

A photograph of a sandy beach with waves crashing onto the shore. The sand is golden-brown, and the water is white with foam. Several footprints are visible in the sand, leading from the water towards the foreground. The text "HOW TO WALK" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters at the top, and "IN THE WILL OF GOD" is overlaid in the same style at the bottom.

HOW TO WALK

IN THE WILL OF GOD

How to Walk in the Will of God

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A Predetermined Plan

Over the past twenty-five years as a Christian I have been exposed to the various theories concerning the will of God. Most of them have left me in utter despair, wondering if God has a will for us at all.

Very early in my Christian life I was introduced to the idea that there was a predetermined plan; whatever happened, good or bad, was the pleasure of Deity and there was no changing it. Many years later while watching *Fiddler on the roof*, I could totally relate to Tevye as he wistfully asked, “*Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I were a wealthy man?*” It is the sigh of the man who had been taught (as I had) that he was locked into a closed plan, sealed before time began. Tevye saw himself programmed to be a poor peasant by the eternal whim of Deity; he might as well accept it.

If this is true, our choices do not really count. The most we can choose is to bend to the inevitable and say, “*Thy will be done.*” Anything else would be doing battle with God. But this is hardly a choice – it is simply choosing to go along with the inevitable rather than beat my head against it. This brought me to a quiet despair. Life was a pointless exercise. I was like a car being pulled through a car wash on a revolving chain. The only choice I could make was to accept the wax job after the brushes- it was inevitably coming!

More Than One Plan

I then met up with a group of people that had a variation of the theory. They told me that God had more than one plan. He had, indeed, written out a perfect plan for my life, a cocoon of joy, a trouble-free existence.

While walking in that perfect blueprint, I would be immune to the problems that faced ordinary humans. However, should that perfect will be disregarded or missed, I would enter the permissive will. It was a horrible thought to be shunted off the thruway on to a permissive country road.

I began spending my waking hours seeking to find that perfect will and staying in it. I could not face the horror of ending up in some wretched second-class existence. But I soon discovered finding that will and keeping in it to be very difficult. It seemed that God kept this highly prized information from all but those who spent most of their life looking for it.

My friend and I spent hours seeking the elusive mind of God concerning future college, job, marriage and (all of us hoped) a call to the mission field or some full-time ministry. In such a perfect plan, every detail has to fit. God forbid I should buy a Ford if the perfect blueprint had indicated a Chrysler! One could find oneself in the permissive will through such an error. An extra cup of coffee could cause a delay that would frustrate a meeting that was in the plan; bacon and eggs for breakfast instead of oatmeal could upset the eternal purpose.

I found myself in a nightmare of unrest and fear. I also realized that I was not alone now. In seeking the elusive plan, I was always preparing for life and never actually living it. I was always in the traffic line waiting to get to the toll booth that would introduce me to the freeway of the perfect will of God.

One day while reading Proverbs 24:30-34 I realized that what I had come to believe was turning into a lazy man. Proverbs depicts him as living in dreams of tomorrow while his real world of today fell apart around him. I was in grave danger of missing the wonder of today while I waited for tomorrow. I looked around at my friends. They were restless in their jobs, waiting for the job or vocation that would be the will of God. Some had even quit their jobs and sponged off the Christian community while they spent their days seeking the will of God.

In despair I left that teaching and shelved the whole matter of God's will. Later I met a company of people who struck me as rather odd. If their car has a flat tire, they hilariously praised God for flat tires. When grandmother had arthritis pains, they praised with glee the God who gave arthritic pains. Upon further inquiry I was told that if we praised God for everything that happened, the bad things would go away, and we would

be left in the perfect will of God- joy and peace.

It was yet another variation on the old theme of finding the perfect will. I briefly tried their thesis but discovered that I could not praise my way into that elusive blueprint. Worse yet, when I praised God for the bad things, nothing got better – and sometimes everything became worse! It seemed the blueprint that had been collecting dust since before time would elude me until I died.

Understanding the Will of God

When I speak of the will of God we mean the desire and active purposes of perfect wisdom. We could define it as God's perfect desire achieved by His perfect method.

I discovered the heart of the matter one day while reading... *“that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* (Colossians 2:2,3 NIV)

The focus of God's wisdom is not a cold blueprint, but the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:1 calls Him the Word of God, i.e. the out speaking of God, wisdom in human form. God does not give us a list of rules or directions, but gives us himself in the person of Jesus, and that in us by the Holy Spirit.

The first time I left England I went to Belfast in Northern Ireland to speak at a church in the city. I came off the ship with a scrap of paper in my hand that had the address of the local pastor scrawled on it. I inquired of the dockers to the directions. They were very friendly and vied with each other to give me the fastest route to the parsonage. But their accents were so thick that I was none the wiser after all their advice. Finally, I went to a parked police car and asked the officer to write the directions to the address. Smiling, he looked at me, opened the door of his car and motioned me to get in. He then drove me to the house.

He might have said, *“I am the way.”* He didn't give me directions that might be misunderstood. He was the map and directions all rolled into a warm human being. God does not give us a list of directions that must be deciphered. **He places the Spirit of Christ within us who is the way and will of God.**

The Will of God in Us

God's perfect method for achieving His perfect plan is to put His will within us. It is not an elusive blueprint outside of us, but His Son within to be realized.

When I understood this, everything changed. No longer was the will of God the place I lived, the job I had or the car I owned. The will of God was Christ! Whatever I owned and wherever I found myself, the will of God was that Christ lived His life through me.

