

Knowing and Doing the Will of God
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Knowing and doing the will of God starts with God. Biblically, there is only one God (Deut 32:39; Isa 45:5-7; 46:9), and He created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them (Gen 1:1; Ex 20:11; Neh 9:6; Acts 17:24). Furthermore, God is not silent. He has provided general revelation about Himself through nature (Psa 19:1-2; Rom 1:20) and special revelation through His Word (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21),¹ and through His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-3; cf. John 1:1, 14, 18). Today, we have the written Word of God which provides the clearest revelation of His will. Apart from His Word, we have no clear understanding of who God is, what He is doing, or what He expects of us.

God's will is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (Deut 10:10; 23:5; 2 Ch 21:7) which uses the Hebrew word אָבָה *abah*, which means "to will, [or] be willing."² Also, in other passages (Psa 40:8; 143:10), the Hebrew word רָצוֹן *ratson* is used, which refers to "what pleases the Lord."³ Some passages in the New Testament specifically mention God's will, where the Greek term θέλημα *thelema* is employed (i.e., Rom 12:2; Eph 6:5-6, Col 4:12; 1 Th 4:3; 5:16-18; Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 2:15; 4:19). God's will in each of these passages refers to "what one wishes to happen."⁴ This speaks of what God desires from people. Other passages employ the Greek word βούλομαι *boulomai* (Matt 11:27; Jam 1:18; 2 Pet 3:9), which denotes a "desire to have or experience something, with implication of planning accordingly."⁵ The latter term sometimes refers to what God brings to pass, such as when James writes, "In the exercise of His will [βούλομαι *boulomai*] He brought us forth by the word of truth" (Jam 1:18a). But sometimes it refers to what God wants, but makes contingent upon a human response of faith, such as when Peter writes that the Lord "is patient toward you, not wishing [βούλομαι *boulomai*] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Context always determines the meaning of a word.

¹ God, on several occasions, commanded His prophets to record what He had revealed to them. He told Moses, "Write this in a book" (Ex 17:14), and "Write down these words" (Ex 34:27). To Isaiah He said, "Now go, write it on a tablet before them and inscribe it on a scroll" (Isa 30:8), and to Jeremiah He commanded, "Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book" (Jer 30:2).

² William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 788.

³ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1282.

⁴ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 447.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

Those who are positive to God desire to know Him, His Word, and to pursue His will.⁶ Jesus said to fellow Jews, “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself” (John 7:17). Jesus explained that knowing God’s Word is predicated on a desire to do (ποιέω *poieo*) His will. But some hearts are negative to God. And when the heart is negative, no amount of divine revelation will prove persuasive.⁷ Jesus spoke to the hard-hearted Pharisees and said, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word” (John 8:43). Jesus then gave the answer, saying, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44). They could not hear His words because they were unsaved and negative to God. These were men who “loved the darkness rather than the Light” (John 3:19). Paul described them as ones “who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). Paul also spoke about the unsaved person, saying, “But an unbeliever does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor 2:14).

Of the one with positive volition it is said, “his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Psa 1:2). The benefit of such a lifelong meditation is that “He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (Psa 1:3). The godly person is positive to the Lord and welcomes His Word. David said, “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” (Psa 40:8). The word *delight* (צִפְּחָה *chaphets*) means, “to take pleasure in, desire...to delight in...to be willing...to feel inclined.”⁸ This speaks of positive volition. God’s *will* (רָצוֹן *ratson*) refers to what pleases Him. And the word *Law* (תּוֹרָה *torah*) means *teaching, direction, or instruction*. Jeremiah said, “Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16). To eat God’s Word is a picture of positive volition, as Jeremiah welcomed the divine revelation into himself. Once received, it delighted (שִׂמְחָה *simchah – delight, joy, gladness, mirth*) his heart (לֵבָב *lebab – inner person, mind, will*).

⁶ For the Christian, this does not mean our sin nature is removed, nor that we are free from the sinful pressures of living in a fallen world. Paul said, “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:21-23). This struggle with sin continues until we leave this world and enter into heaven. Until then, it is God’s will that we remain in this world (John 17:15) as His ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20).

⁷ For example, Noah preached to his generation for one hundred and twenty years, but they refused to listen (Gen 6:3; 2 Pet 2:5). Jeremiah spoke to the leaders of Israel, saying, “these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened” (Jer 25:3). Preachers are responsible for the accurate output of the message, not the outcome of response.

⁸ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 340.

