

Abiding In God

Introduction:

What is the result when man resists God’s plan and follows a plan of his own? We want to study some basic insights on knowing God’s will for our lives. No one lesson will hold the key to knowing God’s will, but instead, our goal is to glean pieces to this complex puzzle. I encourage you to study each lesson with prayer and meditation and as we put the puzzle together you will gain a greater understanding of God’s plan for your life.

You will find a page of *Acknowledgments* at the back of this quarterly; the listed books were very helpful in the preparation of these studies. The direct quotes are on a numeric notation referral, the first number you see inside the parentheses’ is which book is being referred to, and then the page number is, of course, the direct page number that quote is taken from.

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Lesson 1: Resisting God's Plan

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55:1-13

Memory Verse: *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* John 10:10

Introduction:

God is good and He wills only the best for us. Though He is great and awesome, He cares about us as persons with the same delicate precision He used in designing the complexities of space. He has formulated a plan for each of our lives and His plan dovetails precisely with the calling and contribution He has in mind for each of us.

We enjoy being in charge of our lives, we like to chart our own courses. This seems to be part of our very deepest nature. Many times man's alternative plans lead to an unprofitable life filled with sorrow, pain, and failure. Usually, God does not force His plan upon us but He gives us the choice to accept or resist it.

We often resist God's plan for one of our own. Biblical examples would be the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness and the people demanding a king. The book of Jeremiah shows us over and over again God's people resisting His plans for them.

Here in Isaiah, we are encouraged to seek the Lord and find pardon. Not only will God's salvation supply what is necessary for our life but it also provides what brings joy. God's gracious thoughts exceed all human imagination.

Study Questions:

1. What can happen when man relies upon his own ways? Proverbs 14:12; Romans 6:20-21.
2. Identify in these verses the results of following our own plans. Acts 7:51-53; Proverbs 21:2; Matthew 7:26-27.
3. How do our ways and thoughts compare to God's? Isaiah 55:6-9.
4. What results when God's people resist His plans for them? Jeremiah 2:11-13; Jeremiah 17:5-6, 23; 3 John 1:9-11.
5. Can you share the results from a time, or period of time, in your life when you worked your plan and not God's?
6. Would God ever resist us? James 4:1-6.
7. How does the world offer alternatives to God's plan for our lives? Galatians 1:11-14.
Note: Humanism, Eastern Religions, etc.
8. Does God have a plan for every man, woman, and child? John 10:7-14.
9. Does God recognize the difference between honest doubts and resistance? John 20:24-29.
10. Who must make the choice to accept or resist? Joshua 24:14-15.

Lesson 2: In God We Trust

Scripture Reading: Psalm 37:1-8

Memory Verse: *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* James 1:17

Introduction:

If we can't trust ourselves or our own plans, who can we trust? Is God able to be trusted in planning your life? Webster says, “Trust is an assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or on something future or contingent” (2). I am sure we all have had good and bad experiences when we've been placed in a position to trust someone else. The outcome reflected our opinion of the person's character.

Our coins say, “In God We Trust,” but one wonders how many have the same expression coined upon their hearts. It appears we trust God in very tight spots but what about for **every** plan for our lives? However, putting our total trust in God is quite a challenge.

“Into the communion of participation of Christ, in the graces of His spirit and the glories of His future kingdom. God will continue to uphold and save you if you entrust your bodies and souls to Him. But can it be said that God will keep what is either not entrusted to Him or, after being entrusted, is taken away?” (3:p. 1088).

The idea of God making plans for our entire lives seems to be going a bit too far. What if He lets us down or plans something hard or difficult? We find many examples in the Bible where man put his total trust in God and was blessed for doing so. This is only possible when we see (often with our hearts) that God can be trusted unconditionally.

Also, do we maintain patience in the midst of troubles? We as God's people can have such patience because we can be assured that our eternal reward will abundantly surpass any of the temporary troubles we may encounter. When the wicked seem to prosper we are still called to patience. By doing this we will gain a new sense of pleasure in knowing God. We are to trust, and depend on Him!

