

Have You Received Your Orders?

by Rich Tozour

Rich Tozour's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding one's calling and willingly serving God as a citizen of heaven.

Duration: 1:12:06

Scripture: Psalm 40:7-8, Psalm 119:105, Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 10:7

Topics: "Bible Reading", "Discipleship Commitment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of making a vow to God to read the Bible every day for at least five minutes. He emphasizes the importance of establishing a habit and how it can lead to a desire for more time with God's Word. The speaker admits that while he has been faithful in reading the Bible, he wishes he could say the same about witnessing. He encourages the audience to pay attention, take notes, and avoid passing notes during the sermon. The speaker also uses the analogy of a young man joining the army to illustrate the commitment and sacrifice required in following Christ.

Transcript

You're not saying so well when you're standing. I wonder how it would work if I preached a message while you're standing. No, OK.

We won't do that. So therefore, I need to have you make sure you sit up and pay attention. If you want to take notes, great.

That's good. I always like note takers. You can tell note takers, because they look things up in their bio, and they jot stuff down.

If they miss something, they look over. But you can tell note passers from note takers, because note passers, they try to be real slick about it. And they kind of do one of these numbers, and they pass the note down.

Or everybody else is watching while it goes down, heads are bobbing, and then you see them, and they're making eye contact. Now, don't pass notes, because if you do, I'll have to confiscate it, and we'll read it in front of everybody. But I'd love for you to take notes, and I hope you will, and hope it'll be a help to you.

How many of you remember seeing this poster when you were studying one of the World Wars in school? Anybody ever see that poster before? What was it used for? Anybody know? Yeah, recruiting people to

the United States Army. I want you for US Army. I want you to picture it's, oh, about the year 1940.

World War II began in 1939. Of course, the United States didn't enter the war until December 7, 1941, a day that will live in infamy. But prior to that, Britain was being pounded.

And the Japanese were on the move. The Germans were on the move. The Italians were moving.

And we were sitting. We weren't doing much. But we were beginning to get an army together, because it became apparent that we might get into this thing.

And it's 1940. This actually had been used as a recruiting campaign back in the First World War. And so now this recruiting effort came out of the closet and was being reused.

Let's call a young man. Name him Joe. Joe's walking down the street.

He's 18 years old. He really doesn't know what he's going to do in his life. And so he's walking down the road.

And one day, he sees this poster in the shop window. I want you for US Army. Yeah.

Yeah, that's it. Man, adventure. See the world, get paid to travel, learn how to use a weapon.

Yeah, I think that's the life for me. So it says their nearest recruiting station. He just happens to remember, yeah, there's a recruiting station right over by his high school.

So he goes over there, and he walks in and sees the recruiter. Hey, how you doing? You don't get to say anything. You just get to be the guy.

He says, hey, I saw that poster. It's in the shop window, and I think I'd like to join up. Recruiter says, hmm.

No, don't get this sort all the time. But he sees that Joe's a very eager story. He says, so where do I sign? He says, how old are you, Joe? He says, 18, sir.

You have ID? Yes, sir. Shows it to him. He said, all right.

You're of age. You don't even have to have parental permission, but you do need a physical exam. No problem.

Where do I go? Go back in the room there, and there's a physician waiting. He'll give you an examination. So he goes back, goes to the rig and roll.

The guy's 18. He's in great shape. He comes up.

He said I passed, so where do I sign up? The recruiter says, now, Joe, my job is to recruit. I don't try to talk people out of going into the Army, but he said, I've never had it so easy with a guy like you. But I want to tell you something.

Before you sign in this dotted line, do you understand the cost that you may pay in this endeavor? Do you realize that we may actually go to war? And if we do go to war, you will be sent to the front lines. And if you are sent to the front lines, you will use a real rifle with real ammunition, and you will be fired at with real ammo, real bullets flying past your head. Do you realize that you may come back home in a pine box? You

may give your life for the United States of America.

Do you understand that, Joe? Yes, sir. With that cost in mind, are you willing to put your life on the line? Yes, sir, I am. All right, Joe, take this paperwork, go over there, sit down, fill it out, sign it.

When you come back here, I'll shake your hand, and you'll be in. So Joe goes over, he sits down, he hastily reads everything, signs, they come back, he shakes hands, and he says, congratulations, Joe, you are now a soldier in the United States Army. Joe walks out of there, man, he is so pumped, chest sticking out, walks down the street.

Now, he's not wearing a uniform, but he feels like he's in. All of a sudden, his friend Sam comes down the other side of the street, sees him across the road and says, hey, Joe, buddy, how you doing? Oh, hey, Sam, doing fine. Thanks for asking.

Hey, what's come over you? There's a whole different air about you. I don't know, there's just something about your spirit. What's up? Well, maybe that's just because I just joined up.

Joined up for what? The Army. You're in the service? Pardon me, General, had I known, I'd have saluted. Hey, that's great, where are you going to go? I mean, where are you going to fight? Well, I don't know, Sam, they didn't tell me that.

I mean, we're not really in the war yet, you know. Well, that's true. So, where are you going for training? And who's your commanding officer? Well, I don't know, Sam.

Okay, so what are you going to be doing in the service? Are you going to fire a rifle? Are you going to be in communications? How may I help you? I mean, what are you going to do? Well, I don't know. Now, wait a minute, let me get this, General. You're in the Army, you don't know where you're going, what you're doing, or who you're serving under.

Are you sure you're in the Army? Now, I'd take the wind out of your sails. Let me ask you a question. Is Joe in the Army, yes or no? Yes, he is.

What's the problem? Well, the problem is he hasn't yet received his orders. In a matter of days or weeks, he will get written orders. Uncle Sam will send him a letter, and he will be told where to report and what to do, and who he'll serve under, and all that'll come.

And with orders will come, you're assigned to this company, this particular area. He'll find out all that. All he knows right now is he's in the service.

I've met young people from time to time, and asked them, what are you going to do with your life? Oh, I don't know, I just don't know. I got a lot of options. I kind of like this, and I like that.

Now, listen, nobody in the United States has much patience with draft dodgers. But the thing about this type of effort here is, this is not drafting. At this point, this was recruiting.

That's why it said, see the recruiting station. You had a chance to volunteer. You know, as citizens of heaven, you and I have an obligation to fight for our country.

I'm not talking about the US. I love America, and I'd gladly fight for our country, but I'm not talking about that. You're a citizen of heaven, if you know Jesus Christ as your savior, and you have an obligation, an

obligation to serve.

You say, well, I don't think God's called me. God doesn't draft, he recruits. And recruiting efforts are based on volunteers.

And I remember hearing the song when I was in high school, A Volunteer for Jesus. ■ A call for loyal soldiers comes to one and all. ■ ■ Soldiers for the conflict, will you heed the call? ■ ■ Will you answer quickly with a ready cheer? ■ ■ Will you be enlisted as a volunteer? ■ ■ A volunteer for Jesus, a soldier true.

■ ■ Soldiers have enlisted, why not you? ■ ■ Jesus is the captain, we will never fear. ■ ■ Will you be enlisted as a volunteer? ■ I heard that in our youth group, I heard it in our Christian school, and I thought, yeah. Yeah, that's right.

A lot of friends are saying, oh, I'm not called to preach. But how are you gonna know unless you volunteer? Tonight I wanna preach you a message entitled, have you received your orders? Have you received your orders? We're looking at Romans chapter 12 tonight. Romans chapter 12, I think it would almost be a sin to preach to teenagers without going to this passage.

Romans chapter 12, and I'm sure I won't be the first, nor shall I be the last, that you've ever heard preached from this passage. But I wanna have you stand as we read two familiar verses. Romans 12, verses one and two.

Romans 12, one and two. In fact, we'll read it aloud, and I'd love for you to quote it with me if you know it by memory. Romans chapter 12, verses one and two.

Would you say it with me? I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. You wanna know God's will for your life? Yeah, who doesn't? You ask a guy, would you like to know God's perfect will for your life? He's thinking, yeah.

Man, I wonder who I'm gonna marry. I wonder if I will get married. My mother says I keep acting like this, I probably won't.

I wonder if she's right. I wonder where I'm gonna serve. Man, I wonder if I'll go to college.

Hey, I wonder where I'm gonna live. Hey, I wonder how much money I'm gonna make. I wonder how many kids we'll have.

