



DISCERNING GOD'S WILL—PART 2:
Application of Bible Characters
COURSE WORKBOOK

Also used for
Retreat/Small Group Leader Guide

DISCERNING GOD'S WILL—PART 2: APPLICATION OF BIBLE CHARACTERS

Retreat Leader Guide
WORKBOOK

RICHARD T. CASE



To my wife, Linda, who continues to join me in seeking God's will together for everything in life. As she says all the time and to all that join us—God's will is: Best and None Better! She always encourages us to work through the process of what we have learned, especially as we have spent time in this new material of how Bible Characters discerned and followed God's will. We continue to grow in our understanding and application of these truths in our life and can confirm that we live out God's best and none better. She is truly a joy and because of her joy, it is a joy to seek and walk into God's will together. Thank you, honey!

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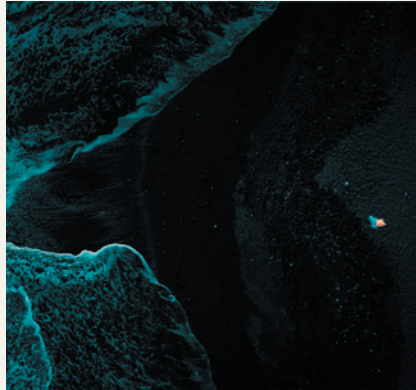
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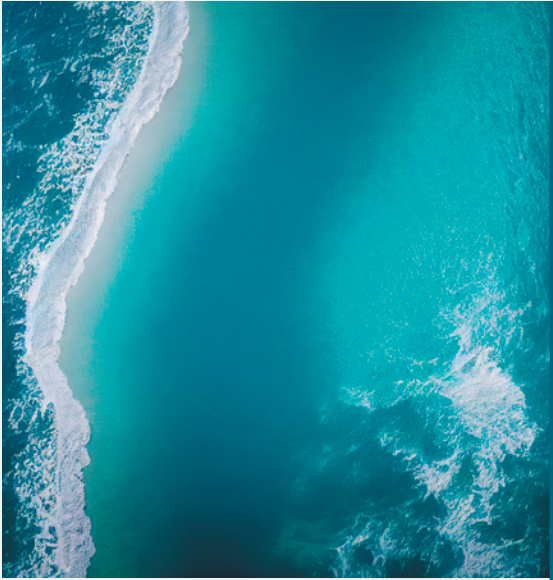
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INTRODUCTION



“It’s not the formal performance of certain things, but rather the heart. This is why it’s so important to study these characters—so that we receive their heart to follow God and see the beauty and blessing of that.”

Welcome to our course: *Discerning God’s Will—Part 2: Application of Bible Characters*. Throughout this course, we are going to study characters in the Bible, and through their experiences, we will learn how they discerned God’s will in their real situations. If this is the first time you’ve been exposed to our courses in *Discerning God’s Will*, we urge you to go back to Part 1 and work through the principles of discerning God’s will. This will give you clear understanding of how to discern it, how to hear it, how to process it, how to clarify it, and then how to follow it, along with practical details for living this out.

In this course, we are going to work through real examples so that we can deepen our understanding of how we can then discern God’s will. Let’s start with a key statement made about David regarding our heart toward receiving God’s will:

Read Psalm 40:6–8:

⁶ In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.^[a]

Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.

⁷ Then I said, “Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:

⁸ I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart.”

It was written of David that he delighted in doing God’s will. In fact, it was what he wanted to be known for, as opposed to following religious duties or accomplishing his own will based on his own definition of success. Is this true of you? It’s not the formal performance of certain things, but rather the heart. This is why it’s so important to study these characters—so that we receive their heart to follow God and see the beauty and blessing of that. We’re going to look at each character and what truly happened in their particular circumstance. How did they receive God’s will? How did they process it? What is the truth about it? What was the outcome of this process?

INTRODUCTION

Write down what you believe are the issues—conflicts, decisions, things you have on your plate, etc.—that you are currently seeking answers for God's will. As you go through this course, you may have more as you process this, so continue writing down issues as they are revealed. How many things does God want to answer in your life? All of them. He is not here to take care of only the more significant issues, while you take care of the smaller ones. His will concerns every aspect of your life. It is His heart to give you His will—which includes all the answers you seek, you simply need to let Him.

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“God promises that if you follow His will, what are you going to receive? Great blessing—with the whole Earth being blessed by you as well.”

ABRAHAM

What were God’s instructions to Abram? Before he followed these instructions, what would he likely want to know? Why? What is the reason that God did not reveal this part of His will yet?

Read Genesis 12:1–3:

The Call of Abram

12 Now the LORD said^[a] to Abram, “Go from your country^[b] and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”^[c]

Was Abraham sitting there saying, *What do you want to do with me?* No, he wasn't even asking. But, what did God do? He intervened saying that He had a plan for Abraham that He was going to reveal to him. As you look at God's will, know that He can give it to you at any point, whether or not you have been asking to receive it. He can break through at any given moment to reveal what He wants to give you. Even though you didn't ask, He might want to alert you to something. This is what He did with Abraham. What was His instruction to Abraham? It was for Abraham to move away from his family.

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If you heard that, what would you say? How would you respond? Would you immediately say *no* because it would be too hard? Or would you ask a number of questions before deciding?

Our natural questions would be: Where am I going? What are You going to do? What's all this about? How is this going to work? How can I leave my family? We have so many questions that need answers before we can say yes, but in this case, God tells Abraham only two things:

1. You have to leave where you are.
2. I'm not telling you where you are going.

But, as you go, what is He going to do? He is going to bless you to make you a blessing. In fact, all the families of Earth are going to be blessed by you. This is an amazing promise.

How would you likely respond to this? By asking exactly what those blessings are. As you consider God's will, His instruction, He gives you a promise, then He waits for your obedience. He asks Abraham if he is going to get up and go. He knows Abraham has questions and that he would like to know more, but He is not ready to give him more because it is God's will, not Abraham's.

God promises that if you follow His will, what are you going to receive? Great blessing—with the whole Earth being blessed by you as well. Whether or not you were expecting it, God gives you His will, which is His instruction and His promise. As you follow Him, He will give you further guidance on this path. Is it your right to demand more? No. He will give the instruction, and you are to walk with Him according to this instruction because you believe that God's will is best and none better. Any time that He gives you an instruction, what would you do? Follow it because you know that He is leading you to the very, very best.

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What did God reveal to Abraham? How important was this revelation to Abraham's understanding of God's will? What was the purpose of circumcision? Why is this so important in our understanding of God's will? Though God told Abraham what He was going to deliver, did He provide the how? Why not?

Read Genesis 17:1–15:

Abraham and the Covenant of Circumcision

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty;^[a] walk before me, and be blameless,² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him,⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram,^[b] but your name shall be Abraham,^[c] for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

⁹ And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,¹³ both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Isaac's Birth Promised

¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah^[d] shall be her name."

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Abraham was obedient, and he left. After he left, God explained the promises of His Covenant with him. Abraham already knew that the Covenant was being blessed by God to make you a blessing. As Abraham walks further into this understanding, God starts giving specifics. First God says that He is giving these to Abraham and Abraham's offspring. Given that Abraham did not have any offspring at the time, God was telling Abraham a wonderful promise—that he is going to have offspring. Further, God says He is going to multiply Abraham and bless his land. He is going to give him Canaan. He knows there are other people there, but God says that He is giving Abraham this specific land. Abraham didn't ask how that was going to work. He didn't ask God for His detailed plan so he could evaluate it.

God said He was giving Abraham this place, that He is going to multiply him, and He is going to bless him—the fruit of his livestock, the fruit of his land. Abraham was going to be prosperous. God shared more of the detail but did not share how. Abraham's only requirement was to be completely obedient. To what was Abraham supposed to be obedient? To what God tells him to do. God needed Abraham in the right place at the right time so He could bless him. God's will is really about what God's is doing and what God is going to do. It is not what you're doing. You've got to follow the instruction so you are in the right place for God to fulfill His blessings. He gets you on the right path when you are obedient and follow Him.

God then says to circumcise all the males. What's the reason for this? It's the sign of the Covenant. Why would He do this? There are two reasons:

1. This will be a mark, a sign of the Covenant. It proves that you're obedient to Him.
2. This is going to be universal, lasting forever—Abraham's offspring and generation to generation—into eternity.

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This mark is permanent, which means He will permanently give you the Covenant. It is absolute. He is going to give you this sign, this mark, this indication that if you follow this, you'll know He is going to give you the Covenant—blessed to be a blessing—and God will reveal to each generation how this will be applied in their lifetime.

What was the purpose of God having Abraham sacrifice Isaac? How did Abraham respond when this likely did not make any sense to him? Why? What was the result of Abraham passing God's test?

Read Genesis 22:1–15:

The Sacrifice of Isaac

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^[a] 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

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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";^[b] as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."^[c]

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven

Prior to having Isaac, Abraham and Sarah struggled. They were told they were going to have a son, but as time goes on, he and Sarah were still without a child. Abraham comes to the realization that Sarah is getting older and going into menopause, and he, too, is getting older and can't fulfill giving semen anymore. He doesn't see how this is going to work. What then did Abraham and Sarah do? They decided to take matters into their own hands to try to fulfill their own promise by having Hagar mother Abraham's baby.

What is the mistake that Abraham and Sarah made? They didn't go back to God. They took things into their own hands. They never went back to God and asked if He wanted them to go ahead and do it this way. Did God prevent them from moving forward with their own plan and making this mistake? No. Did God make sure His will was fulfilled even though His children were not willing to follow Him? No. Abraham was on the path of God's will when he decided he was going to do it his way. God didn't intervene and stop him even though it was not His will.

There are a number of believers who operate this way thinking that if God didn't want them to do something, He would have stopped them. The reality is that God was never asked. Just like Abraham and Sarah, they made their own decisions. If that's the way they want to go, go ahead.

After Hagar gives birth to Ishmael, God tells Abraham that Abraham made a mistake. It was not God's will for Abraham to have a son with Hagar, and now Abraham has to put Ishmael out. God will still fulfill His promise that Abraham and Sarah will have a child together but only if they have a heart to follow Him.

Abraham knows that he made a mistake having a child with Hagar, but since Ishmael is already there, he asks God to take him instead and use him to fulfill God's will. God turns him down because Ishmael is not the son of promise.

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In chapter four of the Book of Galatians, it is noted that Ishmael from Hagar represents the flesh—your own choosing. Isaac represents His choice, His will. Are you going to live His choice? If so, then you have cast out the bound woman and her son. Don't go to the flesh, instead, follow Him.

Abraham did continue to walk with God and received His Covenant. Sarah and Abraham miraculously had a baby—Isaac. When Isaac was between the ages of four and seven years old, Abraham and Isaac go out together to Mount Moriah (the place of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem), as instructed by God. God had instructed Abraham to take up his son, build an altar there, and sacrifice his son, Isaac. He believed God and so placed the wood on the altar, bound Isaac, and laid him on the altar as well. Abraham then stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, but the angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said that now God knew that Abraham feared Him, since he had not withheld his son in any way.

God instructed Abraham to go up the mount and sacrifice his son—the son who was miraculously given by God. If that were you, how would you approach that? Would you argue or debate with God about how it doesn't make any sense? Would you ask if this could be done a different way? Would you tell God that you didn't think you could do that given that he is your own flesh and blood?

Think about that for a moment. Could you do that to your own flesh and blood? It would be pretty tough, but God's will is not about what makes sense to you or what doesn't. Are you going to trust Him, believe Him, and follow Him. Abraham completely believed and followed God's will.

Before departing for the mount, Abraham told his servants that he and the boy were both coming back. So, he knew something. He believed something. Hebrews 11:19 reveals that Abraham believed Isaac was going to be resurrected. Had he ever seen a resurrection? No. He's processing from his perspective what this instruction means. He knows the promise is still valid, and he trusts that completely. Abraham has learned to be obedient, and since God asked him to do this, he believed that God was going to resurrect Isaac so the promise would remain as stated. He was willing to go, and as he goes to carry out the sacrifice, what happens? God stopped him and substituted a ram for his son. This is a symbol of what God will do Himself when Christ serves as the sacrificial lamb for all of mankind.

The angel tells Abraham that because he has passed the test—believing and following God's will completely—He will move Abraham to the next step of His will. As we are receiving God's will, He is going to test us. Do you believe what He is saying—even when something you're asked to do doesn't make sense. Because Abraham passed the test, the promise will be fulfilled—the rest of the Earth is going to be blessed by him—and this includes us.

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The entire story is about God revealing His will step by step and Abraham learning to follow His will, even when making mistakes. The good news is that He stayed with God and learned the process of living out God's will.

MOSES

When did God reveal His will to Moses? Why was God waiting for Moses to pay attention? What does that imply for us in pursuing God's will? How did God relate to Moses when Moses struggled with following God's call? What else did God reveal to Moses that was important as he followed God's path? Why is this important to us?

Read Exodus 3:1–22:

The Burning Bush

3 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and

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this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

¹³ Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”^[a] And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The Lord,^[b] the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷ and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’” ¹⁸ And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ ¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.^[c] ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. ²¹ And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²² but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

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Moses, remember, had killed an Egyptian. He was a leader under Pharaoh because he grew up in Pharaoh's house. Being part of this family meant he was destined to be a leader of Egypt. In this situation though, Moses gets angry about the treatment of the Jews and kills an Egyptian, which resulted in Moses fleeing Egypt and going to Midian. In Midian, he marries Jethro's daughter, and they live there with Jethro for 40 years. What did Moses do for those 40 years? He served, not as a leader of the country, but as a shepherd where he was content, pleased, and happy. Was he asking God to reveal His will for him? No. As far as he was concerned, he already knew it. He was in Midian enjoying life, being faithful, and tending to the sheep. He had a good life.

One day, while he is out tending the sheep, he sees a bush starting to burn, but he also notices that it's not being consumed. Initially he found this interesting but then went back to tending the sheep. The bush continues burning. What does Moses do? He pays closer attention and focusses on what was actually happening. When Moses paid attention to what God was doing, God was able to speak to him.

To apply this personally, as you look at God's will regarding the list of things for which you are seeking answers—God is now asking you to pay attention by processing with Him, with your spouse, with your inner circle. You are to give it the necessary time and energy. But, this is where we tend to fall short. We have an issue that we give to God, hoping He will take care of it, but instead of participating in the processing of it, we get distracted and don't give it the attention and energy needed. God says that it is important to focus and pay attention to exactly what He has to say about that particular issue.

God tells Moses that He is going to use him to free the people, and then He starts to give him a list of instructions. What was Moses' response? He told God that he was not a good leader, and since he already failed God once, he is likely not the right person for the job.

Even though Moses didn't believe he would be able to do what God was asking, he spent time and energy processing and focusing. God told Moses that it's not about him. God chose him. This is about God. God was going to help Moses by giving him Aaron to assist him, and then God continues to give him additional information. With Abraham, it started with little detail—just go—but in this case, God gives great detail. Specifics. He reveals the land to where God is sending them, who's living there right now, and how to proceed—including asking the Egyptians for gold and jewels—and then how to proceed with Pharaoh.

