

How Can I Know God's Will for My Life?

Texts: Rom. 8:2, 5-11, Col. 1:9-10, (Mk. 3:35)

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A few years ago messages began appearing on billboards and buses in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, which the Smith Advertising Agency said were sponsored anonymously. Here are a few:

- Let's Meet At MY House Sunday Before The Game. - God
- We Need To Talk. - God
- Will The Road You're On Get You To My Place? - God
- Follow Me. - God
- Need Directions? - God
- Have You Read My #1 Best Seller? There Will Be A Test. - God

A question I've heard from young people is "What are we here for?" Google tracks web searches since 2004 and incidences of searches are on the rise such as "the meaning of life," "who is God," and two that are really growing are, "**who am I,**" and "**what should I do?**" One of the questions I received was, "**What am I supposed to do with my life?**" Those of us who are older may not have had those questions OR we just don't remember back that far when we did. But, millions of people are asking such questions.

For Christians the questions often come in the form of "How Can I know God's Will/Plan for my Life?" They aren't new with this generation; they've been around for centuries, even millennia. Even the disciples after spending three years with Jesus may have had them after his crucifixion. I heard it when a widow was struggling to find her way after her life-long partner died. We hear it from parents and friends when a young person doesn't find the answer and takes their own life. We hear it when the children grow up and leave the nest, and parents have to find a new life with just the two of them. This is real life and it's tough. We discover we don't have it all together, we don't have all the answers, the "pat" childhood Sunday School-faith falls flat on the face before mass murder and epic natural devastation. If God is supposed to be there for us when everything we cherish crumbles like dust in our hands, how come we have so much trouble figuring out what he expects of us? If you have those questions or someone in your family or someone you work with, it's OK. You're not a bad person or a bad Christian and you're in good company. Hear the psalmist from Psalm 77:1-15a (The Message paraphrased version),

I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might, I yell at the top of my lungs. He listens. I found myself in trouble and went looking for my Lord; my life was an open wound that wouldn't heal. When friends said, "Everything will turn out all right," I didn't believe a word they said. I remember God - and shake my head. I bow my head - then wring my hands. I'm awake all night - not a wink of sleep; I can't even say what's bothering me. I go over the days one by one, I ponder the years gone by. I strum my lute all through the night, wondering how to get my life together. Will the

Lord walk off and leave us for good? Will he never smile again? Is his love worn threadbare? Has his salvation promise burned out? Has God forgotten his manners? Has he angrily stalked off and left us? "Just my luck," I said. "The High God goes out of business just the moment I need him." Once again I'll go over what God has done, lay out on the table the ancient wonders; I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished, and give a long, loving look at your acts. O God! Your way is holy! No god is great like God! You're the God who makes things happen; you showed everyone what you can do - You pulled your people out of the worst kind of trouble...

"Everything happens for a reason." I heard it the other night in a movie. I hear it nearly every day. Is that our God's way? Think back to the story of Adam and Eve in the garden again, the perfect setting. They had everything they would ever need. There was only one rule, "Don't eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." How hard could that be? But, following some bad advice from a contrary source, they decided they needed the one thing they didn't have, to be gods with the knowledge of good and evil. God gave them the power to choose, and they did, the wrong tree, on purpose! That is how the Old Testaments explains why we so often choose the thing we think will make us happy, but turns sour in our stomach – **SIN**. So, God gave us humans the freedom to choose whoever we will follow, to be our god. Whatever holds the center place becomes our master.

That leads us to consider if God has a will and plan for the world and our lives. Let's just try some common sense for a minute. If someone invests enormous resources with incredibly intricate engineering and the ultimate effort in planning, do you think that one will ignore his masterpiece after it's done? Have you ever known a serious miniature railroad hobbyist? They live to build and expand their train layout. I have known a few over the years and they are like Star Trek "Trekies" with railroads. They can't get enough. I have known a couple of guys that built special rooms in their houses just for their model trains. Well, that may give us a slight idea of what God thinks about us, his pride and joy, us humans. Sure, we fall off the track a lot and quit sometimes, but he doesn't give up on us. He cleans us and fixes us up and puts us back on the track again, maybe not good as new, but still useful and beautiful to Him. And, the old ones he prizes as much as his brand new ones.