Man, I wonder if they'll like me. Now, you start thinking about all these things down the road, and it can get overwhelming. How do you decide God's will for your life? You know, up till you're in senior year of high school, everything's pretty much mapped out for you.

You go where you're told, you go to school, you do your assignments, or don't, and suffer the consequences, but you know, you're told. After that, it's decision time. Then what? If I asked the majority of you here tonight, do you know Jesus Christ as Savior, most of you would say yes.

May I say this to those of you who don't? You just heard Brother Kastner say a minute ago, 21 years old when he got saved, and it wasn't because he didn't know. You know, one of the most horrifying things to

me is to think of Christian school kids and church kids I've preached to over the years, all of whom know the gospel, but many of whom have never repented of sin, have never trusted Christ as Savior. I can't imagine a more horrifying thing than to go to hell knowing what you know.

It's not the time for this message. I'll maybe get to it another time, but there really is a hell. Real people go to hell.

And apart from the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, that's where I would have gone. That's where you'll go if you don't get saved. I plead with you, for your soul's sake, settle the matter of your eternal salvation.

I cannot imagine being in the horrors of hell saying, why didn't I listen? Why didn't I listen? They told me in my youth group. They told me in my church. They told me in my school.

Why didn't I listen? And forever regretting, but never having the opportunity to escape the fires of hell. Please don't blow off the message of the gospel. God who loved you gave you one means by which you could be forgiven.

It's simple and it's sufficient. It's the only way by which you can be saved. He wants to save you.

Many of you say, well, I've already done that. So what's God's will for your life? You say, what's that? I just don't know. I used to preach that every Christian is in the army of the Lord.

I had to rethink that because you know, God doesn't draft, he recruits. Every Christian is a citizen of heaven. Every citizen of heaven has an obligation to serve.

Every Christian ought to volunteer and say, Lord, here am I, send me. Every one of us ought to be in God's army. But what's his niche for your life? You'll never know until you surrender.

Let's bow our heads together in prayer. Lord, I thank you for the privilege to preach here. And these college kids above us are hearing the word from brother Will right now.

And I ask that you would work in these messages, both preaching that's going on here at this time. Lord, I ask that you'd open our heart to you. Father, it is so easy for us to do church.

Like out in California, they do lunch. People get together and say, hey, let's do lunch. We do church, I'm afraid.

We do youth conferences and prayer advances. We just go through the motions. You don't want us to do that.

I know you don't, but I pray we'd understand that you don't. I pray tonight that you'd peel back layers of callousness, layers of unsurrender. I pray that you would just get down to the root of the matter in our hearts.

Holy Spirit, you're God. You're the great physician. I pray you'd take the scaffold of truth and wield it through this servant that you might get to the heart of the matter tonight, each according to his or her need.

And please ward off Satan's interference from this place. In Jesus' name I pray, amen. Go ahead and be seated.

Thank you for standing. Joe will find out his orders and then he'll know where to go and what to do. What about you? What if I told you that you can know God's specific will for your life? You'd say, yeah, I'd like to know that.

Well, how do you get there? How do you know God's specific and certain will for your life? Well, we're gonna look at three basic principles tonight. They all begin with the letter D. So if you're taking notes, it'll be easy to follow. First of all, desire the will of God.

Notice here, Romans 12.1. Desire the will of God. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice. Sacrifice.

Interesting, the words living sacrifice. We'd call that an oxymoron. You ever heard that statement? Some of you are probably thinking, I've known a few morons in my life, but what's oxymoron? An oxymoron is a term of apparent contradiction.

You know, like you travel through Louisiana and you'll see signs, jumbo shrimp. I don't think shrimp, shrimp. You know, he's a shrimp.

What does that mean? Small, jumbo shrimp. You know, in athletics now, like in golf, they have metal woods. Metal woods.

That's an interesting term. So there are all kinds of terms that are apparently contradictory. You know, even like dry ice or military intelligence.

No, I'm just kidding. Okay, just maybe I shouldn't go there. All right, but there are terms that are apparently contradictory.

Now, a living sacrifice. A sacrifice in the Old Testament was something that was bound by cords, tied down to the altar, throat was cut. I mean, we're talking blood and death.

But this is a living sacrifice. What does that mean? We die to self, but we're very much alive to God's will for our lives. A living sacrifice.

Present your bodies, a living sacrifice. When Joe went to see the recruiter and the recruiter said, look, I love eager sorts like you, but do you realize there may be a sacrifice involved? That did not deter Joe from doing what he was gonna do. God wants us to desire the will of God.

But this term desire is not just chin-stroking curiosity. If somebody asks you, hey, do you wanna know God's will for your life? Hmm, boy, that'd be interesting. We're not talking about the way psychics do.

We're not talking about palm readers in the occult world. See, people out there would love to know their future. God's not into that.

What God wants to do is direct your future. Not just give you an idea of how are things gonna turn out. Because you see, your future is very much dependent upon choices that you make.

It's not fatalistic. Your future will depend upon things that you choose to do right now. And as I've said already, every decision you make affects the next decision you make.

In fact, my coach used to tell us, Christian school, used to say, you know, you will be what you are becoming. Have you ever thought about that? You will be what you are becoming. What kind of parent will you be someday? What kind of husband or wife will you be? Hey, tell me what you're becoming right now.

Are you a committed Christian? Do you read the Bible constantly? Do you memorize scripture? Do you witness to people about Christ? Do you have a prayer life? If you're that kind of person now, then most likely you're gonna be that kind of person as a spouse. But if you're mean, cantankerous, and self-centered now, guess what kind of parent you're gonna be? Guess what kind of spouse you're gonna be? You will be what you are becoming. Desire the will of God is not just, oh yeah, I'd like to know.

No, it's a commitment of the will. It's saying, Lord, I really am willing to present my body a living sacrifice. The word present is interesting.

The word present doesn't have to do with a one-time gift, like, okay, I come and present my gift to the Lord. But it's a term that was used for a constant presentation. It'd be like a nurse assisting a physician or a surgeon, and the surgeon says, all right, scapel.

She hands him a tool. All right, sponges. Hands him that.

She's ready at a moment of time to just hand him what he needs. Present your body as a living sacrifice. You're always on call.

You're willing to say, Lord, here am I, send me. Isaiah 6, 8 became my life verse when I was a teenager. Also, I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Then said I, here am I, send me.

And then in verse nine, God said, go and tell this people. The specific call for Isaiah there didn't come until he said, first of all, here am I, send me. So how do you know God's will for your life? Well, first, desire the will of God.

In fact, look at this with me. Psalm 40, and we'll come back to Romans, but go to Psalm 40 for a minute, verses seven and eight. Psalm 40, verses seven and eight.

Now, a lot of these scriptures I could quote to you, and I would do so to save time, but I want you to see them. I want you to mark these in your Bible. They're really important.

You ought to get these down as you're desiring and discerning God's will for your life. Psalm 40, verse eight. This is a Messianic Psalm.

It's one of the Psalms that looks forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. Look what verse seven says. Then said I, lo, I come.

In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God. Yea, thy law is within my heart. All right, notice, he says, I come.

It's written in the volume of the book. What's that mean? The volume of scripture is focused on a person. Who's this talking about? Jesus Christ.

This is a prophetic reference to Christ, the Messiah who would come. I delight to do thy will, O my God. All right, so the Messiah, it was said, delighted to do God's will.

Let's see that as quoted in Hebrews chapter 10. Go to Hebrews 10. Hebrews chapter 10, and notice this reference referred to in Hebrews 10, verse seven.

Hebrews 10, seven. Go from Psalm 47 to Hebrews 10, seven. Then said I, lo, I come.

In the volume of the book it is written of me to do thy will, O God. Now wait a minute. In Psalms it says, I delight to do thy will.

Here it says, lo, I come to do thy will. Well, they must have mistranslated it. No, not at all.

For you see, the Hebrew terminology, I delight to do thy will, is the same as saying I'm doing your will. It is a predetermination. God, whatever you say, consider it done.

My desire is such that once I know it's your will, it's already a done deal. I delight to do thy will. You know, a couple of you, one or two of you, have mentioned to me about, hey, yeah, I hear you used to be in rock music and stuff, and how'd you kind of get out of it? Let me tell you.

I was a heavy metal headbanger. I was into ACDC, Van Halen, Led Zeppelin. Who knows how much.

I had hundreds of dollars worth of rock music. I had amassed this collection over years. I had a paper route for the sole purpose of earning money to buy rock music.

