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UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE

Study #21

After a person is saved there is nothing more important in their life than knowing and doing the will of God. Someone defined success as “*knowing the will of God and doing it.*” If you miss the will of God, you can’t truly be called successful for you have wasted the life that God has given you. Christians want to know God’s will and ask questions such as: What do I do with my life? Whom do I marry? Where do I go to school? What do I major in? Should I buy this car? Where do I serve at church? And the list goes on.

*We examine our lives,
Embrace our desires,
And create our plans.*

*Eagerly,
We entrust our fresh design
To God.*

*We're sure... we know...
This plan will make the difference!
This plan will ensure our happiness,
Our fulfillment.*

*Since our blueprint is so clear
Why won't God cooperate?*

Lesson Overview

- I. Why Do We Need God’s Guidance?
- II. Common Misconceptions About the Will of God
- III. How to Miss God’s Will
- IV. God’s Written Will
- V. God’s Unwritten Will
- VI. Prayer and Guidance
- VII. When God is Silent

Which Job?

What College?

Buy This Car?

Move Here?

Marry Him?

This entire lesson is predicated on these four simple truths:

Truth #1

God has a will for you!

“The steps of a good man are O_____ by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.” (Psalm 37:23)

Truth #2

God's will is good for you!

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that G_____, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:2)

Truth #3

God wants you to know His will!

“Wherefore be ye not U_____, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17)

Truth #4

You can enjoy God's will!

“I D_____ to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:8)

Why do we need divine guidance? After all, hasn't man discovered the cure for many diseases, put a man on the moon, and created scores of gadgets to make living easier? Man has achieved mathematically, scientifically, architecturally, BUT he has utterly failed spiritually. Without God's revelation, man can't know God,

he can't live for God, and he can't even live peaceable with himself. So...

I. WHY DO WE NEED GOD'S GUIDANCE?

A. *God knows our nature as no one else does.*

Read Psalm 139:1-4. List five things God knows about you.

- My D_____ and
U_____
- My T_____
- My P_____ and lying down
- All M_____ W_____
- My W_____

B. *God knows the future as no one else does.*

1. Isaiah 46:10 says of God, "*Declaring the E_____ from the B_____, and from ancient times the things that are not yet....*"
2. God is not confined by time. He knows all things by one simultaneous intuition. He exists beyond the boundary of time; He limits time.

C. *God has a purpose for each of us as no one else has.*

You may think of yourself as unnoticeably small and insignificant in the vast universe, but you matter to God!

1. In Jeremiah 1:5 God said, "*Before I F_____ thee in the belly I K_____ thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee....*"

2. According to John 15:16, God chose us and ordained us for a purpose. What is that purpose? _____
3. According to Psalm 139:17-18, how many thoughts has God had about you? _____

NOTE: Either you are a personal being made in the image of God, made with a purpose, OR, you are one among millions of evolutionary accidents on a random course heading toward self-destruction.

II. COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WILL OF GOD

A. Mistake #1: “God’s will is hidden.”

Christians use the terminology “I’ve found God’s will,” or “I’ve discovered God’s will.” This is not to imply that God’s will is lost, or that God hides it from us and watches to see if we find it. By these statements the Christian means he has learned or become convinced as to what God’s will is for his life in a particular area.

B. Mistake #2: “Well, this is something I really want to do, so it can’t possibly be God’s will.”

1. According to Psalm 37:4, what does God give us? “*The D_____ of our heart.*”
2. This means that as you sincerely seek to know God’s will, your will and His will begin to coincide. As you delight in the Lord He gives you “God-placed desires.”
3. Do not be afraid of God’s will. It is not undesirable; it is best.

