

How to Discover God's Will for Your Life

Rich Nathan
November 6 & 7, 2021
Recover Your Life
John 10:1-10

It's not too late to sign up for the Vineyard Growth Classes that are today at 1:30pm.

You can take Membership online if you register, but Membership and all the other classes are in person as well.

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Vineyard Growth classes, 1:30-3:30 today

One way to characterize the time we're living in is that we live in the age of choice overload. When I was a child there were a few toothpaste brands – Colgate, Crest, Gleem and Pepsodent. Each brand had only one type of toothpaste. I did a google search just for Colgate and there are 55 types of Colgate toothpaste. When you go to the store, you have to make a decision. Do you want:

Slide (transition in one at a time)

- Total gum protection
- Renewal whitening restoration
- Sensitive Prevent and Repair
- Sensitive lasting fresh

- Baking soda and peroxide whitening bubbles
- Renewal enamel
- Total S.F. Whitening
- Two-in-one toothpaste and mouthwash, icy blast
- Activated charcoal
- Max clean optic white renewal
- Max fresh with breath strips

And that's just a fifth of the choices of toothpaste. And that's just from Colgate!

Consider virtually any consumer product, whether we're talking about sneakers or cold medicine, soda or bread, TV stations, music genres, beer. You go to the store and purchase orange juice. Do you want your OJ organic or regular? Made from concentrate or not from concentrate? With or without calcium? With no pulp, minimal pulp, maximum pulp? How complicated should it be to buy orange juice?

Contemporary society tells us that more choice in everything is always a good thing and always leads to more freedom. But studies show us that choice overload actually causes us to delay decision – even important, life-enhancing decisions – because sorting through all the options available to us is too taxing on our brains. Companies that offer too many 401k options actually get lower participation rates from employees than companies that offer fewer options. Rather than make a choice, we freeze and do

nothing in the face of the blizzard of options. In fact, therapists tell us that too many choices increase our feelings of anxiety and depression.

One major way that modern life differs from the life of our ancestors is the number of choices available to us. Up until very recently in human history, most people's lives were pretty much predetermined. There were very few people who had a lot of say about which job they were going to take or whether or not they'd get married or whether they would have children. What food you ate was determined by where you lived. Now, we have an infinite variety of choices.

If you grow up in central Ohio, you can stay here or move to California or Australia. You can work from home. You can commute to another state and come home on the weekends. You can choose to get married or not get married or define your sexuality in a dozen different ways. You can have kids as a married couple. You can have kids as a single parent. You can live with your boyfriend or girlfriend. You can stay at home as a mom. You could go to work and hire someone to watch your kids. Your religion may be the same as your parents or different from your parents. Same with your politics.

How do we decide what is right for us? In any given situation – whether it's an ordinary day or a day of momentous decision – there are a million voices clamoring for our attention, telling us to choose this or that option. And on top of all the external voices,

we feel ourselves tugged by lots of different internal desires. How do you figure out what is the right thing for you?

Think about the big decisions in life. You're dating someone. Do you continue this relationship? Break up with them? Take the relationship a step further? Get engaged? Should you stay in central Ohio or move? Pursue this career or that one? Should you have another child? Should you adopt a child? Have you considered taking in a foster child? Which church should you attend?

Middle schoolers, high schoolers, listen to me. You have big decisions to make over the next several years. Will you take on the faith of your parents or grandparents or should you reject the faith you grew up with? What are going to do with Jesus? Are you going to follow him or not? If you are a middle schooler or high schooler you may be deciding what sport you want to play in school? What club should you join? What language should you take? What classes should you sign up for? Who are you going to choose for your friends? What will you do after high school? Will you apply to college? Which college? What are you going to major in?

Discovering what's right for your life is not just a preoccupation of the young. You could be in your late 50's, 60's or 70's and asking yourself: What should I be doing in this next season of life? Maybe your career is coming to an end. If you have some retirement savings, what do you want to do with your remaining years? Do you want to spend your

life shopping online? Watching television? Decorating your home again? Watching your grandkids? Working out?

