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Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World
Message: Wisdom and the Will of God

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There are not many questions that Christians ask more often than what is God's plan for my life. What is God's will for my life? How can I know it? How can I be sure that I know it? When we ask those questions they take a more specific turn because we're in effect asking things like what is God's desire for me in terms of the job I'm in. Should I change jobs? Here are a couple of choices before me. Which of these am I supposed to take? Should I move my family in pursuit of another place to work? Should I consider buying this house, this car, this truck? Where should I go to college? Should I go to college? If I go to college, what should I major in? Who should I marry? Should I marry? All of these questions that we so often ask.

We all have our own set of questions. Sometimes we're grappling with those questions and those questions become rather heavy, almost oppressive as we're trying to navigate our way through the uncertainty of what it is that we think God might have us do. It is certainly reasonable for us to expect that this God that we talked about is our friend, that He is going to guide us, show to us what His will is, that He is going to be involved in our lives. It is certainly reasonable for us to think that in these major decisions that He's going to be there for us. But we also would be quick to confess that we're not always sure how God does that. We're not altogether sure what He expects of us in that process. We're sometimes not altogether sure what we should expect from Him.

We continue our study in the book of Proverbs this morning. Last week, I said it was appropriate that we end 2019 by looking at this matter of the sovereignty of God as we wrapped up that year and that decade. Then I think it's equally appropriate that this morning we start off 2020 together and we get to look at the wisdom of God and the will of God and what that looks like. I would suggest to you this morning when we're walking in the wisdom of God, we're walking in the will of God. When we're walking in the

wisdom of God, we're walking in the will of God. Someone has said, and I think this is a pretty good description, that God in this whole matter of determining and showing us His will is more likely to give us a compass than He is to give us a roadmap. He is more likely to give us a compass than He is to plug in something to our GPS that says okay, go a mile and turn left. It is more like we have a compass. I think as you read and study your Bible, there is not a lot of emphasis and focus on some kind of formula for discovering God's will, some technique that we get down and we just put the template on every one of these decisions that it tells us what we're to do. Much more of what we see is that we are encouraged to grow in our walk with God. So it's not so much technique and formula as it is about relationships.

Let's start off by looking at the different wills of God. The different wills of God. We have to be on the same page and we have to understand what it is that we're talking about. I would suggest to you that there are a number of different ways that the Bible speaks about the will of God. The first one appropriately is the sovereign will of God. When we talk about the will of God, sometimes we're talking about the sovereign will of God which theologians sometimes refer to this as the decretive will. The decree. That decretive will of God. If you could say anything about the decretive will of God, it is that it is secret, that it is unknown. We talked last Sunday about the sovereignty of God. The fact that God is omniscient. He knows everything. The fact that God is omnipresent. He's everywhere present. The fact that God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. God, we said, is in control. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1 about the decretive will of God. Verse 11: "In Him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will." He works all things according to the counsel of His will. That is nothing less than the decretive will of God. That is nothing less than the sovereign will of God. It is not revealed to us in advance. If you want to know what the decretive will of God is, if you want to know what the sovereign will of God is, you simply look back in the past. You see what history reveals to us.

We noted in Psalm 115 verse 3 our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He wills. That is the sovereignty of God. The decrees that God has issued that will come to pass. In Proverbs 21, we talked about the king's heart is like a channel of water. He

moves it wherever He wants it to go. He is talking about the most powerful people in the world. Their hearts are just like a channel of water. God is providentially at work in our world every day doing and accomplishing His sovereign, decretive will. We understand it when we look back in history and we see it.