I was an addict to rock music. I didn't know music was good or bad. I was growing up in a church that didn't even preach the Bible.

But about that time, my parents took us to a Bible-preaching Baptist church for the first time in our lives. No, one time we'd visited a Bible-preaching church. That day, my dad realized he needed to lead his kids to the Lord.

He led me to Christ that day. Four years later, now we start going to a Baptist church for the first time. And so some of the kids in the youth group came up to me.

Now, I had my hair grown down to my shoulders and real bushy. I was liking to be like rock stars. And I wore my black rock and roll T-shirts, and they came up and said, so Tozer, what kind of music do you listen to? Duh, I mean, I'm a walking billboard, you know.

There it is. I said, well, you know, heavy metal like ACDC, Van Halen, you know, Led Zeppelin. Now listen, I thought I was a good kid because I didn't listen to Ozzy Osbourne.

I didn't listen to Black Sabbath. Those were occult groups. Of course, my favorite group was singing, I'm on the highway to hell, hell ain't a bad place to be, and dirty deeds done dirt cheap.

Ain't that wholesome? So, but anyway, you know, we defend our things and we think we're good kids. They said, Tozer, don't you know that's bad? I said, what's bad? That music. I said, get out, what do you mean? They said, that music's bad.

I said, oh, come on, you guys like, you know, the Philadelphia Eagles and I like the Dallas Cowboys because my grandmother taught me to cheer for them when I was a kid. I said, so, you know, you got your football team, I got mine, hey, we can still be friends, right? They said, it's not like football teams, man. Music has a profound influence on your life.

Well, they were right, I didn't know that at the time, but music is not amoral. There are people in our day who like to say, oh, music's amoral, you know, it's just the words that make the difference. Go to 1 Samuel 16, read that chapter about how David takes an instrumental piece of music, the harp, plays on his hands, and Saul's refreshing as well, and the evil spirit departs from him.

It's just instrumental music, powerful. Well, I said, Lord, if you show me, if you show me this music's wrong, then I'll give it up. Now, listen, I was listening to rock music from the time I got up till I went to school, and from the time I went to bed till I came home from school, that's when I was in public school.

And now my friends, first couple of weeks in a fundamental Baptist church are challenging me, that's bad music. Interesting, about this time, my parents went off to this week-long seminar in Philadelphia. It was, at that time, called the Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts.

And they were going to the seminar, and they said, you know, Rich, the preacher on Friday night is gonna talk about music. And I grew up in a home where my parents listened to the Beatles and Barry Manilow and this kind of thing. And they said, we just learned that music is not neutral.

I mean, music is really powerful. And I thought, oh, great. Now, remember, I just prayed, Lord, if you show me the music's wrong.

So Friday night's coming, oh boy. So I went to the mall with my friends, the Depford Mall in Jersey. And my parents went off to the convention center in Philly.

They came home that night and they said, oh, well, actually, I got home and I saw that they'd beaten me there. And I thought, oh, man, my parents have been to this seminar and I got this latest ACDC album I just bought. Oh, man, I gotta hide it.

So I hid it outside. Now, you know, if it's not bad, why are you hiding it? So I hid it. And, you know, the wicked flee when no man pursueth but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Well, yeah, hide that music. I go in, hi, mom, dad, how you doing? Oh, rich. Hey, listen, you got a few minutes? Now, they pay the room board in tuition.

Let's see, do I have a few minutes? Yeah, I guess I do. So, okay, sure. They said, come on in, sit down here.

So I sat down on the couch. They said, I said, so did you have a good seminar? I didn't want to ask this question. They said, it was wonderful.

I said, they talk about music? Oh, yeah, you wouldn't believe. Did you know the Bible has over 500 references to music in it? I think I heard about most of them that night. I said, really? They said, oh, yeah, look.

And they pull out these notebooks and they got their Bibles and they start going through verses about music. And I want to tell you, the more they talk, the more I get convicted. It's like this load of bricks.

Because I had just told God, Lord, if you show me that it's wrong, I'll give it up. The Holy Spirit's convicted my heart. I'm in a corner now.

I've promised God. He made it crystal clear. I mean, there was no arguing my way out of it.

It wasn't like, yeah, but what about, I had no argument left. I said, excuse me, mom and dad. I get up, I went to my room, and the next thing my parents heard was kablam, crash.

I had dumped all the records and tapes on the floor. I was smashing vinyl records, ripping the guts out of tapes. And my dad came in, everything okay, bud? Yeah, dad, I'm crying.

I mean, this is my altar. I'm tearing down my idol. This is my, my God has fallen, okay? So I'm pulling this stuff out of there.

And my dad says, I'm proud of you, son. He goes out and he gets a trash can. We filled that thing.

Folks, this was my, I wanted to be a rock musician at one time. Couldn't sing real well, but you know, in that realm, it doesn't really matter. So I could have done it.

So we start filling up this trash can, and I'm crying, and my parents are saying, that's a boy rich, you know? And I took it outside with my dad, and we burn it. I mean, we burn it in the backyard. You say, man, why didn't you eBay it? Well, for one, there was no eBay back then.

For two, even if I could have eBayed it, if it isn't good for me, it isn't good for anybody else, is it? You know, if I were drunk, and some drunk, and I got convicted, I wouldn't give my Budweiser's away to somebody else. I'd dump them down the drain. Same with the rock music.

I burned the bridge behind me. And the Lord made it clear to me. Now, let me tell you, some of you may be there.

You know, you may be like me, even though you're in a youth group, and your friends are thinking, you listen to what? And you're thinking, what's wrong with these people? Back down, whoa, hold your horses. God wants your heart. Before you're ever going to see the will of God for your life, first you gotta desire God's will.

If you do not want to know God's will, I'm not listening, then you're not gonna hear it. God wants a surrendered heart. In fact, he says in Psalm 37, for delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Let me tell you what happened. Got rid of the rock music, and for two weeks, I listened to no music, because all I cared about was rock. And I used to listen to WMMR and WYSP out of Philadelphia.

And I didn't listen to any music. For two weeks, all I listened to was KYW News Radio 1060, Philadelphia. And KYW, that's news, you know? So I knew about all the corruption in the mayor's office.

I knew about every murder in Philly, and it got depressing. And after a while, I thought, I gotta have some music. So one day, I sneaked, snuck out, yeah, snuck out to the mall, and I bought the same ACDC album that I destroyed that night before it ever got out of the wrapper.

But this time, I bought it in cassette form so I could sneak it in the house. And I'm unwrapping it, and I'm sticking it in the cassette player, and I'm about to get my fix, because it really is an addiction, just like drugs are to addicts. And I was about to push the play button, and the Holy Spirit just convicted me.

Rich, if you go back to this, you know you'll never get free. Oh, I know, oh! Took it out and gutted it again, smack. This is twice I bought the same record, never listened to it.

I said, Lord, you gotta help me. The only kind of music I like is rock music. I don't really care about this church music.

I mean, it's okay, but I can't have a steady diet of it. Well, you know what? Some of my friends had said, yeah, you know there's this new stuff out, it's called Christian rock. I thought, if it's rock, it's not Christian.

If it's Christian, it's not rock. And you know, that lie has really rooted itself in our society, but let me tell you, if it's rock, it's not Christian. And this whole CCM movement, I was not gonna get sucked into that, because I knew, look, God wants us to burn our bridges behind us, not just repave them with something different.

So I said, Lord, you gotta help me. That week or the next, I came across Psalm 37.4. If you delight in the Lord, he will give you the desires of your heart. You know what I realized? He's not saying that if you delight in him, oh, yes, I love God, I love him with all my heart.

Hey, what about that million dollar scratch-off ticket I'd really like to win, God? Could I have that, please, huh? If I delight in you, could I get the million bucks, huh? God is not a genie in the bottle. What God is saying is, if you delight in him, he will either fulfill desires that are God-given, or he will change desires which are flesh-driven. He will either fulfill desires that are God-given desires, or he will change desires that are flesh-driven.

Heavy metal was a flesh-driven desire. Let me tell you what one of my friends said recently to me, and this is really good. He's a pastor, and he said, you know when I counsel people about so-called gray areas in your life? Mine was not a gray area.

But if you go to some area that people wanna defend, he said, I always like to ask this. Well, first of all, before we discuss the matter, number one, and youth leaders, this really works well. If what you're defending right now were proven to be offensive to God, would you be willing to give it up? If what you're defending right now were proven to be offensive to God, would you be willing to give it up? If they said, well, no, I don't care, then there's no sense discussing it, because they're not gonna be persuaded anyway.