Study Questions:

1. How does God feel about entrusting something to someone? Leviticus 6:2-7.
2. What did God promise Noah and what was the result? Genesis 6:13-7:1, 6; Genesis 8:1-5.
3. Have you ever trusted others only to have them disappoint you? Matthew 26:36-40, 43-49, 69-75.
4. What are we expected to do according to these scriptures? Psalm 37:1-5; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.
5. What is the basis for such a trust? Numbers 23:19; James 1:16-18; Romans 8:31-39.
6. Why is God qualified to plan our lives? Genesis 1:26-28; Romans 9:14-24.
7. Can you relate an experience where you put your total trust in God? What was the outcome?
Note: Jesus did not go reluctantly, but with determination to do the Father's will.
8. Why is it better to trust in God instead of man, or self? Psalm 118:8-9; Psalm 146:1-10.
9. What is the ultimate result from trusting God? Jeremiah 17:7-8; 1 Timothy 4:9-11.
10. How far and whom do you trust to direct, that is, to plan your life? 2 Timothy 1:12.

Lesson 3: Sovereign Power to Work the Plan

Scripture Reading: 2 Samuel 22:29-37

Memory Verse: “*But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you*” John 14:26

Introduction:

If God has a plan, how does He work the plan? By what agency does God activate and carry out His plans for you?

“God wants what is best for us, He also knows what is best and He has the power to bring His good plan to fulfillment. He is sovereign over the entire universe, the supreme ruler of all creation, He is limited only by His wisdom and purposes, by His own character and by choices He, Himself has made. Not by the power of nature or created beings, and never by circumstances of our lives.” (1: p.25)

We marvel at the diversification of God’s power. The very thought that the power that created the universe can reside in us is overwhelming. Just as a lamp contains oil, so can we have God’s power directing our lives. God’s power has a purpose.

“Yet in blessing and guiding us as individuals, God has chosen to let us limit him by our spiritual and moral choices. He fulfills His good intentions for each of us if we let Him do so, if we submit to His sovereignty and trust him,” (1: p. 25)

The righteous know that when they fall they are never left lying there; when they stumble, they are never completely forsaken.

Study Questions:

1. In the Scriptures, to whom is power preeminently attributed? 1 Chronicles 29:11-15; Psalm 66:3-7; Nahum 1:3.
2. How diversified is the power of God? Exodus 14:26-31; Joshua 6:20; 1 Kings 17:1-6; 2 Kings 20:1-11.
3. After defeating Goliath, what did David proclaim? 2 Samuel 22:29-33.
4. How would you describe the power of God?
5. What use is power unless it has a purpose? Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Acts 4:33.
6. What is another aspect of the power of God? John 14:16-18, 26. What is the meaning of comforter?
7. How strong is His promise to stay alongside of us? 1 Peter 5:6-7, 9; Hebrews 13:5-6.
8. Do you think God has the ability to fulfill His plans for your life? Philippians 4:13. What does *strengtheneth* mean?
9. Can you share about a time when God’s inward power helped you?
10. How do you feel about a challenge to submit to God and His plan for you? Psalm 37:23-24.

Lesson 4: Designed by God

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 43:4-12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Memory Verse: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” Ephesians 2:10

Introduction:

What do you do when you feel like a black sheep? How do we discover who we are in God’s eyes versus our own mirror image? We all go through times in our lives when we feel inferior to others. The *black-sheep syndrome* sets in when we question our physical characteristics, personality, abilities, or personal success. It is an unfortunate fact that many people live their entire lives unhappy with and about themselves.

“Does God do a good job in designing some people and a poor job in designing others? Does he sometimes make inferior or worthless products unsuited for the purposes he has in mind? Does his hand slip at times, marring his work; or did he merely let us happen and later try to make the most of the result?” (1:p. 42)

God uses what is considered foolish and depressed in this world to reveal His truth so that He alone will receive the glory. Otherwise, the powerful would boast that they had found the truth. God’s plan of salvation does not conform to the world’s priorities, yet in reality, eternal salvation is more valuable. God’s designs are often very specific; His examples of planning, His precision, and His sovereignty, His purposes always win out. He maintains control of history and brings that vision of hope we still need today.

On these and other similar questions the Bible gives to us definite insights. We spend billions of dollars on research and products that enhance our outward appearance. To make cosmetic improvements is not necessarily wrong; however, in the final analysis, we need to know “Who We Are.”

