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## How Do You Know What God Wants You To do?

**Jeremiah 29:11:** (NASB) *For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.*



Should I take that new job or stay with the old one? Should I get married? What about having children? Am I in a good place in the church where I am or is there a better fit for me elsewhere? Should we buy that house that is a little bigger or buy the one that is more affordable? Questions, questions! Now, if you are a Christian, here is the biggest question out of all of the other questions - how do you decide what God would have you to do if the choices before you all have strong positives? Is there some all-inclusive formula to figure out this entire dilemma? Now that is a good question!

How can we know God's plans for us in accordance with the principle of our theme text that was originally spoken to ancient Israel?

**What can we know that would be concrete and universal for all Christians regarding how we should make decisions?** Mark 3:31-35: Is disowning our family doing the will of God? That is not what this Scripture is teaching. Jesus was not disowning his family but explaining that his mission was about something bigger than physical family ties. He was looking for those who would be in harmony with him and the Heavenly Father, those who would be seeking to do the will of God.

Doing the will of God by following Jesus brings us into a relationship with Jesus and therefore with God. But how do we know what the will of God is?

 **A dot or a circle, *How Can I know God's Will, Jefferson Bethke***

- *There's a point in life where I thought God's will in all big decisions that I came to, God's will was a dot. Meaning I had to get it exactly right or else I was off. I had to pick this one, or else I was out of God's will. I had to really labor because I was afraid I wasn't going to pick the right one. That is just problematic and that can be exhausting; it can burn you out; it can also give you a really poor view of God. Because if God's will is a dot, think about how much pressure that brings. Think about how in every decision you feel terrified you're going to get it wrong, because even if your dot is next to the actual dot, you still missed. You're still out of God's will. But I think there's a better analogy. What if God's will is more like a circle? What if God's will is like this flourishing, boundary circle where you can be in or you can be out?*

Let's paint the picture of the circle of God's will and our circle of decisions. Ideally, our circle is a little smaller and can fit within His circle. Ideally we try and live with our circle completely within His, so that all you see from the outside is God's will. Sometimes our circle is bigger and sometimes it is off center. God gives us space within borders and boundaries.

Let's build a picture of the boundaries of the circle of God's will by reviewing several practical and clearly-stated ways we can be doing the will of God in our walk with Jesus:

- ✓ **Follow God's word.**  
A foundational part of the border of the circle of God's will.

**Old Testament:** Joshua 1:7-8: The way to be *very courageous* is to immerse yourself in the word of God. Joshua was told to meditate on it day and night in order to be in accordance with it - stay in the circle!

**New Testament:** 2 Timothy 2:15-16: If we don't read, think, rehearse, speak, act and live Scripture, how can we think we are following His word? The more closely we follow His word, the more likely our "circles" will match.

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** How often do I really look into God's word to get to know his will and his way and therefore be able to identify his will and his way in my everyday decisions?

- ✓ **Love one another.**  
A "must" feature of the borders of the circle of God's will.



John 13:34-35: A true mark of a true follower is how they act towards their spiritual family - people will know who you are by the sermon of action!

God gives us fatherly boundaries that give us space to grow and develop. When we make choices where either decision is inside the circle, God can work with that. Just because your decision may be more towards the left side of the circle and mine more towards the right side, mine is not more "right" than yours and vice-versa; they are both within the will of God.

**A practical application of loving one another:** Galatians 6:1-2: Our love for one another helps us to be alert to each other's weaknesses. Doing God's will is helping those who need it with gentleness and compassion. A real test of living within God's will is if we want to help - and forgive - each other. Instead, am I resenting my brethren? God's word does not allow for resentment.

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** How often do I apply myself to others first, truly watching out for them and unselfishly helping them towards what is best for them?

God wants to be obvious in our lives. Sometimes we come upon situations where we do not know whether to turn left or right, requiring thought, prayer, study, meditation, waiting and watching. Those are parts of figuring out the next step.

- ✓ **The attitudes Jesus modeled.**  
A comprehensive part of the borders of the circle of God's will.

Sometimes God (in this case through the direct words of his son, Jesus) is very direct in what he wants us to do and how he wants us to act. The Beatitudes were spoken to his followers while others listened.

**The Beatitudes:** Matthew 5:3-10: (KJV) *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Be humble. Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Feel the sadness of sin and loss. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Be teachable. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Have a longing for God's way. (Stay out of the "gray areas" of the circle.) Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Be merciful. (Especially at times we want to be angry or jealous.) Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. Have the very best of intentions. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Stand against strife. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Stand for God's ways no matter what the cost.*

Jesus gave us these "attitude checks" in the Beatitudes for us to focus on and compare our decision-making to the edges of God's will. Our decisions are made based on the borders of the will of God, not on how we feel at the moment.

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** What model have I fashioned my life after? Have I modeled an athlete or some movie star or some famous actor, communicator or musician? Has my model got enough of Jesus in it to match the circle of God's will? Does my model create a larger circle that cannot fit within the borders of the circle of God's will?

The fact that the circle of God's will has borders is a sure sign that there is a cost to our life decisions staying within those borders:

- ✓ **Be faithful through sacrifice.**  
Self-denial/a living sacrifice is the price of God's borders.

In this age of selfishness, the Christian is supposed to live *selflessly*.

**There are two parts to approaching a life of sacrifice:** Luke 9:18-23: The first part consists of understanding the reasons for a life of sacrifice. Grasping the magnitude of who Jesus was and is, sets the table for how we are to live. Once we know who Jesus is, the second part is "walking the walk." That walk is a no-holds-barred commitment to his footsteps.

