

# How to Find God's Will

by Brent Barnett

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*Brent Barnett's sermon provides a comprehensive guide on understanding and seeking God's will in our lives through Scripture, prayer, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:16

**Topics:** "Gods Will", "Spiritual Guidance"

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## Description

Brent Barnett delves into the crucial topic of discerning the will of God, emphasizing the importance of understanding the different aspects of God's will - His sovereign will, moral will, and individual will. He highlights the necessity for believers to align themselves with God's moral imperatives and seek His guidance in making decisions. Barnett stresses the significance of seeking God's will through prayer, patience, discernment, and aligning our desires with God's purposes, acknowledging that God's plan for our lives existed even before we were born.

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## Transcript

I can't think of any other subject that has direct application to every Christian and to every day life more than discerning the will of God. Yet I can't think of any area surrounding the Christian life that is more misunderstood or poorly taught on than the will of God. It is absolutely essential that believers are equipped with the proper understanding to be able to seek the will of God for their lives.

We must understand, first of all, that God's will has several aspects. The first aspect is His sovereign will, which means simply that what God has said will happen will happen. When He said that Jesus would come, Jesus came. When He says that Jesus will come again, He will come again. Nothing will stop that. God is in complete control over all things, causing them to work out according to His purposes and design. The second aspect is God's moral will. Just because God is sovereign over all things, including disasters and evil things, does not mean that He likes those things or enjoys those things. Just because He allows Satan to do evil for a time does not mean that Satan acts according to the moral will of God. The moral will of God is what God wants to happen. He wants all men to come to know Him so that they don't have to receive His wrath (1 Timothy 2:3-4). He wants to see truth prevail and sin cease. He wants us to pray and to obey Him. These are all aspects of His moral will. His moral desires are not always seen practically on earth because of man's ability to choose and his responsibility for doing so. In His sovereignty, God has foreknown all things and ordains all things. In His holiness and moral uprightness, He calls man to align himself through Christ with Him. Some do, and some don't. But there is a moral will of God against which

we will all be judged.

The final aspect of God's will is the most controversial one. Most will agree that God is all-powerful and knows all things. Most will agree that God wants certain things to happen, but He doesn't force them upon man because He gives man a role in the process. The confusing part, though it need not be, is regarding the individual will of God. Certainly, if God has a sovereign will for the entirety of the universe and for all mankind in all times and places, certainly He has a sovereign will for each of us individually. Thus, it makes no sense to accept the sovereignty of God and ignore the individual will of God for a person's life. Those who reject the individual will of God are on dangerous ground because they are limiting God's sovereignty. To say that God only knows some of what might happen or that He has an infinite number of possibilities to choose from since He doesn't know for sure what path we will choose is a cop out that denies Scripture. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." We must understand that God knows what He is doing and will do it. He is not unsure of the future in general or of our futures as individuals. What God wants to be done will be done, and seeing that He exists outside of time, it has already been done, without affecting our responsibility to choose. So God is sovereign over our individual lives. Furthermore, it also makes sense that, since God has a moral will for all people, He also has a moral will for each individual. So really, if we believe in the sovereignty of God and in the righteousness of God, we must then accept that God has an individual will for our lives over which He is sovereign and in which He expects moral decisions. God indeed has a plan for our lives that has existed even from before we were born. Psalm 139:16 says, "In Your book were all written, The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them." He also has a moral will governing our lives. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

God's sovereignty and moral imperatives narrow greatly what God's will is for our lives, helping us to make decisions. By believing that God has ordained the steps of our lives (see Psalm 37:23), we can rest easy knowing that all we have to do is seek God and let Him lead us into His providential will and purpose for our lives (see Ephesians 2:10). By believing that God has given us good commands to lead us into spiritual fruitfulness (see John 15:8-10), we can know that anything that counters the Word of God must not be God's will. We will miss His will anytime we go outside of what He has already told us to do. Many, if not most, of life's decisions can be solved simply by applying principles and truths from the Bible to circumstances and decisions. Should parents, for example, discipline their children? The answer, of course, is "yes" because Scripture says to do so. Should a person love all people no matter what? Obviously, they must because the Bible tells us to love others. These are obvious overarching truths from the Bible that govern behavior. Much of the confusion around the will of God starts here with Christians not knowing what God has already told us about His will. Thus, it is extremely important to search the Scriptures in all areas and at all times, especially if we want to know God's will.

Yet some decisions cannot be solved simply through the principles of Scripture. For example, should a person take the job in New Mexico or in New York? Should a person marry Julie or stop dating her and start dating Joanna? Which one is God's will? The principles in the Bible will narrow the choices to a high degree when it comes to who we marry, for example, but it will not tell us that we should marry one individual or the other. The only way to know who we should marry is to seek God. This is where knowing God's individual will comes in.

Some people oversimplify this part of seeking God's will by saying that we can know God's will simply by doing what we want to do. I agree with this argument in that God has given us new hearts with changed

(and changing) desires in addition to putting in us the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). Thus, we should be able to follow our desires as the Lord grants us the desires of our hearts as long as we delight in Him (Psalm 37:4). We must understand, however, that since we are still changing, our desires are not fool-proof. Furthermore, since we may or may not be delighting in God with all of our hearts, our desires could easily be astray from God's best for us. In addition, what God provides in the present might not look as good as it really is because we don't know the future as God does. Though I believe God will give us that which will be the desire of our hearts, He may not do it right away. Also, it is possible that we may not perceive the will of God accurately because we may need the Lord to work on our hearts so that our desires are shaped totally by a life consecrated to Him. Many other influences can affect our desires if we are not careful. Thinking we are listening to God's will, we may in fact be listening to the flesh, to society, or to bad past experiences. Following our desires as a means of seeking God's individual will is not inherently unbiblical, but it needs to be done with great patience, much prayer, and great discernment. So easy it is to think we are delighting in God when we are seeking our own desires. We must let the Spirit work to confirm that our desires are indeed of Him.