C. *Mistake #3: “I haven’t gotten a definite answer yet for every part of this problem, so I’m not going to do anything.”*

Don’t be paralyzed by the fear that you are going to step outside the will of God and incur His wrath. God doesn’t give us a blueprint of our life and reveal from beginning to end (that *would* be scary). He often shows us one step at a time to challenge our spiritual perception. Earnestly seek God’s leading, choose the direction that seems right, and step out by faith. He doesn’t use a cosmic whip to slap the back of our hand and say, “WRONG, start over!” That is a distorted view of God. If He loved you enough to die for you, He isn’t going to play games with your life.

D. *Mistake #4: “Well, Lord, I’ve decided that the best way I can serve you is....”*

Don’t plan your life and pray for God to ratify it. He is not in the rubber-stamping business. It may sound spiritual to say, “*God, I’m going to be a businessman and make a lot of money to give to You,*” but it doesn’t impress God.

E. *Mistake #5: “I’ve disobeyed the Lord. I missed His will sometime ago, and now I’m doomed to ‘second best.’”*

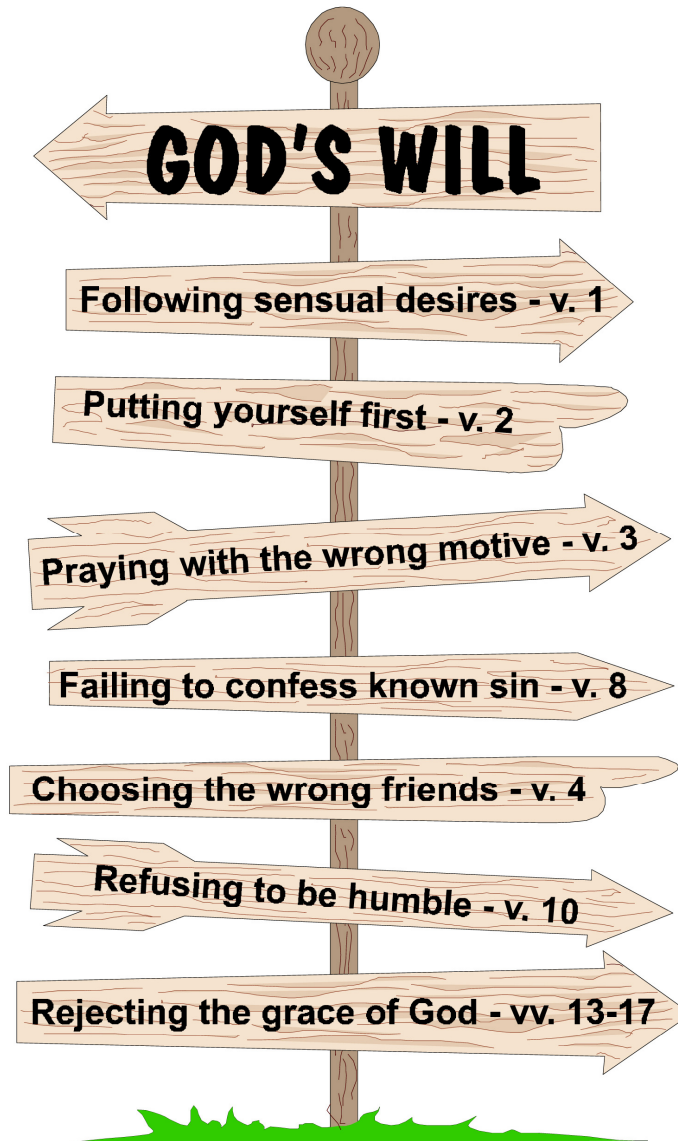
The Bible doesn’t support this idea.

1. Consider Peter’s failures. He rebuked God; he denied Christ three times; he often stuck his foot in his mouth. Yet he became the great preacher of the early church.
2. In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul testified that he used to be:
 - A B _____
 - A P _____

- And I _____
But God decided He could use Paul and put him into the ministry. God can also use you in spite of your past.

III. HOW TO MISS GOD'S WILL

Something is wrong if you can't discern God's will because He wants you to know it. Is your life out of tune with God? Review the illustration below (from James 4) and consider possible ways to miss God's will.