God wanted Moses to challenge Pharaoh and ask Pharaoh to do what? Let His people go. In addition, God told Moses how Pharaoh was going to respond and assured Moses that He will take care of this. He told Moses not to worry when Pharaoh says no and to trust Him through the process. The gold and jewelry will

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allow for their resources and will be their provision. God was going to release the Israelites, take them to the Promised Land, and Moses would be the one leading. God gave Moses His instruction in great detail.

There is no pattern to this process—it is just hearing and following. What are you hearing at the moment? What's the instruction? Did God mind that Moses struggled? No, God didn't mind. It is okay to struggle, particularly when it does not make sense. God says to go with Him and process the truth. Stay with Him and He will have you understand, receive, and then be able to follow His will—just as Moses did.

JOSHUA AND CALEB

What promise did God speak to the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea? Based upon the valuation of the circumstances by the 10 spies, how did they respond to following God's will? What were the four statements they made about what they would prefer to do? What is the reason they took this approach versus having a heart to follow what God spoke?

Read Numbers 13:24–14:4:

²⁴ That place was called the Valley of Eshcol,^[a] because of the cluster that the people of Israel cut down from there.

Report of the Spies

²⁵ At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. ²⁶ And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. ²⁸ However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan."

³⁰ But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." ³¹ Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." ³² So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report

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of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. ³³ And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

The People Rebel

14 Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. ² And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! ³ Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

After God had Moses lead the Israelites from Egypt and they crossed the Red Sea—miraculously by the sea parting, going across on dry ground, and then the Egyptians being killed and unable to follow across into the desert—God spoke to them and told them that He is going to take them to the Promised Land. He had previously given this information to Moses at the burning bush. He also tells them that there is a strong enemy that's already there, but He will overcome them. He reiterated His promise of taking the Jews to the Promised Land, which will be most spectacular.

The group asked if they could send spies to check it out, which God allowed. When the spies returned, what did they say? They said that it was terrible. Not only was the enemy overwhelming, but they had never been defeated. They said this would never work, and they gave a bad report. They grumbled and complained, saying this was a mistake.

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There were four points of resistance:

1. If only we had stayed in Egypt. We should have never followed Moses from Egypt—at least we wouldn't have this problem.
2. Why did God do this to us? To come and kill us? What did God actually say? He said that He is leading them to the Promised Land, and just like He supernaturally released them from Egypt, so will He defeat the enemy that is there. In this case, they reversed truth for a lie and believed that God was going to come kill them. God said that He is taking them to the Promise Land and is giving them the blessing of the Covenant.
3. Wouldn't it be better if we follow our plan, which we have determined to be much better?
4. Let's execute this plan. God called this a bad report that essentially told God that they do not trust Him in any way, and they have decided that they are not going. They were not willing to be persuaded that what He had to say was true. This is called *unbelief*, which, at the fundamental level, is refusal to stay with God, even in struggle, to process His promises—rather, refusing to stay engaged and refusing to go.

Let's see what Joshua and Caleb did.

What was the difference between the heart of Joshua and Caleb versus the 10 spies and all the rest of Israel? What was the result of each's view? Why is this so important for us to understand as we follow God's will?

Read Numbers 14:24:

²⁴ But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.

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God heard the nation say they were not willing to go, but now He will not allow them to go because of their self-centered, stubborn hearts. Joshua and Caleb felt otherwise and said they believe it. How does God respond? He says that because they believe it and have a heart to believe, they will get to go. Joshua and Caleb and their descendants are going to inherit the Promised Land. God says He sees a different spirit in Joshua and Caleb. They both have a heart to follow God into His will as opposed to not being willing to stay engaged with God in order to follow and refusal to be persuaded that what God has to say is true.

If you're going to follow God's will, you can't evaluate what it looks like. Do you have a heart to follow or not? It doesn't even matter what the circumstance is if God said something. Are you willing to keep pursuing it until you see the answer as opposed to thinking this is a big mistake that will never work so you choose not to go any further? God's emotion toward those not willing to stay with Him is anger (Hebrews 3:15–19). Why? Because His heart, His desire, His character is to deliver to us all the Covenant—promises of His will that are unique to us. But since we are unwilling to follow Him into His blessed will, He can't deliver this to us, and His emotion is anger toward our unwillingness to receive His best. Nevertheless, He continued to be their provider as He will never leave us or forsake us. Their shoes and clothes did not wear out. He fed them food and water in the desert where there was no ability to grow food or have natural sources of water. He protected them from handling the heat and sun in the day with a permanent cloud, and He kept them warm at night with a permanent fire. As we pursue God's will, we are called to have the "different spirit" of Joshua and Caleb—and have a heart to follow and not reject the opportunity to receive His glorious will.

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As is described of Joshua and Caleb in verse two, what is required for us to follow God's will? What does that mean then for us to be able to live by and follow God's will in faith? What is the difference between a good report as described here versus the bad report that was described of the 10 spies? What then does that mean for us to always give a good report and follow God's will?

Read Hebrews 11:1-3:

By Faith

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the people of old received their commendation. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

By faith—which is certainty of things not seen, but of things that He has spoken—the elders (Joshua and Caleb) gave a “good report.” This is important to understand because they believed and they gave a good report. But, the spies, who did not believe and were not willing to be persuaded to believe, gave a bad report. They all saw the same thing—difficult circumstances. So, what then is the difference between a good report and a bad report? The difference is whether or not you trust in God. This is based upon what? What He promises. Joshua and Caleb acknowledged that the circumstances didn't look good. The difference between a good report and a bad report is not ignoring the truth. It's about what God has to say and being willing to stay with Him—believing Him—versus rejecting what He says and declaring the circumstances too difficult to overcome.

This is why you need people around you to keep asking what God has to say. It is why you need to continue to stay engaged until you have clarity and you receive His faith to believe it. From there, follow His will. Don't give up. Don't quit. Don't refuse to go.

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What was the promise given to Joshua by God? What was going to be required of Joshua to be able to follow God's path into this promise? What then does it mean to have courage? As opposed to their fathers and mothers, how did the children born in the wilderness respond to following God's will into the Promised Land? What does this mean for how we respond?

Read Joshua 1:1–9; 16:

God Commissions Joshua

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ²"Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. ⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success^[a] wherever you go. ⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

¹⁶ And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go."

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God asks Joshua and Caleb if they are ready to go to the Promised Land. They are, and He promises to them that He is going to tell them the very, very specific detail of how to proceed and where to go. It will all be theirs. Will anyone be able to stand against them? No, because He is going to deliver all of this to them. Step by step by step. Their role is to be strong and courageous. Why do they need to be courageous? Because they need to keep the promise in front of them. They were already warriors who had no problem going to battle, but they needed courage as they walked into the promise and faced things that didn't look good. By faith, they needed to keep going instead of moving forward based upon the difficult circumstances. They needed to have courage to stick with it.

How exactly do you do that? By meditating on the word day and night, by receiving His word, and by abiding in His word. What does God have to say? Stay with it. Stay with it. Stay with it. Have the courage to stay with it until it's fulfilled.

God then turns to the rest of the nation. All of the people alive at that time had been born in the wilderness, had never been in Egypt, and had never seen the Promised Land. All their parents died in the wilderness—never having experienced God's will.

It's important to understand that God allowed them not to follow His will, and because of their choices, they all died outside of His will. His will is not guaranteed—He did not force them to experience it or deliver it to them anyway. If you choose not to follow, then you're going to wander around the rest of your life never experiencing His will. It's a choice, and when He turns to the people of the nation and asks if they want to go, they said they wanted to go and that they would go where He told them and would do as He instructed.

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How did the commander of the Lord’s army respond to Joshua’s question? Who was the commander? How did Joshua respond based upon his new understanding? Why is this THE critical question we are always to ask God regarding His will? Why is this so important?

Read Joshua 5:13–15:

The Commander of the LORD’S Army

¹³ When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” ¹⁴ And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped^[a] and said to him, “What does my lord say to his servant?” ¹⁵ And the commander of the LORD’S army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

When the commander of an army shows up, Joshua asks him this question: Are you for us or against us? His answer is *no*. An emphatic *no*. He didn't waver between *kind of or maybe*. He said *no* to this binary question. Upon hearing this, Joshua immediately falls to the ground and worships because he realizes this is God. This isn't an angel, this is Jesus.

Throughout Scripture, angels never allowed themselves to be worshipped, and neither other people—only God was to be worshipped. This is God Himself. This is Jesus who comes, and Joshua recognizes Him. It's God. Christ then says—further implied by His emphatic *no*—that Joshua asked the wrong question. God knew Joshua had a plan and that Joshua thought he was going to go and win battles with his plans, but God pointed out that he had just asked the wrong question. Joshua understood and then asks the right question: What does my Lord have to say to me, your servant?

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As you're pursuing God's will, this is the question you should ask. Be careful not to get into a binary scenario. God says His will is much more complex than a simple yes or no to your binary plans. God understands that this is the way you think, that you have deadlines, that you have plans, but as you seek God's will, your question is always to be pure. *God, what do You have to say about this? What do You have to say to me, Your servant?*

As a servant of God, be willing to follow whatever He has to say. Do not try to figure it out, just ask the pure question and walk with Him into the answer. Stay in relationship and enjoy the beautiful life together as God speaks and walks you into His will.

As Joshua is preparing to enter the Promised Land, he does two things before moving forward into God's will for the Promised Land:

1. He circumcised all the males because they had stopped doing this during the 40 years in the wilderness. Why? Since they refused to be persuaded that what God had to say is true, they were told they could not enter the Promised Land and would no longer be experiencing the Covenant. They believed the Covenant wasn't for them anymore, so why bother. There was no longer a purpose for circumcision which was the sign of the Covenant. So, they just stopped.
2. He re-instituted Passover because the nation had only done Passover the first year and not during the remaining 39 years. Why? Because, they didn't have any of the elements to do Passover in the wilderness. Where was the material for the Passover? In the Promised Land. God's expectation was that the nation would be in the Promised Land where Passover will be continued without issue.

So, God had them fulfill both circumcision—which was the Covenant being reestablished—and Passover—as a remembrance of the protection and life of God, as well as a pathway to the supernatural. Covenant and Passover—the life of God, the life of Christ for us to embrace and continue to believe.

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What was Joshua's response to God's instruction that did not make much sense to a military warrior? Why did he have this pure and simple response (go back to 5:13–15)? With the victory over Jericho, what mistake did Joshua make in moving on to conquer the city of Ai? When confronted by God with this mistake, how then did Joshua respond? What does all of this say about the process of following God's will into the experience of receiving His will?

Read Joshua 6:1–8:

The Fall of Jericho

6 Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in. ² And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. ³ You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. ⁴ Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵ And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat,^[a] and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him." ⁶ So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." ⁷ And he said to the people, "Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD."

⁸ And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them.

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God instructs Joshua to first go to Jericho, where He instructs him to march around the city seven times and blow the trumpet. What's going to happen—the walls will fall down. After the walls fall down, go in and conquer them, and you'll be on your way to receiving all the Promised Land. They were purely obedient and experienced God's answer for this step as promised. Joshua never questioned God's instruction, and he didn't offer up alternative strategies. Instead, he just believe what God had to say and marched around the city. They followed God's instruction and were victorious. Further, since God's will is always part of a bigger story, this defeat of the enemy in Jericho and the news that the Jews had God on their side spread throughout the land of Canaan.

The next city Joshua is to conquer is Ai. Because it is a dinky little city, his army tells Joshua that he doesn't need to worry about sending the whole army there—a few thousand guys would be plenty. It was going to be so easy that they would conquer it and then come back ready for the next city. This makes sense to Joshua, so they go to Ai, get routed, and come back defeated.

How did Joshua respond to this defeat? After spending 40 years in the wilderness believing, he says they should have stayed in Egypt. They made such a huge mistake that they just should have stayed in Egypt. God then tells him to get up and remember that only a few days ago he met His Son and received the question he was supposed to ask: God, what do You have to say about this? Joshua failed to ask God what He had to say about how they should proceed into the city of Ai. God promised that He would deliver the Promised Land, but it is going to be delivered step by step. Piece by piece. Obedience by obedience. It took Joshua five years to fulfill it. But, at this point, in a sense, Joshua's already thwarted God's will because he decided on his own how to handle Ai.

Can you thwart God's will even though we had received it through His speaking promises to us? Yes, we need to understand that God's will is always potential, but not guaranteed—you can thwart it along the path, which is what Joshua did here. God tells Joshua that he didn't ask Him, and if he had asked Him, God would have told him that he had sin in the camp. God had clearly instructed Joshua that no one should take things from Jericho for their personal use, but there were some who did. Because of this, they were not going to move forward until Joshua dealt with the sin in the camp.

If Joshua grumbled and complained about the difficulty of the task in relation to the issue being relatively small and refused to do it, what would happen? The story would be over. They would not be going any further. They were not going to bypass this step, because each step is critical for their next steps. Joshua needed to take care of the sin in the camp. It was an issue of the heart. Joshua knew the promise

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and where he was headed, but God was dealing with something going on in him. He had unforgiveness, hostility, anger, things he was doing that were not of Him. They could not go any further until God dealt with his heart.

Joshua willingly did what was asked of him then asked God the question that we are always to ask: What do You have to say to Your servant? They continued their journey into the Promised Land, and when God told Joshua to attack Ai, He defeated them. Joshua learned from that point forward to ask God this fundamental question in everything.

Did Joshua and his army ever march around another city? No. God's will is not a system. Just because something worked one time does not mean it will work again. God will continue to give instruction, insight, and answers step by step by step. You know where you're headed, but you're going to have to do it piece by piece by piece with a heart to always ask God the fundamental question: What do You have to say to Your servant?

As we review how to process God's will, it's all about His word to us, His promise to us. Are you going to give a good report? Do you have a heart to go to belief? Be willing to stay with Him until He clarifies His will. He will give you the faith to believe it, and He will give you step by step instruction to experience this. As we have worked through God's will for these characters—Abraham, Moses, and Joshua and Caleb, we see different approaches. There's no system to this. It's personal. God wants to guide you and lead you by speaking a promise, sometimes telling you more, sometimes telling you less. The key is to always ask what God has to say to your servant.

LESSON 2:

DAVID, QUEEN OF SHEBA/SOLOMON, JEHOSEPHAT



"As was written about David, he delighted to do God's will, and this is written in the Book of Life. Is that also being written about us as we go into eternity—that we delighted to do God's will and live it out? "

As we continue now in *Lesson 2 of Discerning God's Will—Part 2: Application of Bible Characters*—we are reminded that this is a corollary course to our original course called *Discerning God's Will*. We would urge you, if you haven't taken it, to go back and take that course first—and then return to this course. *Discerning God's Will—Part 2* will enhance the key principles learned in that original course.

