

How can I know the will of God?

By Bob Koivisto

The earliest explorers and soldiers who discovered and conquered the world never really knew where they were. The earliest maps bore little resemblance to the real world. Even after the invention of the magnetic compass and the sextant, it is only fairly recently that longitude could be determined with absolute accuracy.

Now, an ordinary hiker or housewife or soldier can find their position within a meter anywhere on the planet. They can plot their position, see how far they have come, know how far to go and in what direction. A simple hand held device which is connected to the “GPS” system can tell all this. 24 satellites in stationary orbits around the world give constant readouts. I can even sit in my office at home at my computer and look at a satellite map of any country of the world from outer space and know the weather, the temperature, the wave height, or information on the latest earthquake.

The Bible says that the Christian can get a navigational fix on the will of God that is infinitely more accurate than the results given by those electronic devices using the latest technology. The technology of knowing the will of God has remained unchanged for thousands of years. I can accurately know where I am and with great confidence, know where I am going. And I can confidently trust in the one who says: *“I know the plans which I have for you...”*

I have questioned hundreds of Christians over the last few years and found almost none in agreement about how to know God’s will, but all say they believe in the will of God. Everyone has either no idea or their own idea and most of those ideas have nothing to do with what God has said in His word. If we cannot accurately describe or define what God wants for us, we can neither obey with confidence, nor can we accurately teach others.

The supreme revelation of the word of God is the will of God. The reader would benefit and be blessed greatly if he would engage in a Biblical word study of the phrase “the will of God” or some form thereof. Most who call themselves Christians, and claim to believe in the will of God, have never made the effort or taken the opportunity to look for themselves in Scripture for *the will of God*. For most, when asked about the topic, have no clear response to that which is essentially central to an understanding of the Christian life. For most questioned on

the topic, the will of God is simply just a blur. Be sure of this one thing: **God puts no premium whatsoever on willful ignorance.**

Knowing God's will is not a formula

Say the following words; learn these three verses; look for special signs in the clouds; pray just this way; Buy my book and get a special blessing; Give money to my work and God will reveal Himself to you; Listen to my radio program and learn the secret of knowing what God wants you to do; Get this blessed water from the Jordan river and sprinkle it on your money and God will make you rich.

God doesn't sell information, or keep it a secret, nor does He require special words or formula. Jesus made it clear that knowing his best was based on *relationship* with Him, not a formula. *"Come unto me all you who are overworked, and I'll (lit.) rest you. This is the will of God that you believe on Him whom He (the Father) has sent; that I may know Him and the fellowship of His suffering."*

God's will for my life or God's plan for my life is bigger than my misunderstanding of it.

James 1:5 says if we ask God for wisdom, he won't mock us or chide us for asking him about the unknown, but give us wisdom. If we miss what we think He wants us to do or be or know, His plan is big enough because He is big enough to allow for all things actual and all things possible. We must be convinced that God wants his best for our lives even more than we do. God's concern for his little flock is shown quite wonderfully in the Hebrew of Psalm 23. *"He causes me to lie down in green pastures (gently causing us to stop, rest, and feed)...He leads me in the right paths, for the sake of His name."* This expression in the ancient world, can speak of a rutted road from which it is difficult to turn off. And God has pledged His reputation (name) as a guarantee of His oversight and guidance, and personal interest.

We can relax in the confidence of God's care as we learn to do His will because He knows and anticipates all, is already everywhere, and there is none in the universe with greater power and authority. He is also the God of the smallest detail. Jesus said, *"Even all the hairs on your head are numbered."* - Matthew 10:30

As a God of the details, He changes count every time everyone on earth combs their hair. He knew for any given moment in time and in advance what that count would be for every human who would ever live. God is even willing to do for us what He wants for us with or without our permission, which He does not need in

the first place. Jesus said: “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*” - John 6:44

The word for draw is literally “drag”. God’s grace is irresistible in His desire for us in what we would never seek for ourselves. As Paul says in Romans, “*none seek after God.*”

When it was time for Abraham and God to participate together in ratifying God’s covenant, Abraham fell asleep. So God ratified the covenant by Himself, and Abraham became part of the promise anyway. The covenant was unilateral and unconditional and permanent. God said, “I went ahead without you.” What Abraham didn’t make, he couldn’t break, and God would not. Relaxing in the will of God is possible because we can understand His sovereign care.

95% of the will of God is determined from the clear statement of Scripture.

The Scriptures tell the believer clearly concerning what God wants him to **BE and HOW He wants him to live, and the commands by which he is to live and what he is to believe**. This portion of determining the will of God is clear and unambiguous and is universally applicable for all believers. On this issue, one size does fit all. There is clear revelation in God’s Word about the kind of life and lifestyle the believer is to live and what he is to believe. Living according to what God has revealed, will take Christians far down a road that is pleasing to God and will be within His revealed will. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.