IV. GOD'S WRITTEN WILL

Much of God's will is already revealed in the Word of God; so start there. It is recorded in black and white, just waiting for you to read it and respond to it. God will not make known to you His specific, unwritten will if you are unwilling to follow His general, recorded will. His will is written in positive and negative commands.

A. *Positive and Negative Commands*

An example of a negative command is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14. God says, "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers....*" One thing this means is that a Christian is not to marry an unbeliever. His will is clear on this matter and no amount of praying will convince God to change His mind. God has said "yes" to some things and "no" to others. Know and accept His ruling in these matters.

B. *General Traits of Life*

There are six clear traits that God wants in each of us. He says, "*This is my will for you.*" Make sure these six attributes are true of your life.

It is His will for us to be...

Saved!

1. This is stated negatively in 2 Peter 3:9 where it says that God is "*not willing that any should P_____.*"
2. 1 Timothy 2:4 says that God "*will have A_____ M_____ to be saved.*"
3. In John 1:6-7, why did God send John the Baptist to bear witness of Christ, the Light?

4. If you are spiritually lost, you're not even "plugged into" God; you're not in fellowship or relationship with Him. You could never know the will of God.

Sanctified!

1. The S Lesson (Separation) dealt with this truth. Sanctified means "set apart to be holy."
2. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, "For this is the _____, even your sanctification...."
3. A Christian is to be holy in actions, words, dress, attitude, and so on. Live like Jesus.

Submissive!

1. 1 Peter 2:13-15 says, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake... for so is the W_____ of G____"
2. According to verse 15, what is the result of such a submissive life? _____

3. Do you have a servant's heart in the following relationships?
 - Husband/Wife Relationship
 - Parent/Child Relationship
 - Employer/Employee Relationship
 - Pastor/Church Member Relationship

Spirit-filled!

1. The filling of the Spirit is NOT getting more and more of the Holy Spirit. He is a person,

and when you were saved He came to indwell you. A lost person has *none* of the Holy Spirit, and a saved person has *all* of Him.

2. According to Ephesians 5:17, what does God want us to understand? _____

And this will is expressed in the next verse—to be filled with the Spirit.

3. Being *filled* with the Spirit means being under the influence of the Holy Spirit or being controlled by the Spirit.

Suffering!

1. Read 1 Peter 4:12-19. According to verse 19 some people will suffer according to what?

2. According to 2 Timothy 3:12, what will happen to all that will live godly? They shall suffer P_____.

3. Jesus said, “*Blessed (happy) are they which are persecuted...*” for what cause? (Matthew 5:10) _____
4. Jesus informed His disciples that they would be persecuted. What happened to them?
 - Stephen was stoned.
 - James and Paul were beheaded.
 - Philip, Andrew, Jude, Simon, and Bartholomew were crucified.
 - Peter was crucified upside down.
 - Matthew and Thomas were slain with spears.
 - James was beaten to death with a club.
 - Mark died being dragged behind a horse.
 - John was exiled to die on an island.

5. As Christians you are salt and light. Salt is an irritant and light is exposing. If you take a stand for Christ, you will occasionally provoke people. Lovingly do what is right – at home, at work, at school, and in the neighborhood (AND BE A WITNESS).

Saying Thanks!

1. God says, in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, that it is His will that in E____ T____ we give thanks.
2. God wants us to have a grateful spirit. Being thankful for God's blessings affects all areas of our lives.

V. GOD'S UNWRITTEN WILL

You say, "I am saved, sanctified, submissive, Spirit-filled, suffering for my stand for Christ, and saying thanks to God...and still how can I know what job to take? Whom to marry? And what car to buy? How can I know God's particular will for my life?"

