

LESSON TWELVE LIVING WITHIN GOD'S WILL

When it comes to the question of discerning exactly what God's will is for our life, most people are looking for God to provide a specific answer to a specific situation. Is it God's will that I take this job or not? Is it God's will that my child attend a certain school? Is it God's will for me to be involved in this particular activity? These questions, and so many more, are all good and relevant. God cares about all of these issues in our lives and He wants the very best for us. Why then does it seem like it is so hard to find the answers to these questions? The questions stem from a desire to sincerely follow after God, to be where He wants us to be, and to live a life that is characterized by a series of wise choices. Living within God's will however involves so much more than the daily decisions of our lives.

When we look to the book of Proverbs to discern God's will for our lives, the answer is framed by the terms "righteousness", "integrity", "blamelessness", "the way of life", and "the path of wisdom". In the New Testament, God's will is described as "eternal life", "sanctification", and living in relationship with God and with other believers. Scripture is primarily concerned with the main decision in our life, which is what we have decided to do with God's Son. If we do not have this issue sorted out, nothing else really matters. God wants our heart. Once we have trusted in Christ, then we are told that the Christian life is supposed to be patterned after His life, that we are to treat people and love people like Christ did. This is God's general will for our lives. This is what the New Testament refers to as salvation and sanctification. This is what the book of Proverbs refers to as walking on the path of righteousness. Once our general direction is determined, then we need to evaluate our specific steps. This is the more difficult part of living within God's will because God does give us the latitude to make our own decisions.

Here are some basic guidelines to follow when we are trying to discern whether or not something is God's will for our lives.

1. First look to the Bible. Is the decision we are trying to make in accordance with Scripture? What does the Bible say about it?
2. Seek Godly counsel and wisdom from others. They may not be able to give you the exact answer that you seek, but they should be able to understand your situation from a Biblical perspective and help you sort out the various issues relating to your decision.
3. Will this decision draw you closer to God, or could it potentially interfere with your relationship with Him? What impact will it have on your family life?
4. Pray, pray, pray and ask God for His wisdom and guidance.
5. Having done all of this, do what you think is best. God is with us wherever we go. He is more than capable of dealing with the ramifications of our decisions and of using our circumstances to mold our character.

DAY ONE

What is God's will for my life? As we have seen throughout this study in Proverbs, God always seems to look deeper than our outward behavior or our individual decisions. He peels back layer upon layer until He uncovers our heart. The same is true when it comes to the subject of discerning and living within God's will for our lives. God's main priority is that our hearts belong to Him. The following passages revisit the theme of "fearing the Lord". To fear the Lord is to be in relationship with Him. It is to be willing to submit to Him as our Creator and Life-Sustainer and trust in the plans that He has for our lives. Ultimately this is God's will for all of us.

The Fear of the Lord

Read Proverbs 8:12-13, 9:9-11, and 15:33.

1. How do these verses define the fear of the Lord?

2. In previous lessons we have discussed "the fear of the Lord" as a relational concept. How does this appear in these verses?

Read Proverbs 14:26-27, 16:6-7, and 19:23.

3. How do these verses expand upon the previous definition of "the fear of the Lord"?

4. What are the positive benefits of fearing the Lord?

5. Which of these positive benefits have you experienced in your life?

Read Proverbs 10:27-29.

6. Who are the two types of people contrasted in these verses?

7. What is the underlying difference between the two?

8. What does it look like to fear the Lord?

Read Proverbs 15:16, 22:4-5, and 28:14.

9. What are the consequences of not fearing the Lord?

10. Do these verses promise that if we fear the Lord we will not have calamity, thorns, or snares in our life?

11. How is the person who fears the Lord better equipped to handle calamity when it comes?

Read Proverbs 29:25.

12. If we do not fear God, who else might we fear? In your own words, describe what that means.

13. According to this verse how else can we define “the fear of the Lord”?

14. To exalt means to lift up. What do you need to be lifted out of in your own life? How can trusting in the Lord facilitate this?

DAY TWO

The fear of the Lord describes our relationship to God. There are several terms in Proverbs that also describe the quality of our lives when it is lived out in relationship to God: righteousness, blamelessness, and uprightness.

Righteousness is:

Read Proverbs 11:19, 13:6, and 13:21.

1. According to these proverbs what are the benefits of righteousness?

Read Proverbs 11:23, 12:26, 20:7, and 29:6.

2. What is the desire of the righteous person?

3. What does the righteous person do?

4. Does this sound like the kind of life that you have? Why or why not?

Read Proverbs 11:30-31, 15:29, and 21:21.

5. What does God do for the righteous person?

6. What do you think it means to pursue righteousness and loyalty?

Read Proverbs 4:18-19 and 12:28.

7. How do these verses describe the path of righteousness?

8. What are your thoughts when you read that the path of the righteous gets brighter and brighter?

Read Proverbs 21:3.

