

Sermon Title: How Do I Know God's Will For My Life? Series: "You Asked For It" Pastor Dave Sattler August 23, 2015 Text: Romans 12:1-2 Sources: NIV Life App Bible; Moo & Lucado commentaries; Blackaby, Buchanan, Guinness, & Swindoll books; Martin Luther King, Jr autobiography by Carson; Padgett Article, Relevant Magazine.

Introduction: <Series Slide>

- Good morning everyone. I'm Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC. Continuing our Summer Series, "You Asked For It!" I'll do a message on the God's Will Question, then take a few minutes at the end to entertain some of your questions on the topic - either by text or live.
- For some, the thought of figuring out God's will instantly raises anxiety-levels.
- For others, it's entirely off the radar; they're just livin' life, got it all figured out and 'don't need no help from no one.'
- For most, there is at least some confusion on the matter of knowing God's will.
- I have had many honest struggles with it myself. **How will I know? <Slide>**
- ILL - Which takes us to that 80's pop song by the late Whitney Houston [How Will I Know, c.1985].
 - Lines from verse one, Q: "There's a boy I know, he's the one I dream of. When I wake from dreaming, tell me is it really love."
 - Then, the chorus: "How will I know." Her back-up singers pipe in with some advice, "Don't trust your feelings!" "How will I know if he really loves me." Whitney ends it even with a look to God in the midst of her confusing romance, "I say a prayer with every heart beat."
- **<Slide>** How do I know God's will for my life?
- For teenagers, in that growing world of freedom beyond parents, with a dizzying array of choices at your fingertips, what will you decide? Who influences you? And, how will you make your choices?
- As young adults, how do you decide on career, values, the people you will share your life with? Choose one path and that shuts another. You can't 'keep all your options open' forever. It can be scary. So much riding on your decisions.
- In your 40's & 50's, you have questions, 'Have I given my life to the right things?' 'Do I want to do this the rest of my life? Be in that relationship? This job? What's God's plan for me?'
- Later in life, many muse, 'were my successes real? Were the sacrifices & trade-offs I made actually worth it? Did my life make a difference or did I miss God's will somewhere along the way?'
- Then, throw in all the transitions & 'curveballs' life tends to throw our way: moving ... jobs, cities, countries. Broken ... relationships, marriages, families. Crisis in ... housing, finances, health.
- It's those times when negotiating or discerning even snippets of God's will becomes extremely difficult. How will I know?
- **<Slide>** ILL - 19th Century Danish poet, theologian, & philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard put it aptly:
 - Q: The goal of life is "to see what God really wants me to do; **to find the idea for which I can live and die.**" -- Kierkegaard in Guinness, p 3.
- Finding God's will for our lives. Realized or not, this is the urgent quest all of us are on.
- Yet its answer often eludes us.
- But it's not 'rocket-science,' requiring some intricate magic formula to unlock. Nor does it mean simply pursuing dreams of my own making and then later asking God to bless them.
- ILL - In his highly-recommended book, The Call, a great parallel read for this sermon:
 - Os Guinness boils down how to know God's will to a phrase he repeats over and over again:
 - Q: "**Listen to Jesus of Nazareth; answer his call.**"
- <READ Romans 12:1-2, p 920> Prayer: "God, control me by Your Spirit. Move me outta the way."

Text Outline:

- Here Paul issues 3 directives for finding God's "good, pleasing and perfect will" for our lives.

1. <Slide> "Offer Your Bodies as a **Living Sacrifice**" (12:1).

- An oxymoron, the problem with a "living sacrifice" is it has a heartbeat. Living sacrifices are always tempted to crawl back down off the altar and not be sacrificed anymore. And they do! Often.
- Paul goes out of his way to remind his brothers & sisters in Rome that it's only with God's mercy "in view," that they are able to now "offer" themselves back to God.

- Not ignorantly as animals offered as sacrifices in the temple, but now intelligently, willingly offering their whole selves to God ... this is the call of every Christ-follower.
- At the end of the day, it's this desire that puts us in the will of God.
- Our obedience to God cannot be solely manufactured by us. The motivation, the drive behind our sacrifice can only be in response to God's amazing grace poured out on humanity.
- **<Slide>** ILL - Recently I read the autobiography of Dr Martin Luther King Jr.:
 - Pastor, leader of the 20th Century civil rights' movement, & devout follower of Jesus, he ultimately sacrificed his life for the truth that:
 - Q: "All men and women are created equal (by God.)"
 - The night before he was assassinated, Dr King delivered his final message:
 - Q: "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would love to live a long life -- longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. **I just want to do God's will.** And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land." King went on, Q: "I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!" -- Dr King in Carson, p 365.
- Clearly God gave Martin Luther King Jr a call and he chose to follow, to do God's will.
- Oh, there were many detractors -- white, and black. But he pressed on.
- And as a result Dr King's life was a "living sacrifice" to God that's effect echoes for eternity.