The second question, well, since you say, it's no big deal, in quotes, why not give it up for two weeks and see what happens? Since you say, well, it's no big deal, see if they can give it up for two weeks. You see, because many times, it's not a matter of whether it's right or wrong, it's a matter of addiction. And I went two weeks, and I'll tell you, I couldn't make it two weeks until I found that promise.

And I said, Lord, you promised to give us the desires of our heart. And I began to pray, Lord, if this music's wrong, and you want me to give it up, and I did that, then you've gotta help me like the right kind of music. And I began to listen to wholesome, godly music, the kind of music we've sung tonight, the kind of music the group has sung tonight.

I listened to that steadily. And you know what? I like it. In fact, I love Christian music.

On our way here, Brother Will's wife, Christy, beautiful singer, and also an accomplished violinist, I was listening to her CD. Now, Christy Galkin is polished, and she is ultra-conservative Christian music. I like it.

How did I go from heavy metal headbanger to that? Supernatural. God changed my desires. I'll tell you this, I disciplined myself to listen to the right kind of music for about one month.

Just made myself do it for a month. By the end of a couple weeks, I was starting to, you know, it's okay, yeah, it's okay. I mean, it's not ACDC, but it's okay.

And then after a while, I started to think, what was I thinking? I mean, these guys that I was following, they're singing about perversion and immorality and everything else. And listen, everything I'm listening to here is encouraging me to have wholesome thinking and build me up in Christ. There really is a war in the media because of the prince of the power of the air.

And I don't just mean the news media, I mean the medium, the media, the different mediums through which you hear things, see things. So, God wants your heart. He wants you to desire the will of God.

Look at this in John chapter seven. John chapter seven. That question, if the thing that you're defending were proven to be offensive to God, would you be willing to give it up? That is really a foundational principle.

It's in John seven, verses 16 and 17. John seven, verses 16 and 17. Some Jews had approached Jesus and saying, you know, this man's ignorant.

He was never formally trained. And what right does he have to tell us what to do? Notice his response, verse 16. Jesus answered them and said, my doctrine, teaching, my doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself. That is a really important principle for knowing whether something's right or wrong. If any man will do his will, what's that mean? Will do his will.

That has to do with the will. It has to do with the heart. If any man will do his will, okay, Lord, I'm willing to do it, even though I may not like it, then he shall know the doctrine.

Remember Jesus said, or it's Psalm 40 said of Jesus, I delight to do thy will. In Hebrews it says, I'm come to do thy will. In other words, it's not, well, I delight to do your will as long as it's not too costly.

No, no matter what it costs me, I've made up my mind. I will do your will. When I said to God, I'm willing to give up the rock music if you show me it's wrong, there was no backing out.

I had committed myself to it. That's where he wants you. Lord, if you want me to be a preacher, okay, I'll do it.

Man, that was another issue I had to cross. Ninth grade year, the next year after I'd surrendered to the rock music, in fact, months after I'd surrendered to the rock music, the Lord began to impress in my heart the surrender of my life's vocation to him. I began to see that God was directing me possibly toward a preaching ministry.

And I gotta tell you something, preaching was not on the top of my 1,500 things I considered doing in life. I was scared to death to get up in front of people and talk. It's amazing.

You talk to your friends in the lunchroom, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, no problem. But you have to get up in front of them and give a book report or something. I mean, your mouth goes dry, your hands become wet, and your knees start knocking.

Now, how does that happen? Nerves. USA Today listed the 10 top fears of man a few years back. Number one? No, number two fear, top fear, death.

You know what was higher than that? Public speaking. Man, that was mean. I thought, no, I'd rather die than speak in public.

Now I do it all the time, and I love it. Because if you will surrender your agenda to God, if you'll surrender your will to Him, if you say, Lord, I'm really willing to do what you want, then He will make it clear whether that is His directive for your life or not. He'll make it clear whether that doctrine is just the pastor's opinion or if it's indeed the will of God.

And you better listen. Desire the will of God. But notice the second thing, and that is determine the will of God.

Determine the will of God. As I said, in the case of Joe, he goes down to the recruiter, he sees that poster and he thinks, yeah, that would be great, serving the army. Yeah, he wants to do it.

When he understands the cost, he still says yes. But then his friend Sam asked him, so where are you going, what are you doing, who are you serving under? He doesn't know, because that's the next step. God says the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his way.

The steps of a good man are ordered, step by step. God doesn't give you His will in a five-year planner. Okay, and this year you'll do this, and a few months you'll go here and then there, and then five years from now, here's where you'll be.

None of us see that far down the road. The Lord says, go to now, you'd say, today or tomorrow, we'll go into such a city and buy and sell and get gain, continue there a year. Whereas you know not what is on the morrow, for what is your life? It's even a vapor that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away.

James chapter three, verses 14 and following. So God says, your life is vapor, it's just, you don't know, but I know. So you just let me lead you, and I'll lead you step by step.

That's all you need to know. Wow. How do you determine the will of God? I remember hearing a preacher one time, he was talking about trying to find God's will for your life, and he said, some of you think finding God's will is like looking for a lost child.

Will of God! Will of God! Hello! He got down on the platform, he's looking around for stuff, he's hunting through things, he's going through his coat pocket, he's searching his pockets. Will of God! Where are you? Will of God! Hello! Will of God! Woo! Everybody's looking at him like, is this preacher flipped? He said, folks, it is not that hard to find the will of God. He's not hiding it from you.

Well then, how do I find it? You gotta find it by following his map. Find it on his terms. See, we all want God to put him on our terms.

He says, present your bodies a living sacrifice. First step, if there is anything you're not willing to do, then you're not ready to know God's will. See, most of us approach God like this.

Kind of like, we take a piece of paper, we fill out everything we'd like to do. Okay, I'd like to do this, and this, and this. Okay, God, that's what I'm willing to do, and we sign our name.

If that's okay with you. That's not okay with God. Well, okay, let God put on there whatever he wants me to do, and then, if I don't like it, I'll just kind of do line, item, veto.

You know, I don't like that one. Go to Africa. No, no Walmarts in Africa.

Forget it, forget that. I'm not doing that one. And then you gotta get veto power.

No, it doesn't work that way. You know what God says? Sign your name to the blank sheet of paper and let me fill it in. He wants you to submit wholeheartedly a living sacrifice.

When you do that, then you're in a position to start determining the will of God. So how do you determine it? I came up with five principles by which you can know God's will. First of all, claim the promises of God.

In parentheses, I put the word prayer. Significant that you would come to a prayer advance. You know, if you're gonna advance spiritually, you've gotta do so on your knees.

You advance through prayer. Claim, but don't just pray just to fill. Praying is not just filling the room with words.

Dear God, thank you for this day. Thank you for the sponsors that would give up their time, their vacation to come with us. Thank you that the guy I sat with in the back there didn't smell so bad, thank you.

Prayer is not just filling the room with words. Prayer is talking to God. And specifically, prayer is claiming the promises of God.

Like what? I remember when I was debating, well, would I go to college? And I thought, yeah, I think the Lord's calling me to preach, I need to go to a Bible college. And then, okay, where will I go to college? There were a number of options. I considered a number of different places.

And I got down with the college catalogs on my knees and I said, now, Lord, I'm debating. And a couple of different schools in my mind, I said, okay, Lord, I'm thinking about this one, thinking about this one, I don't know. And we had just made a trip to Pensacola Christian College in Florida.

I was leaning that way, that's where I ended up going. But I ended up saying, ah, Lord, I don't know. I'm thinking this, but I don't know.

So I claim the promises of God. Let me just say at the outset too, sometimes when you hear somebody went to a certain school, you think, well, they think everybody should go there. Not me.

I was blessed to go where I went. But if everybody went where I went to school, the whole world wouldn't fit there. God has a specific will for your life.

And just because your pastor went a certain place, just because your parents went a certain place doesn't mean you ought to go there. Just because your friends are going there doesn't mean you should go there. So you pray, you get along with God.

It's a personal leading of God. Claim the promises of God. So here's what I did.

And I'm gonna mention to you some promises and you can jot them down. For instance, I'm on my knees by my bed. They're in my room in New Jersey and I'm saying, Lord, you tell me in the scripture, Psalm 23 verse one, the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want, Lord, you're a shepherd. I need direction. You tell me in Proverbs three, five and six, trust in the Lord with all thy heart.

