

The Will of God (Romans 12:1-2)

I'm about to say words that worshippers for thousands of years never heard in their worship services: Open your Bibles... For all of biblical history few believers had access to scrolls or books of even part of scripture. For most of church history till 400-some years ago, the world didn't have it in their native language. Don't take for granted what we have, treasure this book.

PTL for missionaries helping people get it in their language!

What is God's will for your life? I know it! God told me, in His Word. God speaks today audibly when you read His Word audibly. If you want to hear from God, listen to His Word (that's where God tells us things).¹ So open your Bibles to Rom 12. We get to hear God's voice by reading His Word out loud. God speaks when Scripture speaks, like we sing 'Speak, O Lord'

Sola Scriptura=scripture alone has that authority, nothing less or extra

The Bible was written by men but inspired by God, literally breathed out God's words. Rom 12 was written by Paul, but inspired by the Spirit for us: Romans 12:1 *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* ² *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing **you may discern what is the will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

We've been going through the book of Romans looking at God's attributes or the aspects of who He is (severity and kindness and wisdom in ch 11). In earlier chapters we've seen His mercy, holiness, goodness, mentioned here. We've studied His glory, that's how ch 11 ends '*to him be the glory forever ...*' Today we come to '*the will of God*' and how we can discern and test it.

This study can literally change your life direction—it did for mine

ABOUT 23 YEARS AGO, HOME BIBLE STUDY TEACHING TIME

- Asked to teach, I said no, later agreed, taught on this passage
- 22 years ago this summer on STM to RP I first preached on this
- God's will for my life in ministry was revealed through all this

WAYS GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE IS SOMETIMES TAUGHT

- Should I move? Signs? (Haddon Robin story of 7:47 on clock)
- Should I get married? Another real life story of pastoral counsel to march around girl like Jericho 7x, see if walls of her heart fall

How are we to make big decisions biblically?

R. C. Sproul's book *Can I Know God's Will* tells a story a girl who was lost and 'came to a fork in the road. Icy panic stung her as she stood frozen by indecision. She lifted her eyes toward heaven, looking for guidance.

Her eyes did not find God, only the Cheshire cat leering at her from his perch in the tree above. “Which way should I go?” Alice blurted.

“That depends,” said the cat, fixing a sardonic smile on the confused girl.

Alice managed to reply “On what?”

The cat asked “It depends on your destination. Where are you going?”

Alice stammered “I don’t know.” “Then,” said the cat, his grin spreading wider, “it doesn’t matter which way you go.”² [You ever feel like Alice?]

Many Christians feel like they’re lost in wonderland. They come to a fork in the road or have to make a decision and they don’t know what to do or even where they’re going, much less which way will take them there. Anxiety or indecisiveness can paralyze us. Is there one destination marked out for us in life? Is it ok if I try a path I’m not sure of or can that doom me to 2nd best? God isn’t like that. If we look up for guidance, He’ll help us. His will isn’t like a maze, a tightrope, a bulls-eye or choose your own adventure novel.³

The book *Found: God’s Will*, says ‘Some apparently think that God’s will is lost. At least they say they are searching for it! To them, God... stashed His will, like [Easter] eggs, somewhere out of sight and sent us running through life trying to find it. And He is up there saying, “You’re getting warmer!” [or colder!] ... Then there are those who are actually afraid of the will of God. I will never forget the athlete who came up to me at Hume Lake Camp and ... [was afraid to really surrender his life to the Lord’s will because he] had the idea that God wants to take robust athletes, break both their legs, and make them play the flute. This implies that God is a kind of “cosmic killjoy,” ... In the middle of this muddle we still ask, “What is the will of God?...” Can you know what job to seek, what school to attend, what girl or guy to love, what decision to make in any given situation? Yes ... the will of God is clearly revealed in the pages of the Word of God ... As we look at some biblical principles ... be prepared for an unexpected and surprising conclusion that could change your life.’⁴ It’s changed my life.

v. 2 ‘you may discern what the will of God is,’ but let’s start where it starts.

¹ I appeal to you therefore, **brothers** ... Before we get to the question of the will of God in v. 2, there’s several implied questions to ask leading up to it.