Paul summed it up in Philippians 2:12, *"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

God is in us willing His will. His desires are expressed in us and He puts His hand in ours so that we can say that we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). There are no secondary roads or permissive wills-Christ is the will of God. We are no longer obsessed with a place, but with Christ who is our life, the "Yes" of God's will within us.

Having seen this, I realized I was no longer a car being pulled through the car wash. I was in the driver's seat on the open highway making free choices. The wisdom of God was not an inevitable plan-it was a person living in me wherever I happened to find myself. It was no longer a matter of what I was doing, but who I was expressing in what I was doing.

Christ living in total unity with us is one with God's wisdom; and that wisdom is infinite, boundless, limitless. He is not bound by one road to achieve His purpose. Any road within his wisdom glorifies Him. As we stand before the crossroads of life, He says, *"The choice is yours. Whichever road you take within infinite wisdom, my will is that you express Christ."*

Examples of God's Will and Man's Choices

In Exodus 8:9 Pharaoh was given a choice. It was his honor to decide when the frogs left the land. It was a real choice. He could choose that they departed at once, or tomorrow or in a week or a month's time. Whatever his choice, infinite wisdom would achieve His purpose.

Tevye could have been a rich man! It would not have upset any vast eternal plan; for whether we are rich or poor, the will of God is that Christ is expressed in and through us. Paul speaks to this in Philippians 4:11-13.

“Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

It did not matter what the circumstance, whether poverty or abundance, everything hinged on Christ living in Paul, his life and strength. We are not alone making our choices in the desert of life. We are one with the Spirit who puts His desires within us and checks us when we step out of wisdom. He not only works within us, but orders circumstances that turn us into the paths that bring us to God's perfect end. In C.S. Lewis ***The Horse and His Boy***, Aslan, the lion symbol of Jesus Christ, comes in the night with ferocious roars turning the duo from their path to what turned out to be the right direction. The horse fled from the noise of roaring lions not realizing at the time that it was the noise of love frightening them to the pathway of wisdom.

God's guidance usually comes to us in a negative fashion. He rarely tells us what to do! He leaves us free to walk through life in harmony with the Divine “Yes” within. It is only when we step out of infinite wisdom that we receive specific guidance away from what we had planned to do.

When Paul embarked on his second missionary journey it was based on his desire to visit the groups of believers in Galatia (Acts 15:36). The author of the Acts, Luke, was fascinated by the subject of prayer. If Paul had spent days or weeks in prayer seeking the will of God, Luke would have undoubtedly made mention of it. Instead he passes over it, knowing that the will of God was to be found in the mundane desire of Paul. It was not something outside of him to be discovered, but a “Yes” to be found within his own desires.

As Paul and Silas passed through the churches of Galatia the will of God was in following what their common-sense desires directed. However, when they decided to go to Ephesus, The One within them gave a check. *“The Spirit suffered them not.”* (Acts 16:6,7). But He did not tell them what to do. They are left to follow their desires that are one with the Spirit and are once more given the “no” from the Spirit before they are directed on to the path that led to Europe.

If the early Church had thought of the will of God as a blueprint to be discovered, we would have had a very different story. The Acts show us men who are in a vital unity with the Spirit, making free decisions. In that unity, the Spirit does not give us continual green lights, only red ones.

The Pathway of Walking in God's Will

Even when we run a red light, however, we do not find ourselves condemned to some second-class permissive will. Nowhere in Scripture do we find the people who failed looking back wistfully saying, "*What if...*" There is no backward glance in God's life. When we fail to heed the inner voice, we receive forgiveness and then say, "*What now.*" Remember, wisdom had infinite ways to achieve His end. We may have left one path, but wherever we now find ourselves, Christ, wisdom within, walks us into a whole new road that expresses yet further facets of God's glory.

The pathway of walking in God's will is not always freedom from trouble. The resurrection has not yet taken place! We still live in a fallen world and share its calamities with our pagan neighbors. **Living in unity with Christ who is the will of God is not deliverance from trouble, but deliverance within it.** The pagan goes through the same situations living out of his self-centered self, the Christian lives out from Christ, and in so doing causes the will of God to be done.

We are no longer seeking a trouble-free pathway. We are free to embrace our trouble and live in Christ in it instead of trying to interpret a mystical lesson that is preparing us for some future day. When I was in the hospital having cancer surgery, Christians continually asked me, "*What is God teaching you in all of this? Do you feel He is preparing you for something?*" My answer always frustrated them. "*I don't think he is teaching me anything in particular, any more than He is preparing me for a special position! He is just being Christ in Malcolm in a hospital ward.*" They went away shocked, for to them Christianity consisted in ever seeking to discover the blueprint realized into time. What I am sharing in this article states that to live in this moment is to truly live. Troubles, joys, sorrows, hurts, laughter, creativity, tiredness...Christ is in you living Himself in you. **This is the will of God.**

But, does not God give specific calls to some people? Yes! Whenever He does so, it is very plain. All those in the Bible who received such a call were not looking for it. They were living in all that the present moment offered. Both Moses and David were tending sheep. Gideon was threshing wheat and Elisha was ploughing when their world was interrupted with a call from God to do what they had never dreamed of. Even Jesus, God incarnate, worked each day as a carpenter until the call to His public ministry drew Him to the Jordan River at John's preaching.

We miss the wonder of this moment by always looking ahead to the unusual and extraordinary "*will of God.*" The magnificent will of God is to be found within every ordinary moment. There is no such thing as the mundane or secular. When we were born again we entered the religious life; and wherever we might find ourselves, Christ is

our life.

Walk out now into life and let ***Christ be your life.*** He in you is the will of God, and you living out of Him is the joy of the Lord.