The second way we talk about the will of God is the moral will of God. The moral will of God. When we talk about the moral will of God, theologians sometimes call this the perceptive will. The perceptive will. If the decretive will of God is a secret, the secret will of God or the decretive will of God, then the perceptive will of God is what is revealed. The perceptive will of God is revealed. We're talking about the precepts of Scripture. We're talking about the will of God that is revealed in His Word, how it is that God wants us to live. We often call these imperatives. Imperatives are commands. They're explicit statements of God's will. There are many things as you read your Bible, especially as we think in terms of the New Covenant in the New Testament in particular, when God gives imperatives. Those are things we're either supposed to do or things we're not supposed to be doing. That is the revealed will of God. There is a little saying that says God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me. I believe it was RC Sproul who said, "Drop the middle line. Just say God said it and that settles it with me." Whether you believe it or not, it doesn't matter. God said it and that settles it and that is His will for your life.

We spend a lot of time wringing our hands about the unknown will of God when we have the revealed will of God and the perceptive will of God right in front of us or on our smart phone in our Bible. It's right there. God is making known to us His will for our life. Jesus, in answering the question what is God's will for your life, in that conversation with that young man who asked what's the greatest commandment, Jesus told him two things. He said you just love God with everything you've got. You love God more than anything else in this life. And then you love your neighbor as you already love yourself. If you want to know what the will of God for your life is, in two sentences Jesus gave it to us. The will of God for your life is love God with everything you've got. You love God more than anything else in this world. Then the second thing you do is you love everybody around you as much as you already love yourself. You do that and then

you're living and you're walking in wisdom. In that sense you're walking in the will of God.

Thirdly, there is this other area of the will of God. We call it the wisdom will of God. It has to do with non-moral choices. This is God's will for our life and the decisions that we make that are not directly addressed in the Bible. When God tells us something, that is the perceptive will. That is God's will for our life that He has revealed to us and we are to do it whether we want to do it or not. That's the will of God. But there's a whole bunch of life that God doesn't directly speak to that He doesn't give us some statement in the Bible as to what His will might be in that given area. We call that the non-moral will. In other words, those decisions are neither righteous or unrighteous. They're not either good or bad. They are in that sense non-moral. Does God care whether you drive a Chevy or Ford? I've already stepped outside of the non-moral will of God. Does God care what kind of car you drive? Let me be more generic. Non-moral. Does God care whether you cheer for OU or OSU? These illustrations are not working. I did not enter into that discussion the third school of Covenant Community Church because then that does become a moral issue. We don't want to go there this morning. Does God care whether you serve in children's ministry or student ministry or adult ministry? In the full view of people or behind-the-scenes? No. He wants you to serve. That's a command. That's the moral will of God that we serve. He doesn't care where you serve in that sense. There's no moral issue that's a part of that. All of these things and hundreds of other things fall into this bucket called wisdom issues.

James speaks to that in James 1:5 and he says if any of you lack wisdom (which is every one of us) let him ask of God who is going to freely give that to you. There is the implication for this whole matter of non-moral decisions of wisdom issues and matters of spiritual expediency. God has already told us that He is going to help us in those regards. He is going to give us that wisdom. When we think of those things, the problem comes in how we expect God to answer when we're asking for wisdom in those areas. We sometimes hear talk about open doors and closed doors. I use that language. I think it's appropriate if we understand what we're saying. An interesting story right out of the Bible is Acts 16. Zac taught on that a few weeks ago. Paul and Silas are in jail and God literally opens the door. Paul discerned that was not the will of

God to go through that open door. He stayed right where he was. So there are sometimes when we talk about open doors, closed doors that we're probably talking about something different than the way the Bible speaks of that. For instance, in Revelation Jesus says the doors that I close are going to stay closed. The doors that I open are going to be open. But we want to be mindful of what we're saying, what we think we're asking God to do when we talk that way.