The other 5% of seeking out God’s plan deals with **WHERE he wants me to DO what He wants me to BE**. There is an element of determining the will of God that is individualized by God which is “just for me.” It involves a skill which is learned by experience of listening and obedience. It is a skill which allows us to move from the unknown to the known. I can learn how to know, for example, where to go to school or make my residence, or certain vocational choices. Some see this as an as yet unrevealed geographical element. Some of God’s grandest adventures and surprises come when discerning his geographical will. The servant of Abraham, who was being obedient, was conscious of being led by God as he went on the way to search for a wife for his master’s son. “*I, being in the way, the Lord led me.*” **If we study why God moves his children from place to place, we can better discern His geographical will,**

Sometimes God uses **Detours**. It is an eleven day journey for the Children of Israel to reach the Promised Land, and yet it took them 40 years. Then only a few of the original numbers entered because of their belief. The huge majority did not enter because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:17-19 says: *“And against whom was God provoked for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose dead bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear they would never enter into his rest, except those who were disobedient? So we see that they could not enter because of unbelief.”*

Sometimes God uses **Dispersion**. In Acts 1:8, Jesus gave the command to spread the Gospel starting in Jerusalem and ultimately to the whole world. The disciples did not immediately obey and huddled together in Jerusalem. God used persecution to get His Church to move out into the whole world.

Sometimes God uses **Discipline**. God can use a forced change of scenery to get the attention of His children. *“But you took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rephan, the images you made to worship, but I will deport you beyond Babylon.” Acts 7:43*

Sometimes God says we are **Done** where we are. (Just a note at this point) Sometimes when a person fails at doing what God has called them to finish, failure can become the excuse for moving on. God may let you go if you insist, but one can spend his whole life from that point forward trying to clean up the mess. *“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into this or that town and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.” You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life like? For you are a puff of smoke that appears for a short time and then vanishes. You ought to say instead, “If the Lord is willing, then we will live and do this or that.” - James 4:13-15*

When Paul was done with his commission to the Jews, God moved him to the Gentile world. *“Now when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. When they opposed him and reviled him, he protested by shaking out his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am guiltless! From now on I will go to the Gentiles!” Acts 18:5-6*

God often **Designates** a location. *“For I do not want to see you now in passing, since I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord allows. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, because a door of great opportunity stands wide open for me, but there are many opponents.” - 1st Corinthians 7:6-9*

“Now when I arrived in Troas to proclaim the gospel of Christ, even though the Lord had opened a door of opportunity for me, I had no relief in my spirit, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and set out for Macedonia.” - 2nd Corinthians 2:12-13

God sometimes calls us to a different location for **Discipleship** training. Sometimes the call even involves being in that new place alone so we can learn that He is all that we need for all that we are. *“But when the one who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not go to ask advice from any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me, but right away I departed to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus.” - Galatians 1:15-17*

Most of that 5% of His unrevealed will becomes increasingly clear by a consistent application and obedience to the principles found in Scripture. For example, one choice over another is often morally superior. One job over others has a greater beneficial effect on the life of the family and so on. We can always simply apply the **sound mind principle**.

2 Tim 1:7 says:

“For God did not give us a Spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (The root meaning of self-control carries the idea of sensible and with good judgment, using your head.)

God has given his children the ability to think and to plan clearly and confidently and make decisions with a mind that is stayed on Him. Choices that are **rational** are not necessarily **unspiritual**. Rationalism alone is never of value when thinking through God’s will however. The Scripture speaks of being spiritually minded or carnally minded. When we have learned God’s viewpoint on life, because we know His word, we become able to discern His will and plan for us. We learn to have the “mind of Christ”, and we learn to live life from a *divine viewpoint* and we learn a *Christian world view*, and even to discern *theologically*.

God’s will is never contrary to His word and can never contradict what He has revealed.

Planning and thinking and calculating and observing are part of the scope of consideration when becoming a disciple. Since we can know that *“His word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path”*, we may have confident assurance

that God gives light about where we are and illumines us as we move forward on the journey. Just because God does not explain the whole journey or process to us in advance, does not necessarily mean we cannot, in confidence, move forward. And in addition, the Scripture shows many examples of “spiritual discernment” in which a believer is clearly led by the hand of God because he is walking in the light of God’s Word.

Luke 14:25-33 which describes the call to discipleship shows how *thinking, planning, calculating, and evaluating* are all essential in responding to God’s call to discipleship, which is at the center of His will for all believers. The advice to “take the time to think things through”, is some of the best I ever received. The concept of *taking a leap of faith* is not only not found in Scripture, but it is contrary to God’s revealed will.

“Then you will take delight in the Lord, and he will answer your prayers. Commit your future to the Lord! Trust in him, and he will act on your behalf.”- Psalm 3:4-5

There is a “mystical” element in making decisions as a believer. We do not speak of putting out “fleeces” or casting lots. But decisions can be made about the unknown and previously unrevealed will of God, because we are in a close relationship with the Savior and are living in the light of His word. Jesus said my sheep can *hear my voice* and He also said that the coming of the Holy Spirit would result *guidance into all truth*.

“Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”- Proverbs 16:3

There are seven clear guidelines which are Biblically based and easily understood by a believer who really wants to know and do the will of God and teach others the same.

PRIORITIES

In my final undergraduate year, God brought a man into my life named Pat. We were roommates so I couldn’t escape his daily exhortation. Bob, “are you putting all your strokes in one place?” His regular challenge to me was to narrow and focus and not to be distracted. He helped to set the course for the rest of my life in both knowing and doing the will of God. Later on, one of my teachers said to me, “those who aim at nothing, generally hit it.”

I must admit that at times, as a relatively new believer, I could often be seen “running madly off in all directions.” I was guilty of living in “the **busyness** of the barren life and the **barrenness** of the busy life.” When the bottom line was evaluated, it was difficult to see what difference my life was making for eternity. Thank you Pat for your persistence in building into my life and exhorting me daily.

One of the most enlightening lessons God has taught me in learning to do His will is that **priorities never conflict**. If we have genuine priorities, there is never any conflict with those issues, events, and decisions which are of less priority. Man left on his own will always do and only do what is most important to him. When, as believers, we submit to God’s stated priorities for us, we begin to become centered in His will. If we refuse to compromise with what God has said are His priorities, life takes on order. Conflict, and uncertainty, and hesitation, and fruitless living disappear, when God’s priorities become the believer’s priorities.

The Scripture speaks beginning to end about living by priorities and orders of importance. First things are always first things. Main things are always main things.

*“But **above all** pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” - Matthew 6:33 (life order)*

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.” - Acts 1:8 (geographical order)

*He answered, “Have you not read **that from the beginning** the Creator made them male and female...” - Matthew 19:4 (creation order)*

*“For I passed on to you as of **first importance** what I also received - that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...” - 1st Corinthians 15:3
(priority of the Gospel)*

*“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the **greatest**? Jesus said to him, love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all you mind”
- Matthew 22:36-37 (priority in theology)*

*“**First of all**, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people, even for kings and all who are in authority, that we*

may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” - 1st Timothy 2:1-2
(priority in prayer)

There are a multitudes of passages in Scripture which describe those acts of God, or events or commands which are both God's and man's first concern. Clearly, it is possible for many priorities all to be incumbent at the same time, and yet not be in conflict. For example, there is no conflict between seeking God's kingdom first and also praying for all people. Clearly the conflict exists between God's desires for the believer and human viewpoint and desires.

God's has a multitude of commands for His children, but they do not conflict or contradict with each other, they only conflict with man's opinion and viewpoint. God's commands are not easy, but God's commands are God's enabling.

PROMISES

A friend has counted the promises of God. He tells me that there are enough for at least one per hour for 24 hours for 365 days per year. Not all have direct application to every believer in this age, but there are still enough which are relevant for us now, and most remain unclaimed. Hebrews 4:2 makes it clear that the promises from God must be *mixed with faith*, in order to be claimed.

Hebrews 11:1-3 encourages us that the invisible becomes visible by faith. Jesus clearly said that believing precedes seeing. *“Jesus responded, “Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you would see the glory of God?”* - John 11:40

Many of the promises given before or during the administration of the Old Covenant still remain valid, because they are rooted and bound by God's loving care for His own people. *“Call on me in prayer and I will answer you. I will show you great and mysterious things which you still do not know about.”*-Jeremiah 33:3 Other promises of God, although made to one people in one age are fulfilled to other people in another age. One excellent example is the promise made to Adam by God of the coming conflict between Satan and Himself and the ultimate triumph of the Messiah. *“And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring's heel.”* - Genesis 3:15

Another promise made to those under the Old Covenant, applies to all those in the future who will become part of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant and its promises are changed and set aside by the promises of the New Covenant.

“Indeed, a time is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I delivered them from Egypt. For they violated that covenant, even though I was like a faithful husband to them,” says the Lord. “But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land,” says the Lord. “I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people.” - Jeremiah 31:31-33

Many foolish assumptions are made and much error has been introduced into the church, because of people claiming the ownership of promises which have nothing to do with the time in which they live or the people to whom they are originally given. People sing the hymn: “Every promise in the book is mine, every jot, every tittle, every line....” Not so! Context is always king, when applying the promises of God. All is not necessarily for us, if it is not to us.

“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the one who was proclaimed among you by us - by me and Silvanus and Timothy - was not “Yes” and “No,” but it has always been “Yes” in him. For every one of God’s promises are “Yes” in him; therefore also through him the “Amen” is spoken, to the glory we give to God.” - 2nd Cor. 1:19-20
The Lord Jesus Himself is the guarantor of every one of the promises of God and assures every believer that God keeps his word. Hebrews:17-18 clearly states that God keeps His promises because He has made a pledge to do so by both His oath and His covenant.