9. Why does God care more about righteousness and justice than sacrifice? (Keep in mind that at the time these proverbs were composed, the sacrificial system of the Temple was the way in which the sins of the Israelites' sins were atoned for).

Read Proverbs 11:5, 11:20, and 28:18.

Another word to describe the way in which we are viewed by God is "blameless".

10. How are blamelessness and righteousness related?

11. What are the rewards of the one who is blameless in their walk?

12. Do you believe that the Lord delights in you?

Read Proverbs 2:6-8, 3:31-32, 11:6, 14:2, 15:8-9, and 16:17.

13. A third term describing who we are as we relate to the Lord is the term “upright”. What other words or phrases are related to the term “upright”?

14. What is the opposite of being upright?

15. How does God relate to the upright? What does He do for them?

16. How easy is it for you to see yourself as righteous, blameless, and upright?

DAY THREE

In choosing to live within God's will for our lives, the specific steps that we take are less important than the direction in which we are headed, but the specific steps that we take need to be evaluated in terms of whether or not they are taken on the correct path. The following proverbs contrast God's way with our way. Because our heart is deceitful, because we cannot foresee the consequences of our decisions, and because we are sometimes motivated by desires that are not aligned with what God wants for us, it is easy to find ourselves walking on a path that looked right in the beginning but evolved into something that is not what we want for our lives.

Read Proverbs 14:12, 16:1-3, 16:9, 16:25, 19:21, 20:24, 21:2, and 26:12.

1. What do these proverbs say about man's way versus God's way?
2. Why would something that looks right and good for us in our own eyes, not be what God has planned for us?
3. Have you experienced a time in your life when you were disappointed because something did not go your way, but later you realized that it would not have been a good choice for you?
4. Do these verses say that it is wrong to make plans for our lives?
5. What is the difference between plans that are made on our own and plans that are made with the Lord?

6. Are there decisions that you are struggling over? Is it easy or hard for you to trust the Lord for the outcome? Do these verses offer any comfort to you?

7. According to Proverbs 16:3, what does it mean that our plans will be established? (The Hebrew word means “to be made firm” and it is used to describe God establishing the heavens).

8. Have you had experiences where you prayed, sought counsel, made a decision and things did not go well for you? Do you think that God’s plans and His paths might involve hardship and pain in our lives? Why or why not?

Read Proverbs 2:20-22, 3:13-18, 8:17-21, 9:6, and 11:30-31.

9. These proverbs describe the path that we should be walking on. What are some of its characteristics?

10. Proverbs 2:20-22 says that we will walk in the company of good and righteous men (and women). How have you found that to be true in your own life?

11. Proverbs 3:13-18 describes the incredible rewards of walking in the way of righteousness. Do you experience these rewards in your life or are they difficult to see sometimes?

12. Proverbs 3:13-18 and 11:30 describe the path of wisdom as a “tree of life”. What does that mean to you?

13. Proverbs 9:6 tells us to forsake our folly. Are there some areas in your life where you may have chosen to go down a wrong path? How difficult do you think it would be to turn around? Does this proverb comfort you in that it is possible to turn things around and experience fullness of life?

Read Proverbs 3:21-24, 10:9, 15:21, and 23:17-18.

14. According to this set of proverbs, we are told to walk securely. How is this described?

15. What commitments in our own lives will enable us to walk securely?

16. Do you feel like you are walking straight and securely? If not, what could help you in your walk?

17. Proverbs 23:17-18 acknowledges that the way of sinners, the paths that might not be so great for us, may look better or more fun. How do we deal with the feeling that we are being denied something?

DAY FOUR

Ultimately the core issue that determines whether or not we are living within God's will is the state of our heart. We have said that our plans and our ideas for how our life should be lived out must be submitted to God's plan for us because our motivations are not always pure. It can be very difficult to determine our motivations, but if there is pain or confusion in our hearts it can drive us in subtle ways to make decisions that lead us in the wrong direction.

The Heart and God's Will

Read Proverbs 3:3-7.

1. What do these verses say about our heart?
2. What do these verses say will keep us on the straight path?
3. How easy is it to open up your heart to the Lord and trust Him with all of your cares?

Read Proverbs 4:23-27.

4. How do we watch over our hearts?
5. What are the dangers of neglecting our hearts?
6. How in touch are you with your heart? Do you truly know who you are, what you want, and what you need?
7. If you do not feel in touch with your heart, can you think of something you can do to uncover some of the deeper parts to who you are?

Read Proverbs 16:20-22.

8. What does it mean to be wise in heart? How is it related to trusting the Lord?

Read Proverbs 19:8 and 24:14.

9. The whole purpose of the book of Proverbs is for the reader to acquire wisdom. What does Proverbs 19:8 say regarding the person who gets wisdom? What does it look like to love your own soul?