Sometimes people talk about asking God for a sign. They have a decision to make, a non-moral issue. They want God to give them a sign. The only example we have in the Bible of somebody asking God for a sign is a bad one. It is Gideon. He is putting out the fleece and he's saying God, do this and if you do it by this time then I know what to do. And God did it and he still didn't do it. Then Gideon changed it and he wanted it another way. There's no example in the Bible apart from that one that I know of and it didn't help Gideon all. When we're asking God for signs then it just invites all kinds of other issues. Are we supposed to buy this house, God? Well, if they accept our offer by this evening we're supposed to buy it. Really? What if they can't get a hold of you and they call you the next morning at 8 o'clock? Does that sign automatically mean no, that you're not supposed to do that? Sometimes people are looking for the non-moral will of God. They open the Bible and they just put their finger on a verse. They read that verse and if that one didn't work, they do it again usually until they find one that they think is reasonably close to what they wanted anyway. People use all kinds of methods to discern what the will of God is. The question that we should be pressing into is how many of these, if any of them, are even Biblical? What God has said He is going to do in this regard for us.

Let's look at a passage that tells us how we can be sure. What if God is more interested in your relationship to Him and in how you walk with Him than He is on this path that you're trying to discern at the fork in the road whether to go right or left. Turn to Proverbs chapter 3. These are verses that we know so well but it's good to come back and see it again. Proverbs 3:1 says "My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in

the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths.”

I want you to see three things about this matter of discerning the will of God. First is the matter of trust. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. When I hear that phrase “trust in the Lord with all your heart”, the one word that comes to my mind is the word “lordship”. The word “lordship”. The word “trust” means to lean on God, to put all your weight on Him. Just cast yourself on the Lord. You're trusting in Him. You're leaning on Him. You're resting on Him. Trusting Him with all of your heart. Remember in Proverbs the heart is who we really are. It is everything about us. So the writer can say in the fourth chapter verse 23, “Guard your heart with all diligence for out of it flow the issues of life.” In other words, everything about your life is captured by that word “heart”. Who you are, what your personality is, what your gifts or skills are. All of the things that make up who you are. Your intellect, your emotion, your will. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lordship. Being a fully devoted follower of Christ as we often say. Someone who completely, unreservedly, wholly is following Christ.

Every Christ follower at some point in life has to answer the question who is Lord in my life. Who am I serving? The apostle Paul in Romans 12 brings that issue right into focus. In Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you, I beseech you, brother. I call out to you, brothers and sisters in Christ, that you would present your body as a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is after all the most reasonable thing that you can do in light of all that He has done for you. What you need to know about Romans 12:1 is the way that verse is structured and the verb tense that Paul uses when he talks about presenting yourself is in what we look at as something that happens at a point of time. It is to continually happen. In this particular verse, he's saying you need to come to some point in your walk with God where you simply say God, from this moment on I'm driving a stake into the ground and from this moment on I want to live every day under the lordship of Jesus Christ. I want to live completely, wholly, unreservedly only to the glory of God. We're to do that at a point in time. The reason that is important is that every other time that you're faced with any decision you come back and you visit that time when you said God, I'm all Yours. I'm putting myself on the altar because I am Yours

and I'm committed to following You all of my life. Every choice that I am faced with, every decision I make, I come back to this starting point that says I belong to Jesus Christ. Everything I have is His. I am determined by the grace of God to live every day of my life for the glory of God. So you trust in the Lord with all your heart. That's lordship.

Look at the second thing that you do. In all your ways acknowledge Him. What are we talking about in all your ways acknowledge Him? We're just talking about daily obedience. It takes us right back to point B where we opened up. We talked about the perceptive will of God. This is the perceptive will of God for your life. Stop looking all over the place for the will of God. It is in here, in the Word. This is the perceptive will of God for your life. He has revealed to you and He has made known to you through the sufficiency of the Word of God everything that you need to know to live life in the way that He wants you to live. This moral will, this perceptive will, this revealed will is where we're to focus. We start off with this matter of the lordship of Christ. From the Lordship of Christ flows this heart to walk in daily obedience to God. I'm trusting in the Lord with all of my heart and as I do that I'm not leaning on my own understanding. In all of my ways I'm acknowledging Him. So there is priority one and priority two.