A. Prerequisites for Guidance

1. An obedience to the written will of God. If you are unwilling to obey God in a specified area, why would He reveal something new to you?
2. A willingness to do God's will before you know it.
Every believer should ask, "L____
W____ W____ T____ H____
M____ T____ D____ (Acts 9:6)?"

God's will is not a menu from which we choose what will fit in with our own plans –
"Lord, I'll go anywhere You

*We look at ourselves -
Assess our strengths,
Cringe at our weaknesses,
Construct a box
And crawl inside.*

We tell God to make a difference...

*As long as we get to stay
Inside the box.*

want...as long as the weather is nice and the people speak English." According to John 10:10, Jesus came to give us a life that is
M_____ A_____.

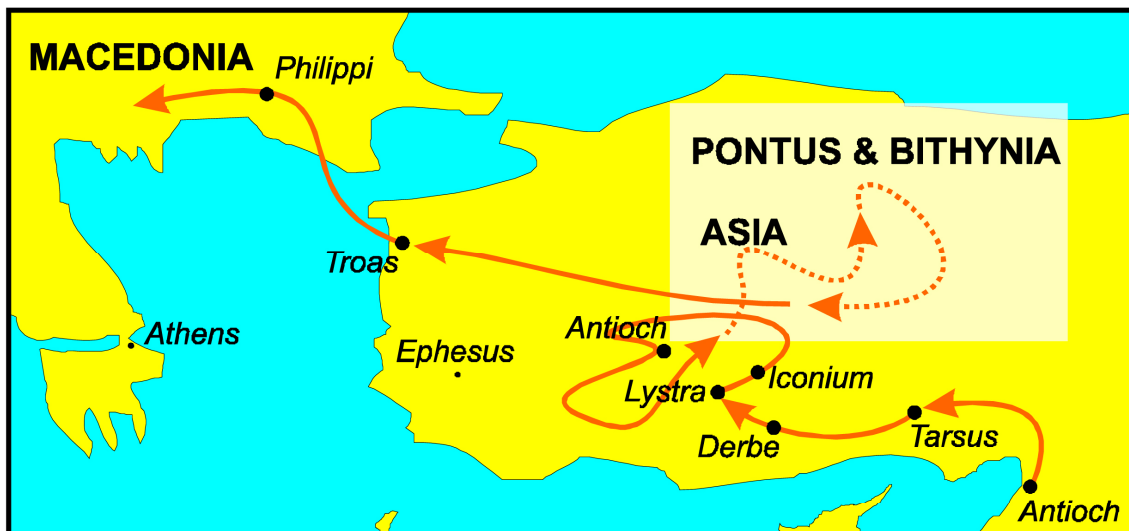
B. Here are seven signposts to follow in discovering God's specific will.

1. Signpost #1 – The Word of God. Though you may not find a specific verse or passage of Scripture that fits your life situation, you can probably find a specific Biblical principle. According to Psalm 119:105, the Word of God is a "L_____ unto my feet and a L_____ unto my path." God will NEVER lead you contrary to His Word.
2. Signpost #2 – Prayer. According to James 1:5, if we lack wisdom we are to A_____ O_____ G_____. If we do, how will God respond? _____

God answers *every* prayer, even your prayer for direction.

Christian author Paul Little explains it this way: *“As we pray, God often gives us a conviction by the Holy Spirit which deepens, despite new information, to an increasing sense of rightness or oughtness about a course of action....”*

3. Signpost #3 – Godly counsel. In Proverbs 11:14, what does God say is in a multitude of counselors? S__ __ __ __ __
Among these “multitude of counselors” are your spiritual leaders. If they believe the literal Word of God then through their preaching and teaching God will give you direction. Christian friends will give you practical advice.
4. Signpost #4 – Circumstances. God does direct through circumstances, but He does not place as much emphasis on them as many Christians do. He has lead in this way



through closed and open doors. On his first missionary journey Paul attempted to go to

Asia and Bithynia. God closed the doors and opened a door to go to Troas and Macedonia. Hence, the gospel went to Europe and America. (See the dotted line on the map above where Paul was stopped by the Holy Spirit.)