Read Proverbs 8:32-35 and 12:2.

10. According to these verses, what is the result of living within God's will?

11. What does it mean to receive God's favor? Do you think these verses depict a God who begrudgingly bestows His favor when we have done enough to earn it or a God who takes great delight in pouring out His blessings on those who love Him?

Read Romans 12:2 and 1 Peter 2:15.

12. When we live within God's will there are incredible benefits for us, but those around us are also affected. How does our choice to follow God impact the people around us?

DAY FIVE

A tension exists in the book of Proverbs. It very clearly states that if we seek wisdom and fear the Lord, we will have a good life. If we deny wisdom and forsake the Lord, hardship and calamity will come. The tension comes when in daily life those who do love and follow God experience pain, sickness, and adversity. So, how do we understand Proverbs in light of life experiences that seem to contradict it? First, we need to remember that the purpose of the book of Proverbs is meant to push the reader to make a decision between wisdom and folly. Second, we also need to be reminded that the individual proverbs were not meant to be specific promises, but general truths. An overall evaluation of the life of Christ would show us that He did obtain all of the

blessings and promises that are offered when we walk within God's will. When we look at the individual pieces of His life however, he experienced conflict and opposition, betrayal by His closest friends, deep physical pain, even deeper emotional pain, and finally a horrific, humiliating death under the government of Rome and the religious leadership of Israel. Yet Jesus' life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection are the culmination of everything that is laid forth in the book of Proverbs, it is the culmination of God's plan for humanity and it is the ultimate example of a life lived within the will of God the Father. All throughout the Gospels Jesus submits Himself to the will of His Father, and in so doing He was brutalized by humanity. However, His submission secured for us the fulfillment of every promise written in the pages of Scripture.

Read Proverbs 20:9, 24:16, and 28:13.

1. According to Proverbs 20:9, is there anyone who lives life perfectly? What is the underlying assumption in the statement "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"?
2. According to Proverbs 24:16, does the righteous man perfectly live his life?
3. Are you surprised to learn that Proverbs presumes that the righteous man will fall?
4. What is the difference between the righteous man and the wicked man?
5. According to Proverbs 28:13, what do we need to do when we fall?

Read 1 Peter 3:17 and 1 Peter 4:19.

6. What do these two verses say about suffering and God's will?

7. Why do you think believers experience suffering? What opportunities does God give us in the midst of suffering?

Read Romans 5:1-5.

8. What does this passage say about tribulations in the life of the believer?

9. As you apply this passage to painful experiences either in the past or in the present, how do you experience it?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

10. What attitudes or actions are involved in living out God's will for our lives?

Read 1 John 2:17

11. What is the promise for the one who does the will of God? What does this mean to you?

12. Having completed this lesson, do you feel like you have a better understanding of what it means to live within the will of God? Have you found encouragement, blessing, or guidance in a particular situation in your life?

SCRIPTURE FOR LESSON TWELVE

DAY ONE

Fear of the Lord

Proverbs 8:12-13 ¹² "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge *and* discretion. ¹³ "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverted mouth, I hate.

Proverbs 9:9-11 ⁹ Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning. ¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you.

Proverbs 15:33 ³³ The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, And before honor *comes* humility.

Proverbs 14:26-27 ²⁶ In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, And his children will have refuge. ²⁷ The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.

Proverbs 16:6-7 ⁶ By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, And by the fear of the LORD one keeps away from evil. ⁷ When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

Proverbs 19:23 ²³ The fear of the LORD *leads* to life, So that one may sleep satisfied, untouched by evil.

Proverbs 10:27-29 ²⁷ The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened. ²⁸ The hope of the righteous is gladness, But the expectation of the wicked perishes. ²⁹ The way of the LORD is a stronghold to the upright, But ruin to the workers of iniquity.

Proverbs 15:16 ¹⁶ Better is a little with the fear of the LORD Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

Proverbs 22:4-5 ⁴ The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life. ⁵ Thorns *and* snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards himself will be far from them.

Proverbs 28:14 ¹⁴ How blessed is the man who fears always, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Proverbs 29:25 ²⁵ The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.

DAY TWO**Righteousness**

Proverbs 11:19 ¹⁹ He who is steadfast in righteousness *will attain* to life, And he who pursues evil *will bring about* his own death.

Proverbs 13:6 ⁶ Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless, But wickedness subverts the sinner.

Proverbs 13:21 ²¹ Adversity pursues sinners, But the righteous will be rewarded with prosperity.

Proverbs 11:23 ²³ The desire of the righteous is only good, *But* the expectation of the wicked is wrath.

Proverbs 12:26 ²⁶ The righteous is a guide to his neighbor, But the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 20:7 ⁷ A righteous man who walks in his integrity-- How blessed are his sons after him.

