

REAL QUESTIONS, BIBLICAL ANSWERS: How do I know God's Will? Romans 12:1-2¹

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you this morning. For those of you that are guests with us today, whether you are in the room or joining us online, we say a very special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, I have the privilege of serving as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to be able to connect with you. You can let us know you are here in a couple ways. You can text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, a reply text will be sent with a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you.

Or you can stop by the information center in the lobby area. We have a gift we'd like to give you there. Again, we look forward to connecting with you.

SERIES INTRO:

Today we are beginning a new series of sermons that we have entitled, "Real Questions, Biblical Answers." This Summer, we fielded questions from you and have selected some to answer of the course of the next few weeks. Some of them are theological questions and others are very practical questions. Ultimately, my prayer is that we learn how to drive everything back to God's Word. So, that's what we are going to do over the next several weeks.

Today, we are tackling a question that seems to be at the heart of every believer. How Can I Know God's Will for my life? If you are not currently asking that question, certainly you have in the past and most likely will ask that again in the future. Or, in the same vein, you might be asking, "How do you know if you are following God's plan?" Same type of question. This is a top 5 question. It seems to be a reoccurring question asked of Pastors all over the world.

We are going to look at several verses today, but I'd like you to mark your finger in Romans, chapter 12. It is my goal, to do my best to answer the question before us and I want to so in a few different ways. First, I want us to discover the Biblical teaching regarding God's Will, then I want to talk through a

few ways we tend to confuse and distort the Will of God, and then I want to talk about practical ways that we can position ourselves to make wise and godly decisions.

There are many different views of God's Will. For some people, it is like a hidden Easter egg that we have to go and hunt and find. For others, the Will of God is a something that is viewed as the opposite of fun. For something to be in God's Will it has to be something that I don't want to do. There are others that approach God's Will by trying to coordinate a list of coincidences. They walk down the street, a map flies into their face, and their nose lands on China. God must want them to be a missionary in China. And there are others that think that God only has one will for our lives and that if we were to somehow miss it, at any point, we are doomed and forever outside of the will of God.

I don't know which view you align with, but the desire for us to be in, quote, "the center of God's Will," is often something that drives us. So, naturally, we want to know how to know God's Will for our lives. And I would say at the core, that is a good thing. It is important to be obedient to God's leading in our lives and the desire to achieve that is evidence of our love for God. But I believe we have overcomplicated God's Will, and I hope to bring clarity today.

Do God's Will is presented in Scripture. In Psalm 143:10, David prayed a prayer and said, "*Teach me to do your will...*" Now, notice that David didn't ask how to KNOW God's will. He rather wanted to be taught to DO God's Will. Jesus lived His life in pursuit of God's Will. The Apostles, in the early Church, were pursuing God's Will and direction.

Regardless of the view we are inclined to have, life is filled with endless possibilities. And when we are presented with an opportunity, it often creates confusion, anxiety, and indecision.ⁱⁱ What should I major in? Should I get married? Who should I marry? What job should I take? Should I spend this money? Where should I go to church? What should I be doing with my life? I'm retired, what now? What does God want me to do? So many questions!

And we are taught Jeremiah 29:11 from the earliest we can remember. *¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* Wonderful we say! What are those plans?! How do I know if I am living out those plans?!

MESSAGE: Let's first begin our study by looking at...

1) The Biblical Teaching About God's Will

Scripture presents God's Will in two forms. There is God's Sovereign Will and then God's Prescriptive Will. These are the only two mentioned in Scripture. Let me define those for us.

A) God's Sovereign Will

Sovereign means supreme rule.ⁱⁱⁱ So, to say that God's Will is sovereign means that it is supreme, absolute. In other words, it is already determined. The Sovereign Will of God is inflexible, it will come to pass. There is nothing anyone can do to thwart that. So, when God says something will happen, it does. It's His Sovereign Will.

