

## **HOW TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD**

**Acts 15:36**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

As we've been picking along in the Book of Acts, we've come to a point where it would be appropriate for me to address the particular theme for this evening, "How to Know the Will of God." We're actually at Acts 15:36, but we're going to sort of roam freely in the Book of Acts this evening as we look at the theme of guidance.

The specific will of God, how to know the will of God. Sometimes we know what God's will specifically is and we struggle to do it. That was the case for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed "Thy will be done." He knew what the Father's will was concerning himself, that He was to go to the cross, yet He struggled with it. There are other occasions where we don't know specifically what God's will might involve. But we still pray "in His will." Thus, Paul, in writing to the Romans from the city of Corinth, as he prepares to leave for a journey to Jerusalem, says to the Roman Christians that he trusts "in the will of God, that he might come to them." He did not know if it was going to be God's ultimate plan directionally for him to go to Rome. But he cast his plans in the qualifications in the will of God. I note that because there have been some teachings in the body of Christ in recent years, that it is inappropriate to condition any prayer request by stating, "according to Your will..."; that somehow we're supposed to have sufficient knowledge, a spiritually intuitive grasp of what God's will is, that we simply come to God in faith and say, "God, this is the way I want it and I have faith to claim it and here's what it is," so that, if we qualify it "in His will," somehow we would be defeating faith. One of the effective ways to learn how to make decisions is to read the totality of Scripture respecting any particular theme. That, by the way, would be an advantage in your life, if you will

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go through Scripture, verse by verse and chapter by chapter, it will protect you from a lot of error. Most heresy or doctrines that get off kilter are based upon a selective reading of texts. But a person who goes through Scripture on a continual basis in their life begins to get a familiarity with the totality of God's Word, so that you can use it as a balance. When someone says something, you can say, "That doesn't check out with Romans 1:9 (or whatever). You have a jaded view. You have an off kilter view." Jesus, in fact, in teaching us how to pray, tells us one of the fundamental prayers that we are to say in life is "Thy will be done." That assumes that God does have a will for us.

I'd be the first to say and to admit that 95 percent of God's will for our life is already known to us. That may strike you as a surprise, but the Scriptures have a rather elastic and expansive view of God's will. God is not nearly as concerned with what we're going to do and where we're going to go as with what kind of person we are going to be. He's far more concerned about "being" than He is about "doing" or "going." If you come this evening saying, "I want God's specific direction in my life," even if you get it and you know exactly what job to take or what major to choose in school or what college to attend or what person to marry, you may directionally have established God's will for your life, but if you are not within God's will in your internal character and disposition, then it matters not that you are going to the place or doing the kind of thing God wants you to do. For the major concern of God is, "Are you becoming the person God wants you to be?" Thus, knowing the will of God is no talisman, no magic coin flip in the air, that somehow we say the magic numbers or recite the magic prayer or get the right person to pray for us or give us a prophetic word and thereafter, we know God's will.

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If you want to find passages of Scripture to concentrate on deeply on knowing God's will, I would suggest three passages in particular that always speak to us about God's will as it relates to our personality formation—the beatitudes in Matthew 5, the love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. There are fundamental qualities of personality development the Lord seeks in our life. If you and I are being that kind of person, we probably have a lot of options about where we can go and about what we can do. We'll be the right kind of person that God may choose to play us like a piano with all sixty-four keys and send us out in any number of different directions, because that's where God's concern is.

I would not be so fated in the will of God to suggest to any young person here that there is only one person that is in God's perfect will for you to marry. It may be that any number of people could meet the directional test for the will of God, but none of them would meet that test if you are a person who has a lot of anger, jealousy, rage, resentment, unforgiveness, those kinds of things. Although I don't want to bag the question of the specific will of God, I do want to form this very broad rule right at the beginning, don't try to take a shortcut to the will of God directionally by omitting a concentration of what kind of person God wants you to be. I suggest that 95 percent of what God wants us to do in regard to His will is a matter of our being. In a sense, the will of God is much like an iceberg which is 90 percent underwater. Ninety to 95 percent of the will of God is known to us. It's the small fragment that we don't know that we're going to be concerned with in this message.

