

## How Can We Know God's Will for Our Lives?

*Romans 12:1,2*

Message by Dr. R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 1/1/17

Let me ask you a question. What do you think: Does God have a will, a purpose, a plan for your life? [PAUSE]

Can you think of a father who has no will or plan for the life of his son?

Can you imagine a mother who has no clear will or definite ambition for her daughter?

Can you imagine a man who has no special desire for the one he has chosen to be his wife?

Can you conceive of a king who has no will for those he governs?

A general who has no will for his soldiers?

A boss who has no plan or pattern to guide the work of his or her employees?

A shepherd who has no design for his flocks?

These are just some of the analogies used Scripture to describe the relationship between a Christian and the Lord.

Let me give you another analogy (one not found in Scripture). Can't imagine a coach who has no game plan, no strategy for his team accomplishing their desired goal. We're approaching the Super Bowl.

If you're a football fan you no doubt can still remember what coach Tom Landry looked like standing on the sidelines of every Cowboys game - wearing a fedora hat, sports jacket and tie, arms folded, stony-faced, emotionless.

QW **head coach** of the Dallas Cowboys for 29 seasons, he led the Cowboys to 270 wins, 20 winning seasons in a row, 13 divisional championships, 5 NFC titles and 2 Super Bowl wins.

Roger Staubach, the Naval Academy all-American and Heisman Trophy winner who in 1972 was quarterback of the Cowboys' first Super Bowl championship team, called Landry "*the greatest coach in the history of the game.*"

. He devised and dictated both the offensive and the defensive strategy, creating many new formations and methods.

On the field he called all the plays At all times, he projected an image of order and command.

Tex Schramm, president and general manager of the Cowboys during the Landry years, described the coach as a "*great strategist. He knows more about football than anyone else in the world. He doesn't use the psychological or emotional approach. He expects his players to perform each week because they are pros.*"<sup>1</sup>

If parents have desires and plans for their children, if kings and generals and employers have a will for those under their command, if coaches have expectations for their players, you can be certain that God indeed has a will and a plan for your life.

**Ephesians 5:17** *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.*

Understand is a command. We often excuse non-action or non-decision by saying, "*If I only knew what God's will was . . .*" as if it was a great mystery that couldn't be determined. But if God says to understand it, then it means it can indeed be known.

**Psalm 143:10** *Teach me to do your will. . .* It's something we can be taught, need to be taught, and can learn!

So let's see what we can discover about it in the next twenty minutes.

**Romans 12 verses 1 and 2** summarize in a remarkable way God's master game plan, his strategy for those who are called by his name.

This morning not going to discuss the play-by-play details, God's guidance along the way, but the big picture – the parameters and characteristics of God's will for his team (that's us!) What does it look like? How does it feel?

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<sup>1</sup> His nickname was "God's coach." A former president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and a lay leader in the United Methodist Church, Landry said he believed there must be more to life than winning at football. "*I'm a Christian,*" he said. "*That's the first thing in my life. I want to be the best coach, because that's what I'm doing. . . . I believe winning is important . . . the real danger is when winning becomes the only thing. If you forsake your honesty and integrity to win a football game, it's wrong.*"

In order to reach the goal of us reaching victory in the game of life, God asks two things of us.

First, he asks us to make our bodies available to him.

**Romans 12:1** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Most people don't like everything about their body.

There's always something wrong.

- If just had curlier hair (or straighter hair).
- If I just had brown hair, or blond hair, or red hair (or any hair at all).
- If I was just a little bit taller (or shorter)
- If I was just a little thinner (or a little plumper)
- If my feet were just a little longer (or shorter)
- If my nose and ears were just a little bit smaller (or different shape)
- If I wasn't so bowlegged . . .

Whatever, we think that something has to be changed to be happy, to be successful, for people to like us!

God wipes all that foolishness aside. He says you don't have to change your body. Just bring it. Offer it as an available instrument for God to use any time, any place, any way he chooses.

Everyone in Paul's day knew what a sacrifice was. They offered an animal as a sacrifice, but you only offered it once and then you could never offer that animal again because it was dead. But Paul says we are living sacrifices – something we offer every day.

Sometimes – just like in a game of football – we get the wind knocked out of us, we get banged up by the opposition. Tempted to just crawl off the field and lick our wounds on the sidelines and feel sorry for ourselves, but the coach says, "*get back in the game! Give it your all.*"

While attending Talbot Seminary back in the early 70's we attended First Baptist Church of Lakewood. My pastor Jim Borrer, had served in the armed forces. Used to go into his study every day, snap to attention before a painting of Christ

and say, "*Jim Borrer, reporting for duty. What are your instructions for me today?*"

How about that for 2017 every day you start out by looking in the mirror and saying something like, *Lord, here I am ready to be used. Whatever I do today at work, or at home, or with my children, or with my neighbors, wherever I am, Lord, I'm offering for you to use me. I'm ready. I'm available.*"

So – the first thing God asks is to give our bodies to him.

Second, he asks us to make our minds available to him.

**Romans 12:2a** *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

Often preachers have emphasized the first part, listing certain activities that are taboo and should be avoided. Not that they were wrong, but the implication was that not doing those things would mean we weren't conformed to this world.

