

2016-01-17 Guidance Sermon V5 – Todd Misfeldt

West Valley Presbyterian Church

- Title: Discerning God’s Will - No Secret Plan
- Verse: Micah 6:6–8 (ESV)

6 “With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

8 He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of us
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? ⁱ

How Do We Know the Will Of God

- What do we think of when we hear “**Will of God**”? Is it something mysterious that we need to work at to discern? Perhaps we are **like the person** in the Micah passage that Steve Norment just read, **God’s will** is something that **we need to do** in order to obtain, or perhaps bribe God to get it.
- Micah gives us the answer in verse 8.
 - If we want to know God's will for our life, here it is, the Bible. God has already told us.
 - Philip Cary says “The will of God for your life is justice, kindness and a humble walk with him. Nothing more is required of you.” ⁱⁱ
 - What Micah says is true. God’s will is in Scripture and whatever we think God’s will is, it must not contradict Scripture.
- There are times when we are somehow **not satisfied** with that answer. Is there a **feeling inside** of us that there is more to knowing God’s will than that?
 - This can be a feeling of anxiousness because our question about God’s will is very specific. Maybe it is a **BIG** decision:
 - Is this the person God wants me to **marry**?
 - Does God want me to take this new **job**?
 - Does God want me to divorce my **spouse**?
 - Those are **big decisions**. Somehow we feel as if we need to work hard to find the answer to these questions. That is what the person in Micah 6:6-7 wanted to do.

- However we will note that vv. 6-7 are all about me, what can I do?
 - In Micah's solution in verse 8 it says "what does the LORD require of us." It is **about God**, what **He** has said, and not about what **we want**.
 - Notice that Micah is saying that the things that the Lord is requiring of us include: "walk **humbly with your God**" (Mic. 6:8).
 - To walk with God is to obey His commandments and **Jesus' instructions** and to do it **humbly**—without grumbling or thinking we know better than God.
- None of this is new or novel. We **already know** this. We only need to **practice** what we know. That is why this sermon is titled *Discerning God's Will - No Secret Plan*.

Our Anxiety

- There should be no anxiety about this. But if we are facing a major decision, the anxiety can still be there. We somehow feel that we need help to make decisions at times. We feel that we need **God's wisdom**.
 - Phillip Cary asks why do we feel the **need for God's wisdom** in our decision?
 - "The **concept of wisdom** is what every method for finding God's will leaves out of the decision-making process. It's left out precisely **because** the project of finding God's will is an attempt to guarantee that we won't make a mistake. All such guarantees are falsehoods, attempts to short-circuit the hard work of acquiring wisdom."ⁱⁱⁱ
 - To guarantee that we won't make a mistake, we want to **push** the decision back on to God. We know that we can **deceive** ourselves. We need **discernment**.
- The reality is that **we may make a mistake, we are only human. It is our dependency upon God that is important.**
- Glen Scorgie writes
 "We are too capable of self-deception and rationalization. Thus, discernment is both a matter of attending to the witness of the Spirit and of allowing the **light of Scripture** to shine on our own hearts to test and confirm that indeed the movement of our hearts is the witness of the Spirit."^{iv}

Shining The Light on God's Word

- **How** do we do this—let the Spirit shine the light of Scripture on our hearts?
 - First, we must **know** God's will and Second we must **practice** following it.
 - God's will is given in scripture. Knowing God's will is not a onetime study but rather it is a process. The Spirit will help us recognize God's will in the Bible—just ask for the Spirit's help.
 - Let's be reminded that if we don't practice following God's will in the **small everyday** activities of our lives, **what makes us think** that when it comes to the **big decisions**, we will follow it?

More likely we will say “oh, this is close enough or God is silent so I will do what I want.”

- If we do practice following God's will, **we will gain trust in God** and His will—His plan for us.
- **Trust** is the third aspect of knowing God's will. We must **really trust** God's will, and we must be practiced in following God's will. “Practiced in God's will” is to recognize His help or His previous involvement in our lives and recognize and remember it as a good thing.
 - Following God was demonstrated by Abram (aka Abraham). In Genesis 12 it says:

12 The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.
... ⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him.^v

That is trust. That is obedience.

