]

All things, not just some things - all things work together. For what? For your good and for God's glory. Will you trust Him in this? Will you remember that when God says no, He does it because He does care for you, because He does love you, because He does understand your needs.

Will you remember that God's plan is infinitely better than your plans? That God's mind is infinitely bigger than your mind. That God's love for you cannot be fathomed.