

**ST. MATTHEWS BAPTIST CHURCH**  
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**Pastor Leslie Hollon**  
**Wednesday Bible Study**

## *Understanding the Will of God*

Learning God's will is similar to doing simultaneous research and development. God wants us to know what's best for our lives. We just have to know how to look for Confirming Signs of the Spirit.

### **Schedule for Wednesday Bible Study**

- January 17 A panel discussion for a podcast program will focus on how we can understand God's will.
- January 24 We will focus on the biblical principles from Leslie Weatherhead's The Will of God and his useful model of understanding the three levels of God's will as: intentional, circumstantial, and ultimate.  
(Copies of The Will of God are available for \$5.)
- January 31 "A Day in the Life of Doing God's Will" - Jesus modeled how to live lifetimes centered in God's will, one day at a time. (Matthew 9)
- February 7 I will teach from my S.C.O.R.E. approach to know and do God's will which includes: **S**cripture, **C**ommunity, **O**rganizing, **R**esourcing, and **E**xperiencing.
- February 14 We will study classical passages & promises on God's will, e.g., Romans 8:28.

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### **Worship on Wednesdays**

Our Lenten worship services will begin with Ash Wednesday (Feb. 21) and continue until Holy Week. Don Hustad and I will be leading the worship experiences, which will be in our chapel.

# *Understanding the Will of God*

## **Three Levels of God's Will**

We are born. We live. We die. Between the birth and death we make decisions – millions of them. By living in awareness of God's will for our lives, we can improve the quality of our decision.

During World War II a pastor from London, Leslie Weatherhead, emerged with clarity about God's will among a people who were regularly being bombed by Hitler's military forces. The people were hungry for guidance in making life & death decisions. The following is my version of Weatherhead's three levels of God's will:

1. **Intentional** – the very best God has for us.
2. **Circumstantial** – recreating the best available life after harmful decisions have been made.
3. **Ultimate** – God eventually wins over evil.

Jesus says to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

We feel the tremors of oneness as our free will embraces God's will.

## **Learning God's Will**

To know God's will requires learning. The success of an athlete is related to his or her conditioning program. Through the spiritual training of our mind, heart, and body—we are in the best position to know and do God's will. Learning comes from the S.C.O.R.E. approach.

1. **Scripture** – receiving God's inspiration through the collected wisdom of the Bible for understanding present options and revealing future options.
2. **Community** – the use of basic skills in reason, intuition, and moral determination.
3. **Organizing** – the insights of your community. People whom you trust can provide helpful discernment.
4. **Resourcing** – studying the seen and unseen possibilities through prayer, people, and information banks.
5. **Experiencing** – review lessons learned from your life and apply the lessons to update your usable wisdom. Then test your decision through a well chosen experiment.

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A successful knowing flows from the spiritual wisdom of waiting and acting: waiting on God's vision to show the way and acting on the vision received from our waiting. To act when we should wait forfeits the promise. To wait when we should act forfeits success. By acting on what we know we get to what we don't know. The truthful search of know God is best summarized in the famous prayer composed by Reinhold Niebuhr: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

## **A Day in the Life of Doing God's Will**

A day possesses 1,440 minutes and on this particular day Jesus needed every one of them. There was a lot of God's will to do and He gave Himself to accomplish God's best.

### **1. God Wills Our Involvement**

9:1 Jesus stepped ashore to His adopted home - The will of God enables us to adapt when things don't work out as we hoped. (Nazareth, His home town, rejected Jesus.)

9:2 The will of God is always approachable. The paralyzed man with his inability to walk was seen as sinful. The man's friends broke from that faulty pattern of thinking and in faith brought to Jesus their friend. Jesus knew that man's heart had been broken, so he said, Take heart in God's will for you. The shackles of shame and guilt were removed from his soul.

9:3 Recognizing the will of God requires spiritual thinking and feeling. Teachers of The Law were paralyzed by their lack of spirituality. They had rejected God's purposes for themselves (Luke 7:30). Stuck in their traditions, they had become separated from God's expressed ways.

9:4-8 God's wills for the best to come from each person. When we are wrong, change is required. Proving His authority to set the standard for what is God's will, Jesus gave an outer sign through healing the man's body. To walk before their eyes, the man had to obey Jesus' command. Having experienced God's specific will, he went home a different person. Awe is the natural response to witnessing God's will at work.

### **2. God Wills Compassion for Change**

9:9 God's will is motivated by compassion. Seeing Matthew's readiness to stop being a public thief, Jesus offered him a chance to begin a new life. Following Jesus equals walking/talking in the will of God.

- 9:10 Matthew knew that God's best is to be shared, not hoarded. So he invited his friends to join him in salvation. During the party's celebration - Jesus gave them his presence. The successes of God's will are to be celebrated.
- 9:11 The will of God sets us free for others but the Pharisees lacked the compassion to be happy for Matthew. Not being stirred by God's universal hope for everyone, they couldn't walk the bridge to a cross-cultural experience and party with the social outcast. They wanted their change, not God's change for Matthew's friend. Lacking compassion, we have no power to enable God's will.
- 9:12 We have to desire God's best if our lives are to experience the best. Acceptance of our need frees us from false pride.
- 9:13 Understanding God's will requires searching for answers. From their homework assignment Jesus hoped the Pharisees would see they were walking in the wrong direction and through hearts touched by compassion, they would join in the party.

### **3. God Wills Our Knowing When To Do What**

9:14-15

Fasting (abstaining from that which is normal; in Scripture fasts usually apply to regular breaks from eating) helps us gain perspective for daily living. Particularly fasts were used when one was processing grief. Jesus agreed that God will us to be aware, but the disciples' joyful awareness of Jesus' identity meant the time for fasting was yet to come in the future but now was the time for celebration.

- 9:16-17 Growing in God's will requires new avenues for doing what needs to be done. Willingness to do the unfamiliar means wanting to break from unhealthy cycles of behavior.

### **4. God Wills Our Being Laughed At**

- 9:18-26 When companions are out of whack with God's best for their lives, they tend to exhort people to join them in their spiritual laziness. Frequently, doing God's will means being different from the crowd.

As the day closes – a grieving father, a humiliated woman, and a risking Jesus – are willing to step out from the crowd and become liberated from the empty demands of cultural conformity. Risking in God's will is the freeing place to live. Jesus laughed last, not at the scoffers, but at the joy of having brought the girl back to life. Doers of God's will laugh best and longest.

## Some Scriptures on the Will of God

**Psalm 143:10** Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

**Psalm 40:8** I desire to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart.

**Romans 12:2** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

**Colossians 1:9-12** For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. **10** And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, **11** being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully **12** giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

**1 John 2:17** The world and its desires pass away, but the person who does the will of God lives forever.

**John 7:17** Jesus said: If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

**Romans 8:28-30** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**Hebrews 13:21** My the God of peace, who through the blood of eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