- **Trust** is important because what is best for us is not always obvious to us. C. S. Lewis told a **parable of a dog** whose leash got hopelessly wrapped around a pole.

“The dog eagerly scampered down the sidewalk, followed by his master holding his leash. The dog sniffed all the way around a sign-post, and then tried to continue on ahead, not realizing he'd looped his leash around the post. His **master gently pulled back** on the leash, trying to get his dog to retrace his steps and get the leash unsnarled. The **dog strained forward** with all its might, wanting to move on ahead and **not understanding** why he was being asked to halt. Now this was a **dutiful dog**, and he soon realized he must **submit** his will to his master, even though it made no sense to him.”^{vi}

Doesn't this **describe us** at times—we pull against the leash. We want to do **what we want** and we cannot understand what God sees and why God isn't behind us. But we—like the dog—**need to submit** to God, our master.

- **Fourth**, we **adjust/react** to God's plan. In the CS Lewis parable, it is not enough **to know** how to get the dog untangled; we must also **act to become untangled**.
 - God's revelation of His will is an **invitation** for us to join Him. When we conform to God's will we begin to better **understand** God. We begin to think like God thinks. We see what God want us to do.
 - This is what **Jesus did** with God's will. John 5:19:
¹⁹“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”^{vii}

If Jesus did this then **so should we**.

Hearing God

- What is it like **when we hear God's voice** telling us His will? A few years ago WVPC did a great study called Experiencing God by Henry Blackaby and Claude King. I'm going to quote from him.
- Blackaby notes that **when God spoke** in Scripture: (Blackaby,73)^{viii}
 1. It was usually **unique** to that individual
 2. The person **was sure God** was speaking (i.e. Moses ex 3:14)
 3. The person knew **what God said**
 4. The person knew that the encounter was **with God**

In my experience, God speaking this way is **not an everyday experience** and it is a **glorious** gift when it does happen.
- Most of the time God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and **in many other ways**. These include through
 - **Scripture** - It gives us God's will (Blackaby,84)
 - **Prayer** – God responds to our requests and questions. (Blackaby,87)
 - A **gentle whisper**, vision, dreams, and others. (Blackaby,73)
 - **Circumstances** (Blackaby, 95)
 - **Through the Church** (Blackaby,105)

- **Thinking** that God has spoken to us is **not enough**. We **should confirm** that what we heard was in fact from God through a **different form** of God speaking to us.
 - God's voice can be CONFIRMED through
 - **Scripture**
 - **Prayer**
 - **Events** - Chance encounters
 - **People** - Sometime is it obvious to those around us what God wants us to do.
 - Foster relates the story of St Francis

“St. Francis. Francis, it seems, was in “**great agony of doubt**” about whether he should devote himself only to **prayer and meditation**, which was a common practice in those days, or whether he should also engage in **preaching missions**. Wisely, Francis sought out counsel. “As the holy humility that was in him did not allow him to trust in himself or in his own prayers, he **humbly turned to others** in order to know God's will in this matter.” He **sent messages** to two of his most trusted friends, Sister Clare and Brother Silvester, asking them to meet with one of their ‘purer and more spiritual companions’ and **seek the will of God** in the matter. Immediately, they gathered to pray and both Sister Clare and Brother Silvester **returned with the same answer**. ... Christ had revealed that ‘He wants you to go about the world preaching’ ” (Foster, 180).
 - St Francis is **an example** of using people around us to confirm God's will.
 - Members of your small group
 - Trusted Christian friends
 - Spiritual Directors
 - Foster notes that we should look for **unity** rather than majority rule in the guidance that we receive (Foster, 182). If we seek confirmation from three sources, they should all agree.
- Once we have discerned God's will, we should **feel contentment and confirmation**.
Ask yourself: Do I Have a Sense of Peace and Assurance about this Decision?
 - Philippians 4:6–7 says

⁶Do **not be anxious** about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the **peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, **will guard your hearts** and your minds in Christ Jesus. ^{ix}

Caution

- There are a **couple of cautions**. There are some wrong ways of trying to sense God's will.
 - If what we think we hear has been **expressly forbidden** in Scripture, it is not from God. God is **consistent** and will never contradict Scripture.
 - The word of God will be **not be based primarily** upon experience → it should be **based on your understanding of God** in Scripture (Blackaby, 75).
 - Blackaby says we should **not** (Blackaby,74):
 - **Look for** open and closed doors
God often works by opening and closing doors as we come to them, but we should be careful not to make this our **primary means of guidance**.
 - Just because a door is open **does not mean** that we should go through it.