I normally, as you know, don't get real doctrinaire and say this is the only way to look at something, but I have found that a particular grid of patterns that I use in determining God's will are very accurate and reliable, and I think rather complete. If you, in looking at decision-making questions, will apply these five principles to your life, you will generally come up with a sense of

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direction. That direction will not always dawn upon you in a moment's time. It may take some process of working out, because some things are not discoverable except by walking through them, step by step. But they are very foundational and fundamental aspects of discovering God's will for our life. They're all out of the Book of Acts, which is really a book about God's guidance. Acts, when you come right down to it, is how the Holy Spirit led the church from a hundred and twenty people to, within the course of thirty years, a worldwide enterprise. That needed the guidance power of the Holy Spirit, people needed to respond to the Holy Spirit, so they made good decisions that produced the kind of results that we see in the Early Church. What were the ways that they received guidance? There are five.

#### **I. The first one is through supernatural revelation.**

This is the one that, in seeking God's will in my own life, I always try to look to first, "Lord, give me a revelation." There are several ways that God may grant a revelation—through angel, an overpowering, overwhelming, personal presence of the Lord himself; or through some powerful manifestation of His presence, which, while not visible, nevertheless is overpowering in its effect. I'll look at those three.

**A.** Can we receive God's guidance directionally by means of angels? Yes, but there is never anyone in the New Testament, nor I believe in the Old Testament, that ever received God's long-term guidance in their life by angelic visitation. But there is short-term guidance, generally related to life-saving emergencies or to witnessing efforts. Like in the Book of Acts, angels grant Peter guidance out of jail. And they grant Philip the guidance to the Ethiopian eunuch, so that he might witness to him (Acts 8) as he's on his way down to Gaza, and ultimately back to Ethiopia. There was a very short-term guidance. So I would suggest, based on that pattern, you would not

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necessarily look for God's long term-guidance for your life—what kind of career you're going to engage in, what kind of college you're going to choose—by angelic manifestation.

**B.** However, there are those occasions when the Lord supernaturally revealed himself to someone, and those occasions are extraordinarily rare. I would not look for them as a common kind of thing. The only such occasion in the Book of Acts, for example, where the Lord himself personally appeared after His ascension into heaven was to Saul of Tarsus, in Acts 9. He appeared in a fashion of a blinding light and said to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me. Is it not hard for you to kick against the goads?" (Acts 9:5). Saul hears the Lord speaking to him.

All of us, I think, would prefer that the Lord guide us that way. If we could just get into a personal place of prayer and say, "Lord, turn on the lights! I'd like to hear a voice in the room." I have never personally heard the audible voice of God. I would love to hear that voice. If it's in this lifetime, great! I know someday I will. Even when God speaks to a person audibly, an audible manifestation of himself, there are two things we should keep in mind about that. One, if it is of such a sufficient character that you can still doubt it. We would kind of like an overpowering revelation that would remove all possibility of doubt. If you look at the supernatural revelation by the Lord to Paul, you will find an interesting complimentary selection of verses—one in Acts 9 and one in Acts 22. In Acts 9, it says Paul heard the voice, but in Acts 2, when later Paul recounts the story of the Damascus Road, he says that the soldiers saw the light, but they did not hear the voice. What's happening here? Obviously, what is occurring is that the soldiers only heard sound. They did not hear articulated words. It was only to Paul that the words had an articulated presence and he understood them. No one else traveling in his company heard the articulated words: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Therefore,

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when Saul got up from that overpowering experience, even though he was blinded, had he turned to someone and said, “What did you hear?” They would have said to him, “We didn’t hear anything but sound. Did you hear something? Are you hearing things?” and he had sufficient room to doubt his experience. A slim thread of doubt possibly, but it was there. Because God, in revealing himself to us, always leaves us room to back out. God, never in the Scripture, so overpowering reveals himself that we do not have the freedom to say no. That would obviously destroy free will, if He overrode your power to say no. So that’s one thing we must keep in mind. Even if you get an overwhelming order from God, there’s going to be something about it to which you can still say, “Did I really hear right?”