“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that could defile the body and the spirit, and thus accomplish holiness out of reverence for God.” - 2nd Corinthians 7:1 The promises of God are not a means of simply obtaining stuff or becoming prosperous, as some would teach, but rather the means and the motivation for living a holy life before God.

“But we passionately want each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of your hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and perseverance inherit the promises.” - Hebrews 6:12
Experiencing the God given results by continuous trust inherits the promises of God, but not just a simple passive acknowledgement. Claiming God’s promises requires persistent follow through by the man of faith.

“I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence. Through these things he has bestowed on us his

precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the divine nature, after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire.” - 2nd Peter 1:3-4 The promises of God release the power of God and participation in the life of God, and provide the means of holy living.

PRECEPTS

A precept is a truth or teaching or a principal which is foundational. Historically, the church on earth has always recognized certain doctrinal teachings as universal and canonical (a measure of what is recognized as the standard by which all belief and truth can be evaluated).

Over 40 years ago, we moved to a community in which there were “churches on every corner.” Most of the locals were church members and were all part of a similar denominational tradition. The older members were able to discuss what they believed, why they believed, and how it worked. Those in my generation was able to talk about the what and why but not the how. Their children were able to discuss the what, but not the why or the how. The grandchildren are no longer able to discuss the what, the why, or the how. And for the most part they don’t know that they don’t know. The facts seem to be that nobody cares that they really don’t know the what, why or how. Many promises remain unclaimed.

“When the foundations are destroyed, what can the godly accomplish?” - Psalm 11:3. In a brief conversation with a member of the most recent generation, I asked what he could tell me about the Trinity. His response was, “There is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What else is there?” This fine gentleman is a church member in good standing, a loving husband and father, and a great provider. The discussion was somewhat short.

There is a suggestion from the Lord Jesus that believers benefit from basic training in basic doctrine. As a friend said, “believers need doctrine in their frontal lobes.” *“Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things written about himself in all the scriptures.” - Luke 24:27.* Believers need the ability to be able to think through a foundational teaching of the Word from beginning to end, not only to believe and understand it, but to be able to “teach others” as well. We really don’t fully understand a truth until we own it, and we can learn to own it by doing it and teaching others. One of the great Bible teachers of the last century was named Major Ian Thomas, a decorated British war hero and the founder of Capernwray, a bible school. He had the ability of taking any subject, where it was

first mentioned and think his way through the entire Scripture. By listening to him speak in my early years as a believer he gave me the desire to be able to do that as well.

The Scripture often uses the concept of building construction to speak of the process of growth of both the believer and the body of Christ. But of course, much more is spoken of than just acquiring information. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”. Without knowledge going full circle, both into our behavior, and out into the lives of others, and toward our increased worship of God, then it is useless.

“You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.” - Ephesians 22:20

The word used for building up speaks of a process of construction up to a finished product. Jude 3 speaks of “the faith” as a package of truth which is complete and given to the saints of God. Jude 20 calls believers to take part in a process of construction which starts with the foundation and finishes with the roof. We are to build up one another in “our most holy faith.” The process uses foundational stones which we call precepts.

Jesus told Peter that the rock of his confession, *“You are the Christ, the son of the living God,* would be foundational to the building of the Church. Jesus became the foundation stone of the Church. The construction process had begun.

A precept is a clear command of Scripture which does not need to be prayed about, but rather obeyed about. There are no options. Choosing from many examples, we could easily cite Romans 13:14 *“Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires.”* As Dr. Louis T. Talbot said, “find out what the flesh likes, and then don’t feed it.”

The great teachers, and leaders, and evangelists, and writers, and theologians have been the great students of the Word of God. They have thought and taught systematically, approached the Scripture exegetically, and carried out ministry successfully because they understood that precept was to be built on precept. They approached the Scripture in context and all of it building together into the unified whole.

PRINCIPLES

A principle is what we might think of as a universal truth which is built from many observations of Scripture, life and reality. A principle is a tool I can use to apply

spiritual truth to life, plan my behavior, know what to expect, and put my plans and defenses in place. Following are a number of useful Biblical principles which have immediate, dependable and personal application. They are also transferable concepts and can be taught effectively to others. For a principle to be true and useful, it must be derived from Scripture.

The first job of leadership, is to train their replacements

When Jesus gave the Great Commission, He made clear that what He taught and trained should be taught and trained to others. “...*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” - Matthew 28:20. Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators said that “as Christians, we are *Born to Reproduce.*” As believers, and as reproducing Christians, we are called by our Master to duplicate and reproduce the truth in the lives of the next generation.

