

Acquiring God’s Vision

Do you believe that God has a plan for each of us that we may discover? It is my hope that you might answer this question in the affirmative and find God’s vision for your life.

The first thing we must address is that God has more than one type of will. There seems to be a deficient amount of work on the idea of God’s wills—at least in my experience. So here I will summarize what I have seen in the Scriptures regarding the wills of God.

Understanding the Wills of God

Many theological ideas sound right but aren’t right. I too thought I had been right in the past as well and have changed my mind after coming to better scriptural conclusions. I also confess here that, there are things I believe today that I will not believe at the end of my life. W. Bickerton spoke to this continual learning in spite of incorrect thinking when he said, “We live in the midst of errors.”⁸¹ One of the errors I used to believe is that everything—everything, that happened is God’s will. But I came to find that that doctrine needs much

⁸¹ W. Bickerton, *Moral Reflections on Select Passages of the New Testament*, (London: Lord Bacon’s Head, 1736), 265. Accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Moral_reflections_on_select_passages_of/51gHAAAAQAAJ?l=en&gbpv=1&dq=%22We+live+in+the+midst+of+errors%22&pg=PA265&printsec=frontcover.

refinement and should not stand without caveats and much explanation.

I believe in the sovereignty of God. God is all-powerful! He created the universe by His will and His word. His creative power is beyond our understanding.

I also know that God can change any king's heart (cf., Proverbs 21:1) if He so chooses; God can harden any king's heart (cf., Exodus 9:12) if He chooses. God's sovereignty was seen also when God directed Jonah to preach to Nineveh. God's purpose for Jonah happened, despite Jonah's objection and actions. Although Jonah could have embraced God's purpose more obediently, God's purposes for him were ultimately done because God trumped Jonah's will and forced His will on the prophet.

With these truths stated and affirmed true, I also know that God *allows* a particular type of His will to be violated. We read in the Bible that Paul commanded the Corinth church to, "stop sinning" yet they continued to sin to a degree (1 Corinthians 15:34). *A type of God's will is violated with every sin.*

Therefore, we need to understand that God has at least four kinds of wills.

He has a ***perfect will*** (which all of humankind's collective efforts cannot change). This perfect will is what has and will happen—no matter what! Jesus came to the earth and was the Son of Mary at just the right time. This was God's perfect will.

God also has a ***permissive will*** which is where our Christian freedoms are allowed. We make choices every day in the freedom God allows us to exercise. How to express love to one another is an example. Choosing a car to buy is another. His *permissive will* also allows us to have freedom in life as we make big decisions for our families and small ones like deciding what to eat for lunch.

God has a ***permitting will***. He has permitted sin to happen without being its source and without condoning it. This is where our wills and God's have interaction.

This has been the case since The Fall in the Garden (Gen. 3). Adam ate the fruit of the forbidden tree in God's permitting will. We was commanded not to eat. Adam could break the command of God because God, in His perfect will, made that possibility possible in His permitting will.

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We have hundreds of examples throughout the Scriptures of a type of God's will being violated. They are literally on almost every page of the Bible. Cain killing his brother was not God's perfect will, but the circumstances that made the murder possible were inside God's permitting will. God told Cain he needed to master sin before the murder (cf., Genesis 4:7), but Cain chose differently. Cain was permitted to chose poorly. We see a clear example of God's permitting will being violated when Jesus lamented about the nation of Israel in Matthew 23:37,

*“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, **but you were not willing!**”*
(NKJV; *emphasis mine*).

Inside of God's sovereignty, Israel's will was done in life and in direct contradiction to one type of God's wills. Here we see Jesus' will—God's will—was not done. God wanted Israel to rely on Him and come under His protection. That did not happen. God allowed Israel to have its will instead, so Israel killed prophets instead of listening to them. We must make sure we understand this will.

Furthermore, theologically speaking, every sin a Christian commits is a violation of God's will, for the Bible teaches the Church, “Come back to your senses as you ought, and *stop sinning*” (1 Corinthians 15:34a, NIV; *emphasis mine*). God's perfect will for the Church is to “stop sinning,” and we violate this type of God's holy desire for us every day.

God also has **purposive will** for us. This will is His *highest purpose and design* for us. Included in this will of God are, 1) God desires all men to come to the knowledge of Him. 2) God desires all people of faith to choose the highest truths as they love God and people in the exact ways as Jesus did. God's minimum commanded purpose is that we love our neighbors as ourselves. But His highest purposive will is that we become the slave of all humankind which is a choice. To become like Christ to our fullest potential is God's will for us—His purposive will .