David Livingston, the great English missionary that opened up the continent of Africa, was on his way to China until God closed that door. His achievements were so magnanimous that when he died in Africa the queen of England had his body retrieved and buried in Westminster Abbey.

5. Signpost #5 – Common sense. According to 2 Timothy 1:7, God has given us power, love, and a S__ __ __ __ M__ __ __. This is a disciplined, self-controlled mind. God expects us to use the mental faculties He has given us. Do you control what your mind feeds upon and what you put in it? If you fill your mind with the world's garbage don't expect to have good spiritual sense.

6. Signpost # 6 – Personal desires and giftedness. Get the thought out of your mind that God wants you to do something very unattractive and uninteresting. He had given you certain abilities and interests. Doesn't it make good sense that God will probably lead you according to the abilities He has given you? Why would He equip you to do something that isn't His will for you? According to Psalm 37:4, God gives you the D__ __ __ __ __ of your heart. That is, if

you are delighting in the Lord then you will have God-placed desires in you.

7. Signpost #7 – The inner witness of the Holy Spirit. According to Romans 8:14-16, a communication exists between the Holy Spirit and our spirit. It is a *peace* that God gives to the soul who is in communication with Him. In Isaiah 26:3, God says He will “*keep him in perfect peace whose M__ __ __ is S__ __ __ __ on T__ __ __*” Why? _____(verse 3).

According to Colossians 3:15, we are to let the peace of God R__ __ __ in our hearts. This means it governs our heart; it “sits as umpire” in our heart. If you are considering a course of action and God has given you perfect peace about it, then confidently and spiritually proceed. However, don’t advance to the neglect of the other signposts, for our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). The *peace of God* is the capstone of confidence after following the other signposts. Seek to harmonize these signposts, and you can be assured of God’s will.

VI. PRAYER AND GUIDANCE

Read the excerpts from *Does God Still Guide* and evaluate your own prayer life in reference to seeking the will of God.

“**A** prayerless life can never be a God-guided life. That may seem too obvious to need saying; but it is one of those axioms which, despite

their self-evident truth, need often repeating, so slow are we to act on them. Because of its varied facets and bearings prayer is a fascinating subject. In one sense nothing could be simpler....

Deep in our hearts, all of us know that nothing is more vital to our spiritual development than prayer; that without it there cannot be fellowship with God, power for effective Christian witness, holiness of character, or any continuing divine guidance in our life. Yet most of us live in chronic apology and regret that we pray so little.

Why is it, that although we recognize the vital role of prayer, so many of us neglect it? Reasons are not far to seek. The first is natural sluggishness against which we all have to contend....

Besides this, prayer is that spiritual exercise which above all else Satan opposes. Another major detriment to regular prayer nowadays is the pitch and tempo of modern life. Our predecessors lived by the sundial and the calendar. We gadget-encircled beneficiaries of the science era live by the alarm clock. Those time-saving labor-saving wheels and wonders which were going to smooth human life into new leisure



have somehow rolled twice as much to do into half the time to do it, until for millions in our crowded cities nearly all lilt and poise in life are gone! For many the usual day is a non-stop “doing the next thing next,” always to a deadline, until leisure seems a far-off foreign shore. This creates two problems in relation to habitual prayer: (I) the difficulty of finding a daily period immune from

invasion, (2) the stilling of minds which have become galvanized into chronic hurry.

Well, those are some of the reasons why the path of prayer is irregularly trodden. Is there any effective counter to them? Let me mention here at least one which has had decisive value for myself. After much dreary experience in what has been called “the barrenness of an overcrowded life,” I reached a point of self-encounter at which I deliberately compelled myself to survey my prayerless scramble objectively enough to find out once for all what was causing the dismal spiritual failure. I asked myself: What are life's supremes?—the “first priorities” to live for? Answers soon came, and I let them burn into my thinking for the rest of my years on earth.