Paul wrote to Timothy: “*And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.*” - 2nd Timothy 2:2. In our lifetime, there have been many wonderful Christian organizations which have turned to dust, when the leader died, because the principle of training replacements was ignored. Unfortunately we see many more today headed down the same path. This principle arises mainly because of neglect. Most of the time when we observe a “one man ministry”, we find a work which will cease when the leader dies. God wants our “fruit to remain.”

With the death of a man, is the death of a vision.

Many of the great seminaries and Bible schools and great churches bear little resemblance to that wonderful institution started by the founders, because someone failed to train their replacements and the vision was lost. Often new leadership, lacking the same vision assumes leadership by default, and things are never the same. I have heard too often, from the lips of too many that they are just too busy doing the job to train anyone else.

God uses ordinary things in extraordinary ways for His Divine purpose

God, who is the creator and sustainer of all things is outside time, space and matter and does as he pleases. Nothing is or can be outside of His care, custody, or control. Jonah called by God to Nineveh, immediately bought a ticket to head in the opposite direction. Incidentally, another small but consistent principle is revealed here and that is: “**when you flee from God, you pay your own way.**”

“so he paid his fare and went aboard...” - Jonah 1:3

The first *ordinary thing* God used was a *great wind*. Even the experienced sailors were terrified. God of course, used the disobedience of Jonah to lead to the conversion of the sailors. Next in order was God’s use of an ordinary great fish in an extraordinary way to accomplish His purpose. After some serious Divine Discipline, Jonah gets his free ride to the beach. God was in sovereign control of this ordinary fish and used it for His Divine purpose to bring Jonah to repentance and deliver him to the right location. He then preaches, somewhat unwillingly to the Ninevites, and they believe.

After a second failed suicide attempt (the first so he might blame the sailors and the second so God could be blamed) Jonah sat down outside the city. God then used an ordinary *vine* to show his mercy to this prodigal prophet. God then sent an ordinary *worm* to show His sovereign omnipotence to Jonah. This is His creation and He can use what He owns any way He chooses. He can cause the *stones to cry out*, or a mere *donkey* to preach His word.

God is able to feed the thousands from a little boy’s lunch. God can accomplish His purposes with or without our consent or participation. He can, will, and does use ordinary things in extraordinary ways for His Divine purpose, even ordinary men. Little is much when God is in it. After all God made it clear to Moses that **any old bush will do**.

Faithful in little; faithful in much

We should never expect that God has called us to an even greater opportunity of service or responsibility, if we have failed to fully obey and do His will where we are. How many do you know who have spent thousands to take a “mission trip to Mexico”, and never spoken to the immigrant neighbor next door? How many have accepted a role of great responsibility and have failed miserably where they are. How many have left a ministry in shambles and disarray, saying that God has now “opened the door on a new and glorious opportunity? “God wants me to leave here.” Does God call men and women from the place of neglect and failure to new and greater responsibilities? Does God call the unprepared and untrained to even greater roles without being prepared and trained?

How long was Moses in Egypt and on the backside of the desert? How long did God train Paul alone after his conversion and before to began his work? How long did Joseph faithfully endure in the house of Pharaoh? How long did Jesus patiently

endure growing and learning before the Father's time to begin His public ministry? Sometimes we might confuse faithful in little with faithful in nothing. Being trained in obscurity is sometimes part of God's great plan.

While David was still a shepherd tending the flock, he was recognized for who he was and called to be King. He was being "faithful in little" while God was training him to be "faithful in much." Most of us have a much higher opinion of our abilities and importance than God does. God does not need me, but he can use me. The greatest ability He wants from me is availability, and a willingness to prepare and be faithful where I am, even though I think I can do great things for God. If God calls a man to prepare for a lifetime and He only uses him for one minute, or one hour, or one day, or even not at all, then that man is still called to be faithful, no matter how insignificant the place or inconspicuous the task.

Great temptations follow great spiritual experiences

God has provided copious examples in Scripture of this principle. Every time we experience a great victory or a glorious high spiritually, we become vulnerable to Satanic testing, or even subject to emotional instability or becoming impressed by our own greatness. The pattern is always the same. After a glorious high, we are in danger of an ignominious low.

The method of testing is always the same. The attack may be devilish or from within our own human nature in failing to mind the Holy Spirit, which can bring a downfall. The appeal to our nature is **always the same** "*...because all that is in the world (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogant pride of life) is not from the Father, but is from the world.*" - 1st John 2:16

The good news is that these three elements never vary and are as old as the Garden. The bad news is that the average believer is unprepared to deal with these **big three** and is ignorant of their influence. The origin of temptation and cure to the fall into sin and the loss of fellowship with God is a mystery to most Christians. I am sad to report, that on speaking to leaders and followers over the past many years, not one was willing to admit they understood and could explain in any detail about the pattern of temptation which started in the Garden and how believers are affected.

Adam and Eve had a face to face relationship with God and were in an unfallen condition and were living in a perfect environment. They had no excuses that the social scientists use today to justify behavior and whether bad behavior is caused

by nature or nurture. Our first parents established the pattern which would set the pattern for the rest of humanity all down through history.