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Many theological errors that I have repeatedly seen in my studies is due to individuals thinking that God only has one type of will.

Summarizing: The Four Wills of God

God's Perfect Will:

God's will that will happen exactly as He intended.

- All of humankind's efforts could not change it.
- These are things and events that will happen precisely how God intends.
- Examples include creating the universe, Jesus' death and resurrection, the last day of the earth as we know it, etc.

Permissive Will:

God grants permission to Christians to make choices about their lives.

- Here we are free to do what we want outside of sinful choices (e.g., how we decide to express love to others; how much to give as an offering).
- In this will, we are free to choose things.
- In this will there is freedom in neutral things of life as well (e.g., a lunch choice, kind of car to buy, etc.).

Permitting Will:

God permits and allows sinful possibilities to humankind—including Christians. God does not condone sinfulness when it is chosen by humans.

- God's permitting will permits humans to do evil without condoning it.
- Examples include: Christians choosing to sin and unbelievers not committing to faith in Christ.

Purposive Will:

In this will, God has a conscious purpose, design, and intent for humankind.

His will for Christians is that they *should and could* respond like Jesus in every

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moment of life. In this will of God, Christians possess the invitation and have the ability (through the Spirit's power) to become committed followers and examples of Christ in their lives to obtain their highest purpose of God's design.

- Being the slave of all humankind is in this will of God.
- Being the servant of all humankind is in this will of God.

Fallacy: God is Now Silent

I spoke much about God's will to say that you and I have choices in life. These choices include God's highest purposes for us as individuals.

I believe it is a fallacy to say God is now silent toward us as individuals because we have the Bible. (Many well meaning Christians believe God stopped speaking after the Bible was completed.) Here, I agree with Becker when he said, "Have you been taught that you can no longer hear from the Spirit of God, that it is wrong even to try to listen to him? If so, that represents a significant hindrance to receiving God's vision [for your life]."⁸² It is inconceivable to me how people can believe that an Almighty God lives inside of their very being and never utters a personal word to them or gives them any particular direction. Many hold this idea to be true as they call God, The "Wonderful Counselor."

We will find hundreds of examples on almost every page of the Bible filled with people who God directed. Name a person in the Bible that went through life with God without ever hearing some important direction for their life from Him. God has always directed everyone who was listening. Examples in the Bible include God using dreams, visions, direct communication, the prophets, the stars, angels, a donkey, elders, teachers, and numerous other means to lead and teach His people. *God is always speaking.*

Many people seem to confuse periods of lessened communication from God and claim there is a lifetime of silence from God to His people—collectively.

⁸² Paul Becker, *Seeing Your Vision Come True* (Oceanside, CA: DCPI), 18.

True, there were long periods that God did not direct Abraham (Abraham was doing his daily thing), but there were always times where He did. The same is true for every figure in the Bible. Paul was directed by God many times as written in the book of Acts.

I agree with Tozer, “The Whole Bible supports this idea. God is speaking. Not God spoke, but *God is speaking*. He is, by His nature, continuously articulate. He fills the world with His speaking voice.”⁸³ Furthermore Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Vision

Since God is speaking, the question is, “Are we listening?” Have you ever asked this question of God: “What is your vision for my life God? A vision is a God-given “clear and challenging picture of the future of a ministry as you believe that it can and must be.”⁸⁴ “Most great moves of God begin with hungry people in humble rooms who believe they are stewards of this moment of history.”⁸⁵

Most people I have met, when they are brutally honest, will admit that, “I am afraid to ask God such a question because I fear what His answer might be.” We should approach this question not with trepidation but with confidence knowing that God equips us for anything He would have us to do.

Action

Are you willing to follow Jesus at all costs? Most Christians are not. We will live our lives, placing limitations on the highest calls on our lives. To make this clear here, Jesus said we should be cautious and make sure we are willing

⁸³ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), 73.

⁸⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing a Vision for Ministry in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 32. As quoted in Paul Becker, *Seeing Your Vision Come True* (Oceanside, CA: DCPI), 17.

⁸⁵ Peter Tanchi, GACX Compelled Conference Session (Denton, Texas), Sept. 26, 2019.