As was written about David, he delighted to do God's will, and this is written in the Book of Life. Is that also being written about us as we go into eternity—that we delighted to do God's will and live it out? In the last lesson, we talked about Abraham and his willingness to follow God—he wasn't given a lot of instruction, but he followed. We talked about Moses and learned to pay attention to the things that you have going—which is everything—for which you need God's direction. Let Him give you instruction and then follow Him fully. With Joshua and Caleb, we learned the difference between a good report and a bad report. We might be looking at the same thing, but we either let the difficulty keep us from pursuing God's will—we are not willing to go because we are so focused on the difficulty—or we understand that God's will is best and none better. By faith, there was a willingness to move forward into the difficult circumstances and not prevent them from following His will. As Joshua and Caleb did follow, they fully experienced the Promised Land. Joshua also met Jesus, the commander of the Lord's Army, and asked Him if He was for him or against him? Jesus told Joshua that he had asked the wrong question. Instead, Joshua learned to ask what He has to say to His servant. This is the essence of seeking God's will. No matter the circumstances or the difficulties, it is to always ask what He has to say about it. Let's continue with other characters of the Bible to see other important truths of discerning God's will.

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DAVID

What was the difference between what Samuel thought was the answer to God's will and what God thought? Why is this so important for us to understand? How did David respond to being anointed as king? Why is his response so critical for us to understand in following God's will?

Read 1 Samuel 16:4–13:

⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him." ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." ¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest,^[a] but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." ¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

LESSON 2: DAVID, QUEEN OF SHEBA/SOLOMON, JEHOSAPHAT

What did God say to Samuel? He told him to go to Jesse in Bethlehem to find His anointed, His replacement for Saul. Why was Saul being replaced? He was completely disobedient without a heart to follow God and seek His will. Samuel went to Jesse's house and asked him to bring in his sons for Samuel to select the one. When he sees Eliab, Samuel thought surely this is the one. But God says what? No. Why? Because Samuel was evaluating Eliab according to what he thought was a good idea, what Eliab looked like on the outside according to Samuel's definition of a likely king. But God looks at it differently because He knows far more than Samuel does. He knows the heart. He knows what's going to happen later. He knows things that are important for His purposes. Eliab was not the one, even though he looked good to Samuel. Samuel understands what God is speaking to him, and brings the rest of Jesse's sons in. After God says no to each of them, Samuel continues to seek God's will by asking God what He had to say about each of the sons. He did not argue but followed.

When Samuel got through all of Jesse's sons, it implies that he tells God that he thought He asked him to go there to get a king, but He is now saying that it isn't any of these men. God then tells Samuel to ask if there are any others. When he does, Jesse tells him about his youngest son, David, who is out tending to the sheep—but he's nobody. Samuel asks Jesse to bring him in, and when David comes in, Samuel heard God tell him that David—who had a heart to follow God—is the one and to anoint him as God's new king. Samuel is obedient and anoints David as king.

After he was anointed, Samuel tells David that God will let him know when and how he will become king. It will be according to His plan which He will show him. For now, David was to keep following God and understand there is nothing he needed to do. He didn't have to figure things out or plan anything. He just needed to continue doing what he normally did and God would let him know. This is another example of God revealing His will step by step—a key for us to follow without demanding to know the entire path—just simply follow and enjoy the path.

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DAVID, QUEEN OF SHEBA/SOLOMON, JEHOSEPHAT

What was Saul's response to the prospect of certain defeat by Goliath and the Philistines? What was David's response to the same prospect? What then is the difference, and why is there this difference? How are we to approach difficult circumstances? On what basis? How did David gain victory over Goliath? Why is this so important for us to understand as we are called to gain victory over difficulties?

Read 1 Samuel 17:1–58:

David and Goliath

17 Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. ² And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. ³ And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. ⁴ And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six^[a] cubits^[b] and a span. ⁵ He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels^[c] of bronze. ⁶ And he had bronze armor on his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. ⁷ The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron. And his shield-bearer went before him. ⁸ He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹ If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." ¹⁰ And the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together." ¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

¹² Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons. In the days of Saul the man was already old and advanced in years.^[d] ¹³ The three oldest sons of Jesse had followed Saul to the battle. And the names of his three sons who went to the battle were Eliab the firstborn, and next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. ¹⁴ David was the youngest. The three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵ but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. ¹⁶ For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening.

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¹⁷ And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah^[e] of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. ¹⁸ Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them."

¹⁹ Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. ²⁰ And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. ²¹ And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. ²² And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. ²³ As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him.

²⁴ All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. ²⁵ And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel." ²⁶ And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" ²⁷ And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him."

²⁸ Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle." ²⁹ And David said, "What have I done now? Was it not but a word?" ³⁰ And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke in the same way, and the people answered him again as before.

³¹ When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul, and he sent for him. ³² And David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him. Your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." ³³ And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth." ³⁴ But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him

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and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has struck down both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ And David said, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!”

³⁸ Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail, ³⁹ and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” So David put them off. ⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine.

⁴¹ And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³ And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.” ⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, ⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.”

⁴⁸ When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground.

⁵⁰ So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. There was no sword in the hand of

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David. ⁵¹ Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. ⁵² And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath^[f] and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. ⁵³ And the people of Israel came back from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their camp. ⁵⁴ And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.

⁵⁵ As soon as Saul saw David go out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is this youth?" And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know." ⁵⁶ And the king said, "Inquire whose son the boy is." ⁵⁷ And as soon as David returned from the striking down of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. ⁵⁸ And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Goliath and the Philistines have called Israel to war. At that time in history, when nations went to war, the nation being attacked would be called by the attacking nation to go to a certain place to engage in war. You both show up, and whoever's got the bigger army is usually going to win. Both sides bring as many as they can and then see what happens. The reason they went, even when facing a superior army, is that if they, as male warriors, did not, the enemy would then come into the city and destroy everything, killing women, children, and livestock. It was honorable to always go, so Saul and his army from Israel go to the chosen place—En Gedi.

In this situation, Goliath says on behalf of the Philistines that they can skip all of the killing if they choose one warrior to fight him. If the chosen warrior defeated him, they would surrender, but if he defeats their chosen warrior, Saul and his army would have to surrender to them. In doing this, they could avoid a lot of bloodshed. In Samuel 17:11 when Saul and all Israel heard these words of the

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Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid. They didn't believe there was any way they could prevail and inevitably their nation would be taken over by the Philistines.

What did Saul not do? He didn't go to God. He didn't even consider it. He decided they were not going to win, and they were greatly afraid. Every day, Goliath came out and asked who was going to fight him, and day after day, Saul had no answer. Who should have gone? Saul. As leader and king, Saul should have gone. He didn't even ask God if he was supposed to go, he had just decided that he certainly was not going. In his fear, he starts bribing people, offering his daughter in marriage and exemption from paying taxes. No one volunteered, so each day, he ups the bribe. There was no one in that whole camp, including David's brothers (which proved what God knew about their hearts and why He selected David as the next king) who offered to fight. Not one person.

While all this is happening, Jesse tells David—who was too young to go to battle—to take some food out to his brothers—a step that God was orchestrating. David goes, and when he arrives he asks how everything is going. The response of the warriors was not good. David hears Goliath issue his daily challenge saying he defies them and he defies their God and again asks who will fight him. In 17:26, David asked the men who stood by him: What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?

As we learned with Joshua and Caleb, David did not diminish the difficult circumstance—it was real, and he didn't dismiss the truth. However, David understood what Joshua and Caleb understood: But God... David stated what He had understood was the truth as spoken by God. How dare this guy, or anybody, defy the army of the living God. On what basis did he make this declaration? He knew the nature and power of God and that God had spoken a promise to the nation of Israel. God had already spoken and delivered the Promised Land and would keep them and protect them in this Promised Land.

David was a student of the Scripture and was abiding. He knew something—that he had been given promises. He knew the truth about the Covenant and that when God's children are in fear, worry, and anxiety, the first thing to do is stand on what God has promised. This is a tough situation, but God said that He is going to deliver to us the Covenant. We can trust that. It is what David trusted. He trusted what God has promised, So, how dare Goliath defy the army of the living God? Based upon this, David volunteered to take care of him.

This led to the king, Saul, asking David who he is? Saul points out that David is a nobody who is too young and too small to fight the giant, but since no one else will do it, he agrees and tells David that he is welcome to use his armor. When David puts on the king's armor, he realizes that it doesn't fit.

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Even though there's an opportunity to take somebody else's idea to fulfill what you know is true, it often does not fit—is not God's answer or will. Does this idea of how really fit you? Don't be afraid to have discernment. This doesn't feel right. As you're processing God's will, trust this bit of your inner sense when you are understanding you do not yet fully understand God's instruction for you to have Him fulfill His will. God tells David that He is trying to show him something. Don't proceed with Saul's solution because He has a different way—keep processing with Him. For David, God reminds him that he was a shepherd, protecting the sheep in dangerous situations and that he has killed lions and bears and wolves with his bare hands. David understood that God was faithful and true to His promises and that he could rely on that in any of his situations.

This Philistine was no different. God had already trained David for this through his instruction and experience using a sling shot. Training consists of experiences that God uses to prepare for things down the path. Journaling what you are learning and sharing it with each other helps us to process what God is saying now for this situation. David understood this and went to fight Goliath. Goliath comes to the battle, ridicules David for being so inadequate, curses David, and curses the living God of Israel. He tells David that killing him will be no problem, and David declares that while Goliath comes at him with the sword and shield, that he comes at Goliath in the name of the Lord, in the name and power and the authority of the Lord.

The Lord had basically told David:

1. The Covenant is still valid, and it's applicable here in this particular situation.
2. You can trust that I'm giving you the victory over the giant Philistine.

David runs into the battle and shoots the stone from his slingshot. What happens? Goliath is killed as promised. It is important to note that David's never doubted his victory in the battle. He went in the power and name of the Lord who had spoken His will specifically from the Covenant that applied here against Goliath. David, who had a heart for God and was abiding with God, knew the truth and could hear His voice. David was used by God to save Israel (the Covenant) and move David farther along the path of becoming king. Why did this happen? He delighted to do God's will.

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After this is done, Saul thanks David and asks David to come be with him and join his inner circle. David joins as a warrior with Saul and becomes part of his military. What then happens? David, being a follower of God, goes to battle and through following God's will, is greatly successful—and the people notice that David is more successful than Saul. Saul's battles are insignificant in size compared to David's, as Saul continues to be fearful of going to battle. When the people of Israel take notice that David's successes are far greater than Saul's, Saul puts two and two together and realizes that David is the one Samuel referred to who would be replacing him. Upon realizing this, what does Saul do? He goes after him, throws his spear at him and chases David out. David flees alone into the wilderness, all the while being pursued by Saul and his army. What is Saul's objective? He wants to kill David. David winds up hiding in a cave—alone, weary, sad, and miserable (Psalm 142). What do you think David's perspective is? God told him he was anointed king. What happened? Not only is he not king, but he is completely alone. He is being chased around, living in filthy, dirty caves, and he is miserable. He doesn't understand this at all. God asks David if he was willing to follow Him, and even though David did not understand his current situation, he still had a heart to follow God.

Though God had promised David to be king of Israel (remember, David was anointed by Samuel for this), what happened regarding this being fulfilled by God? What does that tell us about purpose and timing of God's will? In the middle of David's discouragement, what did God provide him? Why was this so important? How shall we then include community as we are struggling with the fulfillment of God's will—especially when it does not seem to be happening?

Read 1 Samuel 22:1–5:

David at the Cave of Adullam

22 David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. ² And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul,^[a] gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men. ³ And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay^[b] with you, till I know what

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God will do for me.”⁴ And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.⁵ Then the prophet Gad said to David, “Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.” So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

As we know, David is alone, unhappy, isolated, and discouraged, but he had learned to ask God what He has to say about his situation. Immediately, what does God do? Sends him fellowship—sends his family to be with him. This is not an easy thing. There were no cell phones or GPS. The only thing they knew was that he was out there somewhere. They had to search for him cave after cave until they finally find him. God sent the fellowship David needed to be encouraged. Fellowship is having those who love you just show up. God’s will includes:

1. If you're the one who is discouraged, what would be helpful for you?
Community. Don't isolate yourself. Get some people around you to come and just be with you.
2. Be part of the community. As you see people who are struggling and having discouragement, what would you do? Encourage them. Come alongside them. You don't need to tell them what they should or shouldn't do. Simply be with them in fellowship—which will be helpful in regaining hope and encouragement.

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After his family was with him, other people start showing up. Who shows up? The lowest of society—people who couldn't make it in Jerusalem. They're not warriors. They're not military. They're basically down and outers, but they start showing up. They heard David was down there, and wanted to be there, too. As the community grows to 400, what does God say to David? He tells him this is his army. If David was going to follow God and be king of the whole nation, he needed to be faithful in this and train those men. God's instruction for David was to train these men who didn't know anything. God wanted him to spend his energy being faithful to small things.

As we read in Matthew 25, if you're faithful in small things, God gives you bigger things. He says, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into My joy.* It's always a test to follow God and His steps versus trying to get to the end result faster by doing things on your own. There are a lot of small steps to demonstrate your faithfulness of following God. Choose to be faithful to God's instruction—which does not necessarily need to be for a specific "ministry activity," but rather wherever He wishes you to follow. Perhaps He is leading you to spend time with your spouse now, or maybe He doesn't want you to get involved in that committee at church. Whatever God is speaking at the moment—what He has for you—is best and none better for you and for His Kingdom purposes.

David was faithful and trained these men, and together they all go to the city of Moab where they are enjoying life outside of the cave. In Moab, David goes to the king and asks if his family can stay with him until what? Until he understands what God wants him to do. Once he discovers God's will for his next step, he would have family around to provide confirmation (unity with God) so that David had clarity about God's will. Being in fellowship, David had already received confirmation—he was going to be king. He needed to trust it because it was going to happen.

David understood that we need people around us to go to unity with God—people we trust to hear God's voice and confirm what we are hearing. Don't try to do it by yourself or even as a couple. We need people around us to process what we understand as God's will. We need their input so we can process together what we both are hearing. David and his family stayed in process until God's will was confirmed by all. Was he thrilled when he heard that it was time to go back into the caves? No, but that is what God instructed, and all confirmed it. David thanked his family for being with him, sent them home, and went back to the caves, which led to God's next step for David.

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As you walk through this story, describe the elements of how David sought and received God's will—step by step. Why was each step important in how we follow God's will? How might we carry this out? Why can we trust the process completely?

Read 1 Samuel 23:1–13:

David Saves the City of Keilah

23 Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors."² Therefore David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah."³ But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?"⁴ Then David inquired of the LORD again. And the LORD answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand."⁵ And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

⁶ When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand.⁷ Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars."⁸ And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.⁹ David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."¹⁰ Then David said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account.¹¹ Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, the God of Israel, please tell your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down."¹² Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will surrender you."¹³ Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition.

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David and his men are hiding out in caves. As more men came and were trained, David's army grew to 600 men. When David hears that Keilah is getting attacked by the Philistines, he asks God what He has to say about this. God tells him to go down there, and He will give David victory.

