



FIGURING
OUT

GOD'S
Will

Life Group Study Guide

Follows "What is God's Will for My Life?" booklet by John Ortberg

What Is God's Will for My Life?

Week 1: Which Door Gets the Prize? (p. 7 – 22)

What Is God's Will for My Life?

If God's Will for My Life Is So Important, Why Doesn't He Tell Me More Plainly?

There Are So Many Options – How Do I Choose?

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DISCUSSION:

Talking about "God's Will" can often be confusing. Most often, people refer to seeking "God's Will" when attempting to make a personal decision about something. Our desire is that God would communicate in signs and wonders to make it plain on what to do. However, God typically doesn't work like that. And "God's Will" is more than just the decisions we make about what to do with our future path. God is also concerned about our character and our proclamation of His character. Certainly, God is concerned about your personal direction and choices in life, but it's not always about altering your situational path. The question of "What would God want me to do?" applies even if our path is not going to be altered. "What would God want me to do" applies even when there is no decision to be made.

Also, "God's Will" is not only about what we should do, but about what God is going to do. God has a sovereign will/plan/purpose for our life and this world. Much of that was planned before the creation of the world, such as His plan to provide the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. His Will is to create a new heaven and a new earth where He will spend eternity with those who accept that gift of salvation. God promises that He will complete the work in you that He began at your salvation (Philippians 1:6). But for the sake of this study, we will be primarily focusing on our decision-making ability in connection with God's desires. We sometimes illustrate this process of making decisions in connection with God's desire like walking through doors if/when God opens them. Yet, sometimes, we can miss an open door or pry open a closed door. And when that happens, we can wonder whether we've completely missed God's Plan A for our entire life course...if there is such a thing. Who we are and where we are is a mix of actions taken and opportunities left behind. Who we are and where we are is a mix of things we can control and things that happen to us beyond our control. The goal is not to miss an opportunity that God places before us to do His work. The goal is seizing those opportunities or walking through those doors so that we experience His blessings.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Read Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 12:2. How does it feel to know that God has a good plan for your life that is filled with hope and prosperity?

Why can we get so worried when it comes to making decisions?

What is God's primary will for our life? See page 13 in "What is God's Will" booklet.

God shares a lot of His desires for us to follow. What are some of those?

Sometimes we can use the analogy of God not opening a door as an excuse to do what we want or an excuse to not decide. Share a time when that was true for you.

What thought from this week's reading and discussion interested you the most?

PRAY:

Spend some time in prayer with your group. Pray for specific decisions that may be coming up. Pray not only for what to do, but who to be.

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Week 2: Oops, I Already Messed It Up (p. 22 – 48)

If My Circumstance Seems to Take A Wrong Turn, Does That Mean I Missed God's Will?
Will God Be Angry at Me or Punish Me If I Make A Bad Choice?
How Can I Know If What I'm Doing Is Against God's Will?

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DISCUSSION:

Following God's Will both through the clear commands of Scripture and through listening to His gentle guidance leads to experiencing God's good and perfect and pleasing way of living. However, this does not mean the path you take will be bump free. In fact, it may feel like you took the wrong path. God's objective in leading you is for your character development, to be more and more like Christ (Romans 8:28-30). The Israelites in the Old Testament experienced this as they finally escaped their slavery in Egypt. God led them on a path through the wilderness instead of a path they may have been more comfortable with. Why? Because God knew that they weren't *really* ready to take on a battle from a neighboring enemy unbeknownst to the Israelites (Exodus 13:17-18). I like how verse 18 says that they Israelites were ready for battle, but God knew better. So God directed them to what seemed like the wrong way. God's will is not to harm you, but to give you a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). It's important to not judge whether the path is/was God's Will by the short term feel of the path.

Of course, sometimes, we do make bad choices and leap on the wrong path and experience the bumpy side street. The Bible is all about people making wrong decisions. Adam and Eve, David, Jonah, and Peter are all perfect examples of even faithful followers going against God's Will. When you look at their stories, you see how God still lovingly worked to restore their path and relationship with Him. Making a wrong decision and following a "Plan B" does not mean your life is completely off course and all hope is lost.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Read Exodus 13:17-18. How does it feel to know that God will sometimes lead you into the wilderness, the desert place, instead of the way you think you are ready for?

Why is using guidelines such as "being ready," or "feeling peace about it," or "it's the easy way," not a good discernment process?

John Ortberg said, "The wilderness is not just a place of disappointment. It's also the furnace of transformation" (p. 24) and "...a lot of times if we knew what we were getting into, we wouldn't get into it in the first place" (p. 25). Share a time in your life when this was true for you.

What are some good basic processes of determining God's Will for difficult life decisions?

Think about the people in the Bible who made wrong decisions. How did God deal with their wrong choices? How does that make you feel about what happens when you make a bad decision?

PRAY:

Spend some time in prayer with your group. Pray for specific decisions that may be coming up. Pray not only for what to do, but who to be. Thank God for His forgiveness and love to get you back on the right path when you make wrong decisions.

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Week 3: No or Go? Help Me Decide (p. 48 – 74)

What Spiritual Disciplines Can I Begin Practicing to Grow In Decision Making And Discernment?

Is It Okay to Ask God for Specific Things I Want In My Life?

What If I Don't Feel God's Leading? Should I Still Move Forward?