There are a couple of biblical examples that come to mind on this. One example is Jesus' crucifixion.^{iv} We often think that if Judas wouldn't have sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver that Jesus wouldn't have gone to the cross. But the cross was God's plan, His Sovereign Will. Nothing was going to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. Why? Because that was the very act that purchased atonement for sin. It was always God's plan to do that.

Acts 4:27-28 shows us this truth. *²⁷for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, **whom you anointed**, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸**to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined** to take place.* This is God's Sovereign Will.

Another Scripture reference teaching this truth is Psalm 135:6. ***Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.***

Another reference to God's Sovereign Will. Matthew 10:29-30. *²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.* Our days are numbered by God and held in His Sovereign Will.

Guess what else is in God's Sovereign Will? Christ's return. The Bible tells us that Jesus is coming again and that He will establish a New Heaven and a New Earth and there is nothing that can prevent that from happening. Amen?!

The knowledge of God's Sovereign Will ought to bring comfort to you and me. When we have to make big decisions, we can know that no matter the decision we make, we cannot ruin God's ultimate plans.^v You and I are not that powerful. That's God's Sovereign Will. The second form of God's Will is...

B) God's Prescriptive Will

This is the part of God's Will that He asks His people to do. God's Prescriptive Will is the way He wants us to live.^{vi} There are places in Scripture that very plainly talk about God's prescriptive will.^{vii} Let's look at a few of those.

1 John 2:15-17. *¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but **whoever does the will of God** abides forever.* What is the will of God here? To follow His coming to not love the world and it's ways.

Another passage. Hebrews 13:20-21. *²⁰Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹equip you with everything good that **you may do his will**, working in us that which is **pleasing in his sight**, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. What is God's Will?* To do what is pleasing in his sight.

One final passage. Deuteronomy 29:29. *²⁹"The **secret things** belong to the Lord our God, but the **things that are revealed** belong to us and to our children forever, **that we may do all the words of this law.*** The secret things this verse refers to God's Sovereign Will, but the things that are revealed refers to God's Prescriptive Will, His commands for His people written in His Word, The Bible. And what are we to do with what God has revealed? Do them. Obey them. This is God's Will for us.

With God's Sovereign Will, there is no choice. But in God's Prescriptive Will we can choose not to obey.

Now, when we want to know God's Will for our life, truth be told, we are not really interested in God's Sovereign or His Prescriptive Wills. We, rather, want to know God's specific plans for us. So, does God have a specific plan for our lives, a specific purpose? Yes. Does He expect us to know that prior to making

decisions? No. Perhaps you are now thoroughly confused. Allow me to point to two passages of Scripture to give us clarity.

First, Romans 12:1-2. I asked you to mark that place in your Bible for this morning. The two passages I am going to take you to are the two passages I turn to anytime someone asks me how to know God's Will for their life. Let's look at Romans 12.

1 appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [That is a command. That is God's Prescriptive Will. There's more. Verse 2...] ***2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*** [again God's Prescriptive Will. Why do that? Keep reading], ***that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*** How do you know God's will? You first walk with him. Become a living sacrifice, pursue holiness, don't be conformed but be transformed. Then, when we are that, we discern God's will for our lives.

Go back to Jeremiah 29:11. This is the famous "God's Plan for your life" passage. But let's look closer at it. ***1For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*** God know the plans, the specific plans, He has for you. That's the first part of the verse. But look at what plans. Plans for welfare and NOT EVIL. In other words, plans for your good that is rooted in the pursuit of holiness. And when we pursue God in holiness, we have a future and a hope.

The problem in knowing God's Will is that we, as humans, often confuse and distort things. And when it comes to God's Will for our lives, it is no different. Before I give you practical ways to make wise decisions, I want to highlight ways that we often...

2) Confuse and distort God's Will.

The reason I want to point this out is because we need to avoid the confusion in this area. When we talk about God's Will for our lives in a distorted way, we can actually do harm to ourselves and others. Let me give you three ways we distort or misuse God's Will.

A) We Over Spiritualize God's Will.

I want to be in the center of God's Will. I want to make sure it is God's Will. I need to know what kind of cereal God wants me to eat. Before I share the Gospel with this person, I want to make sure God wants me to do that.