David tells his men that they are going down to Keilah to save them from the Philistines. But, the men are afraid because the Philistines have a much larger army. They didn't believe there was any way for them to win. In addition, Saul had been coming after them, and they feared that he was going to find them and kill them.

There are a number of ways David could have responded to this. Being persuaded by logic, he could have agreed with them. Since it didn't make any sense, and it didn't seem possible to win a battle with a much bigger Philistine army, maybe going to Keilah wasn't really the right thing to do. Or he could have stood his ground and told his men that God instructed them to go. Unfortunately, this is something couples tend to do. One says that God told them they were going, so they are going. But the other says they don't know about this. They haven't received confirmation yet—so they either agree to not pursue what God said or demand that they follow what God said without processing.

To his credit, what did David do? He went back to God. David asked God to reinforce His instructions. God responds by telling David that He will do the deliverance. David is to let all his men know that and go being assured He will give them victory. David sought confirmation from whom? God. Is it okay that we disagree? Yes. Does God mind that you might need to process further? No. He'll answer, just be sure all parties have a heart to hear. Listen to what He has to say so you can confirm it together.

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If there is disagreement when seeking God's will, we all are called to go to neutral party and seek God's will. This is critical. Do you really want God's will or are you just playing a game? If you want to seek God's will, but are certain you are never going to change your mind, that means you don't really want God's will. In this situation, David and his men were willing to seek God and when God confirmed His will, they all agreed to go. What happens in Keilah? They defeat the Philistines. What happens after this great defeat? They get to live in Keilah. What's in Keilah? Food. Beds. Games. Fellowship. Normal living. Hallelujah! Not only did they get victory, they get to live life normally again. They were thrilled. This was a blessing from God.

As soon as Saul hears this news, he decides he is going after David and his men at Keilah. Keilah was a city backed up against a mountain with only one way in and one way out. Saul believes that David will be trapped and that he will finally defeat him and end his potential to replace Saul as king.

When David learns of Saul's plan, what could he have done? Decided on his own that since he had been through this before and God took care of him, he'll just stay there and fight it out. He was supposed to be king so, of course, God would save him. And since he saved Keilah from the Philistines, of course the men of Keilah would fight with him and protect him. It's no problem. He beat Goliath. He could have assumed that he already knew the answer especially since they were following God's instructions when they went to Keilah in the first place. Of course, God would want them to stay there where they could continue to enjoy this life.

What did David actually do? He went back and checked in with God about His will, not David's assumed preference. With the new information, he went back to God and asked if Saul was actually coming. If he wasn't coming, they could stay and enjoy that city, but God confirms that Saul is coming. He then asked if the men of Keilah, who he just saved, were going to protect him or hand him over. God tells David that they will hand him over and His will for him is not to stay and fight as he had experienced before, but rather to leave and go back to the caves.

Even though David had been given victory before and God can most certainly do it again, His will for David was for him to leave. If David decided to stay, he would be defeated. Why would he have been defeated? Because God wouldn't give him protection. Why? Disobedience to God, which is walking outside His Kingdom, means also being outside of His protection. God's will for David was for David to leave, which he does, and the men of Keilah never had the chance to hand him over.

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Our sovereign, all-knowing God has an ability to play things out in virtual reality. Whatever path we choose, He can see exactly what's going to happen—because He can play them all out and tell you whether or not you should take that path. He will guide you to the right path because He already knows the outcome.

David, having a heart after God and delighting in doing His will, chooses to follow God, and he and his men go back into the caves. They go back to hiding and guess who shows up in the cave where they are hiding? Saul. Saul goes into the cave alone to relieve himself. David's men tell David that Saul is there by himself, and this is the perfect opportunity for David to kill him. They are certain that God gave David this opportunity, and he should go kill him.

David agrees that this has to be God's will. First, he goes up to Saul, and wanting to know if Saul even notices that David is there, he cuts off the edge of his robe. Then, when he's about ready to attack him, what happens? He gets a checking in his spirit. And though he wanted to do this, and circumstantially, it looks like God had everything lined up for David, he gets a checking in his Spirit—something is not right.

When David had an opportunity to carry out what he believed was God's will due to certain circumstances, what did God do? What does this mean, and what does this look like for us? Why is this such an important part of following God's will?

Read 1 Samuel 24:6–15:

⁶ He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD'S anointed."⁷ So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

⁸ Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. ⁹ And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'?" ¹⁰ Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you.^[a] I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.'¹¹ See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong

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or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. ¹² May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. ¹³ As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. ¹⁴ After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! ¹⁵ May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

David has a checking in his Spirit. He was about ready to take vengeance; and thought rightfully so. It looked like God delivered Saul to David to do just that. He gets checked and goes into a conversation with God. What is it that you're trying to show me? God says to him: *Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord*. It is not whose? It's not David's. It will be taken care of, but He was asking David not to do this in his own hands. There is a truth about that. He is the judge, not David. God will take care of it. David needs to follow instruction and get out of the way because, *Vengeance is Mine, sayeth the Lord*.

David learns this and God tells him to spare Saul's life. When David tells Saul how he spared his life, Saul tells David that David is holy, and he will walk away as friends. He then thanks him for sparing his life. Did it last very long? No. Saul quickly came back after him.

It is not about outcome or what we think should happen, following God's will is simply following Him completely, especially when we get a check in our Spirit about something we are about to do. The key is paying attention. If something isn't right, pursue Him further before you act. Spend more time with Him to learn what He is about to say. Pay attention—which David did. This leads us to the next step of God's will for David.

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When David stifled the checking of the Spirit and responded to a situation in anger and severity of action, what did God do? How does that work for us and, also by us, for others? What is important then as we are processing life with a heart to follow God's will?

Read 1 Samuel 25:2–44:

² And there was a man in Maon whose business was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. ³ Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite. ⁴ David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. ⁵ So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name. ⁶ And thus you shall greet him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.' ⁷ I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. ⁸ Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David."

⁹ When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited. ¹⁰ And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. ¹¹ Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" ¹² So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this. ¹³ And David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. ¹⁵ Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. ¹⁷ Now therefore know this and consider what

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you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him.”

¹⁸ Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared and five seahs^[a] of parched grain and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. ¹⁹ And she said to her young men, “Go on before me; behold, I come after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. ²⁰ And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold, David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. ²¹ Now David had said, “Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good. ²² God do so to the enemies of David^[b] and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him.”

²³ When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said, “On me alone, my lord, be the guilt. Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. ²⁵ Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal^[c] is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. ²⁶ Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. ²⁷ And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. ²⁸ Please forgive the trespass of your servant. For the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. ²⁹ If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. ³⁰ And when the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you and has appointed you prince^[d] over Israel, ³¹ my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.”

³² And David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! ³³ Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own

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hand! ³⁴ For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male.” ³⁵ Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, “Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition.”

³⁶ And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold, he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until the morning light. ³⁷ In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. ³⁸ And about ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

³⁹ When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be the Lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The Lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head.” Then David sent and spoke to Abigail, to take her as his wife. ⁴⁰ When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, “David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.” ⁴¹ And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, “Behold, your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” ⁴² And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David and became his wife.

⁴³ David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives. ⁴⁴ Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Gallim.

David and his men are out roaming by Carmel when he winds up in the company of Nabal, who's a big leader in the area. Because David had once been a shepherd and had a heart for that work, he had been willingly taking care of Nabal's shepherds, making sure they were protected from all the dangers in the pasture lands. David learns that Nabal is having a feast—an over-the-top

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celebration with more food than can possibly be eaten. David knew there would be extras. He and his men were hungry, and Nabal had plenty of extra food.

When David sends some men to ask Nabal if he and his men could have some of the leftovers because of the protection he's given Nabal's shepherds and sheep, Nabal says, *No. Who's that guy? I don't know that guy. No, I'm giving him nothing. No, absolutely not. I'm not giving them anything.* The men come back and report to David that Nabal refuses to give him anything. David is enraged and tells his men that they are going after him, and they are going to kill every man, woman, child, and animal in the whole company. They are killing them all. Get ready, because they are going.

What had David just learned? He learned to listen to the Spirit and follow the truth that vengeance belongs to the Lord. But, what happened here? David got mad. Anger took over, and he suppressed everything he just learned—including overriding the checking in his Spirit. Did the Spirit check him here? Yes. What did he do with that? He discarded it. He went to the flesh—not even willing to hear God at all.

So, God sends Abigail, Nabal's wife. She tells David he should not carry out his plan—not because he is going to hurt her husband, even though he is in the wrong, too—but rather, because David would be violating the truth of God. She tells him that he would not be following God's will and would cause himself much trouble. This would be a big mistake, and she asks him to reconsider.

David, having listened to her, responded how? He received it. He was grateful that Abigail stopped him and realized that he reacted in his own anger. He had not even thought about the lesson he learned, and he failed to receive the checking of the Holy Spirit. But God intervened and sent somebody to him to challenge him. David received the message and decided not to follow through with his original plan to attack Nabal. How did that all happen? How did God's will happen? Because God did what? He intervened. When the checking of the Spirit did not have any effect, He sent a person to challenge these actions. To invite us to His will, He will often send somebody to intervene if we're about to make a mistake. If they point out that they are not sure that what you are about to do is of God or they can't confirm that you're doing God's will, you ought to stop and reconsider before you go any farther.

Sometimes he'll use you to be the person who challenges another. If God reveals truth to you and says that He wants you to say something—always do it with respect and honor, like Abigail did. *Don't you want to reconsider that? Maybe this isn't God's will because I can't confirm it. Would you be willing to go farther?* If they choose not to listen, then leave it alone. When God asks you to be the messenger, you are not to focus on the outcome or the potential conflict with the person who is not willing to hear—just focus on following God's will and serving His purposes.

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David had a heart to follow God’s will, and as we have learned, the key is to hear, process, check in on every step (without assumption), and be willing to have God check us or send a messenger to challenge us when we are not following His will. If we do this, we will experience the fullness of His will for us—which is best and none better.

QUEEN OF SHEBA/SOLOMON

Though the Queen of Sheba was a leader with great wealth and success, what did she desire? Why? Where did she go to receive her desired wisdom? Why? How did she approach Solomon regarding her questions, and how does Scripture describe her questions? How did Solomon respond? What then are we to understand regarding how we approach God in seeking wisdom and clarity of His will?

Read 1 Kings 10:1–13:

The Queen of Sheba

10 Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ² She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. And when she came to Solomon, she told him all that was on her mind. ³ And Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her. ⁴ And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵ the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more breath in her.

⁶ And she said to the king, “The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, ⁷ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. ⁸ Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness.” ¹⁰ Then she gave the king 120 talents^[a] of gold, and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones.

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Never again came such an abundance of spices as these that the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

¹¹ Moreover, the fleet of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought from Ophir a very great amount of almug wood and precious stones. ¹² And the king made of the almug wood supports for the house of the LORD and for the king's house, also lyres and harps for the singers. No such almug wood has come or been seen to this day.

¹³ And King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all that she desired, whatever she asked besides what was given her by the bounty of King Solomon. So she turned and went back to her own land with her servants.

The Queen of Sheba is queen of her country and is extremely knowledgeable. She's very successful and has amassed great wealth through her enterprises. She is a skilled leader, but she still has some questions. So where does she go? She goes to Solomon. How come? She heard he had great wisdom. Who gave him that wisdom? God.

In this story, consider that Solomon represents God, and the Queen of Sheba represents us. We are pretty smart. We are skilled and have much knowledge, but we need more. What more do we need? We need the wisdom to seek His will and His understanding. The queen goes to Solomon and asked what? She asked tough questions, in fact, she asked every hard question she had. This is significant because as you're processing God's will, there's a lot of difficult things to process—there are tough situations. Think about why there are hard situations. If it was all easy, there would be no glory to God for resolving it.

In addition, if you are in a difficult and complicated situation that you can't figure out, one that you aren't sure how to handle, and you don't know what to do next, consider this: Who is the situation hard for? It's hard for you. What are you to do in all circumstances? Go to God.

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What did Solomon do when the queen asked all of her hard questions? He answered every single one of them. Is anything too difficult for God? No, so seek God's will. Ask Him all your hard questions. Tell Him you don't understand, ask Him how things work—no matter how sticky or complicated. God knows and will give you the answer piece by piece and step by step. Get into a pattern of seeking God's will instead of fretting about it, instead of worrying about it, instead of trying to figure it out on your own. What is the best thing to do? Ask Him, and together start processing, learning, and receiving. Ask all your hard questions and expect Him to answer.

JEHOSEPHAT

As opposed to Saul who was faced with certain defeat, how did Jehoshaphat approach seeking God's answer to this difficult circumstance? Why is this important for us when we are faced with difficult circumstances? Based upon his heart to follow God and receive His answer, what did God say was His will? In addition to His promise, what was important for Jehoshaphat to receive in order to join God in the fulfillment of His will? Why then is it so important for us to follow God as He reveals His will?

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–30:

Jehoshaphat's Prayer

20 After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites,^[a] came against Jehoshaphat for battle. **2** Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A great multitude is coming against you from Edom,^[b] from beyond the sea; and, behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar" (that is, Engedi). **3** Then Jehoshaphat was afraid and set his face to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. **4** And Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

5 And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, **6** and said, "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you. **7** Did you not, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? **8** And they have lived in it and have built for you in it a sanctuary for your name, saying, **9** "If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment,^[c] or pestilence, or famine, we will

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stand before this house and before you—for your name is in this house—and cry out to you in our affliction, and you will hear and save.’¹⁰ And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy—¹¹ behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession, which you have given us to inherit. ¹² O our God, will you not execute judgment on them? For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

¹³ Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. ¹⁴ And the Spirit of the LORD came^[d] upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. ¹⁵ And he said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you, ‘Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God’s. ¹⁶ Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz. You will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeruel. ¹⁷ You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.’ Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you.”

¹⁸ Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. ¹⁹ And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

²⁰ And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed.”²¹ And when he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to the LORD and praise him in holy attire, as they went before the army, and say, “Give thanks to the LORD,
for his steadfast love endures forever.”

²² And when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. ²³ For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, devoting them to destruction, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another.

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The LORD Delivers Judah

²⁴ When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the horde, and behold, there^[e] were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped. ²⁵ When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found among them, in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more. They were three days in taking the spoil, it was so much. ²⁶ On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah,^[f] for there they blessed the LORD. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Beracah to this day. ²⁷ Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat at their head, returning to Jerusalem with joy, for the LORD had made them rejoice over their enemies. ²⁸ They came to Jerusalem with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of the LORD. ²⁹ And the fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. ³⁰ So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

Jehoshaphat is the king of Israel, and things are operating well until all the countries around Israel decide to band together to conquer Israel. This would be the equivalent today of Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq coming together to take over Israel. Do they have a bigger army? Yes, absolutely. It was so big that Jehoshaphat's first response was what? Fear—great fear. This was bad, and as far as he can see, they were going to lose. There was no way around this—they were definitely going to lose.