The second thing is: Those who get this kind of revelation from God are given it for a very special reason. That is, they’re going to be called to go through things that other persons are not normally called to go through. That’s the downside of a personal overpowering spiritual revelation. I would suggest to you that it is a biblical pattern, whether Old Testament or New Testament, that anybody who received an overpowering, overwhelming direct call from God has a consequence to that call, and a lifetime of incredible suffering and difficulty and trial. Isaiah, Elijah, Moses, Saint Paul himself, which explains then the reason why God gave them this revelation—they needed an anchor to hold on to because they were going to be called to walk through deeper waters than most people are called to walk. In the midst of walking through those waters, they needed some kind of deeper level of assurance.

Since I’ve discovered that in Scripture, I don’t pray quite as earnestly for the audible voice of God. It’s welcome if it occurs, but I know, if it happens, what’s going to be involved. Of course, the other possibility is that God will make himself known to us in a less overpowering presence,

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but still a supernatural manifestation, like He did to Moses in the case of the burning bush. But again, all those situations still require faith and still require a life of difficulty.

Let's start there. If you're looking for God's will for your life, has God given you some overpowering, spiritual revelation of himself?

The second thing to look for in determining the will of God—let's say you've prayed and you've sought God and there is no concretely audible objective out there. God's not speaking to you in some kind of revelatory way. That leads us, then, to the second means of guidance.

**II. What is going on in your heart while you're at worship? Whether you are worshipping alone or with believers, worship is a time when the Holy Spirit is extremely active in our life providing us direction.**

Take, for example, the matter of personal guidance through worship with the apostle Peter. In Acts 10, what does he do? It's noon and it's time for prayer. He goes up to the rooftop to pray. Can you imagine the history of the Christian church, had Peter missed his appointment of prayer that day? Here is going to be the breakthrough moment, the moment when God is going to link together the Jewish church with the Gentile convert, Cornelius of Caesarea. That's going to provide the prototype pattern for the expansion of the church to the uttermost parts of the world. It's the necessary connection, if the gospel is going to get from Jerusalem to Rome, which is the whole story of Acts. It all hangs on that day, on whether Peter keeps his appointment with God in prayer. Remember that, when he was appointed to get away from serving tables, one of the things that he said he needed to do was to give himself to the ministry of the Word and to prayer. So having given himself to prayer, he's keeping those appointments. While in that place of prayer, what happens? A revelatory experience in the form of vision. Not something overpowering, like Paul, but something you could wake up and say, "Did I eat too much

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spaghetti for lunch? Why am I having this vision?” He understands in that vision that God has appointed him to follow whoever comes to knock on his door. And God uses that. If he had not kept his personal time of worship, he would have missed that.

I would probably guess that a lot of us stagger in knowing God’s will and don’t get connections, because in a regular way, we do not interface with God. It’s really critical, therefore, that we have those personal times, on a daily basis, when we give specific time personally to seeking the Lord and to prayer. God also may speak to us through, not only a prayer—as He did with Peter—but through reading the Word on a personal level, which is also an aspect of worship. Sometimes we may get guidance through reading the Word, although, as a general rule, that guidance from the Word will be general in character. You usually cannot pick up the Bible and put your thumb on a verse that tells you your life direction. I’ve had miserable experiences with that. I have tried doing that. The people who actually originated that practice were a group of people called the Moravian Pietists in Europe, around the seventeenth century. They produced the Pietistic movement in the modern missionary movement. There have been, by the way, many people who’ve had unique experiences with the Bible and knowing God’s will in a directional sense, there’ve been verses that have leapt out at them, and it just confirms something. Generally that kind of experience is a confirming word rather than a directional word. You’ve already sensed the direction and then there’s a verse that just picks you up and knocks you over the head! Generally, when we open the Bible like that, it’s confirming general directions, not specific directions, although sometimes there could be exceptions.