Emphatically, YES, God has a plan for our lives. But, it may not work like we think. God gave us a part of himself, "Made in his image," it says in Genesis. I believe one of the most important gifts that goes along with free will is the **POWER OF CREATIVITY**. I believe he loves to see what we will come up with next. That is not to say that I don't believe God is not **omniscient**. I believe it when the Bible says that he knows the end from the beginning and he knew us before we were formed in the womb or our mothers. Imagine what God can help create with our cooperation?

God does have a perfect plan for us and everything in the world. That is what Leslie Weatherhead in his classic book, *The Will of God*, calls **God's INTENTIONAL WILL**, the plan that God would have liked if everyone and everything in the earth cooperated with his plan. In that will, Jesus would not have had to die, but everyone would have followed him and we would all be living in peace and harmony all the time. However, we all know it didn't happen like that, nor will it ever. So God loves us enough to work with us and our failings, our rebellious sins, our weakness to create what he can now, but in different ways. That is what Paul meant when he said in Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to (cooperating with) his purpose." God makes good things, even beautiful things, come from hard experiences, even catastrophic disasters. That is what Weatherhead calls **God's Circumstantial will**.

You see, God doesn't make us and then put us in a box and put us on the shelf to collect dust. It reminds me of the opening scenes of the first Toy Story movie, where the shopkeeper finds Woody and has a master restorer come fix him up and retouch his paint like new. He puts him in a box to sell as a trophy for a collector to put on his shelf and accomplish nothing. Rather, the story doesn't get interesting until crazy things begin to happen. **That's LIFE!** That's God's will for our life, he just wants to have a big part in it. He finds us most interesting and useful when we are trying to do what he wants and make him happy. That's **the BEST LIFE!** So, there may not be only one certain track for each of our lives. We are all so different with all different backgrounds and gifts to offer and so much to experience we've learned from. Adam Hamilton, in his book, *Why: Making Sense of God's Will*, states that we need to pay attention to what is happening around us, the people we meet, their needs and hurts, the ways we may help in our communities, or with one child. So, if you want to know what God's will is for your life, you've got to get out there and find out what God is up to as Henry Blackaby says in *Experiencing God, Knowing and Doing the Will of God* and jump in with both feet, even if it's a mud puddle.

That reminds me of the woman we know as Mother Teresa. She was born in on August 27, 1910, in an upper crust family in Gonxha (Agnes) Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Yugoslavia. When she saw all the overwhelming needs of the pitifully diseased and dying people in Calcutta she knew she had to do something to help. She was paying attention to what was going on around her and rose to the challenge and change the world. Joan Guntzelman *A Retreat With Mother Teresa and Damien of Molokai: Caring for Those Who Suffer*

When we are faced with a decision or are struggling about what God's will is, God has provided some tools to help us figure out what is best in accordance with what God wants for our lives. Hamilton (p.

70-71) gives us these: the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, guidance of other Christians, lay and clergy, and our God-given intelligence and common sense. Don't think I offer these glibly. God's will is expressed throughout the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. The words for "will" in both Hebrew and Greek are very similar to "hear" or "word." God has spoken throughout history and faithful scribes recorded and compiled much of it in the canon of the Testaments. You will find the principles of God's will there. Take Jesus' response when asked which of the commandments were most important, he said, **Matthew 22:37-40(NRSV)**

³⁷ ... ***"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."*** ³⁸***This is the greatest and first commandment.***

³⁹***And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'***

⁴⁰***On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."***

Someone has said, if you don't know what to do in a particular situation, then do the most loving thing you can. Or, when faced with a choice of how to respond, choose the hard one. God's way is the narrow path and few follow it, Jesus said. Sure, all of us would like to see or hear from God directly, but that seldom happens like we think of it. But we do have the Holy Spirit, God dwelling with our hearts. Paul says in Ephesians 3:18, ***Be (being) filled with the Holy Spirit.***

God cares about us so much that he was willing to endure untold suffering and frustration by allowing us to have free will to choose his way. He does have a plan for our lives, but it is more like a GPS than an atlas and detailed road map. He doesn't show us the big picture, but gives us turn by turn directions if we are listening carefully. The general idea is from Scripture and other Christians. But, know this **God does have an ultimate plan and nothing and no one can thwart him from bringing it to fulfillment**, and he has a wonderful eternity in store for us who do his will. **One more billboard sign, "I love you...I love you...I love you - God" That is our God's Will – to live in His LOVE FOREVER!**