

The Trust Factor – Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense – Week 1
When You Need to Know, You Will Know – Part 1

1 Corinthians 2:9-12: ⁹ But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." ¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

When You Need to Know, You'll Know

Proverbs 3:5-6: ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

These words cling to the soul because they speak to a great need we all feel; the need for guidance. Our text tells us how guidance will come. It is a short course in knowing God's will for your life. If you learn what this passage is teaching and begin to apply it to your daily life, it will make a profound difference when you need to make a tough decision.

Five Key Words:

1. Trust

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart." The word "trust" in Hebrew means, "to lean with the full body," "to lie upon," "to rest the full weight upon." In the Hebrew, to trust in the Lord is to rest your whole weight upon Him; to depend on Him completely.

2. Lean

"Lean not on your own understanding." To "lean" means to rest upon something for partial support. You lean on something when you are not strong enough to stand alone. So we are told to trust, but not to lean.

3. Understanding

"Lean not on your own understanding." "Understanding" refers to the mental processes by which you analyze a problem, break it down into its smaller parts, and then make a decision about what you are going to do. You use it any time you plan your life or solve a problem. Understanding is the decision-making ability that God has given you.

4. Acknowledge

“In all your ways acknowledge Him.” In the Hebrew the word “acknowledge” is a command. The Hebrew word means to know deeply and intimately. It’s the kind of knowing that comes with personal experience.

5. Direct

“He will direct your paths.” A more literal translation is: “He will make straight your paths.”

Here is God’s message to you from **Proverbs 3:5-6**: If you will know God in every area of your life, He will take personal responsibility to make your way smooth and straight. He will remove the obstacles if they need to be removed. He will fill in the potholes if they need to be filled. He will redirect the detour so that what seemed to be a dead-end turns out to be the shortest way to reach your destination. All you have to do is trust in the Lord. Lay yourself completely on Him for full support. Don’t lean for support on your own human understanding. In all your ways know God intimately. He will take the path of your life that seems to go up and down and around and sometimes seems to curve backwards, and He will make your way straight. That’s the promise of Almighty God to you.

This Doesn’t Mean It Will Always Be Easy

Discovering God’s will takes time as the events of life unfold before us, often in ways that seem to make no sense at all. Rarely will we know the whole plan in advance.

My favorite definition of faith comes from Philip Yancey who said, *“Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.”* We want to know why things happen the way they do and why couldn’t things have happened some other way. It would be wrong to say that faith provides all the answers. It doesn’t. By faith we see things that are invisible to others and by faith we believe in advance those things that right now make no sense but one day will make perfect sense because we will view them in reverse.

This is how God works; when you need to know, you’ll know. Not one day sooner, not one day later. And if today you don’t know what to do next, it’s because you truly don’t need to know, because if you needed to know, you would know. If God is God, that must be true.

That’s why the search for God’s will is so exhilarating. When God is leading the way, every obstacle will eventually be removed. The path may have many twists and turns, but in the end He will make your path straight. You have His word on it.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Which of the five key words discussed in this lesson, do you struggle with the most when seeking God's will for your life? Please explain:

2. How does "acknowledging God in all your ways" help us with discerning God's will?

3. Philip Yancey said, "*Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.*" Does this definition of faith give you a better understanding of faith? Why?

4. Has this lesson helped you to better understand how to discern God's will for your life? Explain

The Trust Factor – Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense – Week 2
When You Need to Know, You Will Know – Part 2

Proverbs 3:5-6: ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*

Know God Intimately

So many people struggle at this very point. The Bible says, in all your ways know God intimately, know Him deeply, and know Him personally. So often we skip this part.

Many of us go through life leaning almost completely on our own understanding. We like to be in control. This passage is a warning to all of us who lay out life the way we want it and then say, "Here, God, stamp it with your blessing because I am going to go out and do it for you." God says, "Know me first. Put me first in everything, including all your plans, all your thinking, and all your dreams."