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DISCUSSION:

Making decisions in connection with God's desires is not typically a quick and simple task. It's not as if we pray a quick prayer and then receive the answer. It's because to understand God's heart and desire, we must build a close relationship with Him. The more we understand Him and the more we spend time with Him is when we can understand what He would do or have us do in certain situations. It's just like an earthly relationship. When you spend more time with someone, you know how that person would act or respond. That's why we should be continually growing in our spiritual habits such as reading Scripture, praying, and being around Christian counsel. It helps speed up the decision-making process rather than trying to go to God with no clue of His clear commands of Scripture or being in a support system of believers who have walked that path before you.

Eventually, after you gather some wisdom from God, you'll have to make a decision. You could attempt to ignore the situation or put off the decision, but that often doesn't solve the problem. John Ortberg says, "staying as our default mode can become a strategy for comfort and safety more than faith" (p. 70). If God is more concerned about your character development to be more like Christ, then faith is certainly a characteristic He wants you to develop. Faith is only developed by doing things when you don't fully know how it will work or if it will work. Gideon in the Old Testament wanted several signs before believing in God's word. That is not faith. God is not going to give you complete insight into what the future holds with whatever path you take. He wants you to seek Him for wisdom, which He will generously give to anyone who asks (James 1:5), but He also wants you to take a step of faith and trust in Him. God typically sheds light only on the path directly in front of us rather than on the whole landscape. God is waiting for us to be active participants in the discovery of His will, to boldly step out in faith, rather than waiting until we clearly see a sign that says "go". Getting no answer from God is not necessarily an answer of "no."

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Read Revelation 3:14-20. How do you make sense of "God opening and closing doors of opportunity" with this passage of "us opening and closing doors of opportunity"?

John Ortberg mentions 4 main spiritual habits to grow in to develop the skill of discernment: Prayer, Rest, Seek Counsel, and Practice. Which spiritual habit is your strong exercise, and which one do you need to better develop?

Read Matthew 26:39. Jesus asks God to change His plan even though He knew He wouldn't. How does that make you feel knowing you can tell God what you would want even though you know what He wants?

Do you tend to jump out in faith and then ask if it's God's Will or ask for God's Will and wait until you clearly have an answer?

Why do you think John Ortberg says, "it's often better to execute an imperfect choice with your best self than the perfect choice with your wrong self" (p. 73)?

PRAY:

Spend some time in prayer with your group. Pray for specific decisions that may be coming up. Pray not only for what to do, but who to be. Tell God what your desires would be and then pray for the faith to go open the door that God may be waiting for you to open.

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Week 4: It's Not Magic. It's Faith (p. 74 – 100)

Isn't Knowing "God's Will" For My Life Reserved for Spiritual Giants Or "Professional Christians"?

Can I Want Something So Badly That God Has to Give It to Me?

How Do I Learn to Recognize God's Voice?

INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DISCUSSION:

Following God's Will is a combination of recognizing God's voice as well as being a "living sacrifice" of being willing to do whatever God would want and conforming our mind to His way of seeing things (Romans 12:1-2). We can often mistake this whole process of discovering God's Will to be only for the BIG decisions in life or how to do BIG things for Him. Yet, it's really a way of living. We can sometimes get nervous about living a life this way, especially at first, when it's not normally the way we've done things. Perhaps in the past, you simply made plans without consulting God. Perhaps you've sought out astrology or other forms of superstition practices. Ever thrown a dart at options hung on a wall? Rolled some dice? Played "paper, rock, scissors" to see whose way is best? God doesn't want us to do those things.

Sometimes, we make the process harder than it is. We don't have to go through the whole process of deciding what to eat for dinner every night. Yet we should discover God's principles of what foods to eat and how to take care of our bodies before we think it doesn't matter. Seek to know God's Will in all matters. And then give yourself some grace and mercy. We put so much pressure on ourselves as though one decision leads to success and prosperity while the other one leads to doom and destruction. Remember, God has a good plan for you. He's concerned about your heart, rather than a "following of a law." As a child of God (one who has already walked by faith in salvation – John 1:12), He is working to finish the plan that He started at your salvation. He hasn't left you. He's not surprised by your predicament. He's not trying to hide His plan from you. Continue to trust and follow Him by faith. Remember that we don't go to God only when we need to adjust our circumstances, but when we need to adjust our character. Which is all the time. Continually ask God how you need to be "here and now" not just "there and then."

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Read Romans 12:1-2. What is the relationship between being a "living sacrifice" and "renewing our minds" with "discerning what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God"?

Have you ever wanted something so bad that you convinced yourself that the reason you wanted it so bad is because God wanted you to have it? What is having a desire for something not a good indicator for God's leading?

Why does God not want us to use astrology, fortune-telling, consulting a medium, or the like to know what you must do?

Read John 10:2-5. How do the sheep know His voice? What are the characteristics of God's voice versus the voice of the other influences?

What is the greatest truth you learned in this study on "Knowing God's Will?"

PRAY:

Spend some time in prayer with your group. Pray for specific decisions that may be coming up. Pray not only for what to do, but who to be. Ask God for more passion to know His Word and Will in any situation. Thank God for your group as you've shared bad choices, desires and passions, and your life with one another. Pray about helping one another know God's Will and to follow God's Will.