Study Questions:

1. What does the Bible say about our existence? Psalm 139:13-16.
2. To whom do you owe your existence? Colossians 1:15-18; Revelation 4:11.
3. What are we saying when we say these kinds of expressions: *If I could change one thing about me I would . . . or, I hate the way I . . .* Romans 9:19-24; Isaiah 29:15-16; Isaiah 45:9-10; Matthew 6:27. Is there any way we can change these expressions?
4. What wrong methods do we use to evaluate ourselves? Does what other people think about us affect us? 2 Corinthians 10:12-13.
5. What is the most important thing we need to recognize about ourselves? Ephesians 2:10. What are some synonyms (a word that means the same, or almost the same, as another word in the same language) for workmanship? Consider Isaiah 19:25; Isaiah 29:23.
6. Does God use ordinary people with human limitations and flaws? 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2 Corinthians 4:6-7. Note: God controls trials and uses them to strengthen His people.
7. Does God have a better viewpoint to evaluate us? 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Peter 3:4. Note: The state of a man’s heart is more significant than natural ability and physical appearance.
8. Is it possible for God to use even those born with the most extreme handicaps? John 9:1-3. Can you think of an example?
9. In the final analysis, we all have a tag proclaiming “*Designed by God.*” Isaiah 45:12-13; Psalm 100:3-5.

Lesson 5: The Turning Point

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:17-24; Acts 9:1-22

Memory Verse: *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”* Isaiah 1:18

Introduction:

Can a black sheep be made white? Is it possible to turn darkness (blindness) to light (sight)? The idea that man is sinful from birth through no fault of his own, stuns many people’s toes as they ponder their spiritual condition. No doubt, many sin on their own accord upon reaching a certain age. No matter which way you view it, the fact remains, that man is sinful and separated from God. Unbelievers have a barrier to overcome. Sometimes what the world thinks is obviously true, is painfully wrong.

By God’s design, He allows us to see the depth of sin that can be forgiven. For instance, Saul persecuted the churches and even consented to Stephen’s death. Saul was blinded on the road to Damascus, but actually he was blind spiritually from birth. The road to Damascus was *“the turning point”* of his life. Upon his conversion, he could see both physically and spiritually.

“This is what God did at Calvary. He took man’s greatest failure, his most shameful atrocity - putting to death the Son of God—and made it central in a perfect picture of salvation, available to all mankind. He can do this today for us. He is not pleased when we waste our lives by lamenting our failures or handicaps. He wants us to rely on him to forgive, to overrule, and to transform.” (1:p. 48)

Christ is restoring believers to what they were originally created to be. Paul was killing Christians because he thought it was the right thing to do. Christ’s revelation changed Paul’s thoughts, and his preaching was visible proof that he had repented. Genuine repentance is evidenced by changed behavior. Each one of us must reach a place where we are confronted to make life’s greatest decision. However, we must remember God has already done the major part. When Jesus Christ died on the Cross of Calvary, it was the turning point for a lost and dying world. When you receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, it will be the turning point of your life.

Study Questions:

1. From our birth, what is our spiritual condition? Romans 3:23; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:12-14.
2. What was wrong with the man in Bethsaida? Mark 8:22-26.
3. What is the spiritual condition of man separated from God by the gulf of sin? 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Revelation 3:17-18. Note: The Laodicean church was self-deluded.
4. What was Saul’s condition with God? Acts 7:57-8:3.
5. Did Saul have a turning point in his life? Acts 9:1-9, 17-22.
6. What was the purpose of this tremendous experience? Acts 26:4-6, 9-20.
7. What are we to be turned from and what are we to be turned to? Ephesians 4:17-24; 2 Chronicles 7:14. Note: God’s people needed to confess their sins, repent, and then come back to Him. God would then hear, forgive, and heal them.
8. What happened to the blind man in Bethsaida? Mark 8:23-25.
9. Is it fair to say that receiving Jesus Christ as our personal Savior is the turning point in our lives? 2 Corinthians 5:17.
10. Can a black sheep be made white? Isaiah 1:18; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Romans 6:1-14.

Lesson 6: Lord of My Life

Scripture Reading: Romans 6:11-23

Memory Verse: *“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple”* Psalm 27:4

Introduction:

Christ is our Savior, but He is also Lord of our lives! Do our priorities and commitment to Him reflect Christ as Savior and Lord of our life? Many people may recognize Jesus Christ as the only Savior for the world; some may even accept Him as their personal Savior. This step is necessary to salvation and indeed, the only way! Receiving the justification of God through Christ is indeed a beautiful experience. Unfortunately, there are many who never go beyond this initial experience. Though believers in Christ have died to sin, sin is still a problem.

“If I decided to really turn my life over to God, what would this mean? Would God come in and completely reorganize the furniture in my life? Take out all the fun? Get on my case? A lot of us are afraid to take God seriously for fear of what this might mean.” (5: p. 52)

Babies are cuddly, cute, and exciting to be around. However, no parent would choose to **not** let his children become men and women. We should also recognize that even though it’s healthy to watch over new babes in Christ and feed them the milk of the Word, our goal should be that they would advance to a diet that includes meat.