2. **<Slide>** "Do Not Conform to the pattern of this world ..." (12:2a)

- A huge stumbling block to hearing God's will is all the other wills, advice, & vices that 'call our name'.
- Our tendency is to try and blend in, when Christ-followers are actually called to "not conform."
- Or, as J.B. Phillips famously put it in the Living Bible paraphrase many of us grew up on:
 - Q: "Do not let the world squeeze you into its mould."
- God's will is so often counter-intuitive, 'crashing' against the values of this world.
- And following it puts us 'out on a limb' or 'at the end of ourselves' and requires faith.
- Or, God might even call us to do things that go against our better judgment or oppose the popular opinion of family, friends, or colleagues.
- ILL - In cf. Exodus 23:32-33, God issues a similar stern warning to the people of Israel.
 - Having just rescued them from slavery in Egypt and knowing their temptation to follow the practices and values of other worldly cultures ...
 - **<Slide>** God said, Q: "Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."
 - In having the people wander the wilderness for 40 years, God was seeking to 'take the world out of them.' To wean them off of their Egyptian slave-drivers, off their own 'bright' ideas, and onto Himself -- the only Source of Life that would ever sustain them.
 - That's likely why God later gave them a Promised Land with the geography of Israel.
 - Not exactly "flowing with milk and honey," history shows the biblical lands are not easy to defend, not easy to grow things in, and have few natural resources -- principally, the least amount of water per capita of virtually any nation on earth. The people of Israel would have to attach themselves to God's will. Not conform. Depend on God. For protection against their enemies. For every crop to grow. For enough water to survive. For everything.
- So too us today, God knows our wills are easily 'bent' by the circles we run in, that relying on conventional wisdom, the world's gods & resources quickly becomes a way of life for us.
- Without a conscious effort to focus on God's will, we just live like everyone else all around us.
- **<Slide>** When things are different in God's value system:
 - Greatness is measured in servanthood. To "die" to self is to truly "live." To "give your life away for Jesus" means to save it and "find" it again [cf. Matthew 16:25].
 - All of these counter-cultural ways of living come at a cost to us.
 - Cost of time. Money. Power. Prestige.

- Knowing God's will often means surrender of our dreams, our possessions, our relationships.
- We may even be made to look and feel 'stupid' when we don't conform.
- But God has also wired in such deep meaning and benefit in following His way.

3. <Slide> "Be Transformed by the renewing of your mind." (12:2b)

- Transformation is one of the glorious bi-products of walking with Jesus.
- There is a sense in which, through the power of Christ, the will of God can become internalized in our hearts and minds. We just know it. God's dreams become ours.
- As one commentator says, Q: ... "new orientation in our thinking leads to new orientation in our behaviour." -- Moo, p 395 The result? We are transformed and able to please God by doing His will.
- This does not happen overnight, however; and it's never fully complete this side of eternity.
- The "renewing of our mind" is a process requiring cooperation with God's Spirit -- filling our minds with information that will help re-program our thinking in line with the will of God.
- One of the tensions in knowing God's will is if we externalize it too much and believe God's will is only somewhere-out-there-beyond-our-grasp, we can become fatalistic and give up on seeking it.
- On the other hand, if we internalize it too much, 'God's will is within me,' we can take ourselves too seriously and subtly begin to 'play God' in our own lives.
- Perhaps an illustration will help us understand the balance.
- <Slide> ILL - Last week on vacation in Oroville, WA, I watched water-bombers fight a forest fire.
 - They would swing over the lake, drop down on it for about 250m to fill up with water, then fly up over the mountain into the heavy-smoking fire to drop their load.
 - Over and over again for 6 hours.
 - I'm told pilots are trained to rely on their airplane's internal onboard instruments.
 - Especially in rough conditions.
 - With much training, pilots develop a sense of trust in what their instruments tell them.
 - But it would be silly for a pilot to not also look out the windshield of the plane ... externally to check weather, watch for other objects in the sky, see lights on the runway.
 - And use them also as guidance to fly the plane.
- God's will is out there ... external, beyond us. Sometimes it's crystal-clear, but other times it's just hard to grasp, like looking out the cockpit in a thick fog.
- But, God's will is also revealed internally. As we pursue Jesus, we develop a trust, we begin to know how to 'read the 'instruments' God has given us -- our mind, our body, our heart.
- When we surrender to His transformation, God speaks His will to us through them too.

