

KNOWING GOD'S WILL FOR MY LIFE (4:10-27)

*This sermon series is adapted from JD Greear's series called "Still Standing."

- Proverbs is mostly written by Solomon (the son of David and Bathsheba).
- He's writing to his son to give him wisdom to navigate life.
- We're not walking through the book verse-by-verse. You have to pull themes from Proverbs.
- And we won't cover all the themes this time, which would take years.

Anybody remember the *"Choose Your Own Adventure"* books? You could make choices throughout the book that would lead you to different places and different outcomes?

You're being chased by a rabid animal, and you come to a cave. It says, "Do you want to go in? If so, turn to page 210. If not, turn to page 230." You'd be like, "Go in the cave!" So, you turn to page 230, and it says, "Sorry, it wasn't a hidden cave, it was the side of a volcano. You plunge 500 feet into melting lava." And you say, "Aww man, if only I knew!" Sometimes it was a great outcome, and sometimes it wasn't.

And for many of us, finding the will of God seems like that. There are two doors. Going through one is a great outcome; and going through the other is doom and destruction...

- Should I take this job?
- Go to this college?
- Should I ask her out?
- Is this the person I should marry?
- Should I move to this city?

Many of us live with this nagging question: *How do I know God's will?*

Proverbs 4:10–27 "Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. ¹¹ I have taught you the way of wisdom; I have led you in the paths of uprightness. ¹² When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. ¹³ Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life. ¹⁴ Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. ¹⁵ Avoid

it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. ¹⁶ For they [the wicked] cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. ¹⁷ For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. ¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. ²⁰ My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. ²² For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. ²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. ²⁴ Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. ²⁵ Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. ²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. ²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil."

As we walk through this passage tonight, I want to give you four observations about knowing the will of God...

1. The will of God is more of a path, than a door.

It's called a "**path**" or "**way**" seven times in these verses. It talks constantly about: walking or running on this path, swerving or staying straight on this path, getting tripped up or turning your feet away from things that trip you up.

So, viewing the will of God primarily as a "door" (like the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books) – that's really the wrong way to view it. It's a long-term path – a process of learning to walk with God and allowing Him to correct our course as needed.

Don't get me wrong, there *are* times when God's servant (like Paul) was supernaturally directed to do something specific or go to a specific place. Paul sometimes even says things like "a door of opportunity opened to me," but that's the exception, not the rule. Most of the time Paul made decisions like the rest of us.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 16 Paul lays out his plans like this:

- "If it seems advisable that I should go... they will accompany me" (vs. 4).
- "I *intend* to pass through Macedonia, and *perhaps* I will stay with you or even spend the winter." (vs. 5-6).

- “I *hope* to spend some time with you, *if the Lord permits.*” (vs. 7).

That’s not a guy who hears God say, “Behold, choose door #2.” So, Paul didn’t view God’s will mainly as a door to choose. In fact, we Christians have to be careful about the way we approach God’s will. We say things like...

- **“Follow the open doors.”** But lots of doors opened in the Bible that were *not* from God. Take Jonah for example. The door opened up for him to get a ticket to flee from God...
“Do you have any tickets to Tarshish? Or, anywhere away from Nineveh? You do... *Yes! Jehovah Jireh – God provides!*”
- **“I had a peace about my decision.”** Remember, Eve had a peace about eating the fruit. The Bible says it “was pleasant to her.” God never tells us to make our decisions *solely* on having a peace about it.
- **“The Holy Spirit was prompting me.”** In Acts 15 Paul says, “It *seemed good* to the Holy Spirit and to us” (vs. 28-29). So, God can/does prompt people toward a certain decision or direction. But we all get hunches and impressions, and they’re not always from God.



So, what’s the answer?

The best option is a wholistic approach. Paul was seeking answers from: the Scriptures, the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and wise counsel from other believers. He said, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit *and to us.*”

But we often view God’s will like shaking the 8-ball. Remember that game? We come up on a decision and think, “Which one is God’s will? Is it A, B, C?”



But why do we so desperately want a quick and easy answer like the 8-ball game? Because...

- **We don’t trust God with the unknowns.** We don’t really trust that God will take care of us, so we want Him to give us specific answers before we make a move. We want Him to give us the 8-ball answer to which college, or career, or job, or spouse we should choose. But notice God’s promise...