Matthew 6:33: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Do you want to know the secret of knowing the will of God? Here it is: in everything you do, know God. But we all want a formula. Proverbs tells us that the secret is a relationship with God.

You Must Have A Desire

Knowing God is not having knowledge of what He can do, but also knowing His Divine nature and character.

Exodus 33:13: *Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.*

Moses was a man well acquainted with the power of God, yet he still had a desire to know Him. Seeing the demonstrations of His power and His mighty acts does not constitute knowing God.

Psalm 103:7: *He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.*

Philippians 3:10: *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,*

When we have this desire we will want to spend more time getting to know God. We will spend more time in His Word and in His presence through prayer and worship.

In light of this text, what is the will of God for your life?

To know God in everything
To see Him present everywhere and in everything, and
To live in total surrender to Him

The most important thing is not the decisions you face; the most important thing is your relationship with God. And the closer you get to God, the easier it will be for God to guide you in the way He wants you to go.

Knowing God means using all your energies for Him. Knowing God means taking all that you have and placing it at the disposal of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Proverbs 3:5-6 ends with a promise: *“He will make your paths straight.”* God is able to remove the obstacles in front of you.

What If The Obstacles Aren't Removed?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: *7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

God's grace is sufficient to help us endure and see us through.

2 Corinthians 10:13: *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

1 Peter 4:12-13: *12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*

When you know God, He leads you step by step. When the journey is done, you will look back and say, “I don’t know how I got from there to here, but I do know this: Jesus led me all the way.”

When you need to know, you’ll know. If God is God, that must be true.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What do you think it means to know God and how do you, personally, go about doing this?

2. What does the statement “know God in everything” mean to you?

3. If the obstacles are not removed, what do you do then?

4. Can you give an example of time in your life when the obstacles were not removed? How did you handle it? Looking back, what was the outcome?

The Trust Factor – Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense – Week 3 Decisions, Decisions, Decisions - Part 1

James 1:5: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

All of us have moments when we want to hear God's voice or receive some definite sign regarding a relationship, a business decision, a career choice, or a major life decision.

Our decisions really do matter. We make our decisions and our decisions turn around and make us.

It's God's Problem, Not Ours

Often, when it comes to the will of God, we would like someone else to make the decision for us. If God would only tell us what He wanted in a given situation, we would do it. But most of the time we're left with something less than 100% certainty.

That leads me to share an important principle with you. With all my heart I believe the following statement is true: God wants you to know His will more than you want to know it, therefore He takes personal responsibility to see that you discover it. Knowing God's will is ultimately God's problem, not yours.

Let me suggest what this really means:

- He can put you exactly where He wants you to be.
- He can arrange all the details years in advance.
- He can open doors that seem shut tight.
- He can remove any obstacle that stands in your way.
- He can take your choices and fit them into His plan so that you end up at the right place at just the right time.
- He can even take your mistakes and bring good out of them.
- He can take tragedy and use it for your good and His glory.

All He needs is a willing heart. He just needs you to cooperate with Him. This doesn't mean that you won't have to make decisions. But it does take the pressure off, because it means that you can trust God to take your decisions and use them to accomplish His will in your life.

Four Verses to Think About ...

Let's take a quick look at four verses that help us see how God works in, with, through, and sometimes in spite of our decisions to accomplish His will in us.

1. **Proverbs 16:9 NLT:** *We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.*

The word “determines” is a very strong word that speaks of God’s control of every detail in the universe. You can make all your plans, in fact you can have your life mapped out step by step, but in the end, God determines every step you take.

2. **Proverbs 16:3 Amplified:** *Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.*

There are no “accidents” in life, no “random” events, and no such thing as “luck.” Even seemingly meaningless things fit into His plan. To paraphrase Forest Gump, ‘Life is like a roll of the dice, but God is in charge of how the numbers come up.’”