#1. Are you SAVED? Are you brothers, family in Christ that this appeals to? Christ Jesus said in Mark 3:3 ‘*whoever **does the will of God**, he is my brother and sister...*’ He said in Jn 6:40 ‘*this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life*’

What is the will of God the Father? God told me in His Word, *'this is the will of [the] Father: eternal life for everyone who looks on and believes in Jesus the Son of God. You can't begin to know the will of God for your life until He is Lord of your life, and you trust in Him for eternal life. Rom 12:1 is an appeal to believer, brothers and sisters who are those who do His will. He's not willing for you to perish, but that you should come to repentance.'*⁵

Jesus came to do the Father's will and to rescue us from doing our own will. Isa 53: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all... it was **the LORD's will to crush him**...the LORD makes his life a guilt offering [Jesus' life for our guilt] and the **will of the LORD will prosper in his hand***⁶

Saving faith turns from our will to trust Christ's death and life for us

Jesus says of God's children, *'these little ones who believe in me...'* Jesus says, *'it is **not the will of my Father** who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish'* (Mt 18:6, 14 NIV). He says *'this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day'* (John 6:39). His will is that you believe (that's His will of command) and His sovereign will keeps you to the end (His will of control). His revealed will: believe and be saved. That's where *doing His will* starts.

#1 flows out of v. 1. Are you saved? **#2 question. Are you saying thanks?**

¹ *I appeal to you **therefore**, brothers, by the mercies of God ...*

When you see a therefore, ask 'what's it there for?' What's there before it? Look back in context Rom 11:31 where Paul just talked about God's mercy: *so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the **mercy** shown to you they also may now receive **mercy**.*³² *For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have **mercy** on all...*³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. This is praise!*

Therefore, in view of God's mercies—implication is you're praising God for His mercies, or saying thanks for His mercies. Rom 1 talks about common grace or mercies in creation, but it says sinners *'neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened'* (v. 21 NKJV). They didn't give God glory or give thanks, so they couldn't think or see His will, and they became fools.

I know giving thanks is God's will for you. Why? 1 Thess 5:18: *give thanks in all circumstances; for **this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.***

APPLY TO DIFFICULT DECISION: Acknowledge Him in thanks, Pr 3:6

Don't stress or obsess the unknown, bless Him who knows

#3. Are you submitted? v. 1b ...*to present your bodies as a living sacrifice*

...

Jesus came to a difficult crossroads. In His humanity as the time comes to offer His body as a sacrifice on the cross, He prays in Gethsemane in Mt 26 'My Father, **if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will**' ...*for the second time, he went away and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, **your will be done**' (v. 39, 42).*

That's how He taught us to pray: Let your kingdom come, your will be done

Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine ...

Have Thine own way, Lord ... You are the Potter, I am the clay

Mould me and make me after Thy will, While I am waiting, Yielded and still

Acronym PCS uses: P.R.A.Y.: P-Praise, R-Repent, A-Ask, Y-Yield/submit.

John says if we ask anything according to His will He hears us (1 Jn 5:14).

James says if you lack wisdom, ask God, and you don't have because you don't ask. And he says it's ok to make plans about next year, but submit it all to God ('*if the Lord wills we will live and do this or that,*' James 1 & 4).

- **ARE YOU SUBMITTED TO GOD IN PRAYER?**
- **TO AUTHORITIES IN YOUR LIFE?**
 - o 1 Pet 2:13-15: *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men... For it is **God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men** (NIV). We submit to authority because it is God's will*
 - o Eph 6:6 calls us to submit to authorities at work '*not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart*' (NIV). Not a people-pleaser, but doing the Master's will as Christ's slave.
 - o Eph 6:1-3 calls children to obey the authority of parents and all to honor father and mother that it may go well with you. It blesses us and honors parents when we ask their counsel.
- **TO CHURCH LEADERS AND GODLY COUNSEL?**
 - o Heb 13:7, 17: *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God...Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls... You say but they're imperfect—God alone is perfect and you aren't!*
 - o 1 Pet 5:5 '*...submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble"*'⁷

Before you make a big decision, and announce it to others, seek counsel of one of your spiritual leaders and other mature believers. Don't send a text or write an email with big decisions, talk face to face with a pastor-shepherd or someone in our WHW team, submit your thinking to scriptural principles.

v. 1 ends talking about worship, have you talked with those you worship with? If you're thinking of moving, do you know yet where you'll worship?

Before big decisions, ask leaders / believers for any godly input

Are you saying thanks and submitted (God, authorities, pastors, counsel)?

#4. Are you seeking to please Him? v. 1c ...*holy and acceptable to God*...

Another translation says '*holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*' The word pleasing/acceptable is the word in 2 Cor 5:9: '*whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to **please him.***' Is it your goal, your ambition, your aim to please Him, and to be holy/set apart?

1 Thess 4: '*live in order to please God... **It is God's will that you should be sanctified [set apart/made holy]: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy ...For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life***' (v. 1-7 NIV).

APPLY TO SEEKING GOD'S WILL IN RELATIONSHIPS – BE HOLY

Paul uses this same word for pleasing the Lord and God's will in Eph 5: '***discern what is pleasing to the Lord...Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but **understand what the will of the Lord is*****' (v. 10, 16-17). It mentions saying thanks, submitting to each other.