Then notice we focus on our paths being made straight. I said before that we tend to focus so much of our energy on the unknown will of God. We have fallen into this mindset that says if I am in the right place, if I'm doing the right thing, if I'm with the right person, then our thinking is such that everything is going to be okay. All of our focus is on something that the Scripture frankly doesn't even speak to. The Scripture speaks to what is the priority of your life – the lordship of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures speak to this matter of all your ways acknowledging Him, this commitment to daily obedience. Then what is it that is going to happen? I'm going to be becoming the right person. I'm going to be the right person. Stop looking for all of the other things out there and start focusing, the Holy Spirit says, on being the person that God intends for you to be who He has called you to be. Then look at this cause-and-effect. He will make straight your paths as you exercise sanctified judgment. As you exercise what we would call sanctified common sense. Trust in the Lord, obey Him and then make sanctified decisions. All of God's promises flow out of that heart that says I will trust Him that it will

lead into His Lordship that I'm committed to daily obedience. Then He makes our paths straight as we do that.

If you were to ask me where would you go in the Bible to find practical expressions with regard to this matter of walking in the will of God, I think I'd be hard-pressed than to do better than the wisdom literature. The book of Job. The book of Psalms. The book of Proverbs. The book of Ecclesiastes. What are those books all about? Those books are all about people walking with God through all of the experiences that life brings us. The whole story of the Bible is reflecting that, but if you're just talking about a section of Scripture that illustrates what this looks like in daily living you can't do better than the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Those books are taking you through all the highs and lows, through all the ups and downs, through all the joys and sorrows that life brings to us. It's a picture not of somebody obsessed with what do you want me to do, God. It's a picture of people who are in a relationship with God and growing through all of the experiences that life brings their way. It again simply underscores it's not about technique. It is not about formula. It's about growing in your relationship with God. How do you do that? You do that with the Word of God. You do that with the people of God. You do that in prayer.

Let's just take those practical, sanctified judgment disciplines if you will. Let's apply it to a couple of things that are very practical in that sense that we do often face. Let's say we have a job offer. Maybe we have a couple of choices to make. Maybe we're trying to discern whether we should change careers or maybe we're looking at it at something that seems to have come across our path. What are we going to do with that? We've already committed to the lordship of Christ. we've already committed ourselves to walk in daily obedience to God so that is our starting point. Understanding that the job offer is something that is within the realm of righteousness. It isn't a job that immediately is going to violate our faith, that it isn't going to be a job that we're going to immediately be put into conflict whether we can even live out our faith. Of course that job offer we understand immediately that's not a non-moral issue at that point. That becomes very clear. We turn to the Word of God first. We don't keep going until we find a verse. We don't turn to it that way. We can begin to read the Scriptures as we are hopefully doing in our daily practice. And what are we finding out? We're finding out

many things about God's heart and His desire for us. One of the things that we're finding out is that God's heart and desire is that we would be able to provide for our family. He wants us to have employment and income to make it possible for us to provide for our family. He certainly wants us to be in a setting where we're going to be able to live out and express our faith in the public square or wherever that might be that God would use us in that way. He wants us to consider what is the impact going to be on our family. If you go into a job and you know straight away that they're asking you for 80+ hours a week, unless that is for a very short season, that can't be anything but harmful to your family life, to your married life, to your own personal individualized life if you're single perhaps. That may be a choice that you have to make for a short season but nobody commits to a career that blocks God in marriage and family out of their life with any sense of sanctified judgment in doing so.

And then what do we do? As we read God's Word and we listen to what the Spirit says through that Word, we go talk to our friends. We seek out godly counsel. We say listen, here's what's before me. What do you guys think? You know me. You know my abilities, gifts and interests. Here's an offer. What do you guys think about this? So you begin to seek that counsel from others, people that you respect and trust. You take all of that in and then you are praying about that as well. As you pray you're asking for God to reveal your own heart. What's my motivation in this? Is this opportunity just all about personal advancement? Is this just about financial reward and everything else is secondary to that? So we're asking God to show me my own heart as I make this decision because I want to trust You with all my heart. I don't want to lean on my own understanding. I want You to make my path straight. You're simply calling out to God and you're asking for His guidance.

