

How to Know God's Will for Your Life

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

- *Does God have a specific individual will for your life?*
- *Does the Bible tell us to seek God's individual will for our lives through our circumstances?*
- *How can we make decisions which are God's will for our lives?*
- *Should we pursue experiencing God?*

Some time ago a Christian brother I had known for years asked to see me personally about a matter in which we disagreed. When we got together, he said that he had hesitated coming to me, but he felt God was leading him to do it. Then he explained the way he felt led of God.

First, he had heard a sermon on the radio that made the point, "If you have something against a brother, you should go to him personally." Next, he had been talking with some friends in a restaurant, and one brought up the fact that when we disagree with our friends in Christ, we should go to see them. Then last Sunday his Pastor mentioned something about it in a sermon, so he concluded he was being led by God to come to see me.

"I really appreciate your coming to see me, Jim (not his real name)," I said. "But here is the difference between your view of the spiritual life and mine. I would say you should come to see me because the Bible says to do it."

The Individual Will of God

We shall here demonstrate that the Bible nowhere teaches us to look for an individual will of God for our lives. We shall show that there is a sovereign plan of God being worked out in our lives individually, and the righteous character of God is revealed in the Bible for everyone to follow individually. But there is no personal will of God which we should try to identify in areas not revealed in the Bible—such as, perhaps, selling a house or marrying a certain person.

People in the Bible Who Were Individually Led

The individual-will view argues that many people in the Bible were individually led by God, implying the Bible teaches an individual will of God for our lives. There are two problems with that. (1) The Bible is the specific record of God's revelation given to certain individuals. The Bible nowhere implies all believers should expect or attempt to find an individual will of God. We are not prophets, kings of Israel, apostles, or authors of the Bible. For example, Gideon put out the fleece not to find God's will but to confirm that the revelation he had already supernaturally received was from God (Judges 6:36-37). (2) The individual will of God in the Bible was given directly, verbally, and supernaturally. Consider Abraham (Genesis 12:1; 18:1), Moses (Exodus 3:14), Joshua (Joshua 1:1), David (2 Samuel 2:3-31), and Paul (Acts 9:5).

We Should Not Try to Find What God Has Not Revealed

The Bible tells us God has a sovereign plan by which He is involved in our lives individually (Romans 8:28). But we are not told to try to find out what that is. There are revealed things and secret things. We are to know the revealed things (Deuteronomy 32:46-47; Micah 6:8; Daniel 10:12-13; 1 John 5:3) but not the secret things (Deuteronomy 29:29). Therefore, the individual work of God not revealed in the Bible cannot be determined (Ecclesiastes 3:11; 11:5; John 3:8; Revelation 22:18).

We Should Not Look To Circumstances to Find What God Has Revealed

God criticized Job for only one thing-looking to his circumstances to find out what God was doing (Job 38:2; 42:3). David refused to decide God's will for his life through circumstances (1 Samuel 24:4-17; 26:8-10; 2 Samuel 10-15). So did the Apostle Paul (Acts 21:4, 10-14).

We Should Look to the Bible to Determine God's Revealed Directive Will

Our task is *handling accurately the word of truth*, not pursuing an individual circumstantial will of God (2 Timothy 2:15, also see Hebrews 4:12 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Traditional "God's will" passages refer to following God's biblically revealed directive will, not looking for an individual circumstantial will (Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 3:5-6; Colossians 1:9).

Problems with Seeking an Individual Will of God

- (1) When we pray for something and look for something, we tend to find something, whether or not it exists. When I ask, "Should I buy a different house?" something will come along sooner or later which I will interpret as an answer. Of course God may specifically give us what we specifically ask for, and we should give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). But there is no conclusive way to know any specific event is that answer. We cannot dictate or determine God's individual involvement. God is God, not a "Jeannie in a bottle."
- (2) Circumstances and feelings (usually interpreted as "the work of the Holy Spirit") often lead to frustration when we get mixed signals.
- (3) Foolish, even disastrous, decisions are justified by "God led me to...", thus removing personal responsibility.
- (4) In non-moral areas, there is no simple way to tell if circumstances are from God, the Devil, or wishful thinking.
- (5) Circumstances and hindrances to circumstantial leading might be a closed door or a test of faith, each requiring the opposite response.
- (6) Foolish delays can be incurred while "waiting on God."
- (7) The individual-will mentality must be subjectively abandoned at some point. We do not usually look for "guidance" in putting on our socks in the morning.
- (8) Seeking one right individual will can keep us from gratitude for several good opportunities.
- (9) To add something to the Bible-like circumstances or feelings-only tends to color or negate the Bible's input. Circumstantial opportunities might justify sinful debt, an unbiblical marriage, or illegitimate leadership.
- (10) Using the Bible out of context, by, say, opening it to a chance verse or phrase, is to use it as a pair of dice or a deck of cards, such as the old joke, Judas hanged himself ... go thou and do likewise.

Finding God's Will--The Way of Wisdom

Possibly the biggest problem with seeking the illusive individual will of God through circumstances, experiences, and feelings is that it distracts from focusing on the wisdom of God's directive will revealed by studying the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17). Since God has only revealed His sovereign plan (realized through what actually happens) and His directive will (stated in the Bible), then we can assume these are sufficient for decision making. In other words, the teaching of the Bible dictates our moral actions, and wisdom derived from the Bible directs our non-moral decisions.

Here Are Some Suggestions for Decision Making Based on Wisdom

- (1) Look back at your past decisions. What have been the results of those decisions? Maturity comes from training yourself to make good decisions (Hebrews 5:14).
- (2) Look for the consistent patterns of life. Wisdom comes from knowing the regular patterns of events (Proverbs 6:6-11, 30:24-28). So following unusual circumstances (like unexpected phone calls, gifts, or coincidences) runs contrary to wisdom.
- (3) Evaluate life's patterns from God's point of view. There is worldly wisdom and godly wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:13, 14). Godly wisdom comes from practicing the attitudes revealed in the Bible (like in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Sermon on the Mount [Matthew 57], the Fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5], the characteristic of love [1 Corinthians 13], etc.).
- (4) Make the most of every opportunity for the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 5:15-16; Colossians 4:5).
- (5) Study the situation. Use the circumstances as a context to guide your decision making, not as something pointing out God's individual will. That includes counting the cost (Luke 14:28), being well informed (Hosea 4:6), and using wise

counsel (Exodus 18:19, Proverbs 19:20). Examine the situation like Nehemiah examined the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11-16; see also Joshua 2).

- (6) Study the Bible for God's attitudes (Micah 6:8). The actions of God supply a basis for decision making even in non-moral areas (Psalm 119:97-105).
- (7) Look for what is closest to the heart of God, not what you can get by with or away with. Settle for second-best financially and organizationally but not morally (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Questions and Answers

Q: *Does God have a specific individual will for your life?*

A: There is a sovereign plan of God (revealed as it happens) and a directive will of God (revealed in the Bible) but no other revealed individual will.

Q: *Does the Bible tell us to seek God's individual will for our lives through our circumstances?*

A: No. Since there is no revealed individual will of God in non-moral areas, it follows that one should not look for it. There is no command in the Bible to seek God's will for the individual.

Q: *How can we make decisions which are God's will for our lives?*

A: By following the moral directives of the Bible and using wisdom, based on the character of God revealed in the Bible.

Q: *Should we pursue experiencing God?*

A: I know of nothing in the Bible that tells us to experience God. I know of lots of passages telling us to know God (Hosea 4:6; John 17:3; Romans 10:1-3; 1 John 5:20).