*“When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was **good for food**, was **attractive to the eye**, and was **desirable for making one wise...**” - Genesis 3:6.*

This pattern of temptation is most commonly known as the *lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*

Another familiar example of the sin pattern is King David’s encounter with Bathsheba on the house top which begins in the same way and then leads to his ultimate downfall and the division of the kingdom. The story begins in 2 Samuel 11. There is another principle which is all too familiar in the Biblical narrative and that is: all sin is planned. By either default, that is by being unprepared and not having put on the “*full armor of God*”, or by devious planning on our part, sin will show its ugly head. “*But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death.*” - James 1:14-15

May I remind you again, there is an undeniable process which take place when submitting to temptation and that is: all sin is planned. It matters not whether the planning was 5 seconds, 5 minutes, or 5 days. It matters not whether it was from lack of spiritual preparation, or devious decisions; all sin is planned.

Another classic example of the temptation pattern is found in Satan’s active intervention and attack on The Lord Jesus after His *great spiritual experience* in the wilderness. All three temptation areas are on full display.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After he fasted forty days and forty nights he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.” But he answered, “It is written, Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will lift you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Once again it is written: You are not to put the Lord your God to the test.” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written, you

are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” Then the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to his needs.” - Matthew 4:1-11

The passage actually deals with genuine temptation. There is no temptation, if that temptation is not directed to a genuine human need to be met. The sin arises when the right need is met in the wrong way. The Lord Jesus sets the example when responding to the Devil’s attack in which the Devil misuses or twists the word of God. When reviewing the temptation in the Garden, exactly the same method was used on the first Adam.

The Lord Jesus responds confidently and with full authority when He replies in each instance with: ***“It is written.”*** The sword of the Spirit is the word of God, and is the only effective weapon which can be used against the enemy which is both ***“alive and powerful.”*** Great books have been written on the topic and much is left unsaid here, but the principle being discussed needs to be included in speaking of the “will of God.”

What’s in the Box?

God was most deliberate when designing the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the box were three items which were specific reminders of God’s dealings in grace and mercy with His people. There was the pot of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the Law. Each represented a specific transgression against God of which believers and unbelievers can be guilty. As believers, we must be aware these three items are in the Ark to remind us that when we sin, we are liable to sin against **the provision** of God (manna), **the authority** of God (Aaron’s rod) and **the law** of God (tablets of the law). We know that as the blood of the offering was sprinkled over the Ark of the Covenant, sin was propitiated and God was satisfied with that offering. We know as well that the Lord Jesus is the *“propitiation for our sins...and that the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses from all unrighteousness.*

All believers live in a two story house

One would be remiss in not providing the clear Biblical solution for dealing with sin in the life of the Christian. Sadly, this is another topic with which I have spoken to hundreds of Christians. Many, with whom I have had a discussion never even thought about it before. And others said it was a non-issue. Nearly all said they were happy with the Spiritual life they were living. When asked how to deal with personal sin, many said “well you simply read your Bible and pray.” Others, who

sincerely tried to give a biblical answer, almost everyone said: “You just ask God to forgive you.” That seems reasonable and sounds quite spiritual, but it is simply not Biblical. Most Christians in the Church today, are untaught in basic Bible doctrine. I heard just recently from a pastor that he doesn’t teach doctrine, because it “divides too many people”.

I took a graduate class in Milton from A. W. Tozer’s son and I learned much. But the most memorable line I learned was from Paradise Lost: “The sheep look up and are not fed.” I am broken hearted when speaking with fellow believers who say they live a spiritual life and have a handle on living for God. Unfortunately, virtually all of the church members spoken to are unaware of both how to deal with temptation and solve the personal sin problem, perhaps because hungry sheep are both weak and unaware.

The two story house

The solution to the ignorance and confusion is understanding the two story house. Upstairs is where we have an eternal, permanent, untouchable position. Upstairs are all the things God does for us the moment we believe which are settled forever. Some of those things, of which dozens are described in Scripture are: seated with Christ in the heavenlies, forgiven, cleansed, sealed by the Spirit, accepted in the beloved, child of God, justified, chosen, glorified, sanctified, a new creation, eternal life, redeemed, blameless, and saved by grace. This is a brief list of what we shall call *positional truth*.

Downstairs, the believer’s house has two rooms. One room has the light on and in the other, it is dark. The Epistle of 1st John is written to believers and full of instructions on how to have fellowship with God and know the truth. The important verses we need to read are in chapter one verses 5-10.

“Now this is the gospel message we have heard from him and announce to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.”

The passage is written to believers, not about their relationship with God, which is already established, but about *fellowship* with one another and with the Father and the Son. The underlying word fellowship is sometimes translated communion, or a close sharing. Fellowship with God is broken when we decide to enter the room where the light is off, when we sin. We cannot commune with God, pray effectively, know His will, or have fellowship with Him in the dark room.

