

Knowing the Will of God



Hi, this is Nick Greear. Pastor Dennis had to run up to SD with Chary and asked me to fill in for him with a message to give him time to tend to family business affairs . Before we begin that message, let's pray: *Father, Thank you for preserving your Word that we might know you better and thank you for the illumination of the Holy Spirit you give your sons and daughters to understand your word. Help is to open, and keep open, the eyes of our heart to what you would say to us. I ask that the words I speak are true, intended as you mean them, and bring glory to you. Father, uplift and encourage those who are listening and give them the confidence of your love and strength. In Jesus name I pray: Amen.*

There are many questions in life. Some are rhetorical in nature and don't need a real answer; others demand honest and straight answers.

Perhaps one of the more significant questions that does need an answer is this: How can I know the will of God for my life?

I suggest that this is a **profound** subject and a critical aspect of living our Christian lives.

Ephesians 5: 14-17:

*Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. **So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.***

- WAKE UP!
- BE ALIVE!
- PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU WALK!
- BE WISE AND KNOW THE WILL OF GOD!

Our key passage for this discussion is found in the 5th chapter of Ephesians, verses 14-17 where the Apostle Paul writes, speaking to believers:

*“Awake, sleeper, And **arise** from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but **understand** what the **will** of the Lord is.*

May I ask you to repeat out loud with me that last sentence: *So then do not be foolish, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is.* One more time together please! *So then do not be foolish, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is.*

We are reminded in the verses leading up to this passage that we all were formerly in darkness but now are children of light in the LORD. But now we are to **WAKE UP, BE ALIVE, LOOK AROUND YOU** and **BE WISE**, knowing what the will of the LORD is. We are not to live our lives as in former days, but, walking circumspectly, make proper use of the time allotted to us for the **days are evil**. We are to be **WISE** and **KNOW** what the will of the LORD is.

Further, I'd like to point out that when scripture says we are to do something, that is, know what the will of the LORD is, it is **NOT** an impossible task; God makes it possible to do so. We **CAN** know what the will of God is.

- WAKE UP!
- BE ALIVE!
- PAY ATTENTION TO HOW YOU WALK!
- BE WISE AND KNOW THE WILL OF GOD!

**Seven qualities or characteristics in
our lives to help us discern the will of
God.**

To avoid any charge of plagiarism, I must tell you I have based this sermon on one that I heard over 30 years ago by Dave Breese, a saint that has now gone to be with the Lord.

There are many resources in books and on the Internet that help us to discern what the will of God is. They range from simple charlatan methods such as randomly pointing at verses and taking other verses out of context. At the other end of the spectrum we have thick books and theological papers addressing the subject.

I'm going to take a different tact and offer to you seven **qualities** or **characteristics** that must be true in our lives if we are to be **wise** and **understand** what the will of God is. These are **not** magic steps or a formula for us to blindly follow, but rather **spiritual** qualities that must be true and operative in our lives if we are to know the will of God.

Let's start!

#1: You Must be Saved.

You must be born again. (John 3:1-5)



By grace we are saved through faith in Christ, it is a gift from God. (Ephesians 2:1-9)

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved! (Romans 10:9-10)

The first characteristic is that you must **know** that you are a Christian, one who has been born again. We know it is God's intent that all men be saved.

Jesus said to the Jewish Rabbi Nicodemus: "*You must be born again.*," and we read in Ephesians chapter 2:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),...for by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:1-9)

And we read in Romans (10:9-10):

*"THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"--that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you **will** be saved; for with the **heart** a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."*

I trust you have believed that Jesus died for your sins and was raised for your redemption and reconciliation. If you have doubts, let's talk later!

#2: You are Walking in (Sexual) Sanctification

*For **this is the will of God**, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ...not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ...and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, ...For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. (1Th 4:3-7)*

The second characteristic is that we are walking in sexual sanctification.

We read in First Thessalonians chapter 4:

*For **this is the will of God**, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. (1Th 4:3-7)*

Friends, we are to lead lives of sexual purity and celebrate our sexuality within the God-ordained boundaries of one man and one woman in holy matrimony.

Before we move on to characteristic #3, let's talk about two aspects of scriptural sanctification.

#2: Sanctification (Cont.)

Positional - God's Part:

(He) raised us up with Him, and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

**If you are a born-again Christian, you ARE
positionally sanctified!**

There is POSITIONAL sanctification and what I'd call PROGRESSIVE sanctification AKA growing in maturity.

