

God's Will for Your Life Is More Obvious Than You Think (Courtney Doctor)

Have you ever wondered what God's will is for your life? I'd venture to guess we've all asked that question at some point. For most of us, the question rises to the surface at critical junctures: choosing a spouse or a job, choosing what school to attend or which house to buy. These are the times we tend to cry out, *Lord, show me your will!*

As we seek to know God's will, we often feel tension. In a sincere desire to please him, we can sometimes walk in fear that we will make the wrong choice about the details of our lives. We spin in circles, wondering where God wants us to get coffee, how much he wants us to spend on groceries, or whether he'd be happy if we went to Disney for vacation. Every choice becomes a paralyzing decision: either discover what God wants, or make a choice that could ruin everything. For some, obsessing over life's details leads them to make decisions in clearly unbiblical ways—hinging their choices on apparent signs and coincidences.

Others swing to the opposite end, thinking God doesn't really care about the details of our lives and doesn't have a "will" for anything we do.

We can also assume God's will applies only to certain aspects of life—whom we marry or what job we take, perhaps—but outside of those big things, we can basically believe we control the moments of our days.

James says this kind of attitude is arrogant and evil (James 4:16). In all things, we should acknowledge our utter dependence on God's sovereign plan, saying, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

But how can we know if the Lord has willed something or not?

One Will, Two Angles

Theologians discuss God's one will in two main ways—his secret will and his revealed will. His *secret* will (sometimes referred to as his hidden or decreative will) refers to the fact that God is sovereign and rules meticulously over all. Nothing happens outside of his perfect will. It's called "hidden" or "secret" because we don't know his will until it's come to pass: *I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose."* (Isa. 46:9–10)

This is the sovereign, but hidden, will of God. And nothing will thwart it.

By contrast, God's *revealed* will is what he's made known to us in Scripture. For instance, we know it's God's will for us to love our neighbors, bridle our tongues, act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly. We know it's God's will that we not murder, steal, cheat, lie, slander, gossip, or boast. How do we know? Because he has told us in his Word.

Focus on God's Revealed Will

Ironically, we're prone to overlook God's revealed will and hyper-focus on his secret will. We often want to know God's hidden will for the future, while walking contrary to his revealed will in the present.

Instead, we ought to diligently study and seek to understand God's revealed will. As we sit under good preaching and teaching, reading and studying and memorizing our Bibles in a covenant community, we will grow in our ability to know God's revealed will. And as we renew our minds, the Spirit of God will help us not only discern God's will (Rom. 12:2), but also apply it to the circumstances and moments of our days.

Trust God's Secret Will

While we obey God's revealed will, we can trust in God's good providence—that as his secret will unfolds he is working all things together for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28). Whatever our days may hold, we can trust that the specifics are designed by a loving God for the good of our souls.

Whether the decision of the moment involves choosing a spouse or choosing new flooring, we can trust our sovereign God to order our lives for his glory and our good. Today and every day, the truth is clear: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3).

This means we can trust God's will even during trials. Sometimes we think that suffering can't possibly be the Lord's will. But we forget that our salvation was won when Jesus submitted himself completely to God's will in the moment of his greatest suffering.

After living in perfect obedience to God's revealed will, Jesus, on the night before his crucifixion, asked his Father three times if there was any other way for him to accomplish God's plan to save a people for himself. Everything hinged on how Jesus would respond to God's perfect will. And, praise and glory to Jesus, he submitted himself, saying, "Your will be done" (Matt. 26:42).

So, seek to know God's revealed will. Be diligent in obeying it. Walk in holiness, pursue sanctification, love your neighbors, be generous with your resources, bridle your tongue, and worship God. Trust that God, in his providence, is working all things together for your good, and remember that what is currently hidden will one day be revealed in glory.

And as you wait with steadfast hope for that day, thank the Lord that his will is always good.