This is like the **farmer** who wanted to be an evangelist. When he saw a cloud formation that looked like "PC," he took it to mean "Preach Christ" and left his farm, never thinking that it could also have been interpreted as "Plant Corn."

Blackaby says "The 'throwing out the fleece' approach is rarely valid. It is easy to misread circumstances and interpret them in ways that flatter **our preconceived plans**."

In 2 Corinthians 2:12–13 Paul found this out: ¹²Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had **opened a door** for me, ¹³I still had **no peace of mind**, because I did not find my brother Titus there. **So I said goodbye** to them and went on to Macedonia. ^x

- A final caution is to **ask God to stop us if we are wrong**, i.e. I will proceed in this direction, **close** the door if it is not your will.

This way is **not in scripture** and it puts the whole **burden of responsibility on God**.

Last Step

- God may not tell us everything. “God always gives a direction **on the front end but** He may not tell us all we **want to know** at the beginning,

but He will tell us what we need to know to **take the first step** of obedience. Examples of this are Noah and Abraham getting just enough direction to proceed.

Our task is to **wait** until the Master gives us instructions. **Don’t start ‘doing’** before we have a direction from God. If we do, more likely than not, we will be wrong. (Blackaby, 74-75).

- When we hear God’s will and it is confirmed, our next Step: **Respond** (Blackaby, 78). Just do it!
 - What responsibility is attached to the knowing of God’s will? → The doing of it.
 - Don’t question as Moses did with God and the burning bush (Ex 4:14-16).
 - God **honors our choices** and desires our unforced love; He does **not overpower** or coerce us. He will not force us. **We** need to respond.

Jauncey says "God never burglarizes the human will. He may long to come in and help, but he will never cross the picket line of our unwillingness" (James Jauncey).

If we love God, know His will, and trust Him, we **will follow** His will.

Conclusion

- We want to be in the will of God

A place of safety outside God's will is too risky a place for any child of God to contemplate.
--Sam Higginbottom

- We have seen that **when God speaks** to us directly, we will know.
- We have seen that God’s will is **in the Bible** and whenever we hear God’s voice, He will **never contradict** Scripture.
- When God speaks to us and we **want to confirm** that what we are hearing is God’s will, **God will confirm** what we have heard through scripture, prayer, events, and the wisdom of others.
- Obtaining guidance from God is **not difficult** but it does require **practice**, and at times patience.
- Remember, any effort that we make to hear God better is **worth a thousand** times the cost.

Because as Dante says:
IN HIS WILL is our peace.

DANTE, *The Divine Comedy: Paradise*

Prayer

Dear God. We thank we that your will is so **transparent**. We thank we that it is **no secret** but that it is there **for everyone to see**. We thank You that You have **sent** the Holy Spirit to us to help us discern Your will for our lives. We thank You for **Your Holy Word** which shows us Your will and reminds us of **Your power** to bring it to pass.

Give us the **same wisdom** that Solomon asked for in 1 Kings that You would give us, your servants, an understanding mind and the ability to discern between good and evil.^{xi}

You are our wisdom and our vision.

In the name of Jesus, our Savior, Amen.

ⁱ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2001), Mic 6:6–8.

ⁱⁱ Why we don't have to 'find* God's will for our life

No secret plan by *Phillip Cary*, Christian Century October 5, 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Why you don't have to 'find* God's will for your life

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^{iv} Gordon T. Smith, "Discernment," ed. Glen G. Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 405.

^v *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ge 12:1–5.

^{vi} <http://blog.cslewis.com/parables-for-pilgrims/> (accessed January 15, 2016).

^{vii} *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 5:16–20.

^{viii} Blackaby, H. T., et al. (1990). Experiencing God : knowing and doing the will of God. Nashville, Tenn., LifeWay Press.

^{ix} *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Php 4:6–7.

^x *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 2 Co 2:12–13.

^{xi} *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 1 Ki 3:9.