

## MOODY DISTANCE LEARNING

### Errors to Avoid in Determining God's Will, Part 1

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*Greg Wheatley:* Welcome to Radio School of the Bible. This program is a ministry of the Center for External Studies, part of the Moody Bible Institute located in Chicago. My name is Greg Wheatley, and this quarter we are studying God's will for your life with our instructor Dr. Bill Thrasher, Professor of Bible and Theology in Moody Bible Institute's Graduate School.

Well, we've been talking about prayer in the life of the believer and how that relates to God's will. And that's where we pick up today, right Dr. Thrasher?

*Dr. Bill Thrasher:* Yes. We wanna just reiterate on a point we were making last broadcast. Perhaps you weren't with us. If you weren't I'll try to say this. This is a principle that's been a tremendous help to me in regard to prayer and that is this, not original with me. But a pastor on the west coast was leading a number of people to Christ from a variety of different backgrounds. As they came to Christ, they, like you, still had temptation.

They sometimes were tempted to go back in some of those wrong choices. And here's what he told em. Now you can apply what he told them to any persistent temptation in your life and all of us have persistent temptations. Here's what he said. He said, "I want you to think ahead of time of a prayer that you'll pray every time you're tempted. And if it's truly Satan throwing a fiery dart at you, he will lessen the intensity of it when you're responding by every time he throws that fiery dart, by praying a prayer that would damage his kingdom if God were to answer that prayer.

You know, there are times I've been in sort of agreement with another believer Greg of just saying that every time I'm tempted I'll pray for you. Every time you're tempted you'll pray for me. There's something incredibly therapeutic, that's not the only way to deal with temptation but there's something incredibly therapeutic about getting the attention off yourself. Sometimes you can fight temptation in your own strength and get more wrapped up in the temptation. So I found that to be a tremendous help. There's no better way in a sense for a father to be reminded to pray for his family than when he's tempted or to get his children to pray for him when they're tempted.

That's an agreement we've tried to work out in our little family and but that's simple and it's not complicated. It took me a little while to work that out in my own life but I don't know what I would do with that. It's like taking those moments of weakness and turning those into special opportunities. I know that I think God allows us to be tempted because it allows us to feel with people, to have compassion for people and for me to pray for people I wouldn't pray for.

You know we can pray from a spirit of pride as I've almost prayed down at people. As if we've got together and Lord whip these people into motion. But that's not prayer. You know that's the way we would operate it. But God says no, prayer, in the words of John Calvin is a discipline of our weakness. Where we pray not out of response of our strength but our response of our weakness.

Well, talking to God and communicating with Him is very important in regard to knowing and discerning God's will. You know God's will, for a person who wants to know it; they need to realize that God is eager to guide them. God is eager to guide them and I'm gonna share a few points, Lord willing today and next broadcast of what I call errors to avoid, errors to avoid. And I wanna say I am indebted to a couple of lectures that I heard a Dr. J.I. Packer give a number of years ago. He happened to give em here at Moody Bible Institute.

We have a theological lectureship each year. This happened to be a year I was in charge of that and Dr. J.I. Packer was a speaker and he gave some of the best lectures I've ever heard in regard to God's will. And so some of these points grow out, certainly the – he gave the seed thoughts in some of these in regards to what I'll be doing these next couple of broadcasts in regard to errors to avoid and then also some instructions to heed. And these are some errors to avoid in regard to seeking God's will. One is an unwillingness to think ahead was how he'd put it. An unwillingness to think ahead.

I read a principle we get out of Deuteronomy 32: 28 and 29, God talking to the nation of Israel. It says, "For they are a nation lacking in a council and there's no understanding in them. Would that they were wise that they understood this that they would discern their future." You see an unwillingness to think ahead, it's wise when we're making decisions to think of the long-term consequences of those decisions. Something on the spot may sound great.

You know we don't think of the long-term consequences. Now I'm not saying think of the long-term consequences in a way that one is paralyzed from ever making a decision. But certainly that'd be another wrong extreme but certainly to give deep consideration. In other words let's just give an example. You know if a person was considering marriage, you know it may be that somebody that they're fun, maybe they're attractive but and there's nothing wrong with that but sometimes we may need to look deeper.

You know what's things gonna be like 10 years from now, 15 years from now? Does this person have a sense of responsibility? This person's gonna look different 10 years from now, 15 years from now, 20 years from now. And so an unwillingness to think ahead is certainly an error to avoid in regard to seeking God's will. Also an unwillingness to take advice, an unwilling to take advice.

You know sometimes when we can passionately want something so bad, it's – there can be a subtle unwillingness to take advice that almost results in literally an inability to hear other people. You know when I'm not willing to hear; you really lose your ability to hear somebody. You can want something so bad and there's nothing wrong with coming to God and saying, "Lord I want this. This is my preference." But it's always helpful, these are the words of George Mueller, he said, "You know seek to put your heart in neutral when you're seeking God's will." Think of benefits if it didn't happen this way. And so and that's hard.