With that, as opposed to figuring out what do by himself, what did Jehoshaphat do? He went to God and called a fast. Together, he and his community asked what God had to say about their situation. Jehoshaphat knew that there was strength and beauty in community, and when in trouble, the best thing to do is surround yourself with your community, and together seek God's will.

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Jehoshaphat speaks out of Deuteronomy about a truth—which is the Covenant. Jehoshaphat knows that God has given us a truth from Scripture that He is going to keep preserving us and keeping us because of His Covenant, which He said lasts forever. How does he know that? Because he studied it. He's received it. He's processed it. He knows the Covenant is true. However, in this particular situation, when he has no idea what to do, he knows the Covenant is true. And though the Covenant is true, he doesn't just ask God to take care of it. Instead, he tells God that he has a specific problem, but he knows the Covenant is true, which is why he is coming to Him. He is standing on the Covenant. He doesn't know what to do about this, so he is seeking God and asking what He has to say about his specific problem.

When you need answers—wisdom and understanding and instruction, God says not to worry about it. It's His fight, not yours. This specific battle is His, not yours. He's got this. The Covenant is true, and He will fulfill His promise to the Covenant and protect Jehoshaphat from this overwhelming army. Nevertheless, God gives specific instructions for how Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel are to walk into His will for this. God tells Jehoshaphat to go down to a specific place and prepare as if he is going to battle. At this specific place and at a specific time, Jehoshaphat will see what He is about to do.

What if, since the battle is God's and not his, Jehoshaphat decided to go back to Jerusalem? What would have happened? He would have thwarted God's will. Yes, Jehoshaphat received His promise of the Covenant and in this particular situation, this battle is His, but He also gave instruction for Jehoshaphat to walk into His will. *If you believe Me, you have to take this step of obedience*—which is what Jehoshaphat did. He and all of Israel go to the place specified by God and tells them to believe what God says and believe the prophet who spoke that the Covenant is true. He told them God said He was going to deliver them today, and if they believe it, they will see it happen. Since they were obedient, they experienced the full victory as promised.

Not only were they victorious, what else did they get? All the spoil. Why did the opposing army bring all their spoil? Because they assumed there was no way they were going to lose. So not only did they have armor, but they had all their belongings they were planning to live with in Jerusalem. Israel got to take all this amazing stuff back to Jerusalem. What was originally meant for evil was changed. God blessed them with abundance. Think about what Jehoshaphat did throughout this situation. He didn't know what to do, so he sought God and stood on the Covenant. He asked God what He had to say, he was obedient in the most difficult, horrible situation, and he received God's answer. Why? Because he had a heart to receive it. This is a wonderful reminder of how we are to seek God's will—always.

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As we finish this lesson, we processed how David, the Queen of Sheba, and Jehoshaphat discovered God's will. The one common thing they shared was a heart to seek God's will. We learned that God uses a variety of ways to communicate His will—checking of the Spirit, bringing people around you, or speaking to you. Even when His instructions are violated, He will find alternative ways to bring you His message. Bring all your hard questions and God will answer each one of them. In difficult situations, know that the Covenant is true, and ask God how He specifically is going to handle this one for you. Stay with Him and follow His instruction as you to walk together into the fulfillment of His will.



LESSON 3: NEHEMIAH, JEREMIAH, DANIEL



"As we walked through a variety of Old Testament characters: Abraham, Moses, Caleb and Joshua, David, Queen of Sheba, Jehoshaphat—we learned that there is no system. You can't put it into a protocol that if followed correctly will result in God's will."

As we continue our course: *Discerning God's Will—Part 2: Application of Bible Characters*, we want to remind the participant that this course is an adjunct to our primary course, *Discerning God's Will*, which describes the principles of what it means to walk with God as we learn the process of how to discern His will, particularly processing what He has to speak to us. As we learned with Joshua, the primary question that we should always ask is, *Father, what do You have to say about this?*

David delighted to do God's will, which is his legacy that is written in the Book of Life. It is to be our legacy as well. David understood that God's will was always best and none better. As we walked through a variety of Old Testament characters: Abraham, Moses, Caleb and Joshua, David, Queen of Sheba, Jehoshaphat—we learned that there is no system. You can't put it into a protocol that if followed correctly will result in God's will. No, it's more about who you are with—your intimacy with God. He desires to guide you and wants to surprise you and will use a variety of ways to reveal His will. God then confirms His will through people around you who can assist you in the process. In this lesson, we continue to look at how Bible characters received and understood God's will.

NEHEMIAH

Jeremiah prophesied against Israel, saying that if they didn't repent they were going to come under judgment. Think about that—this would be judgement against God's own children. Why? Because His children were not willing to follow Him and seek His will. The purpose of judgment is always what? To repent and come back to intimacy with God, and seek, receive, and live out His will. But, the Israelites, at this time, said they were not willing to repent and return to following God. Jeremiah didn't even know why he should bother since they would not listen to him and there would be no results from him speaking what God's had revealed to him. God told Jeremiah that he was His messenger, and that since God always has a heart for His children to receive best and none better, He wanted Jeremiah to give His message.

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When the Israelites emphatically refused to repent, God told Jeremiah that the judgment was now sure. He then told Jeremiah to turn to the remnant—any who had a heart to follow Him in the judgment—that if they surrender and don't fight, they'll be captured, taken to a foreign land—because Israel and Jerusalem are going to be destroyed—and will still have a grand, Covenant life there. When the judgment came, those who rejected God's offer to follow Him into this foreign land were killed, the nation was completely destroyed, including the temple, and the remnant was taken back to Babylonia. Part of the immediate remnant were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nehemiah, who was born in Babylonia, was the child of two people who were also of that remnant. Both Nehemiah and his parents abided in God, abided in the Word. He had never been in Israel, but he fully understood God's Word, and he lived a grand, Covenant life in a foreign land. He was the cupbearer to the king, and as part of the king's court, lived in luxury. Let's see what transpires with Nehemiah:

What prompted Nehemiah to consider God's will about restoring Israel? How does God prompt us in a similar way? What then did Nehemiah do with this prompting? How long was he in process, and what did this process look like for him as he received the details of God's path for him? How does this work for us? Why is this process so important for us to receive God's will? What else did God reveal to him that he followed when he arrived in Jerusalem? Why is this also important for us to follow God's will?

Read Nehemiah 1:1–2:20:

Report from Jerusalem

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, ² that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. ³ And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

Nehemiah's Prayer

⁴ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said,

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“O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. ⁸ Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ ¹⁰ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. ¹¹ O LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

Now I was cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah Sent to Judah

2 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ² And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” ⁴ Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it.” ⁶ And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time. ⁷ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy.” And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.

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Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

¹¹ So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. ¹² Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. ¹³ I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. ¹⁵ Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. ¹⁶ And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work. ¹⁷ Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." ¹⁸ And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. ¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" ²⁰ Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim^[a] in Jerusalem."

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Nehemiah, remember, was born in Babylonia, and got promoted to be the king's cupbearer—a very trusted place. Because he's the one who tastes the food and drink before the king partakes, it is a very personal relationship. He became a confidante, almost like a personal counselor to the king; and the king to him—a very personal, positive relationship. He lives in ultra-luxury in a big palace in the winter capital of Susa, so, as far as he's concerned, his life is what? Great, enjoyable, pleasant.

When his friends come from Israel, he asks them how everything is going, and they tell him that it is terrible because they are still oppressed and have and are basically nothing. The reason they're nothing is because they didn't have a functioning city. The temple had been burned by Nebuchadnezzar, and even though it had been rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Ezra, there's nobody there to occupy it. It's sitting empty. The big, beautiful temple has been rebuilt, but it's not functioning because the city wasn't set up for commerce because there's no protection. It's not operational. So, the news they shared is that the nation and the city are still depressed, still not functioning, and still ruined.

How did that impact Nehemiah? It broke his heart. He already knew the truth based upon what He had learned from abiding in the Word. He knew that if they—his ancestors—were unfaithful, God was going to scatter them and judge them—which is what happened and why he was living in a foreign land. He also knew that if they returned to God, He would restore it.

Nehemiah goes to God on their behalf to ask Him to restore Israel as promised. In the month of Chislev, which is the month of December, he began praying that God would restore Israel. He continued this prayer until God fulfills this in the month of Nissan, which is the month of April. For four months, Nehemiah prays and processes what he is hearing, receiving, and understanding as God's will. The information his friends shared struck his heart and led to his dialogue with God.

Nehemiah prayed and asked God what He had to say about this, and what did God say to him? God told him that He was going to send him. Over the course of four months, Nehemiah dialogued with God about God's decision to send him, about how he was the cupbearer and didn't have the privilege or right to leave without permission, about how he had no experience leading people. He dialogued with God so he could understand and confirm God's will and so he could understand how it was all going to work since he couldn't just up and leave his position.

At the end of chapter one, Nehemiah asks God to give him favor with the king. For all those months he had been asking how it was all going to work, and he kept hearing that he was going to have to ask the king. When it was finally time to approach the king, what did Nehemiah do? He prayed to God and asked for the promised favor to be fulfilled and for the ability to state clearly what he was

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requesting. He had been preparing for this moment for four months and knew exactly what needed to be asked and why. It was not a spur-of-the-moment decision, as hearing, receiving, and understanding God's will takes time.

Nehemiah further needed to know all the steps to be able to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall—which is what God had instructed Him was His will. He understood that the journey would have to go from Babylonia up the Euphrates River, Baghdad up to Lebanon, and down to Jerusalem from the north. It would be a long dangerous trip as there would be robbers, thieves, and nations that without permission are going to stop and arrest them.

During the four months, he also discussed and processed with God what was needed for the journey. He would need protection, but where was he going to get that? God told him the king would give it to him. He would need material for the rebuilding of the wall. Where would he get that? Again, God told him the king would give it to him. To sum it up, God wanted Nehemiah to go so, he was going to have to ask the king to release him as well as provide him with all he would need for the journey.

Remember, this did not occur in just a day or two. It was processing for four months. The depth, the conviction, the understanding. This went on until Nehemiah received what? God's will with great clarity and confirmation. And then, one specific day, he woke up, and God said what? Today's the day. Everything that they had processed is now going to begin.

It comes to a point where God's will comes into reality, and it is fulfilled. This is the day. This is the opportunity. This is the house you're supposed to buy. This is the job you're supposed to take. This is it. It becomes real. For Nehemiah, the day had come, and in faith, he believed God would grant him favor because he was following and trusting Him.

God said the king was going to approve this, so when the king asked Nehemiah what he was requesting, Nehemiah said he'd like to go. The king gave him permission to go, and then asked Nehemiah what else he needed. He told the king he would need supplies. The king granted his request, and asked again if Nehemiah needed anything else. When he told the king that he would also need protection, the king granted that as well.

Why did Nehemiah receive this favor? It wasn't just in that moment. He has had a relationship of favor, as directed by God—Covenant. There are several examples in the Old Testament of God granting wisdom to the ones who are still seeking God. They get promoted up because of that wisdom, and then the people who have captured them are benefiting from God's wisdom through these people. Nehemiah was very valuable to the king. God's wisdom was at the king's disposal.

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In this particular situation, just as we saw with Jehoshaphat, Nehemiah started out standing on the Covenant. God had said that He would still bless them to make them a blessing and that He would restore them. Nehemiah believed that. He didn't know if this was the time or if there was something else going on, but he was struck in his heart that there was something to pay attention to. He asked God if there was something He had to say to him about this. As he was seeking God's will, he wasn't asking what he should do. Instead, he began processing. He asked God if He wanted him to be involved in this. He asked God how He wanted him to participate in this. God told Nehemiah to let Him lead him onto His path, as there are specific details for each step of this path.

When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, what is the first thing he does? He does an assessment of the wall. He needed to find out what was going on so he inspects it and then he put together a plan. His specific instruction was to do what? Build the wall. Why was he instructed to build a wall? The wall would allow Israel to re-establish the town, which was necessary for them to function economically. The wall would provide safety and the protection that was necessary for commerce. He had been receiving this element of God's will through his processing for the four months back in Babylonia. Was Nehemiah a master builder? No, he was the king's cupbearer. He doesn't know construction, but God told him that He wanted him to inspect it privately and then have a specific plan to build the wall. In order to do this, he would need to know each part of the wall. After his inspection, he was to go to the people, invite them to the great work, and then give assignments. He performs the assessment, goes to the people, and says what? He tells them that God said He is going to restore them and that everybody is to join in. They agreed and rose up to build the wall.

Nehemiah received very specific instructions as to how he was to build the wall. God didn't just tell him to go build the wall. God does not give general instructions. He leads step by step by step into what He is going to fulfill in the supernatural. God also reminds us, as He did Nehemiah, that there's an enemy attempting to thwart His will.

The enemy's first line of attack with Nehemiah was to discourage him, saying it'll never happen. Unfortunately, in the believer's circle, the enemy tends to be right next to you. It is other believers saying that would never happen, that God won't do that, that God doesn't act supernaturally, that you can't hear God's voice. Nehemiah's response to this attempt was what? He paid them no attention, telling them they have no right there, and that the God of heaven will make them prosperous. He did not bother with them because they had no right to this. He did not engage with them because he knew they were trying to distract him. Instead, they moved forward into God's will. Do not get distracted so you lose focus on the path of God's wonderful will—which is best and none better.

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As Nehemiah was placing people along the wall to rebuild it, what had he heard from God that was important to how he placed the people? Why is this significant for us?

Read Nehemiah 3:1–3:

Rebuilding the Wall

3 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. ² And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them^[a] Zaccur the son of Imri built. ³ The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

Nehemiah understood something significant. He placed each of the workers where they would have a personal interest. For example, he put the priest over the gates because that's where the sheep come in. Why would that be important to the priest? Because the priest does the sacrificing and needs sheep. He made assignments of everybody around the entire wall—where it was important to each group. When Nehemiah inspected the wall, he was not only looking at the areas that were broken down, but he was also determining who should be assigned to which sections.

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As Nehemiah was building the wall, what did he learn about the life of the people? How did he respond to this problem? On what basis did he respond? Why is knowing the truth of Scripture so important for the fullness of living out God's will? How do we then approach situations as we follow God's will step by step? Why is this so important?

Read Nehemiah 5:1–12:

Nehemiah Stops Oppression of the Poor

5 Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. ² For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive."³ There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine."⁴ And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards."⁵ Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. ⁷ I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them ⁸ and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" They were silent and could not find a word to say. ⁹ So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?" ¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. ¹¹ Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them."¹² Then they said, "We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.

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Even though the people are actively building the wall, they go to Nehemiah and tell him they are being repressed. They are in trouble. Yes, they willingly joined him to build the wall, but they wanted him to know that things have happened that are causing them to not be able to live in an enjoyable fashion. The leaders of the city have not taken care of them, have forced them to place their kids into slavery, and came and took all of their belongings. They were in despair.

How did Nehemiah respond to this? He responded in anger. Why was he angry? Because it was his own people who were doing this to each other. Further, he was called to provide God's plan of restoration—which would release them from despair. He knew the truth, God's will, as it is laid out clearly in Leviticus. He asked God what He has to say about this situation, and God tells him to set it back right. Nehemiah's anger is because he knew that it wasn't of God—that it is his own people who are not following God.