Now to me what the Bible portrays is this. As you have processed all that information, then make a decision. Make a decision. Make a choice based on those principles that you have seen in God's Word that friends and family have shared with you in that process. As you have prayed, God has hopefully given you some sense of understanding about where you are and your own heart in that matter. Make a choice. My friend, if the choice doesn't work out perfectly the way you thought, it doesn't mean that you are out of God's will. Maybe He wanted to teach you some specific things

within the context of what might even be from the human viewpoint failure. Such I believe is the way God has constructed our relationship with Him in this matter of making non-moral choices.

Or step into the other arena that many of us have made and many others are contemplating and hope to make perhaps at some point in the future and that is should I get married or not. Does God want me to be married? For some, for most, I think the answer to that is likely yes. There are others that God has given the gift of singleness to and that's a good and honorable thing Paul said. But as you think through that process, how do you do that? You start right where we did the last time. The lordship of Christ. I'm committed to the lordship of Christ and I'm committed to walking in obedience to God. I'm making at this point the most important decision of my life as a Christian. Who am I going to spend the rest of my life with? Once you marry somebody, it is not a matter of finding the right person. You're married to the right person as the Scriptures would define that. So this is the biggest decision most of us make. What do we do with that? We come to the Word of God and what do we find? Do we find God saying Carlton, it is my will for you to marry Bonnie. Of course not. We wish that it would. We would like for that to be the case. But that's not the way God functions in our relationship to Him. He tells us a lot about marriage. He tells us that marriage is between a man and a woman. He tells that when we get married you leave your father and your mother. You've got to form this new relationship, this new union. You've got to let the old relationship go. He tells us that we are to find someone who shares our faith so that we're not unequally yoked together. Someone who even within that sphere, which I have said many times, is not enough to find a Christian.

A lot of people will tell you they're a Christian. It is not enough to find a Christian. If you're going to spend the rest of your life with somebody, the lowest denominator is not yes, I'm a Christian. You're looking for somebody who is a fully devoted follower of Christ. You're looking for someone who has the same passion for Christ, for His Word and for obedience and lordship as you have. It doesn't always parallel that but that is your desire. That is your heart. And as you step further into that matter what are you doing? You're asking your parents, I would think if they're available for that. Your close friends. What does this look like to you? do you see this person as being at a life partner

with me? Do you see us as being a couple that will do well together? Or do you have a totally different opinion and all kinds of red flags that are going off in your mind? You're seeking the counsel of others and you're praying as you go through the process. You're saying God, You know I want what You want. I want You again to show me my motivation. Is my only motive I don't want to be single? Is my only motivation I want to show somebody else that I'm loved by somebody? Those kinds of motivations are going to fail us. But if our heart is right before God we're asking Him God, don't just show me the right person. Help me to be the right person. That's what I want more than anything. I want to be the right person that You've called me to be. Then what do you do? You make a decision, guys. You ask the question and you get married. Then the journey begins. The difficulty and the joys and the ups and downs are all part of that. I believe that's the way God leads us.

Here's what Augustine said. Augustine was not talking about the will of God per se. This was taken out of an exposition that Augustine did out of 1 John 4 but I think it fits. I think he would agree with our using it in this way. He said, "Love God and do whatever you please. Love God and do whatever you please, for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is beloved." He is talking there obviously about these non-moral issues. If you love God, then all that He has revealed you're going to do. That's going to be your heart. In all of these other areas, there is freedom. There is this trust of lordship. There is daily obedience of asking Him to direct our steps. Then there's this path that He opens up before us.

Now here's my question to you. Why is it that God has planned it this way? Let's close by looking at what we take away. Instead of one thing, there's a number of things I want to hit just briefly as we wrap up. Why does God direct our paths in this way rather than giving us a technique, rather than giving us some formula? Why is it that it's all about a relationship?