Listen, I can clear that one up for you real quick! It is always God's Will for you to share the Gospel. You know how I know that?! Because it is a part of His Prescriptive Will. Acts 13:47. ***47For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*** God has already willed that to take place. And by the way, God prefers Frosted Flakes. Just kidding.

I think we can all recognize that there are areas that we over spiritualize God's Will. The second way we distort God's will is that...

B) We Weaponize God's Will

What I mean by weaponizing God's Will is using it like a trump card. I remember in college when I told a girl I was hanging out with that it was God's Will that we break up. Who can argue with that, right?! That wasn't God's Will, that was my preference that I wrapped up in God's Will. I weaponized it.

Sometimes we will say, God told me to tell you... Be careful. We ought not presume to speak for God unless we are certain it is from Him.

So, we over spiritualize God's Will and we Weaponize God's Will. Thirdly, ...

C) We Disguise God's Will

Often, when we proclaim something as, quote, "It's God's Will," we are really taking something we want and making it align with God. We are great justifiers. We think because something is easy, or because something will make us happy, or we think we will find fulfillment that it is God's Will for us.^{viii} But try telling that to Paul when you get to Heaven. What about the apostles?

Wouldn't we all agree that it was God's Will for the Apostles to launch, build, and expand The Church?! Yes, of course! It was anything but easy for them! Were they happy about it all the time? I guarantee you they were not.

Paul encountered obstacle after obstacle. The Apostles gave their lives for The Church. What about Jesus. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane? He's praying as He's sweating drops of blood on His way to the cross. What does

He pray? “If it’s possible, Father, let this cup pass from me, yet not my will but Your will be done.”^{ix} No way we would say the cross was easy for Jesus. But we would all agree that it was God’s Will.

Now, I’m not saying that God won’t make His will obvious for us in how He coordinates certain things at times. But make no mistake, God’s Will for our lives is anything but easy. God’s Will for our lives is not to make us happy or fulfilled by the things of this world. Hear me, I’m not saying that God’s Will makes us unhappy, you see, I’m just saying that we can’t disguise our own happiness and fulfillment as God’s Will because it makes life easier for us.

So, we understand God’s Sovereign and Prescriptive Wills and we don’t want to confuse and distort God’s Will. So, how to do we navigate life and do so in a way that we understand God’s leading? Let me give you...

3) Practical ways make godly decisions.

There are three specific things that I want to share with you that I pray is helpful to you. First, ...

A) Be Rooted in God’s Word.

To be able to see The Lord’s leading in our lives, we must position ourselves to know and be obedient to God’s prescriptive will. We should not expect to hear or receive wisdom from God if we are not in His Word.

Romans 12:2 told us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That happens by being in God’s Word. It shapes our hearts and our thinking to know and to carry out God’s Will in our lives.

Doing this will allow us to leave our personal desires at the door and avoid the trap of weaponizing or disguising God’s Will. Psalm 37:4 says, *“Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”* When we delight ourselves in The Lord, we align our heart with His heart and then He gives us that heart.

In order to know God’s Will, we have to be rooted in and aligned to His Word. God will never lead contrary to His Word. How you know if something is from the Holy Spirit or not is by measuring that up against God’s Word.

Secondly, ...

B) Seek Godly Counsel.

The best way to seek godly counsel is to be prayerful and seek the advice of people that are living their lives in a way that honors God. Find mature, dedicated followers of Jesus and ask for their advice. That’s important because people give advice based on who they are. If they are worldly, it will be worldly advice. If they are godly, it will be godly advice. Mentors, parents, pastors, friends, church members, etc. Invite them to pray with you.

Now, you are responsible for the decision you make, and you should not rely solely on what others say. But you will have input from others that care about you and desire to help you follow The Lord’s lead.

Be rooted in God’s Word, seek godly counsel. Thirdly, ...

C) Enjoy the Journey.