*Greg Wheatley:* That is hard and it brings up an interesting question because I have almost, I've heard that advice before that in coming to God with say a decision, you have an A, B decision that one ought to be able to say Lord I just don't carry the way. That's very hard. It almost sounds like we're not human anymore because we're gonna have preferences. Maybe flush that out a little bit for us.

*Dr. Bill Thrasher:* Yes, yes, yeah. And I don't think he meant in a sense of not having a preference cause I think that could almost boil down to almost encouraging a person to be spiritually deceitful. You have a desire and sometimes quite frankly when a person is totally yield to the Lord, desire can be an indication that that may be God's will. Now we also know, hopefully we all have a long enough track record to know that some of our desires have been deceitful but I think it's just saying envisioning the good that could come out of it if it didn't.

And the one thing that's helped me is just to come to the Lord saying, "Lord, this is a strong preference. I desire this. But Lord, you're omniscient and I'm not. Lord, my desire is based upon the knowledge that I have." I said, "Lord, if I had all the knowledge that you have, I might think entirely differently about it. But from what I know, this is great, I can't think of anything better." But that's helped me trust the Lord.

*Greg Wheatley:* That's good. That's helpful.

*Dr. Bill Thrasher:* So an unwillingness to take advice, you know I remember there was a time I was looking to the Lord to do, what to do in regard to pursuing some doctorate work. And I was still single at the time and I thought people were encouraging me to continue in school and I did and I wrote off a number of people that were very experts in regard to the field and they gave me some helpful advices.

But you know I was writing letters and getting letters back and but the Lord prompted me. "You know the person that knows you the best is your mother." My father was no longer living at that time. So I wrote her a letter and said you know just tell me what you sorta visualize for me in regard to that. And you know the letter I got from her; it was more helpful than all the others. So you know I'd say when unwilling to take advice, especially the advice of the people that know you the best, your parents, your pastor, that's very important.

Now sometimes even if you fear them telling you what you don't wanna hear. I remember my own parents, when I wanted to go right into the ministry right after college and I went to a secular college state university. I didn't wanna get training. In my mind seemed like the more people knew about the Bible the less excited they were about it so whatever they had I didn't want. And so but you know my parents, they said, "Yeah, I think you should."

And that wasn't at all my desire at first but older, wiser men confirm that yeah, I'm so grateful for that now. So sometimes what they may tell you may not be something you initially wanna hear. And even sometimes if you, since hey, they don't have the frame of reference that I have or whatever. It's important to explain your convictions to them without a spirit of condemnation because they do from their perspective; they do want your best. And to try to find underneath sometime what in a sense their advice is but an unwillingness to take advice certainly is gonna hinder one in pursuing God's will.

You know another error to avoid is an unwillingness to suspect one's self. Now here's what I mean by that is that every, not every strong urge is a prompting from God. Scripture would say, "Search me oh God, know my heart. See if there be any hurtful way in me. Lead me in the everlasting way."

Scripture even tells me that I can be tempted to crave the wrong things. Not just to desire em but to crave 'em. I Corinthians 10 says that that's one of the ways that God's people in the past were tempted. And so I can be tempted that way. All of God's people will be tempted quite frankly to crave the wrong things. So an unwilling to suspect one's self.

So a strong urge, test it over time. Talk to people about it. It may indeed in a sense be of the Lord but it may not be. So an unwillingness to suspect one's self can get one into trouble. Another is an unwillingness to discount personalities. In other words if a person said, "Well you know so and so told me this so I know it's God's will." Well it may be, that certainly may be need to be deeply considered but just because someone said that doesn't automatically make it God's will.

Know there's a passage of scripture in the last chapter of I Corinthians and I've always admired this. Or Paul says, "But concerning Apollos, our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren but it was not at all his desire to come now. But he will come when he has opportunity." I've always admired that man.

*Greg Wheatley:* Interesting, isn't it?

*Dr. Bill Thrasher:* But yeah, if Apostle Paul came up to me and encouraged me greatly –

*Greg Wheatley:* You'd probably go.

*Dr. Bill Thrasher:* Yeah, I mean you'd say, well he's the Apostle Paul. But an unwillingness to discount personalities. And so in other words just because a person says something – now I think probably in our weakness, sometimes hey, we'd like if we could just what, go to somebody and they could always just tell us what God's will is. But you know that would greatly hinder our relationship with God. Certainly even as our children grow older, we want em to listen to our advice but we would want em to also have an independent relationship with the Lord that it's when we're not there, we're not available they're able to discern His will. And so I think that's true with God as well.

*Greg Wheatley:* Very helpful advice and insight again today on Radio School of the Bible. Thanks Dr. Thrasher. Well, more on God's will for your life when we get together next time in Radio School of the Bible.

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