I think first of all it's because God loves wisdom. God loves wisdom. If you've been with us in Proverbs and those first nine chapters, we can pick any of those nine chapters we wanted to right now and we can almost point our finger at any of those set of verses and what we would here is the heartbeat of the Spirit of God pulling us into loving the truth of God and the wisdom of God with everything we got. Those opening

nine chapters are all about loving the wisdom of God. the title over all of them is the blessing of wisdom and pursuing that wisdom. and remember we said on day one wisdom is seeing ourselves and seeing life the way God does. Wisdom is seeing life and seeing ourselves the way God does. when you come to the New Testament who is the perfection of wisdom? Who is the perfection of wisdom in the New Testament? It's Jesus. In Colossians Paul says that it is in Him that are hidden all the perfections of the wisdom and knowledge of God. It is nothing less than loving Jesus with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

My friend, what if somebody came to you today and they said to you, "I'll pay off every bill that you have. I'll wipe out your home mortgage. I'll fill up your 401(k) like you can't even imagine. I'll give you spending money that you won't even know what to do with. I'll give you money for vacations. I'll put you in a 10,000 square-foot home. You can go out and buy any vehicle that you want Ford or Chevy." What do you say to them? Or, they say I'll give you wisdom. If you fear God, because that's where Proverbs begins – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. You say to that person, "You can have all your stuff. What I want is the wisdom of God because that's the only way I can truly live life the way God intends." A lot of us are choosing the other. The pursuit of our life shows that. The heart of God has directed and constructed a relationship with Him that isn't about techniques or formulas for success. It's about a growing relationship with a person.

Secondly, God has done this because it fulfills the capacity for which we were created. We were created as moral beings. Our will is no longer free in the sense that we often speak about it. It's free in the sense that we can make moral choices. Our will is bound unfortunately by Adam and Eve's choice to choose the wrong thing. The whole point is that God didn't create robots. He created individual human persons who have the ability and capacity to choose and make good choices. In this case, by the Spirit's empowerment and grace. What is it that pleases the heart of the Father if it isn't that He sees us making good choices? It fills His heart with joy. That is what He has designed and created us to be – those who would bring glory to His name.

Thirdly, because we mature as we accept the responsibility of our choices. This is the process of growth. This is why some people have so much trouble making a

decision. They're immature and don't want to be responsible. They want somebody in their life to always tell them what to do. Parents, there's nothing to cripple your children more than answering for them at every step along the way. Keep them immature and keep them irresponsible by making every choice and every decision for them. The way God has constructed this relationship is that we grow and mature as we make these choices. Granted, yes, some of them don't work out but God works all things together for good to those who love Him. God is interested in our character and in that development.

Lastly, because the choices we make reveal the path we're on. We're almost back to Proverbs 1 because the choices we make reveal the path we're on. My friends, this morning every one of us can look at our life and in a matter of seconds you can answer the question whether you're on the path of the wise or the path of the fool. The path of the wise or the path of the fool. God wants you on the path of the wise. God wants you to take Him seriously every day of your life. He wants you to live sold out to the lordship of Jesus Christ every day of your life. He wants to be involved in every detail of your life. He wants you to walk mindful of His presence every day of your life. My friends, if you do that in the constant pursuit of truth and the wisdom of God, God will give you Psalm 37:4 – the desires of your heart. Such is the nature of God's relationship with us.

My friend, it all begins with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It all begins with the grace of God in our life – not by works that we do that we earn this favor or merit before God. It's what Jesus did for us. The gospel and our receiving an understanding of the gospel is what opens up this path. We extend that invitation to everybody that's here this morning. To trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean on what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary and God will give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank You for this glorious gospel. Thank You for this wonderful truth. Thank You for Jesus who embodies this wisdom that we so desperately need. Father, grow this church and grow these people in the wisdom of God in this year that is before us. We pray for Your glory and Your glory alone. In Jesus's name, Amen.