When the human heart is receptive to God's Word, it transforms that person from the inside out, and this is both cognitive and experiential. David and Jeremiah wanted to know and walk with God, and His divine revelation, properly understood and applied, was the means to know and do it.

God will open His Word to the believer who dedicates his/her life to Him. Paul wrote, "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 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" (Rom 12:1-2). A surrendered life to God makes the Christian sensitive to the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, who aids the believer to know God's will. Concerning this passage, Arnold Fruchtenbaum states:

It is hard to understand what the will of God is without this act of dedication because the believer does not have the Spirit's illumination, which is needed to determine God's will from His Word. Dedication brings knowledge of the will of God. Having the knowledge, the logical outworking of the dedicated life is that the believer now does the will of God.⁹

God's Word is powerful and accomplishes what He desires (Isa 55:10-11; Heb 4:12), and it lights a fire in the heart of those who welcome it. For example, Jesus, after his resurrection, walked for several miles with two disciples and gave them a Bible lesson which lasted for several hours as they traveled "to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:13). Luke records what Jesus taught them, saying, "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). After His Bible lesson, the two disciples said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). The heart that is positive to God receives His Word and is excited by what is learned.

Theological Categories of God's Will

The will of God can be divided between His secret will and revealed will. Moses wrote, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). What God has revealed in Scripture is what He deems important for us to know. But there are secret things that belong to the Lord and He remains silent. To spend our days pursuing

⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Faith Alone: The Condition of Our Salvation: An Exposition of the Book of Galatians and Other Relevant Topics*, ed. Christiane Jurik, Second Edition. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 120.

that which God has decreed to keep secret will result in unending frustration. If we have prayed and have studied God's Word thoroughly and received no answer to prayer, then it's either because God does not want us to know, or to know at this time. We may, through our daily experiences, seek to determine God's will for us; however, such providential understanding must always be subordinate to God's written revelation. Though we don't know many particulars about what God is doing, we know He is in control and directing history to the return of Christ and the eternal state, and we are part of that grand plan. Concerning God's revealed will, the following classifications are noted in Scripture.

First, **God's sovereign will**, which refers to His free and independent choices to do whatever He pleases. God declares, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please" (Isa 46:10b; cf. Psa 33:11), and "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan 4:35). "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps" (Psa 135:6), and He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11b).

God remains in constant sovereign control, guiding His creation through history. He meddles in the affairs of mankind, and His unseen hand works behind all their activities, controlling and directing history as He wills. We know from Scripture that God possesses certain immutable attributes and that He never acts inconsistently with His nature. For example, because God is righteous, all His actions and commands are just. Because God is immutable, His moral perfections never change. Because God is eternal, He is righteous forever. Because God is omniscient, His righteous acts are always predicated on perfect knowledge. Because God is omnipotent, He is always able to execute His righteous will. Because God is love, His judgments can be merciful toward the undeserving and humble.

God controls who sits in positions of power, whether they hold that position by birth or democratic vote. Ultimately, it is God "who changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings" (Dan 2:21a), for "the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Dan 4:17). When Israel turned negative to God, He judged them by placing weak leaders over them, saying, "I will make mere lads their princes, and capricious children will rule over them (Isa 3:4). The result was, "Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths" (Isa 3:12b).

God even controls hostile unbelievers to accomplish His purposes (Prov 16:4). When Jesus was on trial, Pilate falsely thought he had control over Him, saying, "Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" (John

19:10). Operating from divine viewpoint, Jesus said to Pilate, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). While praying to God, Peter and John acknowledged God’s sovereignty over the Gentile rulers, saying, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28).

Second, **God’s directive will**, which refers to His actively guiding His people to do what He expects. For example, God directed Adam and Eve to be “fruitful and multiply” and to “rule” as theocratic administrators over His creation (Gen 1:28). After creating the garden of Eden, He directed them to “cultivate it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). He also gave them freedom, saying, “from any tree of the garden you may eat freely” (Gen 2:16), but also gave one prohibition, saying, “from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). Other examples include God directing Noah to build an ark (Gen 6:13-14), directing Abraham to leave his country and go to the place where God wanted (Gen 12:1), directing Moses to go to Egypt to liberate His people (Ex 3:10), and later to give them the Law so they could walk in His will (Ex 34:27-28).¹⁰ It should be remembered that the four Gospels reveal that Jesus was born and lived under the Mosaic Law code (Gal 4:4), and during His time of ministry, He directed others to obey that code (i.e., Matt 8:1-4; 23:1-3). However, that covenant and law code has been fulfilled by Christ and rendered obsolete (Matt 5:17-18; Heb 8:13). And now, God has given commands to Christians which are found in the New Testament. The book of Acts covers the first thirty years of the Church and is generally historical information, being descriptive but not prescriptive. Specific commands for the Christian living in the dispensation of the Church age generally start in Romans 1 and extend to Revelation 3. However, Jesus’ discourse in the Upper Room (John chapters 13-17), the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:19-20), and the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-2) belong to the Church.