3. **Proverbs 19:21:** *There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand.*

Let me give you a paraphrase of this verse: “You can make all the plans you like, but God gets the last word.” His purpose always prevails. When God determines to do something, it’s going to happen. You can write it down and take it to the bank. God always gets the last word.

4. **Proverbs 20:24:** *A man’s steps are of the LORD; how then can a man understand his own way?*

There is something hidden in the Hebrew text that you wouldn’t know simply from reading the English translation. The word translated “man’s” in the first phrase comes from the Hebrew word “gibor”, which refers to a mighty warrior, a ruler. Solomon means to say that God ordains even the steps of a mighty man.

The word “man” in the second phrase comes from the Hebrew word ‘adam’, which is the generic word for mankind. The meaning is, “If God directs the steps of the mighty, how then can an ordinary man understand his own way?” We’re like a man stumbling around in the darkness, bumping and tripping over ourselves, trying to find our way forward. Only God can see the big picture of life.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Many believers want 100% certainty regarding God's will in a particular situation in their life. What are some of the consequences that could occur if we wait for 100% certainty before we act?

2. How will an understanding of **Proverbs 16:9 NLT**: "*We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps*" influence with our decision-making?

3. What do you think about the statement; "There are no 'accidents' in life, no 'random' events, and no such thing as 'luck'"?

4. What helped you the most in this lesson and why?

The Trust Factor – Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense – Week 4 Decisions, Decisions, Decisions - Part 2

James 1:5: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

The First Rule of the Spiritual Life: He's God and We're Not!

Understand this and you'll be OK, forget this and you will walk in continual confusion. This is where all spiritual understanding must begin.

Four simple principles that can help you as you seek to do God's will:

Principle #1: Use all your intelligence to make wise decisions.

Sometimes people talk as if you shouldn't use your brain at all but should wait for some mystical sign from God. I know the Bible says, "*lean not on your own understanding*" (**Proverbs 3:5**), but that doesn't mean to throw your brain away either. It simply means that after doing all your research on a given decision, submit it to God and ask for His help. If you need to make a major decision, use your head, study the situation, gather the facts, talk to your friends, seek godly counsel, and then submit it all to the Lord.

Principle #2: Since we don't know the future, we will rarely have 100% certainty about most decisions.

Many people believe they must be 100% certain of God's will before they make a decision. I can understand their thinking. After all, if you are facing a life-changing decision you'd like to know in advance beyond any doubt that you are doing what God wants you to do. All too often that leaves us paralyzed by an inability to make up our minds. Some decisions are so important they can't be left to chance.

- Did Noah know all about the flood? No, but he built the ark anyway.
- Did Abraham have a road map? No, but he left Ur of the Chaldees anyway.
- Did Moses understand what it meant to lead God's people out of Egypt? No, but he said yes when the Lord called him.

- Did Joshua know how the walls were going to come tumbling down? No, but he marched around Jericho anyway.
- Did Gideon fully grasp God's plan to defeat the Midianites? No, he doubted it from the beginning, but God delivered his people anyway.
- Did young David have a clue of what was to come when Samuel said to Jesse, "This is the one"? No, but the Spirit of the Lord came upon him anyway.
- Did Jehoshaphat know how God was going to defeat the Ammonites? No, but he put the singers at the front of the army and sent them out to battle anyway.

The life of faith means living with uncertainty even in the midst of doing God's will. Too many people want what God has never promised—100% certainty before they will act. It is rarely God's will to give you 100% certainty before you make an important decision.

Principle #3: God wants guidable people who will trust Him with the details of life.

Guidable people look to God and not to themselves. That is, they understand that after they have done all they can, it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Let me share a secret with you. Guidable people always receive guidance from God. Why? Because God always speaks loud enough for a willing ear to hear.

Are you a guidable Christian? Or do you still feel like you have to be in the driver's seat of life. If you are struggling with this, let me suggest these two simple prayers:

- 1) "Lord, let your will be done even if it means that my will is not done."
- 2) "Lord, right now I'm not sure I want to do your will. But I am willing to be made willing. Do whatever is necessary to change my heart. Amen."