Lean not into thine own understanding. I don't wanna do that. I don't wanna lean on my rationale.

I wanna trust you. In all thy ways, acknowledge him. That's what I'm doing here.

And then you promise, he shall direct thy paths. You tell me in Proverbs 16, three, commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass.

You tell me in verse nine, a man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directed his steps. Proverbs 16, nine. You tell me in James one, five, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that shall be given him.

Lord, I need clear direction about Christian college. Is this right? That's how I prayed. Now, if you didn't get some of those references, jot them down.

Psalms 37, five. Psalm 37, 23, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Proverbs three, five and six.

James one, five, ask of God if you're lacking wisdom. Psalm 23, one. Tons of scripture.

Proverbs 16, three and nine. Lots of scripture that promises God will give you direction. You do not have to make a decision arbitrarily.

See, I was in college at a time when a book came out called Decision Making and the Will of God. And the author was saying, well, you know, God's will is not specific for your life. There are kind of this sphere and you've got choices A, B, C, D and E in this sphere.

And any one of those you pick is right for you. Now, where do they get that from? Do you think God's just arbitrary and God's saying, well, you know, if you wanna do whatever you do, that's fine. Look, folks, God knows exactly how he's wired you.

He knows exactly who you're compatible with. He knows exactly what would be best for your education. And it's amazing because sometimes we think that particular guy went to that school and he turned out that good.

I don't see how it happened. But God knows just where we are, when we are, and he leads us step by step. And he's perfect in his timing and he's perfect in what we're ready to handle.

So claim the promises of God. B, hearken to the word of God. Letter B, hearken to the word of God.

And in parentheses, I put devotions. Bible reading, Bible heeding. Okay, not just reading it, but heeding.

Devotions, quiet time. So prayer and then Bible reading. Let's see, I'm gonna, I wanna have a guy help me.

Can you help me here in the front row? What's your name? Anthony. Anthony, come on up, Anthony. You can be my helper tonight.

You like crowds? Okay, good, you're a perfect guy then. All right, Anthony, I want you to start right over here. You don't have to say anything.

Okay, so I want you to start right here. Now I'm gonna direct you somewhere. All you gotta do is take the right steps, all right? First of all, I want you to turn toward that organ over there.

I want you to take five paces toward that organ, would you? Good, I want you to take a half a turn, face that clock back there. Okay, now those are my notes there, Anthony, and I'm gonna sit down and I want you to, I want you to finish the message. No, that's all right, I'm just kidding.

I told you I wouldn't make you talk. Now, had Anthony known I was gonna have him come up and preach the message, you think he would've come up here? No, okay, that's why I was glad he didn't. All right, thanks, Anthony, you can go sit down.

If God showed you and me five years from now, you're gonna, I'm gonna marry her? Oh, I don't think so. Probably more often than not, it'd be the girl saying, I'm gonna marry him, I don't think so. Now remember, they mature more slowly than you do, so they'll, you know, give them time.

The pimples will pass, the immaturity will pass. Some of you, if you knew five years from now who you'd be married to, you'd say, oh, no way, Jose. But you see, God doesn't show you five years from now.

You're not ready for that yet. So what does he say? The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. That's in Psalm 37.23. Now, thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, Psalm 119.105. In Bible days, they didn't have flashlights.

They would use little lanterns. And to free up their hands, they would take these little lanterns, they were filled with oil, had a wick in them, and they would strap them around their ankle. They were called foot lanterns.

And a foot lantern would give you enough light so you wouldn't break your neck. So if you're about to step off a step, you'd say, whoa, you can see this much. Now, you can't see from here to the piano, but you can see enough for your next step.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. You say, well, how can I be sure that I do God's will? One of those ways is be in the book every day. Personal devotions.

You know, it is to your own peril that you neglect the Bible. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet. I'll read the Bible, what, once a month? Well, in church.

Now, listen, the Bible has taught us, Jesus taught us, in fact, man shall not live by bread alone, but by what? Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. So if man doesn't live adequately just by mere physical bread, in fact, God says spiritual food is needed for the spiritual man, for the soul. Okay, give us this day our what? Daily bread.

Now, your body was designed that you need physical food daily. That's why, even though this is a serious thing, a prayer dance, we got spiritual stuff going on, we still make time to eat three times a day. But we can do a lot with those three meals a day.

But you need food. You know why? Yesterday's food does not suffice for today's activities. But a lot of people approach the spiritual, I think, well, my pastor's a good preacher.

I don't care how good your preacher is. Sunday sermons will not carry you through the whole week. Well, my pastor preaches an hour, great.

You ever sit down at a Thanksgiving feast and you just mean, oh, you just couldn't fit another. Oh, I guess we'll go watch the Cowboys. Dad, you don't like the Cowboys.

Oh, I know, but I like eating and I'm gonna sit down and watch the Cowboys. So he goes out there and he's watching a football game and about seven o'clock that night, you hear your mother, honey, what are you doing? He's in the refrigerator. He's rummaging around, just looking for that leftover turkey.

We ate at two o'clock. Didn't you say you were stuffed? Yeah, woman, that was at two o'clock. I'm hungry.

And he's in there and he's making this Dagwood sandwich. She said we had enough turkey to fill a ship. Well, that was then.

It's always better a second time around. And he's building himself a big sandwich. And what's he doing? He's starving.

By the way, the women are just saying the next day, it's Black Friday. It's retail heyday. They all go out shopping to the mall.

Let's go by the food court, girls. Oh, I ate so much yesterday. Yeah, me too, but we've been walking the mall.

They'll go and they'll sit down and they're all eating. Now think about it. We know that yesterday's food is not sufficient for today's activity.

That's why you need personal daily devotions. Give us this day our daily bread. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

If Panera bread sounds enticing when you walk through the mall after you've been tired and hot and worn out from all these sales you're getting to, how much more your soul is starving for food from God's word because you live in a hot, filthy, spiritual world that's hostile to Christians. You need time with God. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.

I'll light unto my path. So you claim the promises of God. You hearken to the word of God.

I made a promise when I was a teenager. I went to that same seminar with my parents the next year after I'd given up the rock music. The preacher was talking about making a commitment to read your Bible daily.

I'd never done that. I knew I should read the Bible every day. In fact, I tried, but I just figured, oh, I'm not that disciplined.

He said when he was a young man, he made a promise, in fact, a vow, a vow to God that he'd read the Bible daily. He said, now, you know, the Bible says better is it that thou shouldest not vow than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Vows are serious things, but they're not bad.

This ring represents a vow, till death do us part. You know, he said, I made a vow to God that I'd read my Bible every single day. He said, but what I did is I said five minutes a day.

Because five minutes will give you enough to get a habit established. And then you'll find you want more than five minutes. But if you'll establish a habit, it'll grow from there.

I thought I could do that. So as a 15-year-old boy, I made God a promise. I'll never turn the light off at night and go to bed unless sometime during the day I've read my Bible at least five minutes.

Well, I made that decision when I was 15. I'm now 39, 24 years have passed. I've never missed one day, never once in 24 years reading the Bible.

Now listen, I wish I could tell you that about witnessing. I wish I could tell you I've never missed an opportunity to witness. I can't tell you that this month.

I try to witness to somebody or at least give out a tract some way, get the gospel out every day. But I don't always. I wish I could tell you I've prayed every day for 24 years.

I can't tell you I've prayed every day in the last 24 days. I've tried. I keep a record.

I keep myself accountable. I have a consistent prayer life. But there've been some times this month I fell asleep on the job, the prayer job.

I'm supposed to be spending time with God and I fell asleep. So I don't want you to think, oh, he just must be this incredibly disciplined human being. No, I'm not.

But Jesus said one thing is needful. What was it? Mary chose it, sitting at Jesus' feet, hearing his word. I determined there was one non-negotiable in my daily habits.

That is quiet time with God. I cannot go to bed at night, no matter healthy or sick, no matter whether I'm dog tired or not. I cannot go to bed at night unless sometime during that day I've spent some time in God's word.

You know what I found? I went from five minutes to 10 to 15 pretty fast. And then it was sometimes a half hour. By my junior year in high school, I was spending an hour and a half reading and studying my Bible.

Not because anybody made me, because I got a hunger for it. Some of you say, oh, I don't have any interest in the Bible. You're a spiritual anorexic.

