

How God Makes Men: The Principle of Discerning God's Will

Selected

Good morning, men! Why don't we say a welcome to Jim Seibert all the way in the back, and this is possibly his last Friday morning here. If you stand, Jim, and let us show our appreciation to you. If you would like to say hello to Jim before you leave today, you know where he is.

Let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning and the shout out today goes to the Gurnee Huddle, so called because the leader, Don Arnold, lives in Gurnee. The church is the Sign of the Dove Church in Waukegan, IL. Seven men meeting on Saturday mornings at 8:00 am. They've done a couple of our book studies and now they've started joining us for the video Bible Study. We'd like to give them a warm welcome, so would you join me in doing that? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're really glad that you're here!

This is Man in the Mirror's Men's Bible Study, where we always have room for one more guy. Our mission is becoming and making disciples. It's not just coming here for what we can become but also what we can pass on to other men. We're in this series *How God Makes Men*, second time around. We began by looking at the principle of Mission Success. We then looked at the principle of Uncompromising Character. We then looked at the principle of Building Relationships, and we also have looked at the principle of Abiding in Christ. Lastly, we have looked at the principle of the Power of the Holy Spirit. So let's just suppose you're doing all of those things, and it still is baffling you about what you're supposed to do. There's something that's keeping you up at night, or maybe not keeping you up at night but you're very disturbed about something. You have a decision to make or an issue you're facing or a problem, and you're absolutely convinced that God has not shown you what you're supposed to do. It could be that you feel like your marriage is absolutely hopeless. Maybe there's even infidelity, maybe it's on your part, maybe it's on her part, and you're wondering if you should remain married. Maybe there are Biblical grounds for divorce but you're still wondering should I remain married? Maybe you're upside down financially, and you're wondering I can't afford to tithe, but should I do that? What is God's will for me in this? Maybe you've got a broken relationship somewhere in your family, and you have this ache in your heart and you just don't know what you need to do to reconcile this relationship? You want to, but you just don't know what to do to reconcile it. You don't know what God's will is. You don't know how to pull that off. You're just not sure what to do, and so today I want us to talk about how you can be sure you're making the right decision. The title of today's message is The Principle of Discerning God's Will.

When I was in my twenties as a young businessman, I met a guy. I suppose he was in his fifties, all I know is that he had grey hair. When you're in your twenties, it's hard to say, but this man was a Christian. He was a little brusque, he was always offering his opinion, even when it wasn't asked for. Perhaps especially when it wasn't asked for! He was looking for a place to hang his real estate license, so he kept telling my partner and I that we were two of the sharpest young businessmen he had ever met. How can you resist that? So, we let him hang his license in our office. But he wasn't part of core business, so he came and went as he pleased pretty much. But whenever he was around, he was often kind enough to ask how it was going. No matter what I would tell him, he would always say the will of

God this, the will of God that. If it's God's will it will happen, if it's not God's will it won't happen. Everything happens according to God's will. I came to think of him as being a fanatic, a religious nut! Later, I, too, have become a religious nut, but at the time it just seemed a little bizarre to me because I was a baby Christian myself. So I want us to talk about this idea of discerning God's will today. We're going to start at the passage in Luke 22 where Jesus is at the end of his career on earth. You may recall that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that when you pray, pray our Father in heaven, may your name be revered throughout the whole earth. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. That's the way he's instructed us to pray, but look what he prays himself in Luke 22. He goes out to the Mount of Olives, leaves the disciples. He kneels down and he prays this:

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

Your will be done, not mine.

Is this really the will of God?

One time, I was in a pretty tough place in a business deal. Somebody asked me in that situation do you think you missed God's will? Well, it's a wonderful question but a terrible conclusion to assume. David was anointed the king of Israel and then he spent the next thirteen years on the run dodging spears. Job had his entire business empire taken over by terrorists, and then his children were tragically killed. Moses had a vision that he was going to be the deliverer of his people, but then he was driven into the wilderness for forty years! Then he was finally called back, but pharaoh's heart was hardened, he wouldn't listen, and he was eventually driven out of Egypt where he spent another forty years listening to his people murmur against him. He never did enter the Promised Land personally. Then there are the stories of Joseph, Abraham, Ezekiel, Elijah, Peter, Paul, and so on. Most of God's will is lived on the other side of a storm. A lot of God's will is lived in the storm. In fact, after Jesus fed the five thousand, he told his disciples to get into a boat and go to the other side of the lake. He went up into the mountains to pray, and in the middle of the night, about three miles from the shore, a storm came up. Jesus sent the disciples into a storm! Then he came walking on the water and rescued them from the storm, but it's a storm he caused in the first place! Jesus will often send you into a storm to save you from the storm! A lot of times, he's going to put you in the middle of someone else's storm just so he'll have somebody on the inside when people lose hope. Storms are just part of the deal. Is this really the will of God? It's really in the Bible!