I asked myself: Which comes first, religious service? – or knowing God? Which has the basic importance: what I do? or what I am? Which means more, both to God and men: quantity? – or quality? Which means more to Christ: my work for Him? Or my prayerful love for Him? In Christian life and service, which is the utterly vital: ability, activity? – or inwrought holiness of character? What would my reactions be about all these, things (I asked myself) when at last I should meet my heavenly Master? Would I be meeting a Master whom I recognized by His incomparable splendor, but did not know personally (having been too busy serving)? – or would I at last be meeting face to face One whom I had for years known heart to heart?

With startling newness it became clear to me that all those “first priorities” which give richest meaning to life are dependent upon and determined by the place we give to prayer.

To others who may know “the barrenness of an overcrowded life” I recommend a similar deliberate self-confrontation. Do not say, “It is useless: I know the answers beforehand.” You do not know them dynamically until they dominate you in such a way that you

conform your whole life to them. Compel your mind slowly to weigh and answer. Then relate the answers to your own life, home, business, habits. Of this I am certain: you will give at least one answer which will align you with all the greatest saints who have ever lived. You will answer that nothing can be more important to your life and wellbeing than REGULAR PRAYER. You will believe this, not because others have said it, but because you have seen it...

In the Bible there seem to be four levels of prayer indicated. It is (1) a necessity, (2) a duty, (3) a privilege, (4) a delight. On the first level, prayer is simply but sheerly a necessity. Without it godliness withers and the spiritual life atrophies. What air is to the lungs, or oxygen to bodily health, prayer is to our spiritual development. Even Bible knowledge becomes stale and lifeless apart from prayer, just as even a well-fed body ails and dies without fresh air.... Prayerlessness is a spiritual grave.

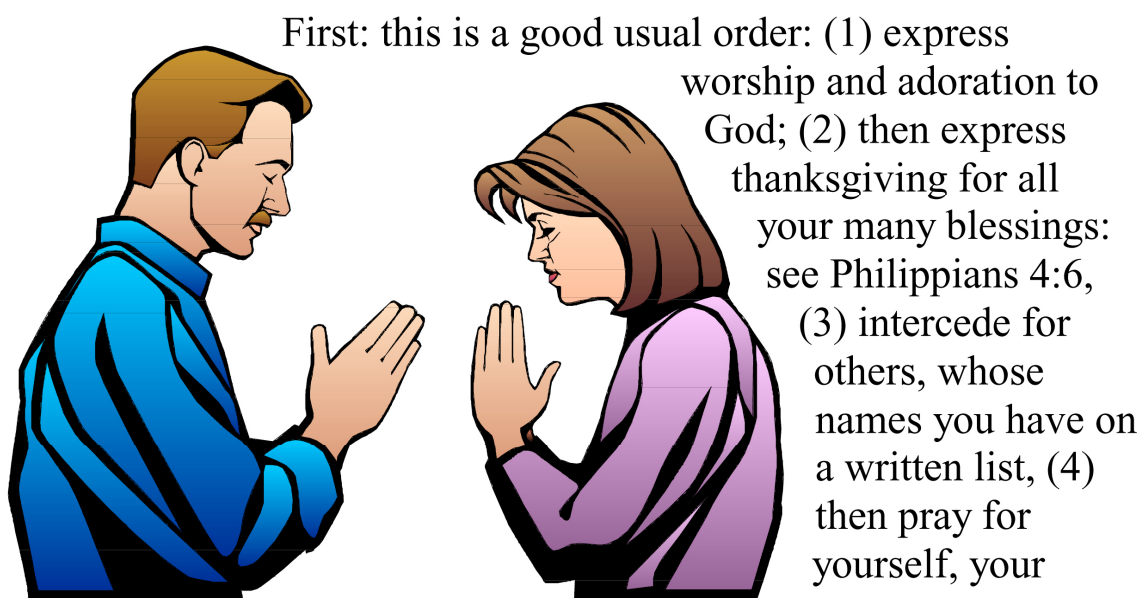
Prayer is seen as a moral duty. As an expression of worship it is our duty to God. As a means of intercession it is our duty to others. Then there is that third level: prayer as a transcendent privilege. It gives access to the highest of all thrones, through the costliest of all sacrifices, with the readiest of all welcomes. But the highest level is when prayer becomes our dearest delight, opening up to us a heart-to-heart communion with God which is heaven begun below...