“The capacity for Christ’s indwelling is elastic: it increases as the years go by. We are filled only to the amount of our capacity. There is always more of His fullness as the years unfold. For the greater the obedience, the greater the discipline, the greater the faith, the fuller and more complete the allegiance to our precious Lord.” (1: p. 61)

Being a slave in the ancient world meant being owned by a master. Whether slaves obeyed or not would not change their status as slaves. The question then becomes one of obligation. A person who has been freed from sin can continue to act as a slave to sin, or they can live as a slave to righteousness. Through living in faith and obedience in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, we can fully enjoy God’s free gift of eternal life. I’m not sure when it happens, it is usually a gradual process, but most Christians reach a place where they make their Savior also Master of their lives. Allowing or letting Christ be Lord of our lives is a huge commitment, but the benefits can also be awe-inspiring.

Study Questions:

1. When we accept Christ as our Savior are we immediately ready to serve Him? 1 Peter 2:2; Matthew 18:1-7, 10.
2. Do we as babes do this alone? Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 2:1-4; Ephesians 4:11-16.
3. Why are we not to remain as babes forever? 1 Corinthians 3:1-4; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:1-3.
Note: Children are gullible, vulnerable, and easily victimized. The church needs to work diligently at moving babes in Christ on to maturity.
4. What do you think the difference is between Christ being our Savior and being our Lord? 1 John 4:12-16; John 4:42; Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 3:17-18. Note: Savior means preserver; Lord, means master.
5. Do you think it is possible to recognize or receive Christ as Savior, but not as Lord? 1 Corinthians 3:9-11.
6. What are some key elements in allowing Christ to be Lord of our lives? Romans 6:11-19.
7. What is God’s will concerning Christ as being master over all we do and say? Romans 12:1-2, 4-8.
8. Besides “self,” what are other rights we can yield to Christ? Can you add to this list?
 - a) Clothes and Food - 1 Timothy 6:8
 - b) Money - 1 Timothy 6:9-10; Matthew 6:19-21
 - c) Music - Colossians 3:16-17
 - d) Future - Hebrews 12:1-2
 - e) Health - 3 John 1:2
9. What is the benefit of making Christ our Savior and Lord? Psalm 27:1-14.

Lesson 7: The Perfect Team

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:44-47 / Hebrews 10:11-25

Memory Verse: *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me”* John 15:4

Introduction:

“What was it about the Christians in the first century that caused the pagan world to sit up and take notice? With so much trouble and pain why did so many people flock into the church?
(5:p. 60)

Our relationships in church may also be distant and strained. We may be scared to share our innermost thoughts for fear of being rejected or the information wrongly used. It is God’s intention that the interpersonal relationships in His family be open and honest. The faults and confessions of sin should be treated as need, and responded to with love and concern.

Often God is seen as being far away and not familiar with our everyday struggles. It is possible to have such a close, ongoing, relationship with Christ that you consider it more of a team rapport. No, this is not bringing God down to our level, but instead, it is increasing our expectations and raising our level of trust and further instilling a greater personal relationship with Christ. Faith in God leads believers to place their hope in His promises. Restoring a right relationship with God then prompts believers to restore their relationships with others, and so we see that love for God will also demonstrate itself in love for others.

The Israelites may have approached God at Mount Sinai with fear and trembling but we can approach God with boldness. It is because through Christ’s blood we now have continuous access to God Himself. Our hope is then our confident expectation of the future. When we gather together and inspire one another with the truth, we can find God applying His truth, His word, to the very circumstances of our lives. Knowing that Christ’s return is imminent we are encouraged even more to remain faithful to Him. Fellowship carries both, the idea of a positive relationship that people share and participate in a common interest or goal.

God loves because He is love; we are to love because we are from God. It is this love that reaches beyond the Christians community to anyone, anywhere, seeking a person’s highest good—even at a cost to ourselves.

You, the Brethren and Christ—the perfect Team!

Study Questions:

1. Why is it not necessary to tackle life by ourselves? Matthew 11:25-30; John 14:12-18; John 16:5-14.
2. What is the most important fellowship we can experience? 1 John 1:5-7; John 17:20-23; John 13:35.
Note: Unity, an ultimate expression of God’s love.
3. How close can our relationship with God and Christ be? John 15:1-7.
Note: A plant does not produce fruit instantly but happens through a process.
4. What results from such a close and ongoing fellowship? Romans 8:31-39.
5. How does this relationship carry over into the community of believers? Hebrews 10:23-25; Matthew 18:19-20.
6. Note: “Lord, when I am having a ‘bad day’, there is no one that I can call and really talk to . . . and nobody calls me when they are having a ‘bad day.’ What is wrong with our fellowship?” [6: p.28] Galatians 6:1-6.
Note: Choosing to bear one another’s burdens is what Christ expects from **all** believers.
7. What close relationships did the early church experience? Acts 2:44-47.
8. Should we be able to share our faults and sinful actions with our brethren? James 5:13-20.
9. How should Christians treat each other? John 13:34-35.
10. Discuss the need for better interpersonal relationships and how it could help the church.