The Big Idea today is this: **Don't assume you've missed God's will just because it's hard.** It's just so easy to make the assumption that maybe I didn't hear God right. Maybe it was the pizza last night. Something's not right here! God's will is often found on the other side of the storm. You have to go through the storm, and sometimes it's even found in the storm, and Jesus comes to us in the storm to reveal his will, fulfill his will, and to make his will come to pass.

What Christians Believe

Let's talk a little bit about what Christians believe. Turn to Romans 8:29. There are lots of different ways of saying the same thing. This is one way of saying what God is trying to do, what God's will is for your life. This is God's will for your life. This is a summary statement. You can say it in different ways, but this is the sum, the apex, the pinnacle of God's will for our lives. Romans 8:29:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

God is in the process of conforming, transforming us into the likeness, the image of his own son. You and I are becoming more like Jesus every day, even when you think you're going backwards. Even when you feel like you're moving away, you're not. God is using all things, working all things together to this end. Romans 8:28, of course, is the verse before it. The famous verse:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

He has predestined, it is predetermined that you will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. That's what's going on, that's what Christians believe.

What else do Christians believe? Christians believe Matthew 10:29, that two sparrows are bought and sold for a penny. Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from God, apart from the will of God. Christians believe Proverbs 16. To man belongs the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motifs are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for his own ends, even the wicked for a day of disaster. God is sovereignly orchestrating all events.

What else do Christians believe? Romans 12:2 do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That's why we come here! Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is! His good, pleasing, and perfect will! God has a good, pleasing and perfect will, it's for you to become transformed, conformed to the image of his son Jesus. These are the things Christians believe!

Romans 8:26, in the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not even know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit helps us himself by interceding for us with groans so deep that words cannot express. He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for us, the saints, in accordance with God's will. That ache you have in your heart is the Holy Spirit pleading for you in harmony with God's will. These are the things that Christians believe.

What's our response? Turn with me to 1 Peter 4:12. It's hard, I get it! This is what Peter says:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Verse 19:

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

That's one response. When you suffer, commit yourself. Just understand that you're suffering according to God's will, because in the process of transforming our lives into the image of his son Jesus, as with Jesus he will send us to the Mount of Olives. There's going to be in our lifetimes many times when he will send us off to a place where we would rather not do his will if there was another way.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 5. One response is in suffering submitting ourselves to his will. Then in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Rejoice always, pray about everything, give thanks in all circumstances. Always rejoice, always pray, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. How can we do that? How can you do that? How is that possible? It's possible if you don't assume that you've missed God's will just because it's hard! It's going to be hard! It's not always going to be hard, but a lot of it is! Oprah actually had an episode on men's issues. Yes, I taped Oprah. But she said something on this show. She said people think my life is so glamorous, and 20% of it is, but 80% of it is just hard. That's Oprah! She's rich! She's famous! She's a celebrity! She can open doors! Every privilege and advantage, and 80% of it is just hard! That's just the way life is! So don't assume you missed God's will just because it's hard.

7 Means of Guidance

Finally, let's look at 7 means of guidance God has given us to discern his will. First is the Bible. The single most important question to ask if you're looking to discern God's will is what's the Bible say? Has God already spoken on this matter? The Bible is full of commands which are duty, and principles which are wise. For example, a principle is neighbor love, love your neighbor as you love yourself. That's a principle, you can apply it in many ways. There are commands, too. Do not commit adultery. That's not a principle, that's a command! It's very clear. So there are very few things, in fact, with regard to your moral life, you will never face a moral decision about which the Bible has not already spoken. There is no moral choice which it has not covered. Moral choices are between right and wrong. There are moral decisions and priority decisions. Moral decisions are choices between right and wrong. There's always a morally right and morally wrong answer, and those answers are always found in the Bible every time. No exceptions. The other kinds of choices we make are priority ones, choices between two or more rights. In other words, there's not a single right answer. Who do I marry? Where do I live? What job do I take? Where do I go to college? How many kids do I have? Do I buy the red or the blue car? These are priority choices. God does not dictate nor prescribe a specific will for those things. Does that mean he does not have a good, pleasing and perfect will? He most certainly does. For things that are not specifically addressed in the Bible, there are things that are beneficial and things that are not beneficial. Even if you choose that which is not beneficial, he hits the reset button on his will. It's kind of like he's always going to get where he wants to go, even if you're making decisions that throw yourself off track. He's always going to get you conformed to the image of his son Jesus. It's always going to happen. That's what Christians believe, because that's what the Bible says. That's the main thing!

Second is prayer. Over and over again we are invited to present our requests to God. Prayer is the currency of our relationship with Jesus. Take out your wallet and spend some of it. Prayer, and asking God for wisdom.