In a one to one over coffee, when discussing this topic, I will ask my friend to read the passage, after admitting they did not personally know how to deal with sin as a believer. Inevitably they will answer when asked what to do when we sin, and looking straight at the text they usually give their first answer that we should “ask God to forgive us”. This is a gentle reminder to me to be patient with the untaught and with those who do not know how to read God’s word. God has made restoration to fellowship simple, clear, and easy to do. The meaning of the word *confess* means nothing more or less than to agree with or to say the same thing. Another translation could simply be to “name it.” When we confess to God, immediately He moves us from the dark room of sin into the light with him. He even deals with those sins we cannot remember, in order to confess them, because He also “*cleanses from all unrighteousness.*”

We call this the doctrine of Rebound. We have no reason when we recognize what we have done not to immediately confess and bounce right back. We cannot wear this verse out nor use it too often. After listening to a sermon on 1st John 1:9, the lady went up to the preacher and asked, “Does I fess ‘em as I does ‘em, or does I bunch ‘em?” What do you think?

As redeemed sons of Adam, we still want to box with God, but our arms are way too short. We all want some form of compromise and down deep, we try and avoid absolutes and argue with ourselves that sin isn’t really that bad or I am not as bad as the other guy. Socially, relativism and compromise and liberalism and subjectivism are ways that truth is decided in our world. What is true for you is true for you and what is true for me is true for me. There are no absolutes. Are you absolutely sure? “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all...*”

There is a process which takes place in the heart of the believer who genuinely recognizes that he has sinned against a holy God and has offended the Lord of the universe. That process may take a moment in time or it may take longer. Two excellent examples which need be studied in detail are found in Psalm 51 after David’s fall into adultery and murder. Example two is found in Jonah chapter two as Jonah experiences Godly sorrow. J.Vernon McGee said that it was “salty on the

outside of the great fish and salty enough on the inside as well.” Those two passages show in great detail, the process which the believer may pass through as he recognizes the sinfulness of his own offense against God and restoration to fellowship.

God disciplines His own children only

A necessary follow up to the doctrine of rebound is an understanding that God does not tolerate continuous and unconfessed sin in the life of his child. It never occurs to most people that there are direct consequences to living a life as a Christian and not having fellowship with God and not living in the light. God’s discipline is both promised and inevitable and is a genuine sign of His love for His own. The central passage on discipline is found in Hebrews 12:5-11 *“My son, do not scorn the Lord’s discipline or give up when he corrects you. “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.” Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? But if you do not experience discipline, something all sons have shared in, then you are illegitimate and are not sons. Besides, we have experienced discipline from our earthly fathers and we respected them; shall we not submit ourselves all the more to the Father of spirits and receive life? For they disciplined us for a little while as seemed good to them, but he does so for our benefit, that we may share his holiness. Now all discipline seems painful at the time, not joyful. But later it produces the fruit of peace and righteousness for those trained by it.”*

The subject of “divine discipline” has not been found in the index of sermon topics for a few years now, after it was voted as the singularly most unpopular sermon title. From beginning to end, there are inevitable consequences seen in the lives of believers who live in disobedience to God. Some discipline is short term, some long term, some is easy, and some is hard. Many to whom we speak on the street or at events or religious gatherings reject the doctrine of the **security of the believer**, in favor of the doctrine of **eternal insecurity and autonomous free will**. One of the major objections is the belief that the Christian who is secure in his salvation believes that he can simply get his salvation insurance and live as he pleases. Not so! Those who think that is possible have betrayed their own heart. Many wonder why so many they know at Church live as they please without regard for the commands of Scripture, and nothing ever seems to happen to them. God disciplines only His own children.

God, it seems, deals out His discipline in a just way and so that the ultimate purpose is restoration. There are times however, when a believer goes beyond the point of restoration, and God must take him out. There are two clear examples in the New Testament which should be understood.

*“For this reason, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself first, and in this way let him eat the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks without careful regard for the body eats and drinks judgment against himself. That is why many of you are **weak and sick, and quite a few are dead.**”*

God desires that we keep the meeting around His table as a holy time with holy people. In extreme instances, God’s discipline in the Church, can lead to the ultimate discipline of death. The same can be true for those who unashamedly lie to God.

“But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of the land? Before it was sold, did it not belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart? You have not lied to people but to God. When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died, and great fear gripped all who heard about it. So the young men came, wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. After an interval of about three hours, his wife came in, but she did not know what had happened. Peter said to her, tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land? Sapphira said, Yes, that much. Peter then told her, Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out! At once she collapsed at his feet and died. So when the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear gripped the whole church and all who heard about these things.”- Acts 5:3-11. Paul clearly taught that believers were “to live in fear, perfecting holiness.” Holiness has no meaning apart from an overwhelming reverence for who and what God is.