Lesson 8: Getting in and Staying in Spiritual Shape

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:13-21; 2 Peter 1:1-10

Memory Verse: “*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*”

Philippians 3:14

Introduction:

By considering ourselves in spiritual development as a member in God’s army, many of us are very careful to stay in good physical shape. The methods may range from a good diet to a rigorous exercise program. There are, of course, many variations of the two. The reasoning though, is usually the same. We desire long life, better daily health, and yes, sometimes the doctor gives us no choice; but when we transfer these concepts over into the spiritual life, we become fearful of getting caught up into works or methodology, which can include tactics, methods or even attitude.

The Bible has many passages that encourage us to get into, and to stay, in spiritual shape. Our spiritual development through proper conditioning is an important aspect of the *Christian Walk*. We must always keep in mind we are justified through Christ only, but this is not an excuse to be lazy, slothful Christians. God envisions for each of us an attractiveness, vitality, and adequacy that will far surpass our highest expectations for ourselves. Whatever we have attained spiritually and morally we still fall short of the glorious, loving ideal He has in mind for us. More than we know, and perhaps in different ways than we know, our potentiality has been stifled and our personalities inhibited by sin.

“Whatever our present state of development, God is neither disillusioned with us nor content for us to remain as we are. He wants to liberate us more and more from cords of hostility, resentment, self-blame, regrets, anxiety, fear, and feelings of inferiority or superiority. His plans for us include the realization of our personal uniqueness plus an excellence of character beyond the reach of our human powers.” (1:p. 53)

Christ has done everything necessary for us to endure in our faith. He is our model, our example, a pattern which indicates an exact representation. And one of our goals should be that we can lead others to Christ by our own example as well. This can be done if we focus on Christ as we will reflect His image to others.

Perseverance, patience, and prayer are essential to be a faithful witness for the Lord. And a person who exercises self-control will not easily succumb to discouragement or the temptation to quit.

Study Questions:

1. What is the result of a Christian who remains a spiritual weakling? Hebrews 12:1-2; Matthew 26:40-41.
2. Do you think it is practical to speak of *conditioning* in a spiritual sense? 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.
3. Where is our source of strength in our conditioning process? Isaiah 40:28-31; John 15:5.
4. Define and discuss these inquiries of practical applications for spiritual development.
 - a) Ephesians 6:18; Romans 8:26-27; and Colossians 4:2-6.
 - b) 2 Timothy 2:15 and Ephesians 6:14.
 - c) Galatians 2:9-10; Acts 2:41-47; and Hebrews 10:23-25.
5. What are some inner qualities God wants to cultivate in our lives? 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; 1 Corinthians 13:11-14:5; Ephesians 6:14-18.
Note: Pursue, carries such meanings as run, run after, and aspire to.
6. How does practical discipline and inner quality enrichment blend together? 2 Peter 1:5-10.
7. In our spiritual development, what must we keep in mind? James 1:4-6.
8. When Paul was around 60 years of age, what were his feelings on getting in, and staying in shape? Philippians 3:12-16. Note: Paul was not speaking of moral perfection but of reaching the state of completion as a Christian.

Lesson 9: Trials, Suffering, and Growing Pains

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 12:3-24; 1 Peter 4:12-19

Memory Verse: “*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*”

1 Peter 1:7

Introduction:

Spiritual growth is often accompanied by growing pains. The Christian life is made up of building blocks tightly fit together. Some of these blocks consist of neat experiences and good times, while some of these blocks consist of trials, pain, and suffering. All of these blocks are necessary in the making of a successful Christian.

These growing pains are experienced in a variety of ways. Sometimes they are small trials, nuisances really, but at other times they are large and overwhelming trials. Looking around, you may notice those who live orderly lives, seemingly they have a perfect marriage, perfect children, continuous financial blessings, and they are not afraid to remind others of this perfection. While here you are, trying just as hard or in some cases harder, and what do you get? Family problems, financial problems, depression, sickness, and so forth; and too often, including those who are perfectly willing to tell you where you **failed**. Quite frankly, I do not understand why this is. However, **in spite of your circumstances, there is something you must remember**, the most critical element is how **you** respond to these trials and what your attitude is like. This is not easy, but with God’s help, it is possible.

