

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, February 24, 1991, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

## PSALM 119:105

“Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

### GOD’S WILL FOR MY LIFE (2) WHERE TO GET GUIDANCE

It’s amazing to see the ways in which people try to discover the future: tea leaves, fortune cookies, palm reading, horoscopes, Ouija boards, and so on. If you try to get guidance from the wrong source, then you’re going to base your life on incorrect data, and you’ll get wrong results in your life. So, this morning let’s look at the subject: “Where can I get guidance?”

And to start off, I want to identify five unreliable sources of guidance:

**1. Don’t rely on CULTURE.** A lot of people base their lives on the fact that if everybody is doing something, then it must be OK. “Go with the flow.” You don’t rock the boat. When you’re in Rome, you do as Rome does. Let culture determine your value system. Every year U.S. News and World Report puts out an article on what’s “in” and what’s “out,” so that you can discover whether you’re in style or not!

Christians today often accept many standards that God says are questionable. In Romans 12:2 (Phillips) the Apostle Paul says, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.” And Exodus 23:2 says, “Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.” The majority is often wrong, so you must never allow culture to be your guide for life.

**2. Don’t rely on CIRCUMSTANCE.** I am amazed at the number of Christians who allow circumstances to determine and dictate God’s will for their life, “The offering plate missed my row, so it must be God’s will that I not give today!” And we take what happens, and we say, “Well, it must have been God’s will,” And yet Scripture repeatedly points out that circumstances are often completely contrary to God’s will.

In the Book of Jonah, we have a classic example of this, where Jonah was doing the exact opposite of what God wanted him to do. In Jonah 1:1-3 it says, “The Word of the Lord came to Jonah... ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me.’” But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish.” Now Nineveh was east of Palestine in modern Iraq, near Baghdad. Do you know where Tarshish was? It was about as far west as you could go in those days; it was a seaport on the southwest coast of Spain, near Gibraltar. And he went down to Joppa, a suburb of Tel Aviv, where he found a ship bound for Tarshish, “Well, what do you know! It must be God’s will!” So “after paying the fare he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord” (verse 3).

Now here's a typical example of how circumstances can often be contrary to God's will. Jonah is running away from God and guess what? - there's a ship going to Tarshish! Now in those days ships didn't just leave every day or so. Often a ship from that far away would come in only every three or four months. It wasn't like today when, if you miss a plane, you can get another one within an hour or two. So this ship was actually waiting for him, and he had money for a ticket, and they had room for him on board, so up the gangplank he went! "It must be God's will!" Circumstances can often lie.

Many years later there was another Mediterranean cruise. Paul was being transported to Rome. In Acts 27 he warns the captain, "If you leave now, there's going to be a fatal storm." But the captain said, "Nonsense, everything looks fine." Verse 13 says, "When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted." That's the way many people act today. "Well, it looks OK." And they sailed right into the middle of a storm that broke up the ship. When you rely on circumstances you will often sail right smack into a storm.

In 2 Samuel 11 David is king. Everything is going great for him. He's a real "fat cat." He's out on the roof of his palace one evening, and he looks down, and on the rooftop of somebody else's house is this beautiful lady bathing. And David says, "How convenient! I'm the king. It's a spring evening. Here's a gorgeous woman. Her husband is off fighting in a war. It must be God's will!" The fact is, folks, Satan can manipulate circumstances.

**3. Don't rely on COUNSEL.** If you're going to get counsel, at least get the right kind. There's a lot of bad advice floating around these days - books, magazines, TV, counselors of all types. Have you noticed how almost anyone can become a columnist these days — Dr. Ruth, that dirty old woman, and a bunch of other pinheads? And people lap it up. I saw a headline on a scandal sheet in the supermarket the other day that said, "Why everyone needs an affair"! Isn't that profound advice?!

Folks, it bothers me that we have a lot of Christians paying non-Christian psychiatrists to tell them how to live their lives; these "shrinks" who don't have spiritual insights, and are often atheists themselves, are trying to set Christians straight. But it doesn't work. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, "Bad company corrupts good character."

**4. Don't rely on COUNTERFEITS** - cults, horoscopes, bad therapy, palm reading, scientology and the like. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that Satan masquerades as an angel of light; and 1 John 4:1 says, don't just accept everything you hear, but "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Gideon laid out a fleece, but today many Christians are getting fleeced.

**5. Don't rely on your CONSCIENCE,** because that is often a very unreliable source of guidance. Have you ever heard this statement: "Let your conscience be your guide"? But, believe me, your conscience can tell you to do a lot of stuff that's not in God's will! Most people base their decisions on how they feel. "I just had a peace about it!" "How could it be wrong when it feels so right?"; or the opposite, "I just couldn't get any peace about it — therefore I didn't do

it.”