God wants to weave a beautiful tapestry with your life if you’ll allow Him. If you’ve ever seen a tapestry, they are beautiful works of art. But if you ever look at the backside of a tapestry, it’s a hot mess. Sometimes all we see is the backside of the tapestry, but one day God will give us a glimpse of the front side. Stay faithful. He will lead you on a journey and at some point, you’ll look back and see His work. Don’t fret in the angst of the decision, rather enjoy the journey The Lord has you on, even if it’s hard.

CLOSING ILLUSTRATION: Softball Tournament

When I counsel people about God’s Will, I often tell a story of an event in my life. When I was in college, I played a lot of softball. I remember playing in one particular tournament in Waco where I was playing left center field.

It was the first game of the tournament. I was in the outfield when the batter hit a ball. It was a solid hit, good hit. But I was tracking with the ball. My eye was so fixated on the ball that I had no idea where I was on the field. But I was determined to run hard after the ball.

Well, as I was in a dead sprint, I ran into the fence as the ball soared for a homerun. When I got up, the Short Stop who had come out to be the cut off began dry heaving. I was cut pretty badly in the shape of a chain link fence. My coach told me if I left the game that I would cause us to have an automatic out. So, I finished that game, went and got stitched up and came back to finish the tournament.

Why do I tell you that story? Well, if the ball represents God, and we are running hard after The Lord, solely focused on Him, we have a tendency to run into God's Will for our lives.

The Scripture that I think of every time I tell that story is Proverbs 3:5 and 6.

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Run after The Lord and allow Him to guide you.

CONCLUSION: Ask the band to come back up.

As we conclude here this morning, I want to talk, for just a moment, to those that might be here today that have never trusted Jesus as Lord. I can tell you that I know God's specific Will for you. He desires you to come to Him.

2 Peter 3:9 says, "*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*"

Need to trust Jesus... You need to seek The Lord... You come this morning.

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, Moody Publishers: Chicago, 2009; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, InterVarsity Press: 1994; John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Romans 9-16*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1994; Douglas J Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2000; Faith Eng and Evangeline Vergo, "How Can You Know the Will of God?" article published by CRU, accessed online: <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/how-to-know-gods-will.html>; Britt Mooney, "5 Simple Ways of How to Know God's Will," published by crosswalk.com December 16, 2020, accessed: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/simple-ways-of-how-to-know-gods-will.html>; GotQuestions.org, "How can I know God's will for my life?," accessed online: <https://www.gotquestions.org/know-God-will.html>; Billy Graham, "In His Own Words – 6 Steps on Finding God's Will," article published June 5, 2014, The Billy Graham Library, accessed online: <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/6-steps-on-finding-gods-will/>; Courtney Doctor, "God's Will for Your Life is More Obvious Than You Think," published by The Gospel Coalition, November 25, 2019, accessed online: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gods-will-life-obvious-think/>; April Mott, "How Do We Know God's Will for Our Lives?," published by Christianity.com, April 23, 2019, accessed online: <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-life/how-do-we-know-god-s-will-for-our-lives.html>; Chuck Swindoll, "How Do I Know God's Will," article published by Insight For Living, December 26, 2017, accessed online: <https://insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/how-do-i-know-god-s-will>; John Piper, "How to Know the Will of God," published by Desiring God, September 27, 2015, accessed online: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-to-know-the-will-of-god>; John MacArthur, "Taking The Mystery Out of Knowing God's Will," published by Grace to You, July 16, 2006, accessed online: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-310/taking-the-mystery-out-of-knowing-gods-will>.

ⁱⁱ Kevin DeYoung, *Just Do Something*, Moody Publishers: Chicago, 2009, page 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Oxford English Dictionary defines sovereign, "1 A supreme ruler, especially a monarch." Definition accessed online at: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/sovereign>.

^{iv} Example taken from Faith Eng and Evangeline Vergo, "How Can You Know the Will of God?" article published by CRU mentioned above.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} DeYoung, page 18.

^{vii} Passages taken from Kevin DeYoung's examples.

^{viii} Idea taken from Kevin DeYoung.

^{ix} Luke 22:42. ⁴² saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." ESV