Biblical sanctification means: separated from the world for God.

When we were born again we became POSITIONALLY sanctified before God.

We read from Eph. 4:2-6:

"(The Father) raised us up with (Jesus), and seated us with Him in the heavenly places.... and from 2 Cor. 5:21 we read; He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

If you are a born-again Christian you **ARE** positionally sanctified because of what God has done, through Christ for God's purposes!

Now this was the easy part for us and the hard part for God. Let's look at **our** part of sanctification.

#2: Sanctification (Cont.)

Progressive / Experientially - Our Part:

“The state of proper functioning.”

“Set apart for its intended use.”

Greek: *hagiasmos*: “holiness”

Biblical definition of experiential sanctification:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; (1Pe 1:14-15)

We call our part of sanctification in this life progressive / experiential or simply growing in grace and maturity.

The generic meaning of sanctification is "the state of proper functioning." To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use **intended by its designer**. The Greek word translated "sanctification" (*hagiasmos*) means "holiness." So, to sanctify Biblically, therefore, means "to make holy." God calls human beings to be holy — as holy as he is holy. 1 Pet. 1:14-15 commands us as follows:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; Let me read that again:

So: the hard part for us is growing in grace on a daily basis; becoming progressively sanctified in our Christian walk.

#2: Sanctification (Cont.)

Growing in Grace: “The University of Life.”

- Recognize I’m not perfect at this time.
- Actively press-on to achieve the goal.
- It’s a life-time race.
- Dismiss past failures at holiness and reach forward.

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, (Php 3:12-13 NASB)

We are living, as it were, in the University of Life being prepared for our eternal life. Let’s make the most of it.

Don’t pray to be delivered from the problems and pressures of this life, but commit to being **men of God, being women of God** that are on the road to being perfected in holiness.

We are not to seek some emotional experience that will somehow deliver us from our spiritual responsibilities to grow –up in grace. The Apostle Paul said at Phil.3:12-14:(GNB)

*I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already **won me to himself**. Of course, my friends, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above.*

Let’s move on to characteristic #3 that should be operative in our spiritual lives:

#3: Learn the Word of God

Psalm 119:

- I have treasured your Word in my heart.
- How sweet are your words!
- From your precepts I get understanding.
- Your word is a lamp unto my feet.

Hosea 4:6:

- My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
- God will reject Israel because they forgot God's law.

Hebrews 4:12:

- The word of God is living and active.
- It pierces & divides soul, spirit, joints and marrow *until*;
- It sees and judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

If we wish to know what God's will is, I suggest we listen to and conform our behaviors to what , well, He has already revealed to us. We must **know** the Word of God. The Psalmist writes in chapter 119::

*Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.
(Psa.119:11) : How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way: Your **word** is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. (Psa 119:103-105)*

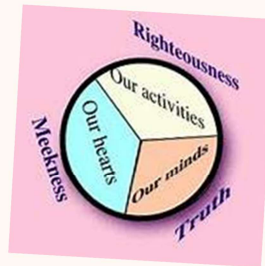
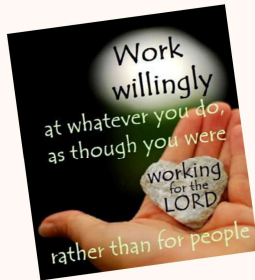
In Hosea (4:6) the people have abandoned God through their ignorance of His Word and the prophet of God wrote to Israel:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because (they) have rejected knowledge, I also will reject (them)...Since (they) have forgotten the law of (their) God, I also will forget (their) children.

and we learn from Hebrews (4:12) that

*the word of God **is** living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

#3: Learn the Word of God (Cont.)



Personal decisions:
1. Learn God's Word.
2. Obey God's Word

Every aspect of life has been addressed in God's Word. Let's just briefly consider five areas:

- i. Marriage and sex: it's all there in scripture from Genesis, through Song of Songs, and all through the New Testament and **easy to understand** if our spiritual eyes are open:
- ii. Economics: personal and corporate pconcepts regarding what we do with our resources are thoroughly addressed. If you are having repeated money problems, I suggest you may have disregarded God's will in this area for long periods of time. Do you tithe 10% of the first of your finances? Do you stay out of foolish debt? Do you consider all your material possessions as yours, or as **God's** whom He has entrusted their use to you for a little while? Do you freely share with others and those in need?
- iii. Work. Do you recall God created us in His image and that He set the example for work by creating the universe: that in six days he worked to create this earth and all that is on it? Do you consider work to be mere drudgery or something we do in the name of the Lord?
- iv. Relationships: Is there any doubt that the Bible does not address how we are to treat wives, husbands, children, fellow believers, and the unsaved?
- v. How we relate to civil governments. Do you pray for our leaders, regardless of our beliefs towards their policies? Do you obey the government when it comes to paying taxes, obeying traffic laws, or, heaven forbid, wearing sanitary safety masks in times of pandemic illness? Please read Romans ,chapter 10 if you are confused on this subject.