Conclusion:

1. <Slide> Knowing God's Will comes through **Listening to the Ways God Speaks.**

- Yes, God clearly operates in ways above our comprehension. Q: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord" in cf. Isaiah 55:9.
- And, God is also relational, longs for us to have intimacy with Him, desires for us know His will.
- Though we'd dearly love one, few of us receive 'Paul-on-the-Damascus-Road' encounters with Jesus.
- Knowing God's will most often flows from this intimacy with Him, daily walking in relationship.
- APP - If we press in, when we slow down, take time, we can hear and know. God has many means of revealing His will to us. Let's highlight a few ...
- For Christ-followers, the living **Holy Spirit** continues to speak and reveals Jesus and the Father to us through our transformed mind and heart.
- God also speaks in **creation**. Cf. Psalm 19:1 says, Q: "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord."
- Through **other people**, God speaks to us. Nearly all of us are here today because God used someone to tell us about Him, to show us to Him, and to encourage us in our journey with God.
- **Music** is also powerful medium God uses to touch peoples' hearts.
- Vital. God's will is so often made known in and through the community of the **church**. Together, God speaks to us and uses us in each others' lives - across age, ethnic, & socio-economic barriers - to reveal His will for us as individuals and as a corporate body. So important to be part of the family.

- A primary way God speaks is through His **Word**, the Bible. In fact, God's will revealed in any of these other ways never contradicts what God has already said to us in His Word.
- It's always consistent.
- APP - In my experience, God's will often involves a call to GIVE or a call to GO.
- To GIVE -- something precious I'm attached to, that's maybe become an idol and would be good for me to learn to live without.
- To GO -- leave behind a comfortable place or situation, and move out in new dependence on God.
- ILL - I think the clearest time I've ever heard God's will for me was in the Spring of 1997.
 - Pastor Brian Buhler came calling and, along with the Board of Elders of NSAC at the time, asked me to move to the North Shore to be the Youth Pastor here. And I wanted to say no.
 - We were happy in Surrey. Bought a house. Great church. Loved my job. Kyla was in a good school. Didn't want to give it up.
 - In my Bible reading during that time period, God stopped me dead in my tracks one day:
 - With Cf. Hebrews 11:8, Q: "Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, **obeyed and went**, even though he did not know where he was going."
 - In that moment, I knew it was God's will for us to GO to the North Shore.
 - And we went. With some fear and trepidation.
 - And look what God has done -- in us, through us, for us. Here. What a blessing!
- We don't often receive direct instruction from God. This story is one of only a handful of times in my life when I feel I've received specific instruction from God on a big decision.
- The age-old debate of God's providence and our free will looms in the background of this question.
- Is there one, mystical right answer to each of our big life decisions? Is God controlling it all?
- Backstage, 'pulling the strings' in every decision all the time? Well, in a sense, maybe.
- But somehow, under His Sovereign Hand there is much room for us to exercise our ability -- to think, to dream, to act. To relieve some of your worry today, I believe that much of ...

2. <Slide> Knowing God's will comes via **Simple Stewardship of our time, talents, & resources.**

- Some of us need to call off the exhausting 'TSN Analyst Panel' we pull together on every decision - big or small. In his recent Relevant Magazine article, Dan Padgett writes,
 - Q: "We won't always know what to do; sometimes ... our mistakes will have painful consequences. But the goal of stewardship is not to avoid painful circumstances. The goal isn't to make all the perfect decisions, either. The goal of stewardship is to honor God. If that is our goal, then our focus needs to move away from what particular actions we take to what kind of person we are. For if we are people who desire to honor God, we will be good stewards, and therefore will use well the abilities we have been given." -- July 20/2015, RM.
- Our call is simple: "use well" the abilities God has given you. The greatest barrier to stewardship? Our insatiable desire to own things. When in reality, everything we have is on loan from God.
- APP - I feel need to issue a warning to those who've allowed the world to "squeeze" you and today you're consciously operating outside God's will. Or with no regard for it.
- I want to say that things can go well for a time, but eventually we always reap the consequences of our rebellion. It cannot go unpunished. Please stop and listen to Jesus.
- APP - It's also necessary to encourage those of you who feel you've clearly heard God's will in the past and gone the other way. Truth is: God is not put off by you.
- His cosmic plan has not been ruined by your bad decision. Nor has He written you off. God is always there to welcome you. Give you another chance. Please come back.
- "Listen to Jesus of Nazareth; answer His call." Adjusting life to the will of God, stewarding our lives by kingdom values gives us "something to live and die for."
- The fact we get to discover and actually live out God's will here on earth still staggers me.
- What a privilege. What a responsibility. What joy! Amen.