In worship, sometimes we get a real impression of what God wants us to do when we are gathered together in the community that’s worshipping. Within the context of community—whether it’s an entire worship service, such as this, or whether it’s a small group praying and

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sharing together—God’s will becomes crystallized for us. In Acts 13:1–2, while the prophets and teachers at Antioch, there were five of them named, were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Lord said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (NIV). They went into that time of seeking the Lord without a clear sense of direction, not even anticipating a missionary journey, but as a result of their being gathered together and concentrating on the Lord, the Lord impressed their hearts on the matter of their ministry to the world. How is it that when you look at missionaries, for example, most of them get their calling within the context of a worship experience in a body—a youth camp, a Sunday night service, a worship context of some kind, where the Holy Spirit impresses them with some broad field of the world, lays it on their heart? It becomes a deep impression upon them. One of the things we need to watch for in worship is whenever we’re worshipping God truly, as our hearts get more and more focused upon God, sometimes we come to an electric moment in worship where God focuses our hearts on what His heart is. And that is the world. And our worship, suddenly, gets translated into evangelism and mission and purpose and discipleship. That’s what happens in the Antioch church among the prophets and teachers. While they’re worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit speaks.

Worship is indeed an important means of gaining God’s will in our life. In the Scripture, Acts 13:2 appears to have been guidance by means of a prophetic word, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work, which I have called them.” In other words, they already had the call. They just didn’t know the timing. When you say, “The Holy Spirit said,” generally the scriptural rule is that the Holy Spirit does not speak through a PA system. You won’t find, in any church that I have ever heard of, that in the course of worship service, suddenly the public address system will interrupt all the service and you’ll have a pause, “We interrupt this service

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for a divine announcement. The Holy Spirit says...” How does the Holy Spirit talk? He talks through His people, exercising a spiritual gift. So what happened in that mature eldership of the Antioch church was that one of the elders said, “This is what the Holy Spirit is now saying.” And it was confirmed.

I mention that because the matter of receiving guidance through worship by means of a prophecy that someone else gives you is a very tricky and problematic area. A lot of people have gotten into a lot of trouble with it. How do we deal with “The Lord has told me that...”?

There’s an interesting thing that goes on in regard to personal prophecy in the Book of Acts. It starts in Acts 9, at around verse 20 or so. Paul is wrapping up his experience at Ephesus, the end of the third missionary journey. He says that he has determined in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. That’s been a resolution “in the Spirit.” Then, when he meets with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20), they warn him “in the Spirit” that, if he goes to Jerusalem, there is much suffering ahead of him, and bondage and imprisonment. The elders tell him the same thing. “Paul, if you go to Jerusalem, there’s much imprisonment waiting for you.” When he comes on his journey to what is Tyre (now Lebanon, biblical Phoenicia), there the prophets in the church at Tyre meet him and say, through the Spirit, “Do not go to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4). Notice that. Then moving a little bit further on, the prophet Agabus, in Acts 12, had been right about the famine. Now he comes to Paul and he binds him with his own girdle (a sash he wore around his Middle Eastern robe). He wraps this around Paul and ties him up, a symbolic prophetic act which is common among the prophets. He says, “Thus will be the man who goes to Jerusalem. He is going to be in fetters for having gone” (Acts 21:11). The addition of all those factors has led some people to conclude that Paul got out of God’s will when he went to Jerusalem. He should have never gone there. As a result of getting out of God’s will, he suffered his imprisonment. If he’d have listened

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to God and to the prophetic voice, he'd have never made that mistake. But this person does not read the Scripture carefully. Paul's word from the Lord is "Go, but you're going to be bound."