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** How does my life reflect the lifestyle of walking in Jesus' footsteps? Am I in tune with it only on Sundays, Christmas and Easter, or does it stay with me every day? If it does stay with me every day, does it direct me throughout every part of my every day? What do the answers to these questions evidence regarding the borders of my decisions?



**Walls of Scripture and prayer, *How Can I know God's Will, Jefferson Bethke***

- *I think there's two walls that you need to keep everything in. I was reading a commentary by a famous theologian, and he wasn't really talking about God's will but he was talking about the character and nature of the people in Acts, the early church. He said the thing that really defined them was on one side, in light of Scripture and in context of prayer. I like to see those as almost two walls. When something comes to you that you need a decision on, do you put it in the light of Scripture? Do you read God's word and say, "God, have you ever said anything specific on this? Have you ever said anything generally on this? Where can I go? Where can I lean?" And over here in the context of prayer, do you ever take it to God? Do you ask?*

✓ **Be accountable.**

Part of the price of the circle of God's will is cheerful accountability.

Here is an example of being cheerful in accountability of wrong-doings: Luke 19:1-10: Here was a man on a mission, who knew his life was lacking. He saw Jesus as the way to the will of God and chased down the needed fulfillment. The instantaneous accountability and generosity of Zacchaeus show us the magnitude of God's grace and the power of the very presence of Jesus in our lives!

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** How often do I volunteer my life decisions to be placed before God and ask for His scrutiny? Are the borders of my decisions inside the borders of God's judgment?

God gives us the ability to think, choose and apply ourselves. Avoiding making decisions is generally not within the will of God. There is room within the decision-making process to still be within God's will. Reminiscent of the parable of the man who buried his talent, avoiding making decisions is not within the circle of the will of God, as He gives us experiences to make decisions.

So, we have loosely defined the borders of God's will. What now? Shouldn't we all now be easily focused? Shouldn't our daily decisions now simply adjust and flow as we seek God's will above ours? Isn't the problem solved? NO! But it should give us more confidence that we can be in tune with God's will. Proverbs 3:3-6: The principles of these proverbs are often repeated throughout Scripture. How seriously do we take them? Are they the centerpiece of our thinking?

**What is motivating me? How do I know? The heart wants what the heart wants:**

1 John 2:3-6: Jesus was motivated by knowing and doing God's will by being a son. In contrast, Satan was self-motivated by trying to be in the place of God. Whose motivation best describes our desire? Parts of each?

**What is motivating me? How do I know? The following is a great "border" test:**

2 Corinthians 6:14-18: The Apostle describes several different kinds of relationships to which we should not be bound. **For an in-depth analysis of these Scriptures, please refer to our program from January 11, 2015 called, "Should Christians Only Marry Christians?"**

To be different and to be separate are very difficult tasks, especially in a society that more and more expects everyone to be politically correct and comply with the prevailing ideas that everything is good and acceptable. These are not the borders God has set for our decisions!

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** How willing am I to look in the mirror and be completely honest with myself regarding my motivation? Am I being self-serving and cloaking it with spiritual words to make myself look good to myself and others?

**Am I patient in this decision-making process or do I just want to decide and move on?**

Philippians 4:6-7: (NASB) <sup>6</sup>Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Oftentimes impatience is a cover for selfishness, because what I want is usually the first choice.





This next text shows two sides of the issue. **First, the selfish and hurried approach:**

James 3:13-18: (NASB) <sup>13</sup>Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. <sup>15</sup>This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. <sup>16</sup>For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. **Now comes the wise and patient approach:** <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Isaiah 30:21: This is the kind of spiritual thinking that needs to go into our decision-making. It will help us to slow down and make reasonable choices according to God's will.

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** Do I hurry through decisions and therefore rely on how I feel about the situation to conclude it or do I pause and consider wisdom from above to see how I serve God with the situation?

The circle of God's will is a circle with boundaries. The circle of our decision-making also has its boundaries. Sometimes our circle is too big to fit within God's will. Sometimes it might be small enough but off center. Even if we are off center or some of our decisions are outside the will of God, He can still help us. But He will take those decisions outside His will and show us we are wrong - with gentleness, pruning experiences, wisdom, kindness and direction.

**What do I do when my decision is finally made? Hopefully we can be like this:** Job 23:10-12: Let us be sure our decisions pass the "borders" test: James 4:13-17: Take your steps forward but be flexible and ready to change direction if need be.

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** Do have a spiritual confidence or an earthly confidence once I have made a decision? Do I just think about my circle of decisions or do I think about how my circle fits within the borders of God's will?

Always leave room for the will of God to show you more than you already know. Be able to be corrected when necessary. Once again we are faced with the human propensity to want to be right! While this is not necessarily bad in and of itself, it can lead to the development of blind spots.

How much of my decision-making circle is outside that of the will of God? Depending on the decision, we should try and retrace our steps if a commitment of too serious of a nature hasn't been made, or make the best of it if that is the more righteous and godly path. First, we need to take our troubles to the throne of grace - a place to engage in "border repair!" Hebrews 4:14-16: Be honest - when we make a mistake, how boldly do we want to come to *the throne of grace*? Here it says we can come with confidence so we can receive mercy. This is where we belong when we have made a bad decision. Second, we need to focus on God's mercy and overruling in our lives: 1 Corinthians 10:13

Third, we need to see there is value in our fallen earthly experiences: 2 Corinthians 4:7-11  
Finally, we need to focus on getting back up! Proverbs 24:16

**Circle Comparison Checkpoint:** Do I have the courage to not only admit my mistakes, but to refocus my priorities and place myself back within the borders of God's will? Am I willing to do whatever it takes to get back there? If so, then I have learned much about what God wants me to do!

**So, how do you know what God wants you to do?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!**