These biblical distinctions are important, for though all Scripture is written for us, only some portions of it speak specifically to us and command our walk with the Lord. Just as Christians would not try to obey the commands God gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-2, or the commands God gave to Noah in Genesis 6-9, so we should not try to obey the commands God gave to Israel in Exodus through Deuteronomy. Christians are

¹⁰ God had revealed His will for Israel through the Law of Moses, and this gave them clear guidelines for how to live as God desired. Because God cares for His people, He provided them rules for living in relationship with Himself and others. If His people walked in the ways of the Lord, He promised them blessing (Deut 28:1-14). But if they turned away from His revealed will, He promised them cursing (Deut 28:15-68). The blessed life or the cursed life was always before them (Deut 11:26-28). God’s directives were communicated through Moses to God’s people (Deut 6:1-2), who were to receive them and adhere to them (Deut 6:3-6), and communicate them to their children (Deut 6:7).

not under the Mosaic Law (Rom 6:14), but operate under the Law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2). Charles Ryrie states:

Adam lived under laws, the sum of which may be called the code of Adam or the code of Eden. Noah was expected to obey the laws of God, so there was a Noahic code. We know that God revealed many commands and laws to Abraham (Gen 26:5). They may be called the Abrahamic code. The Mosaic code contained all the laws of the Law. And today we live under the law of Christ (Gal 6:2) or the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (Rom 8:2). This code contains the hundreds of specific commandments recorded in the New Testament.¹¹

Because God is the Author of both law-codes (i.e., the Law of Moses as well as the Law of Christ), it is not surprising that He chose to incorporate some of the laws He gave to Israel into the law-code which He has given to the Church. Nine of the 10 commandments are restated in the New Testament (the Sabbath is excluded because it was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant; Ex 31:13-17).¹²

When reading through the New Testament, God provides both general and specific directives to Christians. Examples of general directives include learning God's Word (Rom 12:1-2; Col 3:16; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2), applying God's Word (Jam 1:22), loving others as Christ has loved us (John 13:34), being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), and walking by means of the Spirit (Gal 5:16), submitting to governing authorities (Rom 13:1), paying taxes (Rom 13:6), stimulating one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), and not forsaking our assembling together (Heb 10:25). Other examples include living by faith (Heb 10:38; 11:6), seeking godly wisdom (Jam 1:5), pursuing peace with others (Rom 12:18), being forgiving (Col 3:13), using gracious words (Col 4:6), being kind (Eph 4:32; cf. Prov 3:3-4), edifying others (Rom 14:19; 1 Th 5:11), serving (Gal 5:13), seeking the best interests of others (Phil 2:3-4), rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks (1 Th 5:16-18), and acting for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31). Some specific commands

¹¹ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 351.

¹² Additional biblical distinctions reveal that Israel is a nation (Ex 19:6), but the church is not a nation (Rom 10:19). God's program for Israel focused on the land promised to Abraham (Gen 12:1; 15:18; 17:8), whereas the church is called to go out to many lands (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Israel was mentioned throughout the Old Testament and recognized by other nations (Num 14:15; Josh 5:1), but the church was a mystery not known in the Old Testament (Eph 3:1-6; Col 1:26-27; cf. Rom 16:25-26). Israel had a priesthood that was specific to the tribe of Levi (Num 3:6-7), whereas all Christians are priests to God (Rev 1:6). Israel worshipped first at the Tabernacle and later the Temple (Ex 40:18-38; 2 Ch 8:14-16), but for Christians, their body is the temple of the Lord and they gather locally where they want (1 Cor 6:19-20; cf. 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15). Israel offered animal sacrifices to God (Lev 4:1-35), but Christians offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5; cf. Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15). Israel was required to tithe from the produce of their land (Deut 14:22-23; 28-29; Num 18:21), but there is no tithe required from Christians, only a joyful attitude when giving, "for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

include sharing the Gospel with others (Mark 16:15), and making disciples by teaching them Scripture (Matt 28:19-20). Pastors are to preach God's Word (2 Tim 4:2), equip the saints for God's work (Eph 4:11-12), and help lead them to spiritual maturity (Eph 4:13-16). The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph 5:25; cf. Mark 10:45), and the wife is to submit to her husband's loving spiritual leadership (Eph 5:22). Christian children are to obey and honor their parents (Eph 6:1-4). Christian employees are to obey their supervisor (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:23-24), and Christian supervisors are to treat their workers well (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1; Jam 5:4).