George Muller’s faith when facing trials is vividly shown in his response to a problem-filled situation in 1843.

“I had a secret satisfaction in the greatness of the difficulties which were in the way. So far from being cast down on account of them, they delighted my soul; for I only desired to do the will of the Lord in this matter . . . the greater the obstacles, the more abundantly plain the proof that I had come to a right judgment if they were removed by prayer . . . I did nothing but pray. Prayer and faith, the universal remedies against every want and every difficulty, and the nourishment of prayer and faith, God’s holy Word, helped me over all the difficulties.” (1:p. 37)

For Christians, the purpose of suffering is to prove their true character, to clear away the dross of sin and allow the pure nature of Christ to show itself. Christians should expect and prepare for this suffering. They are to entrust their very lives to God, recognizing He is in control. And while we may be disciplined by some as they see fit, God disciplines us with our good in mind. With **every** trial, God fashions us to be His people—set apart for His good purposes.

Study Questions:

1. Define the meaning and nature of a trial. 1 Peter 4:12-14; Hebrews 11:32-38.
2. Define the meaning and nature of suffering. Acts 9:13-16; 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.
3. Why does God allow us to be tested? Hebrews 12:3-11.
4. What might be the result of a life filled with nothing but blessings? Hosea 13:6; Deuteronomy 8:11-14.
5. What is our normal response to a growing pain? Hebrews 12:11.
6. What was Christ’s attitude and His example during His greatest trials? Matthew 4:1, 4, 7, 10; Matthew 26:37-39, 42, 44.
7. What *fruit of the Spirit* can we draw on as a response? James 1:2-4.
Note: The aim of testing is not to destroy, but to refine.
8. What *promise* can we respond with? 1 Corinthians 10:13; Romans 8:28.
9. Is there another avenue we can take? Ephesians 5:15-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-22.
Note: Do we take full advantage of opportunities for Christ’s purposes?
10. How can things turn out if we respond with a proper attitude? Romans 5:1-5; 1 Peter 1:7; Colossians 1:9-12.

Lesson 10: The Calling of Service

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:12-18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-18

Memory Verse: “*That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*” Colossians 1:10

Introduction:

What is the purpose and plan that God has for us in His vineyard—this realization prepares us for service. Bill Gothard says, “Men keep looking for better methods and God keeps looking for better men.” This thought rings forth a truth that is inescapable. God’s plan and purpose include people willing to serve Him! He could call forth stones but He would prefer to use you.

“Behind the closed doors of humanity are bleeding hearts. We must penetrate and find the entrance.” “. . . When crises come into your life, there is one thing you will notice about service—you will have compassion. You want to be where human need is and to meet that need. . . . There are times you will want to pull back, but whether you want to or not, you are still going to be pressed on by the Holy Spirit. Once the truth breaks upon the horizon of your spirit, God orders circumstances and puts in motion the elements to crowd you to Jesus.” (7:pp. 62-64)

“As we fit into God’s plan for us, he unfolds exciting and challenging purposes for living. Choosing lesser purposes makes us misfits without true significance—no matter what level of achievement or fame we reach in people’s eyes.” (1:p. 69)

God gives everyone certain gifts so that each person can strengthen the church. And based on God’s mercy, we should use our bodies to serve and obey God, meditate on His truth, and let the Holy Spirit guide and shape our thoughts and behaviors.

Study Questions:

1. Does God want to accomplish specific purpose(s) in our lives? Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20.
2. Why are these verses still appropriate today? Matthew 9:35-38.
3. In the parable of the Talents (Luke 19:11-27), what were his servants ordered to do? Luke 19:13. What does *occupy* mean?
4. Describe the commitment in our own individual calling from God. Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-26; Romans 8:16-17; Romans 12:1.
5. What is our greatest purpose in Christian service? Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8. Should this still be the Church’s #1 priority?
6. To complete His purpose, does God have specific tasks for each of us? Romans 12:3-8.
7. How important is it that each fulfills his task properly? Matthew 25:24-30.
8. How important is every task, and a person’s service? 1 Corinthians 12:20-26.
9. *When the going gets tough, the tough get going.* Does this phrase fit into Christian Service? Galatians 6:9-10; Hebrews 10:32-39.
10. What does God desire for us? Colossians 1:9-12; 2 Peter 1:5-8.