You know what anorexia is? Person neglects food because they think, you know, they think they're overweight, even if they're not, and their stomach shrivels and they lose their capacity or their desire for food, and they're starving. Well, they got to get out of that. What do they do? They have to make themselves eat.

Some of you say, I don't have any desire to read this book. First of all, if you're not saved, you're dead. Dead people don't have a desire for food.

You need to get saved. That's why you don't have a desire for it. But if you are saved, you say, I'm saved, but I just don't desire.

You're a spiritual anorexic. You've neglected it so long that you've lost your appetite for it. Make yourself feed on God's word.

The desire will come back, and you'll begin to thrive spiritually. So hearken to the word of God. Daily devotions.

Claim the promises of God. The third thing, receive godly counsel. Receive godly counsel.

In the parentheses, I put the word authorities, authorities. I want you to go with me to Proverbs for a minute. We're going to do just a brief Bible study.

And when I say brief, I mean just two minutes. But I want you to look at Proverbs 11, verse 14. I want you to notice, circle, highlight, somehow identify in your Bible the word counsel in these verses.

Counsel. Instruction is a companion word, too. You may see that word.

But notice the word counsel. Proverbs 11, 14. Where no counsel is, the people fall.

But in the multitude of counselors, there is safety. Now, counsel is people giving you advice. Advice that's intended for your good.

Go to chapter 12, verse 15. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. What is a fool? A fool is a person who acts as if there's no God.

In fact, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. So the fool doesn't want to be counseled. He thinks he's right.

Have you ever met a person, they think they're always right? Well, if we're honest, a lot of us think we're most of the time right. Be careful, because you can be like a fool real quickly. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.

Oh, she told me, I mean, I'm not a fool or something. And you know, you can think you're right. But notice God says, the person that hearkens to counsel is wise.

A wise person is not the person that never needs advice. The wise person is the person that says, you know, that advice is for my good. And I can see the point that person made.

Yeah, they're right. Go to chapter 15, verse 22. 15, 22.

Without counsel, purposes are disappointed. But in the multitude of counselors, they are established. All of us need good counsel.

At this point in my life, there are a number of folks I counsel with. My pastor, my parents, my parents. You're 39, you got kids of your own.

Yeah, but I'll just call and say, mom and dad, I'm thinking about making this decision. What do you think? Just bounce the idea off them. They're my counselors.

You know, I don't call into mom now and say, hey mom, okay with you, I stay up past 11. By the time I get around to making the call, my mom be long in bed anyway. No, I'm a man.

I have to make my own choices, but I still honor my parents. Their counsel is valuable to me. It ought to be valuable to you.

Listen to this one. Go to chapter 19, verse 20. Proverbs 19, 20.

Hear counsel and receive instruction that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. There are many devices in a man's heart. Nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

A wise person is a person who listens to counsel. Go to chapter 20, verse 31. Proverbs 20, verse 31.

I'm sorry, there is no 31. Let's see, 21, 30. I inverted that, sorry.

21, chapter 21, verse 30. There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord. Now what's that mean? There's no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.

I mean, I think about Ahithophel who left David to go with Absalom and he was a wise counselor, but all of a sudden now David knew, boy, this is trouble. Ahithophel's with Absalom and boy, we're in trouble. So he prayed that God would bring his counsel to naught.

Yeah, well, that counsel was certainly against David. It was certainly against the Lord. There's no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.

Meaning what? I remember dealing with this when I was pursuing the issue of a life's mate. Back when I was in high school, we didn't know a whole lot about the whole process of choosing a mate. I mean, back then people said, you know, you just date around and you find the right person.

Well, I had a lot to learn. And so there was this girl in Christian school. I took a lot of interest in.

I'm gonna change the names to protect the innocents in this story. I'll call her Sandy, not her real name, but Sandy and I really hit it off. I liked her.

And we were both seniors. We had a class of 13. And I thought, you know what? This is a girl for me.

We're going off to the same Christian college. She wants to serve the Lord. We graduated co valedictorian.

We were voted most likely to succeed, best Christian testimony award in our school. Remember, we had 13 people. That wasn't too hard to do.

But anyway, I thought we are on the same page. And so she and I started spending time together. I go over to her house with her family.

She'd come over to my house. And after a while, my parents said, you know, and again, this is like my second, we've been in a fundamental church about three years now. My parents said, you know, you and Sandy are really becoming an item.

I said, yeah. They said, you are emotionally attached. Well, I didn't know what that meant.

I said, what do you mean emotionally attached? They said, well, you were just, to me, emotions were, that's the girl, you know, and I'm the guy and I'm not emotionally attached. They said, you're emotionally attached. You're blinded by this infatuation.

You can't see it. I said, it's not infatuation, it's love. They said, it's not love, it's infatuation.

And she's not the right girl for you. I said, what? They said, you know, you need to back this down. You need to slow down your heart, slow down your emotions.

I didn't compute all that. That's why my parents relearned a whole bunch of stuff about guy meets girl. So finally, they said, you know what? We didn't want to have to do this, but you haven't gotten the message.

So we want you to break off this relationship. I was 18 years old. I mean, she and I were not doing anything wicked.

I thought she's the girl for me and my parents told me, break it off. What would you do? The Bible says, honor thy father and thy mother. You say, yeah, but man, you're 18.

Listen, 18 is not the magic number in the Bible. God didn't say, well, when you get your driver's license, which, you know, whatever age that is in your town or state, 16, 17, well, in Jersey, it was 17. Some of you, 15.

You know, it's not when you get your driver's license, you're on your own. It's not when you turn 18, well, I joined the military. You can join the military, but you can't rebel against your mom and dad, according to God.

You know, 21, yeah, I have to drink when I'm 21. God didn't say that. Where do we get this idea that when you're 18, all of a sudden you're independent? Listen, God says, honor thy father and mother.

That commandment was not written to kindergartners. The commandments were given to adults. I mean, did God say to kindergarten kids, thou shalt not in any wise make unto thee any graven image? I mean, they have a hard enough time with Plato, let alone wood and making statues.

Did God say to children, thou shalt not commit adultery? No. So who are the commandments given to? Adults. You're to honor your father and mother.

I wanna tell you something. If you're not right with your parents, you're not right with God. You've got to be right with mom and dad.

Your parents are your chief counsel at this point in your life. They are given for your good. You say, my parents aren't even saved.

They're the parents God gave you. What do you think of your parents are telling you, wrong counsel? I'll tell you about that. Look at chapter 21, verse one.

Proverbs 21, verse one. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water. He turneth it whithersoever he will.

What does the king represent? He's the highest authority in the land. The God says, and many of the kings of Judah and Israel were wicked men. God says, the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.

He turns it wherever he wants. Whithersoever he will. Just like God causes rivers to meander this way and that, God turns the heart of the king.

Yeah, but my parents, they don't listen to God. Neither did many of those kings. I broke it off with Sandy.

We went off to the same Christian college. I was upset with my parents. I didn't like their counsel.

I moped and sulked all summer, which wasn't honoring my parents. Even though I'd broken it off, I'd obeyed them, I didn't honor them. We got to the same Christian college and it wasn't very long before I realized we were going two different directions.

I was called to full-time ministry and she wasn't. And that's not wrong, it's just we weren't heading the same way. I was also establishing some godly principles and standards in my life.

She wasn't convinced of that. And so as time went by, I began to see my parents were right. It's amazing, the older you get, the wiser your parents become.

It is amazing how that happens. The things your parents learn between the time you're 15 and 21, it's just amazing. But you know, as you begin to mature, you begin to realize my parents are wise.

And so I saw, I could have married the wrong girl. So I went through college and I thought, well, I'm gonna find the right girl. And I figured by the time I'm a junior in college, I'll know who she is.

And so probably get engaged at the end of my junior year and get married right when we get out in my senior year. Well, I got to my senior year and there was no girl. And I tried, you know, I'd asked them to this event and that event, I got to know lots of girls, but there wasn't Miss Right.

Some of my friends said, did it ever occur to you that God brought Eve to Adam when Adam was asleep? I said, what does that got to do with this? They said, you're trying too hard, you're out there. I said, what about the verse that says, whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing. They said, did you not know that that means like walking down the street and all of a sudden you find a \$5 bill and say, hey, look what I found.

You weren't looking for it, you just found it. That's the word, bozo. Real kind friends, Hebrew scholars that I had.