Third, **God's permissive will**, which refers to what He permits us to do, either for or against His directive will. All sin falls under this category, for He permits us to resist His directives in some instances. This is also true for fallen angels who are granted a measure of freedom to sin. The fall of Adam and Eve provides a good example of God's permissive will, for after He'd directed them not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-19), He permitted them to disobey and to follow Satan's leading (Gen 3:1-7). Laney writes, "God's permissive will refers to what the Lord permits even when it is not in conformity with His revealed or prescribed will. God may permit sin, though it is not in keeping with what He prefers."¹³

Concerning the permission of divorce, Jesus said the Pharisees, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way" (Matt 19:8). God's permissive will can be observed on a national level, as Paul said, "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways" (Acts 14:16). This explains much of the poor behavior we see among the nations as we study world history. God is always righteous and directs people to righteous living. However, God is no bully, as He does not force people to obey Him. When people turn negative to God, He permits them to pursue their sinful ways, though they are not free to choose the consequences of their actions. One who plays with fire will eventually get burned. Concerning those who "suppress God's truth in unrighteousness" (Rom 1:18), three times it is written that He "gave them over" to "the lusts of their hearts" (Rom 1:24), and "to degrading passions" (Rom 1:26), and "to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper" (Rom 1:28). Once God permits a person to operate by his/her sinful passions, they are given a measure of freedom to live as they want. These are described as "being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful" (Rom 1:29-31).

¹³ J. Carl Laney, eds. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, "God's Decree and Individual Free Will" in *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 215.

Fourth, **God's overruling will**, which refers to those occasions when He hinders His creatures from acting contrary to His sovereign purposes. Throughout Scripture we observe God intervening in the actions of fallen angels and people. After God permitted Adam and Eve to disobey Him, He then drove them from the Garden of Eden and overruled their ability to go back in and eat from the tree of life (Gen 3:22-24). After Abraham lied to Abimelech and told him that Sarah was his sister, Abimelech took her as his wife. However, in order to protect Sarah, God intervened and told Abimelech, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married" (Gen 20:3). Abimelech pleaded with God and claimed his innocence (Gen 20:4-5). God, being just, told Abimelech, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore, I did not let you touch her" (Gen 20:6). Jacob served his uncle Laban for twenty years, but during that time his uncle had mistreated him, and by the end, he saw his uncle "was not friendly toward him as formerly" (Gen 31:2). Realizing it was time for Jacob to leave his uncle, he told his two wives, Rachel and Leah, "your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me" (Gen 31:7). During the tribulation, there will be hostile unbelievers who will try to flee from God's wrath by seeking death. But God prevents them from this escape, as John writes, "in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them" (Rev 9:6).

When Satan wanted to attack Job, God granted him permission, saying, "Behold, all that he has is in your power" (Job 1:12a). But then God restrained Satan, saying, "do not put forth your hand on him" (Job 1:12b). When Satan came back a second time, God granted him permission to attack Job's body, saying, "he is in your power" (Job 2:6a), but then told him to "spare his life" (Job 2:6b). When Job's wife advised him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9), he responded, saying, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (Job 2:10). During the seven-year tribulation, demons are released from an angelic prison and "power was given them" to hurt unbelievers (Rev 9:3). However, they were restrained, as God told them, "not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months" (Rev 9:4-5a). Satan is currently active in the world (1 Pet 5:8; 1 John 5:19) and will be during the tribulation. However, God intervenes at the end of the tribulation and has Satan arrested and "bound him for a thousand years" (Rev 20:2). God's arresting angel "threw Satan into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time" (Rev 20:3).