If we are to know God's will, it becomes imperative that we make the conscious decision to study and learn God's Word where He has revealed His character and His **will** for our lives. It's all there.

Study and learn God's Word, **then** obey it! That is His will.

4: A Consistent Prayer Life

...if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (Jas 1:5)

...pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1Th 5:17-18).

More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day. (Alfred Tennyson)

*pray at all times **in the Spirit**, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, (Eph 6:18)*

In the Spirit: inspired and led by God.

4. Characteristic Number Four: a Consistent Prayer Life:

Recalling from our first passage this morning that the will of God involves knowledge and wisdom, James 1:5 is especially relevant: *if any of you lacks wisdom, **let him ask of God**, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

When should we pray? From 1 Thess.5: *pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's **will** for you in Christ Jesus. (1Th 5:17-18).*

Alfred Tennyson wrote:

*More things are wrought by **prayer** than this world dreams of,*

Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:18 God has already made known to us the mystery of His will, that we have already obtained an inheritance, have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, and been given all the gifts necessary for our walk in this life. In spite of all these blessings, gifts, and capabilities, we are **still** instructed in our struggle against flesh and blood to:

pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...

Our prayers should be **in the Spirit**, that is, inspired and led by God. I consider our prayers in this congregation to be inspired and led by God. When we ask someone to pray for our missions or thank God for our blessings, these are not rote prayers said over and over again, but from the heart of those praying in their own words.

Of little value are rote prayers, without thought or meaning, against the gates of hell!

5: A Prior Commitment to do God's Will

Here am I, send me! (Is. 6:8)

What shall I do Lord? (Acts 22:6-10)

Characteristic number 5 on our journey to know the will of God: Making a **prior** commitment to do God's will a prior commitment to the will of God.

Upon hearing the voice of the Lord saying "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*" Isaiah responded "*Here am I. Send me!*" Isaiah Isa 6:8.

Luke wrote in Acts 22, regarding Saul:

*But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 'And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' "... And I said, '**What shall I do, Lord?**' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' (Act 22:6-10)*

We learn from these two accounts that both said "**I do**" before they even knew what was being asked of them. They made a **prior** decision, a **commitment** to do whatever the Lord asked of them.

5: A Prior Commitment to do God's Will

Here am I, send me! (Is. 6:8)

What shall I do Lord? (Acts 22:6-10)

When asked to do something for the Lord:

- Well....what is it you want me to do?
- Let me consider the inconvenience and count the cost first.
- I, along with Moses, am unqualified, can't speak well, am too shy, I'm ..., I'm, I'm



or

I will; I'd love to!



I encourage you to do the same.

When asked to do something for the Lord, do you have to consider what it is that is being asked of you?

When asked to do something for the Lord do you need to calculate the costs, the consequences?

When asked to do something for the Lord must you question, like Moses, all of your supposed reasons that you can't do it? Is it your speech, your inhibitions, perhaps your hair?

May I suggest that your response should be "**I will.**" Even better, what if we learned to respond to the requests from our church, our spouses and families, our friends with this response: "**I'd love to. I'd love to.**" How about we practice that? Say with me: **I'd love to!** One more time: **"I'd love to!"**

If we could respond to requests for help here in this church with "I'd love to!," think what could be wrought.

Mother Teresa said: *I Am Not Called To Be Successful, I Am Called To Be Faithful.*

Rick Warren wrote: *Nothing Shapes Your Life More Than The Commitments You Choose To Make.*

Are you willing to say "**I do, I will, I'd love to**" even before you know what is being asked of you? I encourage you to do just that. And if you are then able to talk yourself out of whatever was asked, then go for it! But that may prove difficult!

Moving along we come to the sixth characteristic:

6: Sanctified Common Sense

“Biblically sound judgment in practical matters.”