Lesson 11: Discovering God's Will

Scripture Reading: John 6:28-40

Memory Verse: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* Romans 12:2

Introduction:

God will reveal His will for the direction and decision making for our lives. At the outset to the often heard or thought question, “What is God’s will?” we must recognize that this is no easy matter to consider. Often the issue is a small one; while at other times a decision can be a life—or—death matter. Hopefully, the previous ten lessons will help us as we proceed into this question.

The Bible has many examples of those who knew God’s will. They were not guessing, hoping, or taking a shot in the dark. In most instances God does expect us to know His mind in a decision; however, we must be careful not to confuse our own personal desires with His express will. There is a variety of ways to discern God’s will in a matter, and sometimes only one of these is necessary while at other times a combination may be necessary.

“We find that often the Lord doesn’t use all the points. Sometimes he gives us one or two big 1000-watt lights. At other times he gives many small 50-watt ones that make us equally sure of his leading. If we come to yellow or red lights, we evaluate further, and generally wait for clarification.” (1:p. 101)

“But what about those times when much is at stake and we can discover no clear scriptural instruction and yet are forced to choose between two possible courses?” (8:p. 4)

The will of the Father is twofold: 1) that all who comes to the Son will be received and not lost, and 2) that all who see and believe on the Son will have everlasting life. Our desire to serve God will be in vain without a proper understanding of the One we want to serve. When we ask for, seek, and receive wisdom, we will find we will have the practical working knowledge which cannot be separated from the spiritual understanding that comes through the discernment given by the Holy Spirit.

To proceed by faith is not easy, but at times it is the only way. Even in these times, we can be at rest and say as Christ did, “Thy will be done.”

Study Questions:

1. Did God have a known will for Jesus Christ to perform? John 6:35-40.
Note: Manna satisfied physical needs for a while; Christ satisfies Spiritual needs forever.
2. Did God have a known will for Paul to perform? Acts 22:12-16.
3. Does God expect us to know His will? Ephesians 5:15-17; Romans 12:2.
4. Why do we sometimes get confused in discerning God’s will? Mark 14:34-36.
5. How strong can **our** will be at times? 1 Peter 4:1-4; Ephesians 4:17-19.
6. What advantage is there in knowing the will of God? John 15:7-8. Is this promise conditional? 1 John 5:14-15; James 4:3. Note: God will not act in ways that are contrary to His will.
7. What is one tool we can use to discern God’s will? 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Psalm 119:130.
Note: God’s commandments help a person identify his or her way in the world that is filled with confusion, sin, and error.
8. Are there other avenues that God uses to reveal His will? Note: Even wise, capable decision makers need counselors.
 - a) Philippians 4:6-7
 - b) Acts 20:24
 - c) Romans 8:13-14 Acts 20:24
 - d) Proverbs 15:21-22; Proverbs 13:10
 - e) Revelation 3:7-8
 - f) 2 Corinthians 5:7
9. What can we be assured of that God wants for **all** His children? Colossians 1:9; Colossians 4:12.

Lesson 12: Doing God's Will

Scripture Reading: Romans 7:7-25

Memory Verse: "Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" Hebrews 13:21

Introduction:

In practical application, applying God's will with His revealed knowledge, we substantiate the need for action. In the New Testament, *will* is chiefly translated from *thelo*, which expresses an active choice or purpose.

"We may even choose and act deliberately in opposition to the will of God while it is possible to oppose the will of God, His counsel or purpose cannot be frustrated. It may, however, be resisted for a time. Yet God's counsel, His will in its completeness, ever prevails; and man, in resisting it, deprives himself of the good it seeks to confer upon him." (9:p. 3085)

"It appears more spiritual to seek God's leading than to do the obvious thing. It is not. If God gave you a watch would you honor Him more by asking Him for the time of day or by consulting the watch?" (8:p. 4)

The law comes from God. The law reveals sin, it also stirs it up. Without standards of right and wrong, there can be no judgment of what sin is or isn't. Now, since the law points out the path of righteousness it points to life. Our problem with sin is not the fault of the holy law of God but only how our sinful nature responds to the law. Often, we find ourselves defeated from doing what we know not to do. This defeat occurs whenever we fail to live in the power supplied to us by the Spirit. The only consistent way to overcome the sinful desires of our human nature is to live step-by-step in the power of the Holy Spirit as He works through our spirit.

The word of God gives us many things to do, knowing His blessing rests upon our actions. Even when we know what God's will is, that doesn't mean it is always easy to do. Our flesh will often war against performing that will. We must recognize that this condition does exist, but with God's help we can overcome the flesh and carry out His desires. Keep in mind you are not perfect and you will not win every battle over the flesh.