Fifth, **God's providential will**, which refers to the outworking of His sovereign will in such a way that He creates circumstances that direct our lives and destiny. Believers who understand this will make their human plans contingent on God's

sovereign plans (1 Ch 13:2; Acts 18:21; Jam 4:15). As God's people, we know the Lord and His will for our lives because His written Word informs and guides us. The Bible is our divine pedagogical guide. In addition to Scripture, God directs us providentially as He controls the circumstances of our lives to His desired end. However, only the believer with a thorough knowledge of God's Word can properly interpret his/her circumstances and know what God is doing. Interpreting circumstances, or divine impressions on the heart, is never as clear as knowing God's Word. Charles Clough states:

There is a mystical element to Christianity in how the Lord leads you; and He impresses upon you different things. But you can never elevate that mystical part of your Christian life and make it equal to the revelation of Scripture, because the revelation of Scripture is the measuring stick so you can tell the difference between Christ in the heart and heart burn. How you do that is whether it fits the Scripture.¹⁴

God's providence is His continual care over the creation He brought into existence. God continues to create and control circumstances in order to direct history according to His predetermined plan, all for His glory and the benefit of His people. People live in the flow of history, and are moved by the circumstances God controls. J. I. Packer states:

Providence is normally defined in Christian theology as the unceasing activity of the Creator whereby, in overflowing bounty and goodwill (Psa 145:9 cf. Mt 5:45–48), he upholds his creatures in ordered existence (Acts 17:28; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3), guides and governs all events, circumstances and free acts of angels and men (cf. Psa 107; Job 1:12; 2:6; Gen 45:5–8), and directs everything to its appointed goal, for his own glory (cf. Eph 1:9–12).¹⁵

God is holy and never creates evil, however, He can and does control those who do. Satan, and those who follow him, are ultimately under God's sovereign control, and even their evil plans and actions are used for His good purposes. For example, Joseph was mistreated by his brothers and sold into slavery and taken to Egypt where he suffered greatly. Yet, later in his life, Joseph interpreted their behavior from the divine perspective, telling his brothers, "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). And Joseph repeated himself a second time, saying, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 45:7-8a). And later, he told them a third time, "As for

¹⁴ Charles Clough, *Lesson 21 - Moral Relativism; Justification & Procedures for Holy War*, (2010, 17th minute). <https://www.bibleframeworkapplied.org/multi-lesson-series/deuteronomy>

¹⁵ J. I. Packer, "Providence" in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 979-80.

you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen 50:20). It was God’s providence that drove Saul to chase after his father’s donkeys, and then be led to the prophet Samuel and anointed king of Israel (1 Sam 9-10). It was God’s providence that directed Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, so the baby Jesus would be born at the appointed time and place (Mic 5:2; Luke 2:4-6; Gal 4:4). Later, Joseph and Mary were compelled to go to Egypt, in order to preserve the baby Savior (Matt 2:13-15). It was God’s providence that forced Aquila and Priscilla out of Rome by the emperor Claudius’ decree, only to meet the apostle Paul in Corinth and join him in Christian ministry (Acts 18:1-3; Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19). It was God’s providence that put the Lord Jesus on the cross to be crucified by the hands of godless men. Peter, charging Israelites in Jerusalem concerning Jesus’s death, said, “This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23). And after being persecuted by the leaders in Jerusalem, Peter and John, along with others, said to God, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur” (Acts 4:27-28). In these verses we see people behaving sinfully, whether Joseph’s brothers, or human rulers who abuse their power; yet God used their sinful choices to bring about a greater good. Because God is righteous, all His actions are just (Psa 119:137). Because He is loving (1 John 4:8), He directs all things for the benefit of His people. Because He is good (Psa 34:8; 100:5), He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

Concerning Christian ministry, God providentially opens and closes doors of service. Throughout the New Testament, an “open door” refers to a divinely orchestrated opportunity for sharing the gospel and engaging in Christian ministry (Acts 14:25-27). On one occasion the Lord closed an opportunity for ministry (Acts 16:6-7), but then opened another (Acts 16:9-10). An “open door” for ministry can have opposition (1 Cor 16:7-9), does not remove everyday concerns about life (2 Cor 2:12-13), should be sought with prayer (Col 4:2-3), and once opened cannot be shut by people (Rev 3:8). As God’s people, we do not create occasions for Christian ministry; we simply accept those provided for us by the Lord (Eph 2:10).

In summary, knowing and doing God’s will is largely a matter of knowing His Word and walking in it. Those who are positive to God will desire His Word in order to obey it. From Scripture we know about the Lord Himself, His sovereign control over His creation, what He desires of us, His permission of sin, as well as His directing history providentially to the return and reign of Christ. Where Scripture is silent, we may try to ascertain His will through the circumstances of our life, but such understanding must always be subordinate to the clear revelation of Scripture.