*Verses 11b-12 – “**I have led you in the paths of uprightness. When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.**”*

We want the quick and easy answer rather than trusting God to lead, provide, and protect us on the long path of life.

- **We are lazy.** We don't really want to put the effort and discipline into growing in wisdom. Again, we'd rather just shake the 8-ball and get an immediate, easy answer.

But, in verses 20-25 you hear things like: **“Be attentive to my words... Keep your heart with all vigilance... Put away crooked speech and devious talk... Let your eyes look directly forward.”** And we think, “That sounds like a lot of work and discipline.” Yes it is! But remember, the goal AND reward in life is to be with *God*, NOT just to get an answer from Him!

- **We get paralyzed by fear.** If we're not careful, we'll waste our life waiting on God to tell us something specific to do...

Illustration: I was reading about a man named Walter Houston, who was described by family members as a devoted Christian. They said he died Monday after waiting 70 years for God to give him clear direction about what to do with his life.

His wife said, "Walter prayed a lot – asking God for His specific will for Walter's life, but he just never got that confirmation. Sometimes he thought he heard God's voice, but then he wouldn't be sure, so he'd start the process all over again."

She said whenever Walter was about to take action and do something for God, he would pull back "because he didn't want to disappoint God or go against Him in any way."

Walter's friends said he had a number of God-given skills and talents that he never got around to using. They said he was just too afraid of letting the Lord down by mis-reading God's will.

When you do everything right and the decision is still unclear, you have to plan your way, and leave room for God to direct (or even change) your steps. But don't get paralyzed by fear.

- **We have idols.** You may not realize this, but the will of God itself can become an idol for you. How? If you spend more energy

trying to know the will of God than you do trying to know *God Himself*, it has become an idol for you!

Remember, the reward is to be with *God*, NOT just to get an answer from Him! Be careful not to pursue “God’s Will” more than you pursue God Himself! If you sincerely and diligently pursue God, He will lead you into His will along the way.

2. As you keep to God’s path, right and wrong decisions become more obvious.

NOTICE: I didn’t say *every* wrong decision will be easy to spot, but most sinful decisions become more obvious over time as you keep to God’s path. And the key to understanding this is the word “**keep**.”

*Verse 13 – “**Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.**”*

*Verses 20-21 – “**My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.**”²¹ **Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.**”*

*Verse 23 – “**Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.**”*

The basic idea of the word “keep” is to “watch over” or fix your eyes on something.

Illustration: This term was used in ancient times by sailors. You see, they didn’t have GPS, yet they were able to sail all over the vast oceans. They sailed by the stars. They kept their eyes on the fixed realities in the heavens (stars), and they called it “keeping the stars.” And keeping the stars is much like keeping the commandments. Any sailor could get blown off course or get distracted and lose their way. So, they were “keeping the stars” to continually correct their course.¹

And the same is true for the believer who “keeps” God’s commandments. As we fix our eyes daily on God’s commandments, we’re able to continually correct our course and make the wise choice.

In other words, as you “keep” God’s commandments, the commandments begin to “keep” you from obvious wrong choices...

¹ Rogers, Adrian (2012). *What Every Christian Ought to Know: Solid Grounding for a Growing Faith* (pg. 30). Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group

Verse 14 – “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. ¹⁵ Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.”

This side of heaven, we will never make perfect decisions, but the *wrong* choices do become more obvious the longer you walk faithfully with the Lord.

Now let me show you the flip-side of that. The longer you walk God’s path, the *right* decisions become more and more obvious...

*Verses 18-19 – “**But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.** ¹⁹ **The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.**”*

As we walk faithfully with Jesus, “the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.” Over a lifetime of walking this path with Jesus, the right decisions become clearer and clearer...

- As you keep God’s commands (and they keep you).
- As you remain sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- As you seek wise counsel from other believers.

I’m not saying that age automatically equals wisdom. Because, as you get older, you just get a whole new set of problems and decisions to make. And sometimes they become even more complicated. But as you mature in Christ, you develop muscle memory in applying those three principles that I just mentioned (above).

3. The path you’re on now will determine your destination.

Verses 26-27 – “Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. ²⁷ ...turn your foot away from evil.”



What changes do you need to make? Are bad/sinful choices keeping you from God’s will for your life?

Small Groups