I said, oh, well, God began to convict me. I was trying too hard. Got to my senior year and I didn't wanna have senior panic.

That is, you've gotten to your senior year, you don't wanna leave without a mate. So the first thing that comes along in a skirt, snatch her up so you can marry her cause you don't wanna go home single. Well, I wasn't gonna do that.

So I said, Lord, I won't press the issue and I won't try to pursue a relationship with anybody unless you bring her my way. Well, I was asked to travel for a college singing group and I was the preacher with the group. She was the soprano.

I will call her Mary, not her real name because she is the innocent party in this story. And Mary and I traveled together and man, I thought, wow, that girl can sing. She loves the Lord.

She's beautiful. Oh, she plays the piano. Wow.

I thought, what a deal. God just dropped her in this group. I didn't ask to travel with this group.

I got put in this group. There she is. I was asleep and God brought her to me.

So we got back to college and I started going with her to church services and this and that. And my parents had moved to Florida by this time. My dad was working on a master's degree at the school in Bible.

And they saw me with her and they said, notice you're hanging out with Mary So-and-so. Yeah. Spent a lot of time with her, aren't you? Yeah, what do you think? Well, we noticed you haven't asked that up until this

point.

I thought, oh no, this doesn't sound good. I said, so what do you think? They said, well, oh no. They said, you know, she's a nice girl, but we don't think she's for you.

Ay-yi-yi. Now I was sure because I'm the oldest child that my parents had concocted the perfect way to prevent empty nest syndrome. They're just not gonna let me get married and then they'll never have an empty nest.

There you go. So no girl would ever be good enough for their little boy. I was the only boy in the family.

I said, what do you, you don't even know her. My mom, who has incredible discernment, said, no, I know we don't know her well, but she's not the girl for you. I said, oh.

I said, so you're telling me I need to break this off? No, but we're telling you that if this came to the point of marriage and you asked us, could you marry her, we couldn't give our blessing. Well, that was a huge red flag. It should have stopped right then.

But I said, well, will you pray about it? Don't negotiate. When God's saying no, don't try to cut deals with God. It's just like Balaam and Balak and, you know, can I go curse him? No.

Okay, God said no. Well, go ask him again. Well, can I go curse him? All right, but you can only do, God was not negotiating with Balaam for, because God changed his mind.

He was testing Balaam. I began to negotiate. I said, can we pray about it this summer and just ask God to give peace? See, I did believe this principle, Proverbs 21.1. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.

And as the rivers of water, he turns it with her so every well. If God was in it, I knew he could change my parents' heart. I just needed time.

So I said, all right. They said, we'll pray about it. By the end of the summer, we'll make a decision.

All summer, I prayed, they prayed. I wrote her letters. I prayed.

She wrote me letters. We prayed. God, please change their hearts.

Change their hearts. End of the summer, what do you think? They said, well, you know, we see she's a good girl and you're really convinced about this. So we believe that maybe we were too harsh and you may pursue it.

I said, but I've got to have your blessing. If I got married, could I get your blessing on it? Well, if it comes to that, we don't see why we could. Yes.

Oh man. So it didn't sound real impressive and convincing, but you know, it was good enough for me. So I went out to see her family.

You know, I got out there to her home state and now her parents didn't have peace. I thought, oh yeah. Talk about a double death of a vision.

Here are my parents. Now her parents, oh man. When's the end of it? I began to pray.

Her parents began to tighten the screws. All right. You guys are calling way too much.

Just one phone call a week. I'm now a college graduate. I'm out making my own money and I'm calling her.

She's back at school. They said too many phone calls. Okay, now just one phone call.

No, no more phone calls, just letters. It was getting ugly. This went on for 15 months.

And the more and more I'm falling in love, the more and more the signs are not, the indications are not looking good. Finally, I said, Lord, I've got to have an answer. And I did finally what I should have done at the very beginning.

I took some time to pray and fast. For two days, I fasted. I said, Lord, I've got to know one way.

You know, in fact, I was here in Virginia and I was walking down some railroad tracks somewhere. And I remember saying, Lord, you know, I know I could be wrong about this. And if I'm wrong, then don't let me hang myself.

I don't want to live with wrong choices the rest of my life. But Lord, you and I know I'm right. So would you please change your parents' hearts? Now I'm telling you, that's exactly how I prayed.

I was really convinced she was the right girl, despite all the opposition. I had scripture. Hope deferred to make up the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.

You know, and whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing. I wasn't hunting, God dropped her in my group, and I met her that way. And you know, I mean, I had scripture.

You know, having scripture doesn't mean it's God's will. You can twist scripture, Satan does that all the time. I fasted and prayed for two days.

I was telling the college kids this earlier. After those two days, I wasn't getting anywhere. I didn't feel like I was any closer to an answer.

And there was an olive garden across the street, wherever I was, somewhere on I-81. And I saw that olive garden, I thought, that's it. This fast is getting me nowhere.

And I love Italian, I'm going to eat. So I went over to the olive garden, and I sat down, and I'm thinking, I'm miserable. You know, I don't have an answer, and all this.

I get back to the hotel room. This is back when I was a college representative. My parents had tracked me down, and the phone rings, they called me.

Mom, Dad, how'd you find me here? Asked my supervisor, was there a problem? Everybody okay? And as we talked, I said, so what is it? They said, well, we want to talk to you about you and Mary. Is she okay? Yeah, she's fine. Well, what is it? Well, Rich.

We just don't have peace. What? I thought you guys came around. I thought, you know, you could give me the blessing and all that.

They said, Rich, listen, you're 23 years old, and you're going to make this decision. You must make this decision. We're not going to make a decision for you.

But we're just going to tell you that if you marry her, we believe you're going to make the biggest mistake in your life. Wow, what would you do? 23, making your own money, living on your own. And in my mind, I'm thinking, honor thy father and thy mother.

But honor doesn't mean I have to agree with them. That's right. You don't have to agree with them.

But I also know all those references we looked at about hearing counsel, receiving instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. They're all coming back to me now. Receive godly counsel.

I said, so you're saying you'll never be able to give the blessing on this? You know, because permission isn't good enough, mom and dad. It's got to be your blessing. They said, we know, Simon.

We appreciate that. That's your principle. And that's true.

We'll never be able to give your blessing. I said, then when I hang up, I will call her immediately and it's over. They said, honey, we're not telling you you have to.

But we're telling you that we believe this is true as your parents. I said, mom and dad, I know you love me and I know that you're not trying to make me miserable even though I am. And I said, it's over and I'll let you know.

I called her. We talked. We cried.

It was over. I hadn't seen her in three months. I was traveling.

And she said, you know, Rich, it's okay. We both agreed if our parents couldn't give their full blessing, we would never go ahead with it. Now let me tell you something.

Truth will cost you something. That's why Proverbs 23, 23 says, buy the truth and sell it not. There's a price tag attached, but you will never regret the investment you've made in truth.

And as tearful as that was, I broke it up. Oh, I agonized. I'll tell you, I flopped across the bed that night and sobbed like I'd just gone through a death.

A few weeks later, I got back to college. It wasn't any easier. She was pretty much over it.

She was kind of, hi, how are you? Moving on in life, and I was devastated. You know, and she's not a bad girl. You know, if I were to tell you what she does now, she's a Christian school teacher.

It's not like she grew up to be a drug addict. But my parents saw some things, and they were right. It's amazing.

For the next four months, I took interest in no one. My friend said, so when are you gonna find a girl? I said, I'm not getting married. They said, what? I said, I'm not getting married.

There's nobody my parents would ever approve of, and obviously, God's put this big stoplight in my life, and so it's obvious I'm not getting married. They said, Rich, you being single is about as likely as the Pope getting married. You're not gonna be single the rest of your life.

They said, why don't you ask Angela Westberg out? This is this girl I knew that traveled with Angela in the ensemble group. I said, she was the piano player. I said, well, she's a nice girl, but my parents would never go for it.

Why don't you try? So I went home that night and I said, Mom, Dad, my friends are asking me about interest in Angela Westberg. You know that piano player? They said, now, she's a nice girl. You should have been thinking about a girl like that a long time ago.

I thought, this is my parents. I can't believe it. And I'll tell you the rest of the story as I wrap this message up, but let me give you another principle, because I am now 23 and a half, 24 years old by this time.