Third is the Holy Spirit, we had a whole message on that last week, but I would say this; don't be surprised if the Spirit leads you into a storm. Or someone else's storm. His will for you might be that he wants to put you in someone else's storm because you're strong right now and they're going to lose hope. He needs someone on the inside of that storm, so that when that person is ready to jump overboard, abandon everything, give up hope, you'll be there! That's why we say the mission is becoming and making disciples. We're becoming disciples and then he sends us off out there. A lot of times it's hard, it's stormy weather. That's you, having become a disciple, being sent out to make disciples. To show others how God is using that storm to conform them to the image of Jesus.

Fourth, your conscience. In 1 John 3:21 it says if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. Watch this, conscience works very good as a yellow light or a red light. It doesn't

necessarily, although it can work, as a green light. It does not usually work as well that way. If your conscience is clear, that doesn't make you innocent, but for me personally, I use conscience as a check. I stopped watching some movie I rented a couple weeks ago, *The Counselor*. Don't ever watch that movie, I still can't get it out of my mind! About twenty minutes in, I said oh my gosh my conscience was so overwhelming me I was feeling sick and nauseous.

A younger guy I'm mentoring asked me a question about watching a show called *Breaking Bad*, and *House of Cards*. I'm watching him and all these twenty somethings post comments about the shows, talking back and forth about all the virtues and all the dark side, really having a very good, healthy conversation. But what I really wanted to say was stop watching that! If you have to spend that much time figuring out what's going on, just stop watching it! Now, that's grace, you do what you want, but I'm just saying that if your conscience is bothering you, then use that as a cautionary tell or red light even!

Fifth is circumstances. If you're 5'4" tall, can't dribble, and like to work with number, you're probably not going to be an NBA super star, but you might make a great accountant! Some people are born in America, some in Argentina, some tall, some short, some rich, some poor. The circumstances in which you find yourself are a way of revealing God's will. If you want a house that requires a \$200,000 mortgage but you can only qualify for \$150,000, you know God's will!

Sixth is counsel. Let me just be quick to say there is no shortage of people who will tell you God's will for your life, even though they are not willing to lift a finger to help. Those are not the kind of people we're talking about. Proverbs 15 says plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors, they succeed. There's all kinds of information about this, and by the way I've written extensively on these seven means of guidance in *Discipleship for the Man in the Mirror*. But there's counseling counsel, and there's counselor counsel, there's counsel when you already think you know what you're supposed to do, but then there's the kind of counsel you need when you're standing at a fork in the road and you don't know what to do. Sometimes you just need someone willing to listen, to help you sort out your thoughts, because when my mind is forced into the discipline of forming what I'm thinking into coherent sentences so that you can understand me, that is a type of counsel, even though you never say a word. But other times, I don't know what to do and I'm looking for you to give me advice. So seeking counsel is a powerful means of guidance and a way that God guides according to the Bible. Plans fail for lack of counsel.

Finally, fasting. Sort of lost discipline in our age, but it does slow you down. Descarte aside, when we slow the body down and remove its focus on digestion, it is amazing how you will pique your sensitivity to what God is saying. So those are 7 means you can use. The Bible, prayer, Holy Spirit, conscience, circumstances, counsel, and fasting.

George Muller in Bristol England, long time ago, he started an orphanage. He eventually, over a period of sixty years, would take care of ten thousand orphans. He was asked what was the secret, how did it happen that he was able to do that? To what did he attribute his ability to run this orphanage and do all this other work when he never asked for money in all that time? He asked for more orphans, but never for money. He said I made it my business to never start a new project until I was absolutely convinced that it was the will of God. I never even started a project until I was absolutely sure it was God's will for me to do that. But it was still hard. He had lots of storms. He tells a story of one time where they were out of money and food. So for breakfast, he told the orphans to go ahead and sit down at the table and then he prayed our Father, we thank you for the food that thou art going to provide. A minute later,

there's a knock at the door. It was a baker. He said I was awakened at two in the morning and just had the impression that I should make some bread for you. So here it is. A few minutes later, there was another knock on the door. It was the milk man. He said my milk wagon has just broke down in front of your orphanage, and I can't take the wagon into repair it without unloading the milk. Can you use this milk? So yeah, he was absolutely convinced he was doing what God wanted him to do, but he didn't make the mistake of assuming that he had missed God's will just because it was hard, and neither should we. The Big Idea: **Don't assume you've missed God's will just because it's hard.** Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our Father, thank you so much for the truth of your word and what Christians believe or want to believe. Lord, that's why we have these studies so that we can know what we are to believe. So, in the company of community we can come to have that kind of faith. I pray that anybody here this morning or whoever hears this message, that whatever they need in terms of your will, that you would just open their minds to it. Apply these means of guidance, and don't let them make the assumption that they've missed your will just because it's hard. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, and everybody says amen!