Go back to Jonah. It says that “he had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep” (1:5). Jonah was 100% out of the will of the Lord, but he had “peace of mind”! Did you know that Satan can create a false peace in your life?

Look at Proverbs 3:5,6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, then try to figure out what you’re supposed to do!” No, that’s not what it says. It says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

Now what does he mean when he says, “Don’t lean on your own understanding? Are you just to put your mind in neutral and chant a yoga? No. Do you just forget common sense? No, what he is saying is that you need more than just your own conscience as an objective standard for life.

Well, then, if culture and circumstances and counsel and counterfeits and conscience are unreliable, what can I rely on? Well, it’s obvious; you can rely on this Book -- God’s Word. Remember the verse with which we finished the message last week: Psalm 119:105, “Your Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” It gives you guidance. It shines light where there is darkness. God’s Word gives us guidance.

Now let me give you three statements about God’s Word:

a. God’s will is found in God’s Word. Folks, most of God’s will for your life is already recorded. It’s in the Bible! And as we read God’s Word, He speaks to us. That’s not mystical. Did you ever realize that when you open your Bible, God opens His mouth; and when you close your Bible, God closes His mouth!

I like the motto of the Detroit Bible College - “Discovering God’s will by studying God’s Word.” People say, “I want to know God’s will,” and my question is, “Have you been checking the Bible out about it?” “Well, no, not really.”

How does the Bible direct us? It directs us in four ways:

- (1) it gives us directions through principles;
- (2) it gives us directions through promises;
- (3) it gives us directions through examples (of people in the Bible); and
- (4) it gives us directions through commands.

Through one or more of those things you’re going to get invaluable insights concerning God’s will for your life. But you’ve got to spend time in the Scriptures. God’s will is found in

God's Word.

b. God's will never contradicts God's Word. That's how a lot of cults get started. "I got this impression, this feeling; I received this revelation. Oh, it doesn't seem to agree with the Bible, but this conviction has got hold of me." Well, turn to the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22:18,19. God gives a warning; He says, "I warn everyone.... If anyone adds anything to this book, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes away from this book, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life..." In a word, God says, "Don't tamper with the Bible!" God's will never contradict God's Word.

c. God expects me to obey His Word before He shows me His specific will for me. The key to understanding God's purpose and plan for your life is to begin doing what you already know to be God's will; and as you begin to do the revealed will of God, you will then begin to understand the concealed will of God. As you begin to act on the things that are very clear and plain, then you'll begin to understand the things that are not so clear.

Mark Twain used to say, "It's not the things in the Bible I don't understand that bother me; it's the things I do understand that bother me because they are so very clear and challenging." So God says, "You start by obeying what you already know to be God's will, and then we can get into the fine print!"

There are many things in the Bible — principles, promises, commands — that you don't even have to pray about. You can say, "These are God's will for me." Seven times in the New Testament we encounter the phrase, "This is God's will." Let's look at them briefly.

**1. It is God's will that I have eternal life.** This is the starting point. Our Lord says in John 6:40, "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life." How do you have eternal life? Through being good? No. Through going to church? No. Through being baptized or joining the church? No. Through what, then? Through looking to Christ and believing in Him. That's where you must begin. If you haven't settled that, go ahead and do it now. Put your trust in Christ alone for your salvation. God accepts the death of Christ upon the Cross as the means, and the only means, whereby you can have your sins all forgiven, because Jesus died in your place, and paid the penalty for sin that you and I should have paid.

**2. It is God's will that I be filled with His Spirit.** Look at Ephesians 5:17,18: "...understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine... Instead be filled with the Spirit." Now, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? When you become a Christian, whether you realize it or not, God puts His Spirit in your life, But He wants to control your life. And the Bible talks about that, and calls it being "filled with the Spirit." People say, "That sounds kind of scary, kind of spooky — be filled with the Spirit."

Well, let me ask you, "Is getting drunk scary?" You say, "What do you mean?" Well, look -- Paul compares being filled with the Spirit to being drunk. He says, "Don't get drunk; instead be filled with the Spirit." What does it mean to be drunk? To be drunk means that you are under the influence and control of alcohol. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? It

means that you are under the influence and control of God. That's all it means. It's very simple. God is the Managing Director of your life.

People who are drunk have a lot of courage (so I'm told!). They can take on the world. When you're filled with the Spirit, you get a lot of courage. You're not ashamed to let it be known that you're a Christian People who are drunk love to sing. They think they're as good as Pavarotti! The Bible says that when you're filled with the Spirit, you like to sing and rejoice and praise the Lord!

God, says, "Don't get drunk. Don't let anything else control and dominate your life, whether it's liquor or drugs or sex or overeating, or whatever; but be controlled by God." That's what it means to be filled with the Spirit, and that is God's will for you.