Already, in my mind, I should have been married two years ago, okay? But God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Here's another very important principle. Wait on God.

In parentheses, put the word patience. Wait on God. Psalm 27, 14.

I had fainted, verse 13 says, I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Verse 14, wait on the Lord. Be of good courage.

He shall strengthen thy heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord. Psalm 37, seven.

Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Psalm 40, verse one. I waited patiently for the Lord and He inclined unto me.

Psalm 62, five. My soul, wait thou only upon God. My expectation is from Him.

Lamentations 3, 25. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him. Isaiah 40, 31.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. On and on I could go. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

I don't know about you. I hate waiting. I don't like waiting.

I don't like stoplights. I'm gonna come to a stoplight. It only lasts 60 seconds, but I'm thinking I got stuff to do.

Come on, let's go. You know, and wait, wait, wait, wait. And I always wonder why does the doctor want me to show up a half hour ahead to fill out all his forms when he's not gonna show up till three hours later? Why do I have to wait? God'll make you wait.

He'll put you in His waiting room. Man, I wanted to be married the minute I got out of college. I actually wanted to be married when I was 15, but I knew that really wasn't gonna happen, so I'd have to wait till I was 22.

But then I went married when I was 22, and I thought, what's going on? What, God, hello? Wait on the Lord. God's not on your timetable. And you know, my pastor used to say major changes come slowly, but they occur suddenly.

Major changes come slowly, but they occur suddenly. It'll astound you sometime how your world will change in a moment. The fifth principle is in waiting and knowing God's will is this.

Live by integrity. I put character in parentheses. Live by integrity.

If you look at Proverbs 11, there are two verses that make this crystal clear. Proverbs 11, three and 11, five. Verse three, the integrity of the upright shall guide them.

Verse five, the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way. Let me perhaps shock you, but there are some things you don't need to pray about. Huh? There are some things you don't need to pray about.

What do you mean? Well, pastor, I like this guy and you know, my parents aren't really against it. He's not saved, no, but he's so nice. You know, he's got such, he's, I mean, he's so mannerly.

I mean, the boys in the youth group, I mean, they have bouching contests and stuff. They're like so gross. And this guy, he's so mannerly, he treats me just, you know, he'll come around.

You don't have to pray about it. The answer is no. Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

But he'll get saved. He may get saved for you. And by the way, he may get saved.

We've all known stories of people. They got married. One was saved.

One wasn't. The other one ended up getting saved. Well, it worked for so-and-so.

Well, you know, if my neighbor jumps off a bridge and somehow survives, I don't say, well, it worked for him. The law is you don't do it. Just because somebody did it and it worked out doesn't mean it's right to do.

Live by integrity. If you have to violate Bible principles to do it, it's not God's will. It may happen.

You may do it, but it doesn't mean it was God's will. So I said, all right, I've asked my parents and they're in favor. Now, I've got to track down Angela's parents.

Her dad's an evangelist. How am I gonna find him? He doesn't have a phone. This is before cell phones were common.

He didn't have one. I thought, well, he has an itinerary, all the churches he'd go into. But if I go up to her and say, Angela, can I have your dad's itinerary? She'd say, why do you want his itinerary? Oh, because I want to call him up and ask if we can be a thing, you know? And I just didn't seem real suave.

So I thought, how am I gonna do this? I prayed, Lord, if you want me to pursue this with Angela, I need to meet her parents. So I remember saying, Lord, you can put us together. I don't know how you'll do it, but I'm not going anywhere until I get her parents' full approval for this.

I've got mine. I was out on the road for a week. I would ask these pastors in different churches, do you know the Westberg family? Oh, yeah, they've been here for meetings, great family.

Finally, I was up in Maryland and Pennsylvania. I was asking these churches, you know the Westberg family? Oh, great family. I got to this one church in Westminster, Maryland.

It's a very small church with a very small pastor, Pastor Alan Fluge. He was about four foot 10. And Pastor Fluge had 12 children and he pastored a church of about 40, I guess.

So his family was half, well, almost half church. And so I met him that day and he's a character. I mean, this guy was a kick to be with.

So I was talking to him, I said, you wouldn't happen to know the Lars Westberg family? He said, why? Why? You know, just asking. Why do you want to know? You got an interest in one of their daughters? I said, I was just asking if you knew the family. You do, don't you? Pretty girls, those girls.

I said, I was just asking. Well, huh? Maybe. Ah, I thought so.

And I said, so you know the family? Yeah, I know them. He said, in fact, they're going to be at my church tonight. I thought, yeah, right.

Now I know he's a pastor and I know I shouldn't think that way, but I'd already sized the man up and I already figured out he is just, this man is just yanking my chain. So I said, what do you mean they're going to be here? He showed me the bulletin right there. They were, that night.

I said, your church tonight. Guess where I went to church that night? Despite Pastor Fluge. I went to the church, the Westbergs were there.

We went out, we're big spenders, all of us. We went out to McDonald's that afternoon. And, or after church.

No, that afternoon I took her brother, Michael, who was 13 years old at the time. I was 23. I took him out to this milkshake place and bought him a milkshake.

I said, so tell me about your family, Michael. That was fun. And that night we go out.

Michael, by the way, is now my partner in ministry. We go out that night with her family. I told them everything they could ever want to know in my life story.

I told them about all the times that my parents said, wrong girl, wrong girl, all that. I said, so it comes down to this. Mr. and Mrs. Westberg, what I've learned through this whole thing is that dating, as it's practiced in the United States, is a bad deal.

I don't care what you call it, but I think the whole idea is boy meets girl is all about not liking somebody. It's finding out, is this the person that I'm to marry? That being said, I'm not asking if I can marry your daughter, but could we pursue an interest that if God led to the point of marriage, you know, could we take it step by step? Were you willing to do that? They said, yes. I thought, whoa, wow.

First of all, God providentially led me to meet her family. And then they said, we've talked to Angela about it. We had a feeling this conversation was coming.

And yes, you may. Wow, that night when I left, my future mother-in-law said, that guy's gonna marry our daughter. And you know what, when I asked her dad if I could marry Angela, piece of cake.

Because I'd already been through, don't tell him that either, by the way, if you ever meet him. But it was a piece of cake. Because you know, I'd already taken the initiative from the outset.

God's will will be revealed to you through his word, through prayer, through godly counsel, through waiting on God, and by living by integrity. Five critical principles. You know, you said there were gonna be three things.

It was desire the will of God, determine the will of God. Oh, the last one is really simple. I'll sum it up with a statement.

Do the will of God. Do the will of God. You know, it really wasn't hard to do when I knew I was supposed to marry her.

Hey, when can we do it? That was the right timing. Old Joe goes out to conflict, finally. U.S. gets into the war.

He's sent to the beaches of France. All of a sudden, they've just come off the amphibious landing machines there. And the commanding, the sergeant says, hit the dirt! Joe and his buddies, they're down on the deck.

But not Bubba. Bubba's hit the dirt so many times. He is so tired of this loud mouth sergeant just mouthing off.

They gotta clean their boots every time after they gotta clean the rifles. So Bubba says, hit the dirt. Every time the man says, hit the dirt.

And Bubba doesn't do it until all of a sudden, pfft, pfft, pfft, pfft, pfft. German machine gunner gets him, and guess what? Bubba hits the dirt. Boom! For the last time.

You see, Jesus spoke the parable one time. It's real brief. He said, whosoever falleth on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

What's that mean? Jesus is that rock. You can either voluntarily fall and be broken at his feet, or someday you'll be broken because you don't submit. Do the will of God.

James 1.22, be ye doers of the word, not hearers only. James 4, verse 12, he that, 17, sorry. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.

To know to do right but not do it is to your disadvantage because it is sin. Do the will of God. Some of you don't need a message on how to find out God's will.

You just need to do it. Some of you need to get saved, and you know it. I mentioned that at the outset.

When are you gonna do that? On my terms, then you never will. Because God says, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation.

You know what God says, but you're blessed when you do what God says. I liken it to this. The will of God is not something you discover.

It's something you do. The will of God is not something for you to discover. Ooh, I wonder what God's will is.

He's not interested in a curiosity hunt. He wants you to say, whatever it is, God, it's done. I'll do it.

You see, we could say it this way. The will of God is exactly what you would choose for your life if you had all the wisdom God does. The will of God's exactly what you would choose for your life if you had all the wisdom God has.

Would you stand with me as we bow our heads before the Lord tonight?

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