- *You who are ignorant, learn to be wise. You who are foolish, get some common sense.* (Prov. 8:5 ERV)
- *I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion.* (Prov. 8:12) . Wisdom is knowing what to do, discretion is knowing when, where, and how to do it.

The three enemies of common sense:

1. Lack of knowledge (and obedience to what we know).
2. Impatience.
3. Unwillingness to seek out and follow godly counsel.

I call this sixth characteristic **Sanctified** Common Sense; Sanctified **Common Sense**.

It is possible for us to become soooooo spiritual, soooooooo esoteric, so completely removed from this life on earth that we are merely Hindus.

Point in fact, we are earthen vessels in this life; we are humans created by God and meant to live on this earth for a little while. **Watch out** for those who are so spiritual that they are disconnected from this life.

Common sense is sound judgment in practical matters. Prov. 8:5 (ERV) says *You who are ignorant, learn to be wise. You who are foolish, get some common sense.* Pro 8:12: *I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion.*

The three great enemies of sanctified common sense:

1. Lack of knowledge and obedience to God’s Word (mainly from Proverbs).
2. Impatience.
3. Failure to seek **godly** counsel. A few more verses from Proverbs:

6: Sanctified Common Sense (Cont.)

*A **wise man** will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: (Prov. 1:5). The way of a **fool** is right in his own eyes, But a **wise man** is he who listens to counsel. (Prov. 12:15). Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another. (Prov. 27:17). Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a **man's counsel** is sweet to his friend. (Prov. 27:9)*



*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: (Pro 1:5). The way of a **fool** is right in his own eyes, But a **wise man** is he who listens to counsel. (Pro 12:15). Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another. (Pro 27:17). Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend. (Pro 27:9)*

In my judgment, this spiritual tool of seeking counsel from godly men and women whom we respect is probably **the most ignored** scriptural advice we practice. Why are we so unwilling to ask for and take the advice of others? Is it that we really want our own way? Is it that we think we can do it all on our own? Scripture calls this foolishness, the opposite of wisdom.

Pastor Dennis could recite many examples of the Mission Fields strewn with the broken lives and dreams of those wishing to be missionaries who either avoided or rejected the sound counsel and common sense of godly men and women in the missionary business.

I urge you to develop this practice of seeking out godly people for their perspective and advice, but **don't** make the critical error of seeking out those that you know will give you the answer you want; in fact, seek those who are wise and impartial to your plans with a demonstrated Biblical world view.

and

Finally we move to the seventh characteristic to help us know the will of God.

7: Follow the Desires of Your Heart!

May He grant you your heart's desire And fulfill all your counsel! (Psalm 20:4)

If we are:

1. a born-again Christian,
2. growing in maturity through daily sanctification,
3. are growing in our knowledge of His Word,
4. have a consistent prayer life,
5. have made a prior commitment to do God's will (I'd LOVE to),
and
6. are practicing sanctified common sense by seeking godly counsel:

Then you will: *Delight yourself in the LORD; And **He** will give you the desires of your heart.* (Psa 37:4)

Let's say you still aren't sure whether to buy a Ford or a real pickup, marry the blonde or the rich one, which ministry to financially support, or when to pay off the mortgage; then exercise this seventh characteristic:

Follow the Desires of Your Heart!

If, and when the other six characteristics we discussed together this morning are true in your life, do what your heart desires! I would not offer this counsel if it was not backed up with scripture.

(Ps. 20:4) says : *May He grant you your heart's desire And fulfill all your counsel!*

I know this last point is dangerous theology, but if we are:

- a born-again Christian,
- growing in maturity through daily sanctification and holiness,
- are growing in our knowledge of the Word of God, and obey what we know,
- have a consistent prayer life,
- have decided to make a prior commitment to **do** the will of God (**I'd love to**),
and
- are practicing sanctified common sense by seeking **and following** godly counsel,
then you **will** *Delight yourself in the LORD; And **He** will give you the desires of your heart.* (Ps. 37:4). PLEASE understand this does not mean God will be Santa Clause and give you what you ask for; better, He will place Godly desires in your heart that glorify Him and are ultimately joyful to you.

Just don't try making an end-run around the first six characteristics.

The Opening and the Summary

Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Therefore be careful how you walk, **not as unwise men, but as wise**, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then **do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.** (Eph. 5:14-17)

Let’s finish where we started: I read again from Eph. 5:14-17:

*“Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as **wise**, making the most of your time, because the **days** are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the **will** of the Lord is.*

I trust you will.