In his anger, he realizes he has an opportunity. What did he do? He gathers the leaders and requests that they reset everything according to the truth already laid out to all of them in Leviticus. He was not urging them to do something because he thought it might be a good idea—no, he's telling them to remember the truth and realize they have been violating God's truth.

Was Nehemiah confused in his understanding of God's will for him? No. He is certain of it. He understands it as he heard God speak what He wanted him to do. Often, when receiving truth from God, we are to ask another question: Do you want me to say something? If God wants you to speak, He will tell you what and when, and if God leads you to speak the truth to somebody, the best way to do it is to lead them to what? His Word. It's not you and your idea of what is right—it is His truth, His Word.

There was a CEO who was going to buy a home with his girlfriend. He believed that God told him to do this and was seeking confirmation. If you already know God's Word on this, just as Nehemiah did, you can take counsel with yourself. If something isn't right—if it is not of God—you can say that you can't give them the confirmation that they seek, but you can urge them to go to God and process God's Word—as opposed to saying what they should or should not do. Do you see the difference? There's no power in you telling someone they shouldn't do something.

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Who really cares what you think? But, if that person has a heart to follow God, they will care what God thinks. If they reject that, who are they truly rejecting? They're not rejecting you because they've looked at the truth and chose not to pursue and follow it. Their choice which means they are rejecting God. Your role was to invite them to the truth for their own benefit.

In this situation, Nehemiah laid out the truth, and they all responded with what? They understood. They got it. Why was it such a fast reaction? They received that this was from God, that they were called to repent and set things right. They understood that God's will would be best and none better, and they realized that Nehemiah was not only rebuilding the wall, but also rebuilding the souls of those people to restore them back to life—to the Covenant. Restoration isn't just for the wall. Restoration is the essence of how that community functions—how beautiful a description of all that God had in mind—His bigger story.

What else did Nehemiah discover about the spiritual life of the people? Since he had a heart to follow God, what did he then do regarding God's will for the spiritual life of the people? Why is this also so important for us as we follow God's will?

Read Nehemiah 8:1–12; 17–18:

Ezra Reads the Law

8 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their

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heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites,^[a] helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly,^[b] and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

This Day Is Holy

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." ¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

¹⁷ And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. ¹⁸ And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.

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Nehemiah is working with the people as they build the wall. Throughout this project, he asks how it's going, how their sections are going, how they are doing. He had already discovered that their leaders were not taking care of them, which he had addressed and resolved. Now, as they're getting ready to finish the project, he discovered something else. What did he discover? He discovered that the people did not know God's Word. The priest knew the Word, but none of the people of Israel knew the Word. Nehemiah goes to God and tells Him that they don't know how to follow Him and asks what God would have him do.

Because Nehemiah had followed God his whole life, he knew that if you abide with God and learn to hear His voice, receive, understand, and follow His will, life will be Covenant living—blessed to be a blessing. He asks God: Don't they need to know the truth? Don't they need to be abiding in the Word? Don't they need to hear Your voice? They needed all of this. Nehemiah then asked what God wanted him to do. God told him to gather them together and give priority to teaching them how to abide. We're going to abide together because we'll learn the truth together. He didn't tell the priest to lead them and tell them what to do. He knew they needed to learn the Word—just as his parents taught him.

Jesus reiterates this to us as believers. John 15:5 says: Apart from Me, you can do nothing. Fruit Covenant life comes from abiding in the vine, abiding in Him. We are to have the heart to follow God and abide. Learn to abide, because apart from Him, you can do nothing. Why? So that you can discern God's will. The people of Israel learned to abide, rejoiced, had a grand celebration, and began their Covenant life by following God. Nehemiah's life is a wonderful story of the process of paying attention, taking the time to process, hearing, receiving, and following God's will, and experiencing the fullness of God's will—which is best and none better.

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JEREMIAH

What was God’s will for Jeremiah at this particular time in Israel’s history? What was Jeremiah’s response to his call? What was God’s response to Jeremiah’s response? What does this say about how God continues to reveal His will to us, particularly as we struggle with our role in His assignments? What bigger story did God share with Jeremiah? Why also is this understanding so important for us?

Read Jeremiah 1:4–19:

The Call of Jeremiah

⁴ Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.”

⁹ Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me,

“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰ See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

¹¹ And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see an almond^[a] branch.” ¹² Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.”

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¹³ The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north." ¹⁴ Then the Lord said to me, "Out of the north disaster^[b] shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁵ For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the Lord, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah. ¹⁶ And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands. ¹⁷ But you, dress yourself for work;^[c] arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. ¹⁸ And I, behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."

What was God's will for Jeremiah? For Jeremiah to speak whatever God instructed him to say—including going to Israel to issue a warning for walking away from God. He's being called to be what? A prophet—someone who speaks the words of God. God chose Jeremiah to be a prophet—it was His will for him. Was Jeremiah looking for this? Was he asking God if He wanted him to be a prophet or asking God what He wanted him to do so that he can serve Him? No, he's just living life in Israel when God comes to him and says He has an assignment for him. God was calling him to be a prophet.

How did Jeremiah respond to what God was calling him to do? He asked God if He was sure since he was just a youth who didn't believe he was capable. He pointed out his lack of maturity and how there must be others who are far more suitable than he. But, from what we learned about David, God doesn't look at the outward appearance, rather He looks at the heart. He knew Jeremiah had a heart to follow Him, and even though Jeremiah didn't think it was a good idea, God chose him as His prophet. God selected Jeremiah specifically.

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In your personal situations, as you're processing these assignments, these instructions, these places that God is sending you, do you also respond saying you are not that capable? Maybe someone else is more suitable? Does God mind that you struggle with your adequacy in carrying out His assignments? No. He understands and then reinforces that He placed you into this assignment. It is then that you receive understanding and clarity.

God then spoke to Jeremiah about a couple of things he needed to understand:

1. As I send you out, speak only what I say—don't add to it and don't neglect it. Don't remove some of what I say, because you think it might offend somebody. I'm telling you to speak only what I say, and all that I say.
2. It is more than information. My Word is powerful. It has purpose. It fulfills what I speak. And this purpose primarily is to have you give a message to someone in your inner circle to call them to God's best, or warn them of something harmful to them.

Once in a while it's a grand prophetic call for a broader audience (like a church, or even to a city or a nation)—to a bigger place. But mostly, as is expressed in 1 Corinthians 14:1–13, this assignment is to serve each as God so directs for building each other up. And since we are called to speak God's Word, what is important for us? To be abiding in His Word, learning, and receiving the truth so that we experience it and can give it away. This is not easy. We often struggle with wondering how something will be received, or if you should sugarcoat this a little bit, or if you should hold back a little bit and not go all the way. But God says: I'll tell you what to say and speak it all.

For Jeremiah, who asked how this was going to work, God revealed an example for him. He shows Jeremiah a visual picture and asks if he could see it and what he thought it meant. Jeremiah had no idea of its meaning, so God told him and helped him understand. God was teaching Jeremiah how it works. To Jeremiah, God said He was going to have him practice in order to get ready. When the time came, Jeremiah was ready and willing to go. He knew his assignment and God confirmed it. God didn't mind that he needed time to process it. He gave him instruction, taught him what that looked like, and walked into God's will for him.

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Jeremiah had a choice regarding following God’s will—what were the two choices? What is the outcome of each of these choices? How then are we to pursue God’s will for us? Why is this so critical for our hearing, receiving, and following God’s will?

Read Jeremiah 17:5–8:

⁵ Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,^[a]
whose heart turns away from the Lord.

⁶ He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

⁷ “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

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This takes place after Jeremiah had already gone to God and told Him that they were not listening to him, so why should he bother? In addition, they were coming after him to harm him and silence him. God tells him he is not to worry about the outcome. His role was to do what? To focus on God and speak the truth—speak the message without worrying about the outcome. In other words, sheepdog to shepherd, not sheepdog to sheep. The sheepdog doesn't need to worry about what the sheep do, it just needs to listen to the shepherd and keep receiving his instruction. Just like the relationship between the sheepdog and the shepherd, Jeremiah was God's messenger.

Oftentimes, God wants you to give a message to somebody in your group or somebody in your family or somebody who you know. So, you give it to them, but they don't receive it at all. You then question why God had you do that, since it had no value and you did not get the intended outcome. God gives you the opportunity to invite them to something they have a chance to receive. Sometimes you might be the only one who could give the message because you're simply the only one there. Whatever the case, it's a privilege to be God's messenger.

In these verses, God says that if you decide your own path and do this on your own, and if you trust in yourself and trust in man—what is the outcome? You will be cursed. You're going to have dryness. You'll have an unpleasant life. However, if you trust Him, what will happen? Even when you are in the midst of tough times, things will go well for you. You will flourish. It doesn't matter if you are in the thick of a tough time or if difficulties are on the horizon. God tells those of us who seek His will to trust Him because He knows what He is doing. Don't try to evaluate the instruction to determine whether it is a good idea or not. Don't alter His instruction. If you do, you will wind up in a place that's dry as opposed to the flourishing place He promise you.

The flourishing places are for whom? You—for you to have a thriving life even when you're given difficult assignments. Following God's will is following His assignments for us. Our response is to be willing to follow only what God speaks and speak to others what we are asked to speak—not detracting from or adding to. We are to learn to trust Him fully versus trying to figure things out on our own. If we do, we will thrive.

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DANIEL

Daniel was one of the remnant between Jeremiah and Nehemiah. He was born in Israel, was there during the judgement, but then left the city with his family. They listened to God's instruction through Jeremiah and surrendered. They were captured and transported to Babylonia.

How did Daniel respond when he knew that the situation before him was not of God? On what basis did he know this? What did God provide as a solution? What do we need to understand then about what God will do for us in difficult situations? Why is this so important as we walk with God into His will for us?

Read Daniel 1:3–17:

³ Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family^[a] and of the nobility, ⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Beltshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

Daniel's Faithfulness

⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹ And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and

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deal with your servants according to what you see.”¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Daniel at the time was in Babylonia. He was a young person who Nebuchadnezzar had already identified as a person of intelligence. Because of this, Nebuchadnezzar put him on a course to become one of his hundreds of wise men to train to be a servant of the king. As they invited him to this educational program, they served him certain food, as was common for all in the training. What was the problem with this? It was against Jewish truth and custom and had been sacrificed to idols. Was it okay that he was going to be learning all the language, customs, and culture of Babylonia? Yes, God did not forbid this. He had actually sanctioned it for Daniel, as he would be given the ability to discern between what is good and what is not.

In this situation with the food sacrificed to idols, Daniel knew an absolute Biblical truth—He could not eat it as it was against his God and God’s ways. On what basis did he make that decision? He based it on the truth. He knew the Word, and the Word is very clear on certain things. This directs us to God’s will. Daniel asked God if it was His will for him to become a wise man. It was. Then, even though he already knew the answer, he asked God about this food sacrificed to idols. That was no, and now he's got a problem.

Everybody was being served this food, which put him in a double bind. He was supposed to be there, but if he didn’t eat this food, they were going to kill him. He asked God what He had to say about that, and because God is all knowing and all powerful, He introduces the answer. The guardsman tells Daniel that if he does

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not give him this food, he will be weaker, different than the others, and when the king takes notice, this will put him in a position where he will likely be killed—so he tells Daniel that he needs to eat this food. God then instructs Daniel to tell the guardsman to feed him different food and if, at the end of 10 days, he is not as healthy as the others, then go ahead and get rid of him—kill him.

Daniel did not know how to resolve the issue, but God did. Daniel knew God would have the solution and pursued talking with Him. God's solution put Daniel in an even better position physically and resulted in him being put into the group of wise men to the king. The king would eventually see that Daniel and his friends were particularly bright, and they would benefit greatly from this.

God's answers lead us to best and none better—all we have to do is ask and seek.

When Daniel and his friends faced another a situation with very negative consequences (in this case—death), what did he do? (Describe the process.) What did God do, and what does this reveal to us about God's ability to bring resolution to our difficult circumstances? Why is this so important for us as we continue to seek God's will?

Read Daniel 2:14–23:

¹⁴ Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁵ He declared^[a] to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. ¹⁶ And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

God Reveals Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. ²⁰ Daniel answered and said:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;

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he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
²² he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.
²³ To you, O God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise,
for you have given me wisdom and might,
and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
for you have made known to us the king's matter.”

Daniel, being one of Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men, is going to be killed if they—the wise men— cannot interpret the king’s dream. Nebuchadnezzar believes that if they are all so wise, they ought to be able to tell them his dream and its interpretation without him actually telling them what he dreamed. Since no one could do that, he decides to kill them all. Daniel goes to the king and asks for a couple of days to be able to fulfill his request.

Daniel could have asked the king to change his mind or be reasonable or anything else to try to save himself, but instead, he asked for time. He told the king that God can give him something that nobody else can receive on their own. If the king would give him a couple of days, he would come back and tell him everything. On what basis could he say that? Daniel knew his God and also knew that this wasn’t too difficult for him. He wasn’t going to ask God to change the problem, he was asking God to give him His solution to the problem. There is a difference.

So many of our prayers are for God to take away our problems. This was not Daniel’s approach. Instead, he asked for God to provide the solution to this problem. He gets together with his friends and prays for God to tell them what Nebuchadnezzar's dream was and what his dream meant. God answered their

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prayers and told them what they needed to know. God supernaturally delivered the answer to his problem, and Daniel was able to deliver it to the king. After he interprets the dream, Daniel and his friends get promoted.

In this passage, before he delivers the interpretation to the king, Daniel celebrates and praises God for giving him the answer. He has faith and trusts that what he's hearing from God is true, right, and trustworthy. Daniel had a problem that could very well lead to his death, but instead of trying to figure it out on his own, He goes to God and asks what He has to say about this. God supernaturally gives him the answer through His power.

When faced with another situation with dire circumstances (again, death) where he could have easily compromised and rationalized his practice of worship privately versus publicly, what did Daniel do? On what basis was he willing to go to his death versus compromise? What happened? What does this reveal to us regarding how to follow God's will? Why is this so important to us?

Read Daniel 6:1–28:

Daniel and the Lions' Den

6 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. ³ Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

⁶ Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement^[a] to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes

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and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.”⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. ¹² Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” ¹³ Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. ¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.”

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared^[b] to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” ¹⁷ And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” ²³ Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ And the king

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commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. ²⁶ I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God,
enduring forever;
his kingdom shall never be destroyed,
and his dominion shall be to the end.

²⁷ He delivers and rescues;
he works signs and wonders
in heaven and on earth,
he who has saved Daniel
from the power of the lions."