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before starting down a road of *complete commitment*. The more we commit to follow Christ—no matter what—the more it will cost. This is the road of the brave. If one does want to become a fully committed disciple of Jesus, he/she should consider the following passage carefully:

“Now large crowds were accompanying Jesus, and turning to them he said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t sit down first and compute the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish the tower, all who see it will begin to make fun of him. They will say, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish!’ Or what king, going out to confront another king in battle, will not sit down first and determine whether he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? If he cannot succeed, he will send a representative while the other is still a long way off and ask for terms of peace. In the same way therefore not one of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his own possessions” (Luke 14:25-33).

Jesus used many illustrations to teach about becoming a disciple. He used illustrations of building a tower and running out of money and going to war and running out of the “stomach” for it. His point is that if we choose God’s highest purpose for our lives that it will cost—a lot! Count the costs carefully.

Finding our place

Words in this section that are in bold are from Bekele Shanko.⁸⁶

If we desire to see God’s vision for our lives, we should prayerfully consider things like the following:

⁸⁶ Bekele Shanko, GACX Compelled Conference Session (Denton, Texas), Sept. 25, 2019.

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Career Conflict. There may be a time in your life where you realize that your career conflicts with a spiritual direction God wants to take your life.

Self Awareness. Part of “self awareness” is knowing what your spiritual gift is (or gifts are). God has equipped you to walk in the life He has for you (Ephesians 2:10). You fit there. The Lord may have very specific plans for you.

While I cannot say that you will hear from God, what I know is that many people do find ministries that God has called them to, and that specific call keeps them going when the war looks lost.

We have freedom in love. The commands on our lives are summed up with Love God and People. While this is entirely true, we also see people being placed by God in specific ministries and places that rise above the minimum. We need to ask God, **“What is my purpose?”** While you may not hear an answer from God at this point in your life, if you ask this question of God, He may answer you in a specific way immediately. Ask God, “How should I serve your purpose in my generation?” “God, give me insight into my purpose.”

There are times in our lives where we need to get away and alone with God where we may have **personal reflections**. Our reflective questions might include:

1. What are my **core values**?
2. What is my **area of influence**?
3. What are the areas of human need around me?
4. God, what is the next step of action I need to take?

“If God is speaking to your heart, don’t let your mind get in the way of what God wants you to do.”

—Mark Batterson

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We Must See Fruit

No matter what your hands find to do in life, you should look behind you and ask the question, "Is what I am doing producing fruit?" Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, said it best, "Emotion is no substitute for action. Action is no substitute for production."⁸⁷ If you are not producing fruit, make decisive changes to your life. Now.

Scripture Passages

Luke 14:25-33

John 17:6-18

Matthew 9:35-38

John 4:27-38

Questions

- 1) Do you desire to find God's specific purpose for your life?
- 2) What would hold you back from asking God for a specific purpose?

⁸⁷ Justin Taylor, "60 Years Ago Today Dawson Trotman, the Founder of Navigators, Drowned While Saving a Girl's Life: An Interview", June 18, 2016, accessed Jan. 31, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/60-years-ago-today-the-founder-of-navigators-drowned-while-saving-a-girls-life-an-interview/>.

Aim Point

1) Jesus went to places of seclusion to pray during His ministry. I believe the American church does this too infrequently. We live in a media filled society and we rarely get alone with God to hear from Him. Planned prayer retreats can help refocus ourselves and can be used of God to give us a vision for our lives. I will not say that God will give you a vision for your life. What I will say is that, if you are willing to follow at all costs, you should ask Him for a vision for your life.

Paul Becker of Dynamic Church Planting International (dpci.org) wrote a small book entitled, *Seeing Your Vision Come True*. In it, Paul wrote about how to have a prayer retreat to facilitate finding your vision from God. Below is an outline from Becker's book: "Twelve Steps to an Effective Prayer Retreat."

1. Go to the retreat site and rest.
2. Pray for the retreat.
3. Plan your retreat.
4. [Confess and] Repent of your sins.
5. Thankfully review how God has been working.
6. Submit to God's plans for you.
7. Devour the Word of God and take notes.
8. Write down your specific issues and questions.
9. Meet with God in a quiet place. Listen and take notes.
10. Prayerfully respond in writing to your specific issues and questions.
11. Receive counsel from wise, godly people.
12. Plan to communicate your thoughts and delegate your tasks.