Principle #4: When the time comes, make the best decision you can and leave the results with God.

When the time to decide comes, when you've thought about it, prayed about it, talked it over, sought godly counsel, researched your options, looked at the circumstances, searched the Scriptures, and waited on the Lord, when you've done everything you know how to do and the moment of truth comes, then just go ahead and make the best decision you can make.

When you've done that, there's one other thing to do - leave the results with God. Remember He's God and you're not. His purposes will stand.

Group Discussion Questions

1. How does an understanding of the fact that “He is God and we are not” help you with your decision-making process?

2. When it comes to making decisions, what process do you follow? Has it been successful?

3. Which of the four principles in this lesson do you struggle the most with and why?

4. Which of the four principles discussed in this lesson helped you the most and why?

The Trust Factor – Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense – Week 5 The Hardest Prayer You Will Ever Pray – Part 1

Matthew 6:9-13: ⁹ *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Most people have been in the place where our praying seems like we are praying in darkness. You have stood beside the bed of a loved one and found that prayer was nearly impossible. Or you have faced a difficulty so immense that you truly did not know what words to use when you prayed. Or perhaps there have been times in your life when you have not prayed because you were afraid of the answer God would give.

Jesus hinted at the problem when He gave us the Lord's Prayer. Included in that model prayer were these words: *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (**Matthew 6:10**). The basic difficulty may be easily seen if we lay it out in a series of logical statements:

1. God has a will concerning my life.
2. God's will encompasses His desires for my life.
3. But I also have a will that encompasses my desires for my life.
4. Those two wills are often in conflict with each other.
5. When there is a conflict, either God's will or my will prevails.
6. When I pray, "Your will be done," I am asking for God's will to prevail over my will.

That's the basic difficulty we face when we pray. When we ask that God's will be done, we are absolutely asking that our wills be overturned, if necessary.

Jesus taught us to pray that God's will *would* be done "on earth as it is in heaven." Exactly how is God's will done in heaven? In heaven, God's will is *always* done; in heaven, God's will is *instantaneously* done; in heaven, God's will is *completely* done; in heaven, God's will is *joyfully* done. But God's will is rarely done on the earth. *After all, there are over six billion wills on the earth and still only one will in heaven.*

In some ways, "Your will be done" seems like the most hopeless of all prayer requests. "Your will be done" is a difficult prayer to pray sincerely. It may be the hardest prayer you will ever pray. Even though Jesus Himself instructed us to use these words, there are at least four reasons why we find it difficult to do so.

Reason #1: It is hard to pray, “Your will be done” because it means giving up control of your own life.

God has a will (or desire) for your life, but you also have a will (or desire) for your life. When you pray, “Your will be done,” you are asking that His will take precedence over yours. Only one will can be done at a time.

Reason #2: It is hard to pray, “Your will be done” because we often doubt that God wants the best for us.

The first reason touches our will, while the second one touches our mind. The first reason was practical; the second is theological. Oftentimes we’re scared that if we give God control of our lives, He’ll mess it up somehow. We wouldn’t say it that way, but that’s how we really feel.

We’ve all known the frustration of unanswered prayer. When God doesn’t answer our prayers – or when He doesn’t answer in the way we want Him to – are we not tempted to wonder if God gives us the opposite of what we ask for?

How do you pray, “Your will be done” when you aren’t sure that God really cares for you? If you knew that He had your best interests at heart, you might dare to pray that way. But as long as you doubt, that prayer will be almost impossible.

Does God Really Care For Me?

There are many answers to the question, “does God really care for me?” But there is only one that really matters. It’s the answer God gave 2,000 years ago on a hill outside the city walls of Jerusalem.

Romans 5:8: *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

For some people, even the death of God’s Son will not be enough. But if that is not enough, nothing God can do will make any difference. For if someone will give His own Son to die, is there anything else He will hold back?

