

WHEELERBURG BAPTIST CHURCH
Sunday Morning Message October 23, 2016
Discerning God's Will – Voice, Verse, and Providence

INTRODUCTION

An important aspect of what I do as a Biblical counselor is help people discern the will of God for their lives. Typically, people ask for counseling because something in their life is painful, difficult, or out of control. They sometimes feel that God is distant and disconnected from their lives, and they are hurting. In difficult times, people sometimes begin to ask bigger questions, and they are searching for direction.

At other times, there may not be extreme difficulty or pain involved, but there is a desire to know and do God's will. Should I take this job? Should I marry this person? Should I move or stay where I am? Am I in the right church? How do I balance my aging parent's needs, my spouse, my job, and my older children? Would God want me to remain in this marriage? What should I pursue as my life's work? Where should I go to school? How do I deal with the overwhelming busyness of life? Questions. Concerns.

All of our lives are filled with situations that require us to make choices. If you are person that loves Christ, you certainly want to make choices that will bring Him glory and honor. Sometimes it seems that there is not a clear best choice. What is a person to do?

My intent is that this message will help you learn how to know and do the will of God so that you might bring our great God the glory He deserves. That is what we are designed for, and walking in the will of God will certainly maximize our joy and satisfaction. Jesus said that He came that we might life, true eternal life filled with His blessing and joy. Certainly not a life without trial and suffering, but a life that gives meaning and purpose in the midst of difficulties. Psalm 1 tells us that this blessed abundant life will be experienced by the person who rejects the counsel of the ungodly and instead, delights in the Word of God. He fills his days and nights with the Word of God so he might be careful to follow and obey.

Specifically, this morning we are going to look at two key principles that will help you discern God's will and walk in the fullness of life.

First, we will learn from the Apostle Peter that God has given us a clear revelation of His will in the Scriptures. We have all we need with the Bible to know what God wants us to do.

POINT I - God has provided a complete and sufficient revelation for all we need in life through His written Word, the Holy Scriptures.

Second, we are going to consider the wonderful doctrine of God's providence, how through His absolute control and sovereignty He takes care of all creation, especially His chosen people.

POINT II - PROVIDENCE: God is actively and continually caring for His creation,

particularly His chosen people.

After we ponder the sufficiency of Scripture, and the loving providence of God, we'll consider the appropriate application and response as we seek to discern and do His will.

POINT III - OUR RESPONSE: If we want to experience a full blessing and joy in our Christian walk, we must place our plans and desires under the authority of Scripture and accept God's Providence in our lives as good.

Open your copy of God's word to the epistle of II Peter chapter 1 as we consider this matter of the sufficiency of Scripture.

POINT I. God has provided a complete and sufficient revelation for all we need in life through His written Word, the Holy Scriptures.

Peter, the fisherman. The disciple who walked on water with Jesus. The one who swore he would never deny the Lord, and then did so three times, and then is restored by our Lord as He asked Peter three times if he loved Him. As Peter responded, deeply, passionately, and brokenhearted, Jesus called Peter to feed His sheep. Today we have Peter's exhortation documented in this letter to the early church as he fulfilled this call to feed the sheep. In this letter, Peter tells these believers that he is about to be martyred, and he wants to leave them clear instructions on how to hold fast to the end, avoid false teaching and false teachers, and thus obtain a glorious entrance into the kingdom of God. Let's consider what Peter had to say about the role of Scripture in this matter of knowing and doing God's will:

II Peter 1:1-4

Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ²Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

³His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

II Peter 1:16-21

¹²So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

POINT II - PROVIDENCE: God is actively and continually caring for His creation, particularly His chosen people.

PROVIDENCE God's activity throughout history in providing for the needs of human beings, especially those who believe in him.

It is worldly and carnal to believe that the happenings of our lives are controlled by such things as fate, or luck, or nature. Even the deficient idea that there is some impersonal spiritual force overseeing and causing some grander purpose is pagan. Brothers and sisters, we know and proclaim the one and only true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator and sustainer of this universe. He is the beginning and the end of all things, by Him all things exist and consist. He is without beginning, and He does not change. He lives outside of time and space, for He created both. He alone is eternal, and He is sovereignly over and in control of all that is. And He has a precise plan, and all of history is moving toward a climax where in His Son He will judge and destroy this current world, and usher in a new heavens and earth where He will be acknowledged and worshipped by the whole of creation. This the God that we know, love, and worship, that has accepted us through the person and the work of His Son, Jesus.