The church leaders of Ephesus who met him at Miletus said, "Go, but you're going to be bound."

Agabus said, "You're going to be bound." Only at Tyre and only the prophets there said through the Spirit, "Don't go."

I think what happened at Tyre is what I've seen happen in some charismatic circles. Someone keeps talking in the Spirit after the Spirit has quit talking. What the Spirit had consistently said in all the other appearances was, "You're going to be bound." The Tyre prophets, however, having been given that revelation of the Spirit, tried to add up two and two and force that—the Spirit is now saying, "Therefore, don't go." One of the things we learn about personal prophecy from that is that the person to whom the prophecy is given has the right to analyze it scripturally, to agree with it or disagree with it. And Paul clearly disregards it, because the Lord has given him a different witness. So there are well-meaning people who may not be sufficiently trained in spiritual giftedness to know when the Spirit has quit speaking, but they continue to say, "Thus sayeth the Lord."

God will never turn the governance of your life over to someone else. You are in the cockpit with the Holy Spirit. It's up to you to have the final veto authority, no one else. Not even your parents, ultimately. You're responsible before God for the decisions you make in life.

What a prophetic word is, generally—and I would say always—is not a directional word. It is either a preparatory word or a confirming word. A preparatory word is "Get ready. God's about to do this." Or a confirming word like in Acts 13. Already, the Lord had called Paul and Barnabas: to the work to which you have been called. Already they had been called, but now

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comes the confirming word. Now's the time to go. But it was not a fresh revelation. It's either preparation or confirmation.

But by all means, when looking at God's will, don't neglect this aspect. When you come to where the saints meet or when you meet with your prayer and Bible study group, what does God consistently press upon your heart? What's hot inside? Our prayer line is not a party line. I believe we have privileged access to God. Listen carefully. Listen very sensitively to what God is saying to you when you pray or when you're in worship, whether it's personal worship or corporate worship. Because that almost always is a hot inspiration from the Holy Spirit. I've tried to encourage people, when an altar call is given or a response is asked for, if you feel something tugging on your heart, that's not just you. The devil is not going to tug on your heart to make some commitment to Jesus. That's got to be the Holy Spirit. So go with that. Respond to it.

### **III. A third way of getting guidance is circumstance. Your total life situation.**

Where are you as a person geographically, positionally, age-wise? Look at some examples of this, of the circumstance and the matter of circumstance. God used circumstance to guide people into His will. Acts 6 is a circumstance. The circumstance was that there were widows in the Early Church that were having a problem with one another, having good, honest contention with one another. Had it not been for that circumstance, there would have been no need for deacons. Had there been no need for deacons, there would have never been a Stephen. Had there never been a Stephen, there would have never been a martyrdom and perhaps there would have never been a Paul. But it was the circumstance of a church contention that eventuated in Stephen stepping into the arena of God's will for his life, directionally. Don't minimize these circumstances. Circumstantial guidance.

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The fact that I wear glasses has been a means of God's circumstantial guidance in my life—powerfully. Dad said to me, “George, you’ve got to quit playing basketball and contact football and those kinds of things. That’s where you’re breaking your glasses.” Ultimately, I think these glasses got me out of sports. I was never very physically coordinated, but I always had a deep interest in sports. It got me into books. Somehow for me, glasses went with being a bookworm. So as a kid I “ate” books. I read a book a day or it wasn’t a fulfilling day. That’s the way God used my life and developed in me a love for learning. I don’t think that would have ever happened without glasses. That was God’s circumstantial way of guiding me to the kind of lifetime, so far, that I’ve had. The interest in ideas, literature, and the like.

God can use little circumstantial things in our life. Obviously, our parents and our heritage have a great role to play in what we become and what we do. That’s again part of our circumstantial guidance in life. We look around at the circumstances in life. Where do we find ourselves in respect to those circumstances? We’ll probably often find that our circumstances don’t directly guide us so much as they put us in places where we make the direct decisions. They put us in a convenient matrix, where the decision-making is possible.