²⁸ So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This is the same scenario as with Nebuchadnezzar's dream—there was a consequence of death for following God. At this point, Daniel had lived through four kings and had found favor with all of them. Some of King Darius' men became jealous of this and worked to trap him. They went to King Darius and had him sign a law stating that anyone worshipping someone other than Darius would be thrown into the lion's den. The king did not fully understand the implication of this, since he knew that Daniel served the God of Israel. Did Daniel stop openly praying to God as was his custom? No. Why not? Because he knew God, trusted God, and had already learned to be faithful to the truth—not deny the truth or compromise the truth—but to be true to his relationship with God.

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This new consequence of praying to the God of Israel resulted in him being trapped by the law and thrown into the lion's den. Daniel was willing to face this consequence because he was not going to change or compromise what he knew to be true. What happens when they throw him in the den? The lion did not go after him. Daniel was fully protected. Was that supernatural? Yes. This is where trust comes in. If Daniel had compromised, he probably would have been killed. Since he trusted God and what he knew to be true, he actually was saved.

Are you willing to stand on truth for God's will? Daniel is a great example. His story occurs over a 70-year period, and there are only a handful of times that he was tested over these years. Most of the time he had great favor from God. He was always faithful and had no trouble trusting, hearing, and receiving God's will and living the Covenant life because of God's supernatural promises that define this life.

As we finish this particular lesson, we've gone through great characters with Nehemiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. We can clearly see that there is no system. It's processing, understanding, seeking, hearing, following, knowing. The one constant with all three of them is that they knew God's Word. This is critical as you seek the will of God. If you know something is true, you can ask God how He wants you to apply it in your situation. God will supernaturally get you to the place where He wants to fulfill it. It's all about trust. If you trust yourself, you're going to wind up dried out, but if you trust Him, you're going to flourish.

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"God has already given us truth that we are to follow. As we learn and understand, we can ask God how it applies to us."

As we conclude this study: *Discerning God's Will—Part 2: Application of Bible Characters*, we continue learning how these characters in the Bible process with God to receive His will. We have learned there is no system, there is no pattern, there is no set way of processing His will. Rather, it is all about relationship. The ability to hear and receive His will comes from abiding in the Word and understanding the truth that leads to God's will.

God has already given us truth that we are to follow. As we learn and understand, we can ask God how it applies to us. As you are learning to discern God's will, you would benefit greatly if you spent time in our courses: *Abiding in the Vine—Unity and Discerning God's Will*, which is the primary course on this subject that sets up the understanding of what it means to hear His voice and follow Him.

As you continue this study, learning from the New Testament characters, God will relate to you in unique ways, leading you to His will, which is always best and none better.

THE DISCIPLES—when Jesus called them

When Jesus first called His disciples to join Him, what did He state, and what did He ask? What is the profound meaning of His statement and of His question to them? What is necessary for us to be able to follow God's will? By definition then, what is not necessary? How are we to respond to following God?

Read Mark 1:14–20:

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;^[a] repent and believe in the gospel."

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Jesus Calls the First Disciples

¹⁶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."^(b) ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

This describes the essence of how we pursue God's will. Jesus' first statement is what? The Kingdom is here. Thus, He is inviting you to do what? Join Him by coming into His Kingdom. The Kingdom is where it's all going to happen—Thy Kingdom come. Remember, it's a spiritual place. We know that the world is under the control of the enemy, as the enemy has authority over the natural which is to kill, steal, and destroy—entropy, destruction—where things aren't working, and you are surrounded by self-centered people. But God says His Kingdom is superior to that. Why? Because He is the King, who is all powerful. The King has superior power. All was created by Him, not in any natural way, but by speaking it into existence. His Word is superior to the world, to circumstances. Spiritual is superior to natural. The material is subordinate to the spiritual. Your circumstances are subordinate to the spiritual.

When you understand God's will, it's always about the Kingdom. In the Kingdom, we know that the Lord can make things happen. How? He can speak it—nothing is too difficult for Him. This is why you don't need to worry about the trouble or the circumstances or the difficulties or the things you're trying to understand. God knows about this and is not only going to guide you in a natural way, but He is going to make things happen for you in a place that's difficult to live. He is superior to that. He is going to deliver the Covenant to you—He will bless you to make you a blessing. It's about the Kingdom, which is why Jesus' first statement is: The Kingdom is here.

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Following His declaration that the Kingdom of God was at hand, what was His invitation? He said to come and follow Him. Did He tell them everything that was going to happen over the next three years? No, just to come and be with Him—and He would illustrate His will for them day by day by day so they could experience the life He had planned for them.

Jesus knew something about these disciples. Were the disciples religious theologians? No. They had, in modern terms, already flunked out of high school. They didn't make it. In Europe, you go through a process in school, and then you get tested. If you don't pass that test, you don't go on. You don't go on to finish high school. You don't go to university. Instead, you have to learn a trade. The disciples were all tradesman—which included fishermen. Did they know anything at all about God's supernatural life? No, nothing. Did He ask them to follow Him and then tell them all that they would experience? No. What did He say? *Follow Me*—period.

This is why His will is so beautiful and is so simple. He asks if you want to come and live with Him in the Kingdom. *Come and follow Me*. If you choose to follow Him, this puts you on the path of His will for you. If you are to experience this beautiful will, where do you have to be? In the Kingdom. He can't deliver His will if you're not with Him in the Kingdom. If you're in the natural, in the world, the enemy's going to attack you. God can change your circumstances but you have to be with Him in the Kingdom. He is absolutely committed to delivering this grand life to you. He has a specific will—and it's best and none better. It's the Covenant, it's supernatural life, it's super-abundant life. Does that mean you'll be absent of any trouble? No. In the middle of the trouble is where He will demonstrate His power the most. But in order for this to happen, you have to be with Him in the Kingdom.

In this story, when He first met certain disciples, what did Jesus do for them? Why did this encourage them to join Him? What then can we understand as to how God works in our lives to encourage us to join Him? Why is this so important for us and for helping others join Him?

Read Luke 5:1–11:

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

5 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to

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put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men."^[a] ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

As Jesus met these disciples, what did He tell them to do? Put their nets out again. How did they respond? They said that they already did that, and that they were skilled fishermen who knew what we're doing, and since they had caught nothing—it's worthless to do this again. How does Jesus respond? He tells them to do it anyway. What happened when they did? They caught so many fish, they needed help dragging in the net. It was a supernatural work.

As God invites you to come with Him and experience His will, don't think that you have to do everything correctly. These guys knew nothing. They were doing nothing. They had no clue. God showed them something supernatural to encourage them to follow Him. God can deliver the supernatural any time to reveal Himself to us—to show what is on His heart. Many times, God performs these supernatural works just so He can ask if we saw what He just did.

When discipling people who are struggling with an oppressive circumstance, ask them if they would like to learn about the life of God, how to abide with Him so they will see their circumstances resolved. Some might not be interested as they

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feel that God is the one who caused the circumstance in the first place. But where has this way of thinking gotten them? How has this been working out for them? Offering to teach them a different way could lead them to having a heart to follow God and realize the importance of being with God in His Kingdom. Does this mean they have a full understanding of faith? No. But as they follow Him, God does amazing things. He demonstrates His heart. When they see this and recognize that God is doing the supernatural for them, they, in turn, will invite others to come into the Kingdom to be with God. God loves to demonstrate His supernatural works to excite and encourage us.

Are you recognizing God's supernatural work in your life—things that are unique and interesting specifically for you? Linda has these wonderful things happen all the time. One morning, she was sitting at a table outside for her abiding time. The table was two feet away from the marble railing on the porch. As she was doing her devotions, a huge bald eagle landed on the railing, only two feet away from her. For several minutes this magnificent eagle just looked directly at Linda. And then he flew off. She understood that God was supernaturally demonstrating that He really loved her, and it also let her know that He heard what she was praying about at that particular time. It wasn't accidental. It was supernatural, and when the supernatural happens and you recognize that, it really encourages you. This is why it's important to share with others as you experience God's will. It does not have to be spectacular healing (though it often is) but just something unique to you that you know is God at work in your life.

Jesus asked the disciples to put their nets down, and they experienced the supernatural. How often did they experience the supernatural over the next three years? All the time. John makes a statement at the end of the gospel of John, *Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.* They were experiencing it all the time. This will also be your life if you have a heart to follow Him.

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SAUL AND ANANIAS

How did Saul respond when Jesus appeared before him on his way to Damascus to harm Christian believers? What was his key question that we can see characterized his life and how he sought God's will? What did Jesus tell him to do?

Read Acts 9:1–9:

The Conversion of Saul

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

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Saul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees perspective of Jesus was what? They believed that Jesus was moving the people away from them. They had their system, they had their rules, and they were in charge. They knew what was right because they followed the law perfectly. Unfortunately, the laws they created and followed weren't Biblical. At some point, they decided they didn't like this Jesus. Though they spoke of this dislike, not much else was done about it until Saul decided he was going to take care of it personally. He was tired of all the talking and was determined to take action. In fact, he was going to go after everyone he could. As he was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus, which is in Lebanon, he was looking for any Christians that he could arrest, silence, or even kill.

On the road to Damascus, what happened? Jesus showed up. Jesus asks Saul why he is persecuting Him? Saul, in response, asks Jesus who He was. Why would he ask that question? He didn't know. Jesus tells him that He is the one Saul is persecuting. Paul immediately understood. He understood because of the resurrection and the statement of the resurrection. This is Jesus, the personal God, that he was persecuting. He thought he was persecuting the system, but he was persecuting Jesus.

Upon realizing this, how did Saul respond? He asked Jesus what He wanted him to do. Prior to this, Saul had a hard heart, driven by law to snuff out this Christianity. But here, he immediately asked what Jesus wanted him to do. That's how Saul—who would later become Paul—operated the rest of his life. *God, what have you to say to me?* Christ instructed him to go to Damascus where he will be taken care of in three days' time. He is struck blind and is led to Damascus to wait.

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As Saul went to Damascus to wait for Christ's next step, what did God tell His faithful disciple, Ananias? How did Ananias respond to God's instruction? Why? Did God mind that he struggled? Why not? What then did Ananias understand as he was willing to go as directed? Why is this so important for us to as we seek to know God's specific will for us?

Describe how God worked both sides of this situation—for Saul and for Ananias. Why does God work this way, and what does that mean we are to be part of? Why is this so important for us?

Read Acts 9:10–17:

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

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Ananias is in his abiding time with God. When the Lord says Ananias' name, Ananias knew who was speaking to him. How did he know it was God? He had already heard His voice before. He understood that God speaks and it is personal. When Ananias responded, he expected God to give him normal, regular instruction, but instead, God instructs him to go to a specific house on a specific street and to lay hands on Saul so that he can receive his sight.

We need to understand that God's will is very specific to us. Many of us just hope we guess right. In this situation, God did not tell Ananias that Saul was somewhere in Damascus and that he needed to go find him. Rather, His instruction was very, very specific. How come? He knows, and we do not. We do not have to figure things out and guess at what we are to do. His will is not general, it's unique to each of us, so by definition it has to be specific. God gets us to the right place, at the right time, with the right people. It's very specific around the details of our life. We are not to pray for God to just take care of our issues, situations, or circumstances—which is usually what we want Him to do, rather it's to let God guide each of us onto a very specific path.

God gave His instruction to Ananias, who then asked God if He knew who He was talking about. Saul was the guy who was opposing them, trying to arrest or even kill them. It didn't make sense to him, and he didn't really want to go. He asked God if he was sure.

Did God mind that he had a question? No. God knew he was confused by the instructions, that it didn't make sense to Ananias, and that he would rather not do this, so God reinforced that it was His will. In addition, God tells him something very significant. He didn't just tell him to go do it, He also told Ananias that Saul was going to bear His name before the Gentiles. The whole plan of the gospel was right there, and Ananias was the first one to hear this. Everybody else thought it was just the Jews. Ananias heard that it was actually for more than that. God also told him not to worry about Saul as he will have enough trouble to deal with. Upon receiving confirmation from God that this was His will, Ananias agreed to go.

When Ananias went to Saul, he tells him that he is there to fulfill what Saul experienced on the road to Damascus by Jesus when He appeared to him and blinded him. How did Ananias know all that? The Spirit revealed it when he kept talking to God. He asked questions: How did this work? What happened? How was he converted? What did Jesus say and do? God answered all of his questions. With these answers, he could go to Saul knowing everything that had happened to him. Was he there? No. He didn't need to be, because in his dialogue with God, he learned all that he needed to know.

When Ananias put his hands on Saul, Saul received his sight, became a believer, and received the Holy Spirit. God worked both sides of the deal. God had given Saul a vision that Ananias—by name—was coming to lay hands on him. God

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showed/told both Saul and Ananias what they needed to see/hear because He was working both sides of the deal. He easily could have just told Saul that he was converted and that's it. He could have never even involved Ananias at all. He didn't need him. But, what did this do for Ananias? It grew his faith—which led him deeper into following instruction and God's will.

Since God works both sides of the deal, we need to understand that there is more to the story. God has a much bigger story, and He works all sides and angles to fulfill His grand purposes. We are to understand that we are part of it. It's not just God's will for us. We are included in this much bigger story.

CORNELIUS AND PETER

Describe all that happened with Cornelius. What did the angel tell him about why he was there and what he was to do? What did Cornelius then do?

While Cornelius was sending his men to find Peter, describe what happened to Peter. What was Peter's response to the vision? Why did he struggle so much and refuse to follow God's instructions? What did Peter do that is so important for us when we struggle? Though he would not follow God's primary instruction of the vision, why did he follow the instruction to go with the men who Cornelius sent—what was the difference for Peter? As he went with the men, what happened regarding his understanding of God's will? What then is God's role, and what is our role when we are seeking to understand His will, particularly when it not easy to understand or does not make sense to us? When he did understand everything, how did Peter respond? What happened then for Cornelius and his family and friends?

Describe again here how God worked both sides for Cornelius and for Peter. Why did He do this, and what was the bigger story of God's purpose for all of this? How did Peter, and then the rest of the disciples, get drawn into God's bigger story? Why is this so important for us as we seek God's will for us?

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Read Acts 10:1–48:

Peter and Cornelius

10 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day^[a] he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.” ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Peter's Vision

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour^[b] to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” ¹⁴ But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation,^[c] for I have sent them.” ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” ²² And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

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The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man."²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered.²⁸ And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me."

³⁰ And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour,^[d] and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing³¹ and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God.'³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.'³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

Gentiles Hear the Good News

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed:³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

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The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

Cornelius was a Roman soldier, a centurion in Caesarea—on the coast to the west of Jerusalem. This was where Herod's palace was located. A magnificent place, where the physical ruins remain to this day, Caesarea would be equivalent to Beverly Hills of California—a fabulous city with a luxurious and thriving seaport. Cornelius, and the 100 soldiers under him, were stationed in Caesarea. What did Romans believe as their religion? They believed in polytheistic myths and that everything in life had a god associated with it.

For some reason though, Cornelius, who had been around some Jews and had heard there was only one real supreme God, wondered about the typical Roman believer. He surmised that the Roman beliefs were not right, and so he prayed. What did he pray? He remembered that the angel said his prayers had been answered, so he prayed that if there is really only one God and this Roman system wasn't true, he wanted to know that. He prayed for help. He prayed without knowing who he was praying to in hopes that he would find out the truth. He wanted to know and had a true heart to know.