We can't discern what God's will of providence is doing behind the scenes, but we're called to discern His will of what pleases Him in our daily walk. How do we seek that? Col 1:9-10: *we have not ceased to **pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,**¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing to him:** bearing fruit in every good work...* Pray that prayer!

Rom 12:2 ends with discerning what's good and pleasing but remember at the end of chapter 11 it's to Him be the glory forever and ever. Heb 13:21 says may God '*equip you with everything **good** that you may do **his will, working in us that which is **pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*****' Seek to please Him to His glory

Jesus taught ‘do not worry about your life’ and decisions of what you’ll do in the future. *‘But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow*

...

#5. Are you studying and striving to be more Christlike?

Look once more at Rom 12:2: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

2 sides: don’t conform to the pattern of this world, worldly wisdom or ways. Flipside: be transformed by the pattern of the Word as it renews your mind. We saw a couple weeks ago we have the renewed mind of Christ as we take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ based on His Word. 1 Pet 4:2 says live *‘no longer for human desires, but for God’s will’* HCSB.

Ps 1 says the blessed person doesn’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly but delights in God’s Word, meditates on it 24/7 and is blessed in what he does. Ps 119:105 says God’s Word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. All we need for life or godliness is the sufficient Word studied and applied.

*He has shown you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you*⁸

Read and study His Word daily and ask God to teach you His will and show you how to apply it by His Spirit’s leading: Ps 143:8, 10 *‘Let the morning bring me word... Show me the way I should go... Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground’* (NIV).

Counselor Stuart Scott gives cautions for a renewed mind making decisions

Ideas, Inner Feelings, and Impressions [rather than think these are telling us a personal “will of God,” recognize they are not reliable or Revelation, but are subjective, needing the objective Word and wisdom to discern them their source and value. See Friesen, *Decision Making*, 264-65, 206]

Inner Peace [or lack thereof. Discern *why* you lack peace; Friesen, 108-109]

Setting Up Conditions [ex: Gideon’s fleece; but see Lk 4:12, Friesen, p. 214]

Opened Doors [“open door” in NT is an opportunity for ministry, but Paul didn’t take some, 2 Cor 2:12-13, some open doors are elevator shafts]⁹

Don’t be passive, ask, seek, knock (some closed doors may open)

We don’t know the future in God’s secret sovereign will, what we need is wisdom in living out His scriptural will (revealed in His Word, applying it). God doesn’t call us to discover His secret will for the future, He calls us to do His scriptural will He’s revealed to us. Dt 29:29 *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

2 sense of will: Sovereign will – scriptural will, decreed will – desired will
 Will of control – will of command Will in providence – will in precepts.
 If you're not disobeying His Word you're in His will in every biblical sense

Rom 12:2 ends with then you can '*discern what is the will of God, what is good...*' and the good news is all things, even where we make mistakes or not the best choices, God works all things together for good and to make us more conformed to the image of Christ (8:28-29). Jesus said a sparrow can't fall to the ground apart from the will of God, so don't be afraid, you are worth far more (Mt 10:29-31 NIV). You can't fall outside His sovereign will

Pr 16:3 *Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established ...⁹ The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*

The good news is if you do what Rom 12:1-2 says, you'll discern the will of God. If you're submitted (to God and godly input), saying thanks, seeking to please God, studying and striving to be more Christlike, the good news is you can do what you want and you'll be in God's will. EXPLAIN PS 37:4.

If you're not disobeying scripture, there's freedom, act with wisdom

DeYoung: 'If you do these...things [in Rom 12:1-2], then we will be able to discern what God's will is...we will have something better than special revelations and words about the future—we'll have wisdom... Don't wait for the liver shiver. If you are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, you will be in God's will, so just go out and do something ...do what you want, and go where you want for God's glory'¹⁰

¹ Before saying "God told me," or believing someone who says that, see see Deuteronomy 4:2, 18:20-22; Proverbs 30:6, Jeremiah 14:14, etc.

² R. C. Sproul, *Can I Know God's Will?*, vol. 4, The Crucial Questions Series (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 1–4.

³ Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, 23.

⁴ John MacArthur, *Found: God's Will*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1977), 5–8.

⁵ 2 Peter 3:9 NKJV.

⁶ Isaiah 53:6, 10 NIV.

⁷ NKJV.

⁸ Micah 6:8.

⁹ Stuart Scott, "Biblical Decision Making," 2003 Shepherd's Conference, notes at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/SC03-1055CDNotes.htm> and audio at <https://shepherdsconference.org/media>

¹⁰ DeYoung, 90, 59.