One of the neatest places of circumstances that I find in all of Scripture is how God guided this person, Luke. We’ll find this later at the beginning of the second missionary journey, when Luke joins Paul in the city of Troas and then crosses the raging sea to Philippi and then he drops out of sight. He’s out of sight while Paul finishes the second missionary journey and does the whole third missionary journey. So for about five years, he’s not with Paul. By the time Paul finishes the third missionary journey, he’s at Corinth and he’s gathered a deputation of everybody from the churches which he has founded to take an offering to the Jerusalem saints, and at the last minute, Paul discovers that there is an assassination plot on his life. They’re going to get him

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when he gets on the boat at Corinth, so he sends everybody else on ahead and goes by himself back up to northern Greece, to Philippi, where he re-meets Luke, and suddenly Luke is with him—not identified as Luke, but as “we”. That means he’s back in the picture. Luke then goes with Paul to Jerusalem and Paul is arrested in Jerusalem, and Luke—for two years—is traipsing the countryside. What’s he doing during that time? He’s doing what he says in Luke 1–4, interviewing eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus. He’s a non-Palestinian Greek. How would he know about the earthly ministry of Jesus? How would he know enough to write the history of Jesus in the third Gospel and the Book of Acts? He would have never had the opportunity to do the research needed to write the Gospel and Acts had it not been for the fact that he got there. How did he get there? Because there was an assassination plot on Paul’s life at Corinth, which motivated Paul to go to Philippi and get Luke to go with him. Had Paul not had that assassination plot, Luke would have stayed forever at Philippi and we’d never heard from him again. But God used that circumstance to get him into a position where, in actuality, Luke writes more of the New Testament than any other writer. More so even than Paul, although Paul writes more letters and books, Luke writes more words. It’s a powerful way God guided through circumstance. Don’t underrate the circumstances of your life.

#### **IV. The fourth way we get guidance is through the confirmation of other believers.**

We’re not Lone Rangers in the body of Christ. When we’re with the body of Christ, an active member of the Christian community, other people begin to read our gifts and begin to encourage us in the development along those lines and affirm us. For example, if I feel it is God’s will for my life to be pastor and a pastor-teacher, which I feel has been God’s will for me, that will not be implemented if there isn’t any body that wants to be pastored by me or hear me teach. I can only do that if the body of Christ in some way—at least two or three people—gives assent to that. It’s

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the same with any spiritual gift. How, for example, did Matthias—in Acts 1—know God’s will for his life? Not because he had a supernatural revelation. Not necessarily because of circumstances. Not because of an experience in worship. But because the Early Church decided to draw straws, to cast lots and Matthias was chosen to replace Judas. How did Judas and Silas (Acts 15) become ministers to the Gentile community? It’s because the Jerusalem church appointed them to that role. How did the elders of the missionary churches Paul founded get into leadership position? Because they were appointed. How did Timothy find God’s will for his life? Not in the same way as Paul. Paul found God’s will by direct revelation. Timothy found God’s will for his life because one day Paul came along and said, “You have ministry gifts and a calling that I want to see implemented for the kingdom of God. Come along and be part of the team.” We may find God’s will in that fashion—confirmation of the body.

We had a young minister, some time ago, go before the presbytery. He had wanted to pursue a particular line of decision that some people weren’t exactly satisfied with and did not feel it was God’s will. He based his decision on the fact that “God sovereignly, and individually, and personally led me. How can you argue with that? If God’s speaking to me, how can you argue with me?” That’s a tough nut in guidance, by the way. What is the role of direct guidance from God versus the authority of the church? Jimmy Swaggart’s having this problem, isn’t he? We wrestle with it. It’s got to be held in a balance.