Many of us need to bring this to a practical issue in our life. It has been truly said that for most of us the three fold problem is that of getting (1) a quiet *place*, (2) a quiet *time*, (3) a quiet *mind*.

Perhaps, for some, the more disconcerting problem is to fix on a regularly available time. Let us face up to it: for most of us there will be a price to pay (let us be grateful to pay it!). At some point there will be need for self-denial; maybe our having to let go some weekly pleasure hour, or some nightly diversion, or some careless

misuse of time. If we decide to make the first hour of each day our special prayer-time, it may mean going to bed an hour earlier at night, and getting up an hour earlier at morn. John Wesley is a stimulating example of watching the clock at night for the sake of that hour the next morning. Undoubtedly there are reasons why the first hour of the day has unique advantages, but it may not be a workable time in some circumstances. Each must decide according to individual necessities. If it can be early morn, it should be complemented by briefer follow-ups at noon and evening. If it cannot be till evening there should be briefer anticipations at early morn and noon. The vital thing is to fix the time or times and build the habit.

Finally, we need the quiet mind. This, to some of us, may seem the biggest difficulty of all. Oh, these non-stop minds! This up-start imagination! This memory which persistently digs things up from the subconscious at the wrong times! This seemingly incurable thought-wandering during prayer! How do we acquire the “quiet mind”? Well, this is another place where the experience of others can encourage us. Their testimony is, that the quiet mind develops with the prayer habit. Will it seem too kindergarten if I offer a few simple suggestions to those who wonder how they can fill a whole hour with prayer? or how they can cure mind-wandering?



First: this is a good usual order: (1) express worship and adoration to God; (2) then express thanksgiving for all your many blessings: see Philippians 4:6, (3) intercede for others, whose names you have on a written list, (4) then pray for yourself, your

deepest needs and longings. This order saves our prayer-times from deadly egocentricity and from interminable mere “asking”.

Second: preface your praying by briefly meditating on a passage of Scripture. For this it is good to be going through the Gospels or some Epistle – a paragraph or so a day.

Third: pray steadily through an Epistle; so many verses each day; turning every exhortation, every challenge, every promise, every warning, into a prayer for its operation in your own life. This can make your prayer-hour so rich, it will be much too short! You will begrudge every merciless tick of the clock!

Fourth: use your hymn book. Make a list of all the best prayer-hymns, and pray them. Some of them will so surprise you and draw you out in longing prayer that you will keep coming back to re-pray them. Pray till your spiritual experience is up to the level of our best hymns.

To the foregoing simple recommendations I would add just two or three more. First let intercession for others claim a large part of your praying. Paul did (Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:4; Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2). Many of us would find new liberation from captivity to trial, doubt, problems, if we prayed more for others and less for ourselves. Remember Job 42:10. “And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends” – not for himself!

Always have one part of your prayer-period for silent listening. It is good that much of our praying should be in either outwardly or inwardly spoken words; but there is a language of the soul too deep for actual words. There is also a silence before God which speaks even more deeply – and at the same time hears God as only silence can. Remember young Samuel's words, “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth” (1 Samuel.3:9, 10). Some of us tend continually to transpose it: “Hear, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh.” Practice

listening! Never forget that last, seven-fold call of the Bible: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches” (Revelation 2, 3). God needs listeners as well as pleaders.