Proverbs 29:6 ⁶ By transgression an evil man is ensnared, But the righteous sings and rejoices.

Proverbs 11:30-31 ³⁰ The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls. ³¹ If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the sinner!

Proverbs 15:29 ²⁹ The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Proverbs 21:21 ²¹ He who pursues righteousness and loyalty Finds life, righteousness and honor.

Proverbs 4:18-19 ¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, That shines brighter and brighter until the full day. ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know over what they stumble.

Proverbs 12:28 ²⁸ In the way of righteousness is life, And in *its* pathway there is no death.

Proverbs 21:3 ³ To do righteousness and justice Is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice.

Blameless

Proverbs 11:5 ⁵ The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way, But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.

Proverbs 11:20 ²⁰ The perverse in heart are an abomination to the LORD, But the blameless in *their* walk are His delight.

Proverbs 28:18 ¹⁸ He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, But he who is crooked will fall all at once.

Uprightness

Proverbs 2:6-8 ⁶ For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; *He is* a shield to those who walk in integrity, ⁸ Guarding the paths of justice, And He preserves the way of His godly ones.

Proverbs 3:31-32 ³¹ Do not envy a man of violence And do not choose any of his ways. ³² For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; But He is intimate with the upright.

Proverbs 11:6 ⁶ The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, But the treacherous will be caught by *their own* greed.

Proverbs 14:2 ² He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD, But he who is devious in his ways despises Him.

Proverbs 15:8-9 ⁸ The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight. ⁹ The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves one who pursues righteousness.

Proverbs 16:17 ¹⁷ The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life.

DAY THREE**Man's Way vs. God's Way**

Proverbs 14:12 ¹² There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 16:1-3 The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. ² All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives. ³ Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.

Proverbs 16:9 ⁹ The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Proverbs 16:25 ²⁵ There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 19:21 ²¹ Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

Proverbs 20:24 ²⁴ Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?

Proverbs 21:2 ² Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.

Proverbs 26:12 ¹² Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

The Path of the Righteous

Proverbs 2:20-22 ²⁰ So you will walk in the way of good men And keep to the paths of the righteous. ²¹ For the upright will live in the land And the blameless will remain in it; ²² But the wicked will be cut off from the land And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.

Proverbs 3:13-18 ¹³ How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. ¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. ¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. ¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. ¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways And all her paths are peace. ¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.

Proverbs 8:17-21 ¹⁷ "I love those who love me; And those who diligently seek me will find me. ¹⁸ "Riches and honor are with me, Enduring wealth and righteousness. ¹⁹ "My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, And my yield *better* than choicest silver. ²⁰ "I walk in the way of righteousness, In the midst of the paths of justice, ²¹ To endow those who love me with wealth, That I may fill their treasuries.

Proverbs 9:6 ⁶ "Forsake *your* folly and live, And proceed in the way of understanding."

Proverbs 11:30-31 ³⁰ The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who is wise wins souls. ³¹ If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the sinner!

Walking Securely

Proverbs 3:21-24 ²¹ My son, let them not vanish from your sight; Keep sound wisdom and discretion, ²² So they will be life to your soul And adornment to your neck. ²³ Then you will walk in your way securely And your foot will not stumble. ²⁴ When you lie down, you will not be afraid; When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Proverbs 10:9 ⁹ He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.

Proverbs 15:21 ²¹ Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, But a man of understanding walks straight.

Proverbs 23:17-18 ¹⁷ Do not let your heart envy sinners, But *live* in the fear of the LORD always. ¹⁸ Surely there is a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

DAY FOUR

Our Heart

Proverbs 3:3-7 ³ Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

Proverbs 4:23 - 27 ²³ Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life. ²⁴ Put away from you a deceitful mouth And put devious speech far from you. ²⁵ Let your eyes look directly ahead And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. ²⁶ Watch the path of your feet And all your ways will be established. ²⁷ Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

Proverbs 16:20-22 ²⁰ He who gives attention to the word will find good, And blessed is he who trusts in the LORD. ²¹ The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. ²² Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, But the discipline of fools is folly.

Proverbs 19:8 ⁸ He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who keeps understanding will find good.

Proverbs 24:14 ¹⁴ Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.

Favor From the Lord

Proverbs 8:32 - 35 ³² "Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, For blessed are they who keep my ways. ³³ "Heed instruction and be wise, And do not neglect *it*. ³⁴ "Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. ³⁵ "For he who finds me finds life And obtains favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 12:2 ² A good man will obtain favor from the LORD, But He will condemn a man who devises evil.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 Peter 2:15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

DAY FIVE

Proverbs 20:9 ⁹ Who can say, "I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin"?

Proverbs 24:16 ¹⁶ For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, But the wicked stumble in *time of calamity*.

Proverbs 28:13 ¹³ He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

1 Peter 3:17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 4:19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 ¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 John 2:17 The world is passing away, and *a/so* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.