So in this matter of discerning His will and direction for our lives, we have seen that He has given us all the instruction that we need in the Scriptures. We don't need a voice, a sign, or a superstitious confirmation. We have the Word of God, and need nothing else to know and do His will. So how about the specific decisions and plans and choices that we make? How does He direct all of those to the fulfillment of His ultimate plan? He does it through what we call providence. A basic theological definition of providence is:

PROVIDENCE—generally used to denote God's preserving and governing all things by means of second causes

Webster's definition of providence is God conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny;

The Word of God has much to say concerning God's providence over His Creation. Consider the book of Esther, a book that displays the providence of God and never mentions His name. How about the life of Joseph? God's sovereignty and providence is the golden thread that unites the message of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

This morning I'd like to consider a couple of passages that address this issue from the teaching of our Lord Jesus, and then take a closer look at a beautiful demonstration of this principle of providence in the life of Abraham.

First, turn to Mt 10:28-31

28“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And *yet* not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30“But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 “So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.

Jesus was comforting His disciples as they faced the fear of torture and persecution for their allegiance to Christ. Jesus counsel to get their anxieties and fears calmed was to consider the bigger picture – there is only One in this universe that is worthy of our fear and trembling, and it is the One that holds our fate and destiny in His hand. The One that should cause us to lose our breath and consume our thoughts is the One who can destroy both our body and our soul as just punishment for our rebellion. Men can only take our physical life. Only the God of heaven has the ultimate control of our eternal state. And that God is our Father who cares for the sparrows, and knows the exact number of hairs on our head. The One who holds sovereign control and takes care of this world, loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. If we will meditate on that fact, it will banish all fear and anxiety from our lives. He is taking care of every detail. We have no need for worry or stress.

Jesus had more to say concerning this matter of worry, concern, and the stuff of this life.

Luke 12:13-34

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” ¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

²² And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰ For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

³² “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow

old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

I took the time to read the full passage so that you could hear the full context. Someone wanted Jesus to play arbitrator and help him get his fair share of an inheritance. Again, Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter, telling this guy that he is enamored and distracted by things – money, wealth, houses, lands, and all the other temporal stuff of this life. Jesus warned him that his worry and stress of this stuff was an indication that his treasure and focus was money, and not God. He told the man that life is not about how much stuff you have. Then as the master teacher, He tells a story about a guy who was consumed with the gathering of stuff to the point that he had to build bigger and bigger barns just to store all of it. As he counted his money and all of his creature comforts, he found his peace of mind and contentment in the abundant supply of food, wine, and a great retirement account. Jesus said this man was a fool! His foolishness was not that he had all this stuff, but that he found his joy, contentment, peace, and purpose in it. Suddenly he dies, and now he must account for his life to the One who created all that stuff.

Jesus is so clear. Life is more than food, and clothing, and houses, and cars. The lesson today is that much of our stress about the so-called will of God is really just a misdirected focus. When we consider who God is, and His care and love for us, we can literally take no thought for all these things. Providence means God provides – for the birds and the flowers and creation, and certainly for His children. Our God owns it all, and it is His pleasure to give us all that we need and even more. Our focus is to be about eternal matters, eternal life, relationships, our relationship with Him, His kingdom, His purposes. Worry, fear, and stressing over our earthly decisions are an indication of a misdirected heart. If we will seek His kingdom first and foremost, He will providentially provide the direction and wisdom we need to make good decisions that will honor Him.

We now turn to an amazing illustration of providence in the life of Abraham. God appeared to this pagan man, and called him to leave that life and said that He was going to make him the father of many nations. Abraham was amazed, especially as he and his wife were well beyond the natural child bearing age. It was amazing that this God would give him a son and make him the earthly patriarch of his covenant family. But Abraham believed God's promise, and as a result he was counted as righteous and his wife conceived and bore his son Isaac. So Abraham had received Isaac, the promised son that would bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. With that background, let's join this unfolding story of God's providence in Genesis 22:

22 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."² He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he

said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

What an amazing story of God's dealings with our spiritual father!! Within this story, you will find deliverance for all you fear and anxiety about what to do about the future. Here's what I want us to see today. Abraham believed that God would provide. He knew as he climbed that hill with his son, the son of promise, that God would provide a way for his son to come back down that mountain to fulfill God's purpose. Abraham knew that somehow God would provide, even if it meant He had to raise Isaac from the dead. And God provided. God provided a substitute, a sacrifice. Abraham was willing to kill his son knowing that God would raise him from the dead in order to fulfill his promise. Look again at his answer to his son Isaac as he asks about the sacrifice; verse 8 "Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son". Abraham had also told the servants that they would both return. In the face of death, Abraham believed God was even able to raise the dead. And in verse 14, Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide". This is God's provision on display.