What a subject is this matter of prayer! What books have been written on it through the centuries!

To the heart which has become habitually prayerful, guidance is no longer a mutable hypothesis, it is a glad certitude. That which above all else makes guidance real and constant is a reverent familiarity with the *Guide*.”

(Excerpted from Does God Still Guide, by J. Sidlow Baxtor).

VII. WHEN GOD IS SILENT

Any realistic study of divine guidance in human lives must take into account the problem posed by divine delays. Haven't we each asked God for needed direction, waited briefly, and eventually concluded His delay was denial? Yet God wants to guide us, and He delights to observe us walking in His will. He does not deny us guidance. He may delay answering our requests; what are His purposes in this?

A. *The Delays of Jesus*

1. Delay #1 – The disciples are caught in a tempestuous storm as they attempt to sail across the Sea of Galilee. They're in danger. They've rowed all night, are half way across, and are wearied with the struggle. Mark 6:48 records that from the land Jesus “*S_____ them T_____ in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them.*” It was now the fourth watch (3:00-

6:00 a.m.). Why did Jesus watch them struggle for so long?

2. Delay #2 – Jairus' daughter is near death. On His way to her bedside, Jesus pauses to deal with a sick woman. While He is "sidetracked" with her, the servants bring this news, "*Thy daughter is dead: why T_____ thou the Master any further? (Mark 5:35)*" Why did Jesus allow Himself to be detained if the girl was so gravely ill?
3. Delay #3 – Mary and Martha send word to Jesus that Lazarus is sick. Jesus responds in John 11:6, "*When he had heard T_____ that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.*" Why did Jesus deliberately delay coming?

B. *The Purposes for Delay*

These delays seem strange until we understand the design of God.

1. The delay was necessary to demonstrate our Lord's supreme power in a never-to-be-forgotten way.

The disciples were beaten by the storm. Jairus' daughter was stung by death. Lazarus's soul was captive in paradise as his body decomposed. Jesus demonstrated power over *nature, death, and hell* (paradise).

2. The delay was necessary to develop faith in the disciples.

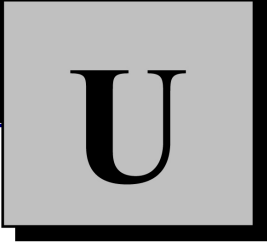
- a. (Matthew 14:31) “...O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou D_____?”
 - b. (Mark 5:36) “...He saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only B_____.”
 - c. (John 11:40) “Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest B_____, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”
3. These delays teach us some lasting lessons about God and trials:
- Our Lord can transform the most hopeless circumstances. No situation is “too far gone” for God to overrule.
 - Our greatest discoveries and blessings often come through our sorest trials. Jairus, for example, thought he was meeting Jesus the healer, but suddenly discovered himself face to face with God.
 - In divine delays there is always a gracious purpose.

So take courage dear Christian. In delayed guidance or in the midst of trials remember Jesus' words to his distraught disciples...“Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”

SPIRITUAL GROWTH ASSIGNMENT

- Complete your V Lesson (Victory).
- Read *Godliness Through Discipline*, by Jay Adams.
- Continue reading through the New Testament.
- Take sermon notes using your *Spiritual Journal*.
- Give out copies *The Amazing Story Behind Amazing Grace*.
- Where would you like to meet for next week's session?
- Bring your Bible, pen, V Lesson, and *Spiritual Journal*.

Discipler Report Back



I met with _____ on
_____/_____/_____ and reviewed the contents of this
lesson. My comments regarding the discipleship time
together are:

*(make comments only if they are needed to help the Pastoral
staff assist you in ministering to this person)*

Discipler's Name _____

*Please drop this off at the Hospitality Booth in the
church foyer on the first service after conducting
this session. This will help the Pastoral staff stay
current with the status of our new converts and
new members being disciplined.*

Thank You