Group Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been at a place in prayer where you felt like you were praying in the dark? What helped you get through it?

2. What do you do personally in prayer when your will is not in agreement with God's will?

3. Have you ever had a time when you doubted that God's will was what was best for you? How did you respond to that?

4. How does an understanding of Jesus dying for us help us with understanding that God really does have our best interests at heart?

The Trust Factor – Trusting God When Life Doesn't Make Sense – Week 6
The Hardest Prayer You Will Ever Pray – Part 2

Matthew 6:9-13: ⁹ *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Reason #1: It is hard to pray, “Your will be done” because it means giving up control of your own life.

Reason #2: It is hard to pray, “Your will be done” because we often doubt that God wants the best for us.

Reason #3: It is hard to pray, “Your will be done” because God’s will sometimes involves suffering and pain.

That was true for Jesus. As He agonized in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane He realizes that this is the cup He must drink and He recoils in horror. These are His words: *“Oh My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”* (**Matthew 26:39**). These are not the words of unbelief. They are words of faith. They are the words of a man who understands fully what it will cost to do the will of God.

If Jesus struggled with the will of God, should we be surprised if we do the same? If it was difficult for Jesus to pray, “Your will be done,” is it likely to be any easier for us? Jesus is our example of what it costs to pray, “Your will be done.” It cost Him His life. No wonder He struggled in Gethsemane.

Reason #4: It is hard to pray, “Your will be done” because you are praying against the status quo.

God’s will is seldom done on the earth. Too many things that go on are obviously not God’s will.

God does not accept the status quo! In fact, He sent His own Son into the world to change the status quo. At Bethlehem God sent a message to the world: “Things are going to change.”

To pray, “Your will be done” is to follow God in opposing the status quo. This prayer goes against the grain. In a world where God’s will is *not* done, we are to pray that God’s will be done.

To pray, “Your will be done” is not a prayer for the weak or the timid. This is a prayer that leads to action. If you see injustice being done, you cannot casually pray, “Your will be done” and then walk away. If you really mean, “Your will be done,” you’ve got to jump into the fight and help make it happen.

You’ll Never Know Until You Let Go

It’s not wrong to struggle with this prayer. After all, Jesus struggled with it Himself. But over the years I’ve discovered that the happiest people are those who have said, “I’ve decided to let go and let God run my life.”

God orchestrates the affairs of life to bring us to the place where our faith will be in Him alone. Slowly but surely as we go through life, He weans us away from the things of the world. At first the process touches only our possessions (which we can replace), but eventually it touches our relationships (which may not be replaced), then it touches our loved ones (who cannot be replaced), finally it touches life itself (which is never replaced). Then there is nothing left but God and us.

Through all this process our Heavenly Father leads us along the pathway of complete trust in Him. Slowly but surely we discover that the things we thought we couldn’t live without don’t matter as much as we thought they did. Even the dearest and sweetest things of life take second place to the pleasure of knowing God. In the end we discover that He has emptied our hands of everything and then filled them with Himself.

Happy are those people who hold lightly the things they value greatly. The happiest people I know are those who have said, “All right, Lord, I’m letting go. I’m going to relax now and let You take over.”

What are you struggling with right now? What are you holding on to so tightly that it almost makes your hands hurt? What is it that you are afraid to give to God? Whatever it is, you’ll be a lot happier when you finally say, “Your will be done” and open your clenched fist. But you’ll never know until you let go.

C. S. Lewis said there are two kinds of people in the world, and only two kinds: those who say to God, “Your will be done” and those to whom God says in the end, “Your will be done.” Which kind are you?

Group Discussion Questions

1. How does the statement; "It's hard to pray, 'Your will be done' because God's will involves suffering and pain" affect the way you pray?

2. If it is true that God's will is seldom accomplished in this world, then what can we do personally to see to it that it is accomplished?

3. What does the statement, "Let go and let God," mean to you? How do you apply it in your life?

4. How has this series helped you with discerning the will of God for your life?