Beloved, God provides. He has also provided a sacrifice for Himself to bear His wrath and punishment. It was His own Son. God sent His only Son into this world, the lamb of God, to bear the punishment due us so that we could be forgiven and set free. He gave His son as a perfect sin bearing sacrifice to provide the forgiveness we needed. His Son also climbed a mountain, the hill of Calvary, and was crucified on a Roman cross to bear the punishment for the sins of God's people. And this one actually died, and three days later rose from the dead validating that what God had provided was accepted and fulfilled the ultimate purpose and plan of God. And as sure as He was crucified, and risen, and ascended into heaven, He will return as King and Sovereign over this world. God provided and gave us His Son. And as sons of Abraham, we also accept and trust in God's provision.

So let me bring this all together in way of application. First, God has given us a complete and sufficient revelation of Himself and His will for us in His written word, the Scriptures. We have no need of further revelation or guidance. What we need is a transformed heart and a renewed mind in the Scriptures so that we might understand and obey from the heart what He has revealed. We also need to trust in His care and providence to provide direct our lives and fulfill His purpose and will. Now let's look at how we need to response in light of a sufficient revelation and God's care:

POINT III - OUR RESPONSE: If we want to experience a full blessing and joy in our Christian walk, we must place our plans and desires under the authority of Scripture and accept God's Providence in our lives as good.

So what does it look like for us to submit our plans to the authority of Scripture and the Providence of God? James helps us answer that question.

James 4:13-16

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

We must humble ourselves, for God resists proud, self-willed, self-sufficient, self-focused people and gives grace to those who confess their dependence on Him as their Father, their weakness and spiritual poverty, and they also put their trust in His strength, sufficiency and sovereignty. God is on the throne and in control. We must bow the knee, and humbly submit all of our thoughts and plans to Him.

The wisest man on earth (other than the Lord Jesus) King Solomon, said it like this:

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

The way to know and do the will of God is to walk in a daily acknowledgement (through prayer) that He is the sovereign Lord and in control, and that you need Him every hour to make wise choices and decisions. You must commit to having the mind of Christ by devoting time in the reading, studying, and understanding the mind of God as revealed in Scripture. To know and understand the Word of God is to know and understand the will of God. We cannot come to know the true God through our own understanding. We need the Spirit of God to transform our thinking with the Scriptures so that we can know and do His will.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We need not seek additional revelation from God, but rather need to affirm that the full and complete revelation was given to the prophets and the apostles. As we study and seek to understand the principles of Scripture, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds to understand this sufficient revelation that has already been given.

So what if I need answers that aren't addressed in the Bible? James addresses this in the first chapter of his Epistle:

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

Note that this is an admonition to ask for wisdom, not guidance. God has given us the sufficient Scriptures to teach us all we need to know about Him, ourselves, our problems, and life. We have the revelation of His heart and nature. We need to conform our thoughts and actions to those principles, and trust His providence for the specific guidance in any particular situation. Paul provides some practical instructions in a very familiar passage, Philippians 4:4-9:

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The instructions are clear. If you lack wisdom, and you are not sure what to do, you need to humble yourself before God, acknowledge your need, confess your sins, and with thanksgiving and joy ask for what you need in faith, knowing that the Sovereign God of the universe who is your Father (if you are in Christ), will hear and answer a meet your every need. When you do this you will receive the supernatural peace of God. Then you must choose to focus on God's goodness and providence, and commit to doing what is right.

This promise for peace and provision is the very promise of God, the One who controls all things.

If you are here this morning, and you are seeking to know and follow the Lord God, we would welcome the opportunity sit down and explain the Scriptures and pray with you and help you in any way we can. Also, I encourage you to come back this evening as we share how God has worked providentially in our lives, and also provide some practical wisdom on how to make good decisions.

Here are a few of the questions we will be discussing:

1. Given God's sovereign control and providence, what is the role of human ambition, goals, and plans? Should we set goals and plan our future?
2. How do we make decisions in practical matters that are not specifically revealed in Scripture? Is it appropriate to seek specific signs and communication for the Lord when trying to discern His will?
3. What if our intuition/conscience seems to contradict our understanding of the Scriptures? Which should we follow?