God knows our hearts and the desires of our hearts. The perfect result comes from blending God's will with our obedience from the heart. When this is done you will be successful! At times the results are not instantaneous and will require patience on our part. We can feel secure when we are doing God's will.

Study Questions:

1. Why does discovering God's will require some seeking? John 6:28-30.
2. How can we be sure God has a will for us and wants it carried out on earth? Matthew 6:8-10; Luke 11:2.
3. In performing the will of God, is it an active or passive connotation? Matthew 7:21-23; Matthew 12:48-50; Luke 6:46-48.
4. What is the basis for success with God? James 4:13-17.
Note: Do not leave God out of your planning.
5. As stewards of God, can we choose to obey or reject His will? Luke 12:42-48.
Note: In each case, the stewardship of the servant is evaluated.
6. Do you think Apostle Paul had a struggle in always doing God's will? Romans 7:18-25.
7. Where does the problem stem from? Matthew 26:41; Galatians 5:16-18.
8. Is it possible to overcome the flesh and carry out the will of God? Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:20-21.
9. When we do God's will, are the results always present? Hebrews 10:35-39.
10. Where should the action come from in doing God's will, and how important do you think this is? Ephesians 6:5-9.

Lesson 13: Looking Down the Road

Scripture Reading: Revelation 21:1-7

Memory Verse: “. . . and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” Philippians 3:13b-14.

Introduction:

As we preview our future journey through the maze of life we recognize that no matter what our present age is, we have a future. Some of that future will be spent in our present life but the ultimate future will be ours also. Keeping in mind God wants our future to be bright, productive, successful and overcoming.

“In the Bible, through commands and principles, God has revealed His general plan for all people. Beyond this His specific plan for each person includes the circumstances He permits and the individual guidance He offers. Over and over the Bible reminds us that following His plan assures our well-being and the highest fulfillment of our potential, now and forever.

“God asks of us a trusting, open-handed attitude toward a future that will contain both blessing and suffering. He asks that our hands be open to receive his sufficiency for every situation and to give freely to meet the needs of others. Such an attitude releases us from our ingrown insistence on plotting our own course and protecting our own interests. It leads us into truly liberated, expanding lives. ‘With hand outstretched to whatever lies ahead, I go straight for the goal—my reward the honour of my high calling by God in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 3:13b-14, Phillips Translation).”

“Father, use your word to make me feel deeply your love and goodness and wisdom. Correct my false ideas about you that make me shrink back from your plan for me. Give me a long-range view that believes you for the best in life today, through all the weeks and years ahead, and forever. Work in me a glad surrender of all that I am and all that I have.” (1:pp. 5, 6, 67).

We continue in our Christian lives the same way we begin, by believing in Jesus. The more we learn of Christ, the more we have to believe, the more we place our trust in Him, the more we receive—and the more we receive the more we can accomplish for His glory! Yes, when we place our trust in God, He will give us His peace in the midst of pressure.

As we sincerely seek God we will receive that which we need, that which is spiritually beneficial to us. We can experience complete confidence and security. Remember, he who overcomes will inherit not only the specific promises to the churches but **all** things.

The future begins with the rest of today.

Study Questions:

1. What should be our attitude as we approach the rest of our lives? Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 11:9-13; John 14:12-14.
2. Why should we have a confident attitude toward God and the future? John 15:1-8; Psalm 1:1-3; John 10:27-28.
3. What exciting promises does the future have in store for you? Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 13:5-6; 3 John 1:2-3.
4. Do you think God wants you to succeed in life? 3 John 1:4; Joshua 1:8-9.
5. Lesson Nine dealt with the suffering and loss we will also experience; of what though, can we foresee with confidence? John 16:31-33; Psalm 138:7-8; 2 Corinthians 4:13-18.
6. Part of our future is growing old. Need we be fearful of this natural process of time? Isaiah 46:4; Psalm 92:12-15.
Note: We will always see the Lord’s never ceasing care.
7. Describe the special event that will take place in our future. Luke 21:25-28.
8. What can we see with anticipation for our ultimate future? John 17:24-26; Revelation 21:1-7.
9. How must we proceed into our future? Philippians 3:12-14.
Note: This does not mean sinless perfection but of reaching the state of completion as a Christian.
10. Share how or why these lessons were helpful to you.

Acknowledgments

The following books were very helpful in preparing these studies. All the direct quotes are on a numeric notation referral.

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