I recall saying to this young man, “I think this question ought to be looked at, not just from the standpoint that you feel God’s guiding you to do this against the advice of all the presbytery and your neighboring pastors. You ought to look at a consistent interpretation of the question, if you have someone in the church you pastor say to the Sunday School teacher that you feel doesn’t have the gifts to be a Sunday School teacher, and you want them to do something else and you

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go to them and say, “It’s time for you to do something else because I don’t sense that this is working.” And they say to you, “You can’t remove me because I talk to God and God says that I’m to do this!” I think you’re going to, at that point, override what they say. Because it’s obvious by the fruitfulness of their ministry that a change has to be made. I said that somehow we’ve got to keep in balance this matter of individual revelation versus the consensus of the community of which we’re a part. If we’re pledged ourselves to be with that community, then we need to listen to that community and what God is saying to us through our brothers and sisters. Listen very carefully to what people are saying to you about the areas in your life where you seem to have a real giftedness and propensity to succeed. We receive direction by listening to the body.

Those are four steps. You say, I’ve tried all four and still haven’t got guidance. Let me go to the fifth one.

### **V. What do you want to do? What’s in your heart? What’s your decision?**

You say, “Is it biblical that I could make a decision without some sign from God, without some spiritual revelation, without some leading in worship?” Yes, it is. Look at the beginning of the second missionary journey in Acts 15. Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go visit the churches which we founded on the first missionary journey” (Acts 15:36). He looks at the need for follow-up, knows that these churches are suffering and says, “We’ve got to go back and help them. We’ve got to get back.”

Notice how different this is from Acts 13, the beginning of the first missionary journey. At the beginning of the first missionary journey, the Holy Spirit says, “Set apart Barnabas and Saul.” At the beginning of the second missionary journey, there’s no mention of “The Holy Spirit said,” it’s just Paul saying it’s sound human judgment to go back and do follow-up. And so they do.

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One of the things that I've learned as a parent is that you eventually want to get your children to make their own decisions. I get a little nervous when people get too spiritual on me. They go to the grocery store and say, "The Lord told me to get pork and beans, then He told me to get napkins..." I say, "Generally, the Lord is pleased if we just use good common sense." Part of the dominion mandate to have rule and authority, part of that is to make decisions. The Lord says, "I will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). If that's the case, it must mean we have some desires and God is at work to fulfill those in our life. So we say, "When all things are considered and all other means of guidance haven't indicated a clear direction... what's in my heart?" What stimulates me the most? In regard to making that decision, we need to keep in balance what do I want to do and what ought I to do. Sometimes, our want and our ought don't line up.

The standing orders of the gospel "Go into all the world," and the Lord's looking for laborers in the harvest may constitute a call to want to volunteer for. There are many matters in life that the Lord simply says to us, "What do you choose? It really doesn't matter to Me. What do you want to do?" What I generally look for when I'm trying to ascertain God's will: First, I start with supernatural revelation. I go to worship. I go to circumstances. I go to the confirmation of the body. And if I still don't have a sense of direction, then it falls back on my shoulders and it gets local—all the lists of why I should do this, all the lists of why I should do that. Wrestling back and forth, until in the gut there begins to be a sense of aliveness in the inside, more toward one side than the other. Then I do something—I've never found a Scripture for this but I think it's valid—I say "Lord, I've sought You for guidance in this matter and You haven't answered by fire or by voice or by revelation or any other way, but I don't want to get out of your will. So three or four days from now, I'm going to make this decision. In the meantime, I'm going to pray

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or fast or both. If You don't want me to make this decision, then in the next few days, block me. Throw something in my path. Block me. And if You don't block me, then I'm going to go ahead and do this. At six o'clock on Wednesday night, then I'm going to go ahead and implement this decision. You have until then to block this. I mean this, Lord, in all sincerity." I actually did this. That was the final test in coming here. I said, "Lord, I'm going to fast for four days and You have until Wednesday night, six o'clock. If You don't block me in that course of time, then don't ever throw it to me that I got out of Your will!" I think God is fair and He would do that.