Rooted in our minds is the idea that God is impressed by the number of things we don't do. In reality, he's not (and neither are other people!)

What God is after is the second phrase: ***be transformed by the renewing of your mind.***

We'll be looking at this process in more detail next week, but in our remaining time today I want to concentrate on the last half of the verse, and look at the upshot of offering our bodies and our minds to God.

**Romans 12:2b** *Then* (having offered your bodies and renewing your minds, as a transformed person) ***you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

We live in a great state, a state filled with most interesting characters with a wide variety of opinions. Most of the millions of people in California probably would not use the terms Paul uses – good, pleasing and perfect – to describe God's will. They don't believe it. Most of them would probably say that anybody getting involved in finding the will of God is in for a very, very dull life.

In fact, if you told them you were trying to do so they'd probably say. "*Don't do it! If you start getting all religious you*

*won't have any fun! At best you'll be bored out of your skull. At worst you'll totally wreck your life."*

Satan has twisted the pursuit of God's will into something to be avoided. God knows that's a lie! In fact the opposite is true –finding and doing God's will is the most exciting, most challenging, most thrilling, most rewarding pursuit a person can make.

The will of God isn't something to be afraid of, or avoided, but something to seek after with all our hearts.<sup>2</sup>

You can prove that it indeed is good and pleasing and perfect. God hands us the keys to understanding his will and says "*here! Take it for a test drive!*"

His goal is that we discover for ourselves and show people around us that in doing the will of God we have found the most exciting lifestyle there is.

In knowing and doing the will of God we have found the secret of living, of enjoyment, of fulfillment; the solution to the empty, lonely restlessness of the age in which we live.

We have Scripture's promise **I John 2:17 *The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.***

Lots of Scriptures talk about doing God's will, but what is it, exactly? I've found three Scriptures that in clear language lay out what God's will for a Christian is. They each deal with an aspect of being transformed.

Draw a triangle. At top write "**God's Will for Me.**"

On the base write reference **Galatians 1:3,4.**

**Galatians 1:3,4 *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.***

We are misfits in this evil age! We don't belong here! We are light in darkness. We are aliens in a society under Satan's control. God's will is that we be rescued. "**Rescue**" has the

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<sup>2</sup> Like David, we should seek for it with all your heart. **Psalm 40:8 *I desire (delight) to do your will O God.***

connotation of being "*extracted by the power of another.*" The chief extractor, rescuer is none other than Jesus Christ, who does it through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We must not hold on too tightly to all the world holds dear. We must allow ourselves to be extracted from the world's influence, from society's expectations, demands, pressures.

This runs counter to our built-in desire to "be like everyone else," what Paul calls being "**conformed to this world.**"

You and I aren't called to be just like everyone else, but to be agents for transformation, living demonstrations of Christ's power to change lives and make a difference.

Label first side of triangle **FREEDOM NOW by the power of another.**

Inside the left side of the triangle, write

**I Thessalonians 4:3.**

**I Thessalonians 4:3 *It is God's will that you should be sanctified.***

Another word for sanctification is **holiness** – being *set apart for the enjoyment of another.*

To be holy is to be like Jesus. **I Peter 1:14 *do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.***<sup>3</sup>

This is only possible of course by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. **Galatians 5:16 *live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.***

On side of the triangle write **HOLINESS NOW for the enjoyment of another.**

Upon accepting Christ as Savior we receive positional righteousness, we gain practical righteousness as we walk in him and separate ourselves from the world's system.

Dick Iverson: "*salvation without holiness is not biblical conversion . . . If the lifestyle doesn't change, there's no conversion.*"

On the inside of the last side of the triangle, write **I Thessalonians 5:16-18.**

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<sup>3</sup> See also I Peter 2:11 and 4:2-5

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18** *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

The verbs are imperative present tense. God wants his people to be joyful, happy, praying, grateful people! Not in the "sweet by and by" but right now!

Growing Christians are joyful Christians. **Nehemiah 8:10** *"The joy of the Lord is your strength."*

The Lord inhabits the praises of his people

**I Peter 2:9** *you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

On outside of third side of triangle write **JOY (or FULNESS) NOW by the presence of another.**

Now draw a little stick figure to represent yourself. We are faced with two options. Do we put him/her inside the triangle or outside of it? Can (1) stay outside of God's will and keep looking for it; or (2) can be right in the center and stay there.

To be at the center of God's will should be where we live, our state of being.

From within this position can evaluate the decisions of life by asking three questions – questions that relate to the three sides, the three "boundaries" of God's will.

1. How does the world's pressures affect this decision?
2. How does this measure up against my desire to be like Jesus? Will I be more like him and enjoy better fellowship with him if I \_\_\_\_\_?
3. Will doing this give me more joy in the Lord? In what way?

### **Conclusion**

As live your life within the triangle, will discover God's will is good because it frees us from the world's pressures.

As live your life within the triangle, you'll discover that God's will is pleasing – both to God and yourself and others.

Nothing makes us happier or more satisfied than walking in holiness.

And as you walk within God's will you'll discover that God's will is perfect – it's "complete," lacking nothing. Nothing is left out. It covers all contingencies of life.

My prayer for you and me and Grace Church in 2017 is found in **Colossians 1:9**: I pray that *God [would] fill [us] with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*