**3. It is God's will that I live a pure, disciplined lifestyle.** 1 Thessalonians 4:3,4 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable." Now if everybody obeyed that, we wouldn't have an AIDS epidemic. God says, "Live a pure, disciplined lifestyle." Is He saying, "Avoid sex"? No. After all, it was God Who thought it up! Sex within marriage is holy. You say, "I would never be unfaithful to my spouse." Good. But would you read about it in a book, with all the lurid details? Would you go to a movie or watch a "soap" that condones and glorifies a lifestyle that God says is not in His will? God calls us to live a pure and disciplined life. He says, "Control your body in a way that is holy." I think that talks about all of our appetites. It's God's will that I have self-control, that I don't just give in to anything I would like to do. Let me tell you, overeating is one such temptation for me!

**4. It is God's will that I maintain an attitude of gratitude.** Let's read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Do you want to know God's will? Simple, pray about everything; be joyful all the time; in everything give thanks. You say, "Pastor, you've got to be kidding -- give thanks for the problem I'm confronting right now?" But it doesn't say that! It doesn't say, "Give thanks for everything," does it? It says, "In everything give thanks" -- and there's a big difference, folks. Give thanks for everything? Why would God want me to be thankful for cancer, or leukemia, or MS, or a terrible accident? It doesn't say, "For everything give thanks." It says, "In everything give thanks." Why? Why should I be thankful in everything? Romans 8:28 tells us why: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him..." God takes even our mistakes, even the problems we bring on ourselves, and He makes them work for our good. Somehow, He takes bad things, like tragedies and mistakes, and He brings good out of them when we give Him all the pieces, when we have the right attitude, Romans 8:29 goes on to say that God uses all these things to make us like His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He uses them to build character into our lives, And, if God is going to make you like Jesus, He will take you through many circumstances that Jesus went through. There were times when Jesus was lonely. There were times when Jesus was tempted to be depressed, or angry, or fearful, or worried. So God will use even our mistakes and problems for good, if we allow Him to do so. So "in everything give thanks." Why? (1) because the problem is an opportunity for me to grow, and (2) the problem is an opportunity for God to show His power. If I never had a problem, I would

never know that God could solve it! So what is God's will? — "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you."

**5. It is God's will that I be a law-abiding citizen.** Look at 1 Peter 2:13— 16; "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men... For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men." What's he talking about? -- the civil government, traffic laws, being a good and loyal citizen of your country. Keep the law, Be an example. Be a testimony. Silence the critics. How many of you have ever been on the Beltway at a rush hour, and some roadhog came zooming along at 70 miles an hour, and he cuts in front of you and nearly clips your front fender; and on his rear bumper is a sticker that says, "Honk if you love Jesus"!! What a lousy testimony. You're in God's will when you abide by the law of the land. What if you don't agree with a certain law? Then work to have it changed. But you abide by it until it is changed. And you play fair with the government on April 15!

**6. It is God's will that I bring others to Christ** - that I share my faith; that I tell others what He has done for me. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance."

What is Peter saying here? He's saying that God doesn't want anyone to die without Christ. God is not willing that anyone should go to hell — that is not His will. He wants them all to know Him. He wants the message of salvation shared. He said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel" (Mark 16:15). So what is God's will? God's will is that I should share my faith with other people. For many people, you're the only Christian they're ever going to know -- maybe some relative, family member, friend, business associate, the person you work beside.

Constantly I have to keep asking myself, "Are people coming to Christ because of me?" If so, I'm obviously in the will of God. If not, I'd better take a long, hard look at myself. It's God's will that the people around me come to know Him. How are they going to come to know Him? -- by sending an angel down? No. If I don't tell them, if you don't tell them, who will?

**7. It is God's will that I commit myself to God and to other believers.** We are to be committed not just to God, but also to a group of other Christians to a church. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:5, "They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

You see, folks, you need two things as you grow in your Christian life:

- a. You need God's Word, which gives you the guidelines; and
- b. You need God's people as your support system. You need to be committed to some other Christians. There's no such thing as "Lone Ranger" Christianity. "Me and Jesus, we've got a good thing goin'. We don't need anybody to tell us what it's all about!" No. God says you need fellow believers to encourage you, and pray for you, and help you when you're down, and point out to you any area where you may have a blind spot and not be aware of a deficiency in your Christian life. We need to be accountable to one another and build one another up in love. To

that end, I would encourage you to get into one of our study groups. Why? Because it's God's will that you be committed to Him and to other Christians.

So, look to the one reliable source:

God's will is found in God's Word.

God's will never contradicts God's Word.

And God says, "Start with what you already know."

And then as you begin to follow what you already know, you will find that what is concealed will become revealed!

**AMEN.**