One tricky thing, and I need to close with this. Quite often, after you make a decision there will come a period of doubt and second-guessing. You will wonder, "What in the world happened? Did I get out on my own? Did I not hear God? What happened?" I can share from Scripture, in the second missionary journey. Paul said, "Let's go back and visit the churches we founded on the first missionary journey" (Acts 15:36). So they do. They travel over a land route you couldn't go today. When they're done revisiting those churches, Paul says in his spirit that he wants to go west. So he strikes out. He's in lower central Turkey, and for the next days—it's about 400 land miles he walks. He starts out. He's got Silas with him, and he picked up Timothy, two full-time workers. They have left Antioch and Pisidia, heading in a northwesterly direction. The Holy Spirit says to him, "Don't go to Asia" (Acts 16:6). Asia meant Ephesus, the headquarters of the Roman province of Asia. So Paul turns north to go to the underbelly of Russia. Again, the Holy Spirit says no. This is one of the funny things about knowing God's will. Often, we sense that we're *not* to do *this*, but we don't have the foggiest idea of what we *are* supposed to do. The key thing is not to stand still, not to get passive in knowing the will of God. I know people who lock themselves in a room somewhere and come out more confused than when they went in. Paul just kept putting one foot after the other. He says, "I know I'm not supposed to go to Ephesus and I

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know I'm not supposed to go to Bithynia so I can go in between." And that's what he does. If you look on the map he heads equal distance from Ephesus and Bithynia. I love to see apostles who don't know what they're doing. It gives all the rest of us hope. He doesn't know what he's doing. He walks for 400 miles. Someone has said that the will of God is like riding a bicycle. You cannot guide a bicycle if you're standing still. You've got to get on it and get it moving. So I buy this theory of God's will of just continuing to knock on doors. I don't see any precedent in Scripture for getting passive—just keep pressing, keep active, keep searching. Something's going to happen.

If the Lord does guide our life, then He's directing us even when we think we're being misdirected. He'll use the funniest ways to guide us. Don't be surprised if you think that's the goal. That's what God has for me. And you get to it, and all of a sudden it's not there. So often we confuse ends and means. What is an end to us is only a means to God. That's never where He intended us to go, anyway. He just uses it to get us there and then He discards it.

That's what's going on with Paul. He's walking the 400 miles. Finally, he gets to the place where he can't walk anymore. He's at sea, at Troas. He's at the Aegean. Where does he go? He's not about to back up. Just at the point where he runs out of his ability to keep going, that's the key. He kept going until he ran out of the ability. Then the Lord said in a vision, "Come to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). That's the slender thread he has to hang his hat on. A vision. Not a very strong means of guidance. But he gets on a boat and goes over. There's no man at Macedonia there. His first convert in Philippi was a woman, Lydia. That's who he's worshipping with down by the riverside. It's a woman who becomes the first convert in Europe. Suddenly, the whole city opens to the gospel. He finds the man in the Roman jailer.

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The key point I'm trying to get across is that he didn't give up. He kept on walking in spite of the disappointment; in spite of wrong turns in the road, in spite of what even looked like cul-de-sacs. He didn't give up. He kept going. If you'll not lie down in regards to God, if you'll get up and keep going, ultimately God will establish His will in your lifetime. You will see that the steps of a righteous person are ordered of the Lord. You'll see it. You may not at the time. You may get very frustrated. But don't give up. Keep walking.

Sometimes, in knowing the will of God, He may use more than one of these. He may use personal worship, confirmation of other believers, something you feel in your heart to do. I'm not suggesting you're only guided by one. But I'm trying to give you a pattern, a logical way of working through decision-making. Starting with supernatural revelation, where all the emphasis is upon God, to personal decision-making, where all the emphasis seems to be on you. Then there's the great middle-ground in between. We gradually winnow that down and see, "Here are the factors," the only factors that we see in Scripture for the rationale of making a decision on God's will, so use these factors and God will guide you and the Holy Spirit will lead you.