I believe that there is an individual will, that we can know it, and that we must humble ourselves and prayerfully wait for God to show us if our hearts' desires are ultimately His desires, depending upon whether or not we are fully delighting in Him. Romans 8:14 says that we are led by the Spirit of God if we are His sons. The leading of the Spirit is not necessarily sitting around waiting for some "word from God," though we should be prayerful and discerning in all things. Being led of God is being directed and ruled by the joy of God and the desires of Him. When God's kingdom priorities rule in our hearts, we are then able to be sensitive to the Spirit Who is leading us in our hearts, controlling and directing our desires and delights. The idea is that we are so fully caught up with enjoying God, fearing God, and worshipping God as we draw near to Him through His Word, through obedience, and through prayer, that we are almost by default doing what God wants. (Note that I said "almost.") The individual will of God will be found as God grants us the desires in our heart after we have been sure to wait upon Him and let Him search our hearts to see if we are truly desiring His purposes above all others, including our own. Again, let me emphasize that our true hearts' desires are not always what we think they are. This is why we must exercise discernment and seek God in the matter of finding His will. It is not quite as simple as doing what we want to do for we are still works in progress. The person who is most likely to discern the leading of God correctly is the one who has surrendered Himself to the authority of Christ, who knows the Word of God, who has placed His requests before the Lord in prayer, and who is humble, not seeking any personal agenda. We must be content with things as they are, trusting God and accepting His provision no matter what and whenever it may come, if at all. Just because we want something doesn't mean God will grant it. We must remember that desires change, circumstances change, and God knows best. God will always do what is ultimately best for us, with the fullness of blessing coming in the next life.

So how do we make sure that what we desire is of God? And how do we know if something that we don't particularly desire at the moment is of God and we just haven't submitted our heart fully to His desires yet? This is where patience, discernment, seeking the counsel of wise believers, and much prayer comes into play. Seeking the will of God is typically a process, requiring much patience, discernment, and waiting humbly before the Lord. In some cases, it might take years before the Lord is able to peel away all of the false desires and lies so that we can clearly see His heart and will for our lives. But the process of giving over our ambitions, dreams, and desires to God in exchange for His best is well worth the wait. Differentiating the prompting of the Spirit in our hearts from our own fleshly desires is a process also. The more we obey and submit to God and the more we read His Word, the easier it will be. If God has led us a

certain way, we can expect more and more "fingerprints" of God along the way as we can see God providing, revealing, or "opening doors," as Christians commonly say. Sometimes God will close and open doors, using circumstances to direct us. Acts 16:7 says, "And after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them." Paul and Timothy wanted to go one way, but their desires, though morally good, were not the sovereign will of God. Thus, the Spirit within them had to redirect them. We are not told how, but maybe they just lacked peace or circumstances simply prevented them. Either way, it was clear to them through the Spirit's ministry in their hearts that God didn't want them to go where they thought they were supposed to go. They did the right thing, stopped in their tracks, listened to God, and waited for new direction. Did they do wrong to want to go one way even though God wanted them to go another? No. They would have done wrong to just sit and not preach the gospel. What we can learn from them is that we must submit our desires to God, be proactive in fulfilling the moral will of God, and be sure to let God be the sovereign One that He is over our desires, lives, and directions. Desires must always be overruled and shaped by the guidance and direction of God as He opens and closes doors because God knows what is best. He knows best where to harness the desires that He has put in our hearts. Therefore, we must be sure to listen and obey the promptings of the Spirit in our hearts even if they were to counter, or at least redirect, our desires. John 16:13 says, "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth." The more we know the Word, the longer we walk with God, and the more time the Holy Spirit has to teach a humble heart discernment and right judgment, the better we will be at following the individual will of God in our lives.

Let's sum up. Does God speak? Yes, (see Hebrews 12:25) He speaks to our hearts, through our desires, through His Word, and by His Spirit working in and on our hearts. How do we find God's will for our lives? Generally, we find direction in His Word. Specifically and individually, we find it first and foremost according to His Word, by faith, through prayer, by waiting upon God, by actively taking steps of faith, by studying His Word, through being involved in a community of faith, by obeying God in all areas of life, and by listening to the Spirit speak to our hearts through desires and indications that only a Christian can know. When we come to a place where we lack wisdom (and there will be many), we must ask God for wisdom (James 1:5), and we are to expect that He will supply it. If we are truly children of God, delighting in God, humble in heart, feeding on God's Word, and having no outstanding sin, we will know the leading of God as He speaks to our hearts. Often, His leading may not be what we expected, but we will find that what God accomplishes as we seek Him is much, much better than what our minds had initially conceived. We ought not to put a deadline upon God. While we wait, we can take the steps that He gives us to take so that we can proactively, in accordance with His already revealed moral will, seek out His individual will. We ought not to quench the Spirit with sin or rebellion or just a callous heart that is too busy or without the desire to listen. If we want to know God's will, He will show us what He wants. Jesus said that the sheep follow the Good Shepherd because they know His voice (John 10:4). Part of being a child of God is that we can discern God's direction, for He does speak to our hearts. Sadly, this sensitivity is mostly lost for many believers. They can't hear His voice above the crowd of other voices clamoring for their attention. Being ignorant of the Bible, they are vulnerable to a variety of imitations. Others have been deceived into thinking that they don't even need to listen for the voice of God because someone has told them that God doesn't speak anymore. Yet God is alive and speaking. I pray that He will teach us all to listen to, to recognize, and to obey His voice within our hearts. What is the Spirit of God speaking to your heart about?

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