The angel shows up and tells Cornelius that his prayers have been heard, and they're going to be answered. Send your soldiers to Peter, who can be found in this town, at this house, on this street. He was given specific directions. His prayers had been heard, and God told him what He wanted him to do. Cornelius could have questioned everything he had heard, but instead, he did as instructed and sent his men to go get Peter.

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Peter, who is doing his normal prayer time before dinner, receives a vision about unclean animals and instructions to kill and eat them. Peter, in typical Peter fashion, says he would never do that. He still hasn't fully learned to ask God to help him understand. He did the same thing in Matthew 16 when Christ was explaining to the disciples that he would be killed and resurrected, and Peter declared that he would never let this happen to Him. Jesus immediately says, Get behind Me, Satan.

Peter had just gone from the most holy person to Satan. Why? Christ explained that Peter did not have the things of God in mind—he had the things of men. Jesus understood Peter's heart, but Peter forgot something—he forgot to ask Him, he did not dialogue with Him, which is his privilege to help him understand things that do not make sense. This is what we just learned Ananias did.

Peter does the same thing with the vision. He refuses to do what is being asked of him. God gives the vision to him again, and again he refuses. God gives it to him a third time, and a third time, Peter refuses. To Peter's credit, he was not emphatic as he wondered what that was all about, he just was not going to God yet. As he is pondering this, who shows up? Cornelius' men. Would a Jew open the door for a Gentile? They're Roman soldiers, so Peter knows that they're Gentiles, and he had no inclination to open the door. But what does the Holy Spirit say to him? He tells Peter to open the door because He sent them. Peter immediately complies. What is the difference between quickly agreeing to this instruction but not to the vision?

1. He was seeing God at work right then. God was doing something in the physical. These circumstances were happening right there at that very moment.
2. Peter was used to hearing these kinds of instructions from the Spirit. He has heard these before. When the Spirit says that He put him there and that He sent these men, Peter does as he is instructed.

Peter then asks the men what they want. They explain that their leader wants Peter to go with them so that Peter can help him understand things. Peter asks God if he is supposed to go, and the Father says yes. God orchestrated the issue because Peter was still struggling with the vision. He did not understand it, it was against what he knew to be true, and did not make sense to him.

Even though they are Gentiles, Peter went with them. Throughout this time, he continued processing the vision and processing what he knew to be true. He was there with Gentiles who he considered to be unclean. In the vision, God told him to go ahead and eat food that is unclean. Was He also saying this about the Gentiles? What was God doing? He was putting two and two together for Peter so he could understand what God was up to.

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When Peter met Cornelius, he asked him what he wanted. Cornelius described the visit by the angel. He explained that the angel told him where he would find Peter and how to get Peter to come to his house to tell him the answer. And at that moment, it all came together for Peter. He states that he perceived there's no what? Partiality. He had been operating with this partiality as normal and right, but now he sees that the Gospel is for everybody—there is no partiality. It's just about having a heart to follow Him. He understands what the whole thing was about and explains the truth about Jesus to these Gentiles. When he was done, he asked the group if they wanted to receive Jesus, and every one of them said yes. The whole group—including friends and family—were baptized. They became the first Gentile believers, which then spread into all the world.

Let's review the process by going back to Cornelius. The angel told him that his prayers were answered. At that moment, the angel could have also said that his answer is Jesus. Jesus is real, and He is the answer that Cornelius seeks. Instead, the angel tells him to go get Peter so that Peter can give him the answer. While Cornelius' men are going to get Peter, God shows Peter something. Peter didn't understand it and didn't think he could do it, but he continued to process it. Why didn't God disqualify him when he said no? He knew that underneath this struggle was a heart that did want to receive the truth of it. It would have been far easier if Peter had chosen to dialogue with God, as did Ananias, but he knew God was up to something.

Because of this, Peter went with the Gentiles as instructed and received the truth as he went. God worked both sides of the deal to fulfill His purpose, which was both for Cornelius and for Peter. God wanted Cornelius to hear the answer from Peter, and He wanted Peter to be involved with Cornelius when He revealed the truth that He started with the vision. What did He do in both scenarios? He opened up the truth for all.

Consider also the innocent bystanders, the people who walked with Peter on his trip, and those who went to Cornelius' house to hear. God's bigger story—His will for Cornelius was for Cornelius and Peter, and God's will for Peter was for Peter and Cornelius. His will for Cornelius and for Peter was also for all these other people. This was God at work, revealing that we are not alone in His will for us—for God's Kingdom purposes. Further, the Jews who went with Peter, those who experienced the reality and truth of this all, also went with Peter to Jerusalem. Why was this significant? They were witnesses to other Jews, and specifically to the disciples.

When Peter goes back and shares all that happened, these witnesses, who were Jews, stood up and verified that it all happened exactly that way. The disciples also received this truth, and their ministry changed—step by step by step.

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In a way, the struggle that Peter went through was a privilege. God used him to step into His bigger story. God doesn't mind that we struggle. It's okay that it doesn't always make sense. The key is to stay with it and let Him play it out. He's working on countless sides and angles for your spouse, for your kids, for your friends, for your inner circle, for people around you. There's more to it than you can imagine, which is why the timing is so critical. Don't be upset when things don't happen as fast as you'd like. God's steps may involve more than we can imagine for His Kingdom purposes.

PAUL

In this story, describe how God directed Paul to hear, understand, and follow God's will. What was God's purpose in teaching Paul these truths about seeking and following God's will? What does this then mean regarding how we are to seek and follow God's will? Why is this so important for us to learn?

Read Acts 16:1–16:

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

16 Paul^[a] came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ² He was well spoken of by the brothers^[b] at Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

The Macedonian Call

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."¹⁰ And when Paul[c] had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

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The Conversion of Lydia

¹¹ So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the^(d) district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days. ¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Paul and Silas in Prison

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.

This is Paul's second missionary journey. He has gone through the cities that he has already visited and just reinforced truth. He doesn't stay in any of the cities for long because he knows his mission is to do what? Start churches and find faithful people, men and women of faith, who will then build a body of believers and continue to teach the truth.

Paul winds up at the southwest corner of modern-day Turkey—where the Mediterranean Sea is to the south and the west. He had come from the east, so he didn't need to go back that way as he had already started churches there. His figured he would head northeast into Asia to continue his mission, but when he started in that direction, the Holy Spirit did what? Blocked him.

Blocking was circumstantial: The supplies that the donkey carried fell over or things just didn't come together. Paul recognized that something was not right, and the Holy Spirit confirmed that He did not want Paul to go there at that time.

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Paul then decided that he would head north, and again the Holy Spirit stopped him circumstantially, and confirmed that was not His will.

Since he wasn't going east and was blocked going north and northeast, the only other directions were south and west—where the Mediterranean Sea was. He could have given up, but Paul knew that God's will was for him to start churches. He knew he was still called to go and had no doubts about his mission. Instead of trying to figure out a new plan, he went directly to God and asked Him what He had to say about the situation.

God's will is progressive. If you've heard it, don't go backwards when the next step is not clear. Even though you thought it was going to look a certain way, continue pursuing God and His will.

By this time, Paul had been able to clearly hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Why didn't the Holy Spirit just tell him which direction to go? Because there were other things at play, other things that God was working. There might have been a time factor to it, or God might have been showing Paul that he needed to be careful of falling into a system. God wanted Paul to pay attention to when he was circumstantially blocked. God was blocking him to show him something—to show him that His will can be demonstrated in a different way, which can include the circumstances He used to block Paul.

When Paul realized that he was blocked, what did he do? He asked God if this was His doing. Upon receiving confirmation, he set his focus on another direction. When he was blocked again, he asked God again if this was Him. God confirmed. Believing there was nowhere for him to go, he asked God what He wanted him to do. God showed him in a vision. At this point, Paul had not even considered that he was to cross the ocean and continue his mission. But when the man from Philippi asked Paul to come over and help them, he realized that he was supposed to go across the ocean and up that way.

The Holy Spirit confirmed that Paul was to get in the boat and get going. The boat travels west and then he goes directly to Philippi. Since Paul is on a missionary journey, he might have thought that he should start churches along the way, but God told him to go directly to Philippi, and not to spend any time doing anything else.

In Philippi, Paul finds Lydia, and together they start a church in Philippi. Even though Paul had his own ideas about God's will, the Holy Spirit showed him otherwise and gave him the information he needed to proceed. The Holy Spirit blocked Paul when He needed to, but then revealed His plan. Paul was willing to follow God's plan completely, not by trying to conform to a system, but simply by following Him.

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From this story, describe each step Paul took to follow God's will. How do you explain the Spirit prophesying a certain result that did not actually happen that way? What then was the purpose of the first prophetic word? How did Paul approach each in this difficult situation? When he wound up in Malta and was bitten by a poisonous snake, what was Paul's response? Why? What does this entire process reveal about how we are to hear, seek, and follow God's will?

Read Acts 27:1–28:10:

Paul Sails for Rome

27 And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. ² And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. ³ The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. ⁴ And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. ⁵ And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. ⁸ Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

⁹ Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast^[a] was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰ saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." ¹¹ But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. ¹² And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

The Storm at Sea

¹³ Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. ¹⁴ But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. ¹⁵ And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we

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gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda,^[b] we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. ¹⁷ After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear,^[c] and thus they were driven along. ¹⁸ Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. ¹⁹ And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

²¹ Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. ²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' ²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. ²⁶ But we must run aground on some island."

²⁷ When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. ²⁸ So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms.^[d] A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms.^[e] ²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. ³⁰ And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

³³ As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength,^[f] for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you."³⁵ And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ (We were in all 276^[g] persons in the ship.) ³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

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The Shipwreck

³⁹ Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. ⁴⁰ So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. ⁴¹ But striking a reef,^[h] they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. ⁴² The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. ⁴³ But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, ⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

Paul on Malta

28 After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ² The native people^[i] showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. ³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice^[j] has not allowed him to live." ⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

⁷ Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. ⁸ It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. ⁹ And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. ¹⁰ They also honored us greatly,^[k] and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

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Paul had been arrested but since he had declared his Roman citizenship, he was to be transported back to Rome with the other prisoners. As they were getting on the boat, the Holy Spirit told Paul that they were going to shipwreck and die. At this time of the year, sailing was dangerous and unsafe because of the weather—storms and very rough seas were likely. So, as instructed by the Holy Spirit, Paul told the captain that he could foresee that this voyage would end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also their lives.

Being a follower of Christ and able to hear the Holy Spirit, Paul had been told this prophecy. Nevertheless, the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. In addition, since the harbor was not suitable for staying there in the winter, they decided to set sail despite Paul's warning. They would, at the very least, attempt to get to Crete in Greece.

Because Paul was a prisoner, he did not have the option to get off the boat. If the boat was moving, he was going to be on it. He had already been told they were going to shipwreck and that everyone was going to die, so as far as he's concerned, this could be it. However, he had also been told that he would be going to Rome. He had been told two conflicting things: Everyone on the ship is going to die—including him, and he would be returning to Rome. Only one of these could happen.

Do you recall in Lesson 2 when we discussed David? He was told he was going to be the king, yet he was living in a cave. David's predicament didn't make sense to David just as Paul's didn't make sense to Paul.

So, Paul was on the boat that God said was going to be shipwrecked, and that is exactly what happened. Throughout all of this, though, Paul is talking to God and keeps talking to God through the Holy Spirit. He initially was told they were all going to die, but this doesn't add up if he is supposed to return to Rome. Will he be spared when the shipwreck occurs?

The Holy Spirit then tells him that they are going to shipwreck, but if the captain follows everything He tells Paul, and they can get to this particular island, none of them will lose their life. This is interesting because God started out saying that everyone was going to lose their life, but now everyone will live if they follow His instructions. Was He just kidding? What was the purpose of that? Obedience—walking step by step with Him.

What was the purpose of this specific process? To save Paul. Yes, Paul had to speak to Caesar, but it was far deeper than that. All those men who were in the shipwreck were now willing to do what? They were willing to listen. They knew that Paul said they were going to be in a shipwreck, and they were. They also knew

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that Paul said they were going to die. They believed that was going to happen, too, and they were afraid.

This is why it is imperative to follow the Holy Spirit as He goes step by step. There's always a purpose—a purpose for everything. Sometimes, He wants you to go down a certain path and you do, but then all of a sudden, you get blocked. There's nothing on that path at all, and you question why you wasted all that time. Since there is a purpose for everything, perhaps God needed you to go to down that path to teach you an important truth or to understand His timing. He is working on something.

This was also what He said to Paul. He needed these men to understand the full truth of what could happen or will happen to them. He needed Paul to continue to process with Him the dilemma that this presented to him. There is no system. What works for one will not necessarily work for another, which is why he must continue to follow and receive.

Paul tells the captain and the men to listen to what he has to say because he knew what was going to happen. The captain begged for Paul to tell them, saying they would listen this time. They now believed that he spoke the truth. They followed every step exactly as spoken by the Spirit to Paul to them, and they wind up on the island of Malta shipwrecked. When they went onto the island, what was the first thing that happened? Paul was bitten by a super poisonous snake. Having bit deeply into his flesh, the snake was hanging on his hand. Paul thought nothing of it, and he shook it off. Why wasn't he concerned? Because he fully understood and believed in God's supernatural healing. The people of Malta, in the natural, waited for him to swell up and die, but nothing happened to him. God saved him. When the people saw this, they asked if God could do that for them, too. Paul confirmed that He could, and they started bringing people to him to be healed. God healed everyone, and the entire island became believers. God did a supernatural work and used the shipwreck for His bigger story—His bigger Kingdom purpose.

There is so much more going on than we can think or imagine, which is why we need to follow Him step by step. Following all of this, Paul winds up going to Rome.

God's will is progressive and immediate, and He's always at work. We are to have a heart to follow Him and trust Him all the way, particularly with what He's already said. When we have adversity, even if we are entrenched in the middle of it, it doesn't matter. We still have God's promises.

As we look at Paul's situation, it's a beautiful explanation of fulfilling God's Word and fulfilling God's will because he had a heart to hear it. Even though he was in danger and going through adversity, did he give up? No. He asked

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God what he was to do next. When he was on this boat that was going to get shipwrecked and they were all going to die, he asked God what he was to do. When he was bitten by a poisonous snake, he asked God what he was to do next. God used all of those circumstances to save the whole island.

We are to participate in and enjoy God's great work. That is what God's will is all about. As we finish this course, I trust we all enjoyed seeing how God worked to fulfill His will for each Bible character as they had a heart to receive it. Did they get it perfectly? No. Was there a system? Absolutely not. It was the relationship each had in the Kingdom of God that allowed for God to do supernatural things to demonstrate His power and to have you join Him along His path. God's will is more about His work than it is about what we do. We are just called to join Him by following His instructions.

We pray that you use all that you have learned about these truths to process your own issues. Blessings.