John teaches us at the end of his first epistle, that for the believer, there is sin which leads to physical death, and sin which does not lead to physical death. We are told to pray for the one who is not terminal, but not to pray for the one who is. *“If anyone sees his fellow Christian committing a sin not resulting in death, he should ask, and God will grant life to the person who commits a sin not resulting in*

death. There is a sin resulting in death. I do not say that he should ask about that. All unrighteousness is sin, but there is sin not resulting in death.” - 1st John 5:16-17

The Great Shepherd desires to “restore our soul”, but the “chastening of the Lord” will be the sure result of those who fail to confess their sin and turn from their sin.

One of the sure results of in depth study of God’s word is the development and recognition of principles which God can fit just for us and our understanding of his will for us. Principles can be learned, applied, and taught to others.

PATTERNS

Patterns focus on those Biblical/historical events, which usually in story fashion, dramatically present a vital lesson for the benefit of the believer.

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they were all drinking from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. But God was not pleased with most of them, for they were cut down in the wilderness. These things happened as examples for us, so that we will not crave evil things as they did. So do not be idolaters, as some of them were. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” And let us not be immoral, as some of them were, and twenty-three thousand died in a single day. And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by snakes. And do not complain, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So let the one who thinks he is standing be careful that he does not fall. No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.” - 1st Corinthians 10:1-13

The passage clearly states that the real experiences of God’s covenant people in the past are an example to those in the Church. The examples teach us how to live, how to deal with testing, and how to have an enduring faith.

Jesus illustrated his teachings by recalling history and the experiences of God’s people in both failure and success. Other excellent examples are found in the faith chapter of Hebrews 11. Jude is another prime example of how historical events and people can be used to heighten our understanding of our own place in the New

Covenant community. Revelation is a closed book to those who have never considered the importance of people and places of the Old Testament.

PARALLELS

This category covers prophetic fulfillment, types, and shadows. The language used may be symbolic and it may be literal. The content and the context determine which we choose. Symbols are often used to make unseen and unknown reality real. Peter, for example, preaching on the Day of Pentecost, spoke of the events of that day as part of the fulfillment of the Day of The Lord and the events which would accompany Messiah's Advent. Both Hebrews and Colossians call the Sabbath celebration of the Old Testament simply of picture of our ultimate rest in Christ.

Jesus introduced the Lord Jesus as the *Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*. His coming was exactly parallel to the prophetic promises through the whole Old Testament.

The believer priest of the New Testament is invited to eat of a sacrificial meal under the New Covenant of which the priests of the Old Covenant priesthood would never taste. *"We have an altar that those who serve in the tabernacle have no right to eat from."* - Hebrews 13:10 Comparison and contrast are often used in showing parallels. The key to understanding the Book of Hebrews, for example, is the use of the word "better", which is a comparative term. It is used both to contrast and compare The New Covenant with the Old which has been abolished, in favor of a better way.

PERSPECTIVE

God can and does often use a combination of elements to help His children gain confident assurance in doing His will. A great example is from the life of Peter in Acts 11:4-18 *"But Peter began and explained it to them point by point, saying, "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came to me. As I stared I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles, and wild birds. I also heard a voice saying to me, get up Peter; slaughter and eat! But I said, certainly not, Lord, for nothing defiled or ritually unclean has ever entered my mouth! But the voice replied a second time from heaven, what God has made clean, you must not consider ritually*

unclean. This happened three times, and then everything was pulled up to heaven again. At that very moment, three men sent to me from Caesarea approached the house where we were staying. The Spirit told me to accompany them without hesitation. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house. He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter, who will speak a message to you by which you and your entire household will be saved. Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?" When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, "so then, God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles."

In this one passage in Acts, God uses multiple elements to reveal clearly what His will is for Peter. In this case, the message needed to be unmistakable. Notice all the separate elements God brings into the life of Peter as he is reluctantly directed in the Gospel outreach. **Prayer, visions, the voice of God, the word of God, repetition, the counsel of godly men, the office work of the Holy Spirit, Angelic assistance, the miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the consensus of the Church.** God showed great patience with Peter, but Peter responded to God revealing His plan to him. But notice that all these separate elements would have meant nothing without the word of God.

Five smooth stones

When David accepted God's call to take on the giant Goliath, he picked up 5 smooth stones. You ask why he needed 5 stones when there was only one Giant. Goliath had 4 brothers. David listened to God, he obeyed, and he planned ahead. And he did not rest in either his own preparation, or the weakness of his enemy. *"Then all the land will realize that Israel has a God and all this assembly will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves! **For the battle is the Lord's, and he will deliver you into our hand.**" - 1st Samuel 17:46-47*

The believer who learns and does the will of God also knows that all is of Grace and of God's loving kindness to inform us and include us and to give us His word. David said that *"God will not forsake the righteous, for the sake of His name."* Move forward in obedient submission to the word and will of God, and He will lead, guide and bless.