There are many of us who are doing just fine. You may even be successful in what you're currently doing. But you may have an internal sense of discontent. A feeling like you might not be doing what you ought to be doing. A feeling that you are not properly placed right now. There's got to be something else or something more.

For those of us who have made the life defining choice to be followers of Jesus, we believe that we don't make the important decisions of life by figuring out what's right for us on our own. We Christians don't make a plan for our lives and then ask God to bless it. Instead, the starting point for figuring out what's right for us is asking the questions, what does God want of me? How can I discover and respond to God's will for my life? Where is God leading me? What is God's will for this season of life?

We've been doing a series titled "Recover your life".

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Recover your life slide

The series is about how we cannot just exist or just go through the motions. How we can live lives that are thriving and satisfying? One of the keys to living a satisfying, thriving life is discovering God's will for your life. I've called today's message,

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"How to Discover God's Will for Your Life"

Let's pray.

Slide John 10:1-10

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.

⁹I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out,

and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Let me read verse 10 again

Slide John 10:10

¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Here in John 10:10, Jesus tells us that the reason we don't want to make independent decisions concerning what's right for us, the reason we don't want to make independent decisions regarding our future is because Jesus tells us that his plan for our life is such much better than anything that the world or we ourselves could ever come up with.

He tells us that there are two internal tugs constantly fighting inside us, pulling us in one direction or another. One of the internal tugs that we constantly feel as we're making a decision comes from someone Jesus calls "the thief". The thief's voice may seem attractive and alluring. The thief often presents us with the obvious choice, the successful choice, the popular choice, the choice everyone expects us to make. But Jesus tells us that the choice presented to us by the thief will rob us and kills us and destroy us. There are choices that you can make in life that will not lead to closeness to God. There are choices that you can make and have made that will leave you feeling

empty and restless and ripped off and dissatisfied. In the end, you will experience what it's like to try to shape your life without God on your own.

Jesus says, on the other hand, there is another tug in your heart. A tug coming from him. A tug coming from the Holy Spirit. If you listen to and obey that tug, you'll not necessarily have an easy or trouble-free life, but you'll have a full life. You'll have a satisfying life. You'll have a life of closeness to God. You'll have a sense of internal peace where you know that you are where you are supposed to be. You're with who you're supposed to be with. You're doing what you're made to do. Things will feel right to you.

Which path do you want to take? The path that will lead to regret? The path that will make you say: I should have listened? Or the path that will leave you satisfied? It all has to do with which voice you listen to. Jesus tells us in this text that sheep know the voice of their shepherd. They recognize that voice and follow that voice. He tells us that they won't follow a stranger because the stranger's voice is not the voice of their good shepherd.

Just a little bit of background about what Jesus is talking about. In the first century each shepherd had a unique call that his own sheep recognized immediately. Sometimes at night, several flocks from different shepherds would be herded together in a cave for protection. In the morning, how would the sheep be sorted? The shepherds would

stand at a distance from the cave opening and begin calling their sheep. By hearing the various voices, the sheep would immediately detect the voice of their shepherd and they would separate themselves and follow their shepherd.

Jesus says to his people that he's the good shepherd. His people can distinguish his voice from all the other voices that are clamoring for our attention. How do we know the voice of our good shepherd in the midst of so many competing voices and the shouts coming from our own hearts? Let me share some bad ways.

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Bad ways to hear God's voice

The first bad way to hear God's voice is what you might call

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The finger in the Bible method of hearing God's voice

What's the finger in the Bible method? I need to know what you want me to do God, so I'm just going to stick my finger in the Bible and do whatever my finger lands on.

You heard about the young man who wanted to know whether he should go out with a pretty girl named Suzy. He opened his Bible and stuck his finger in and it landed on

Slide Proverbs 6:25

²⁵ Do not lust in your heart after her beauty

or let her captivate you with her eyes.

So he said to the Lord, “who should I go out with if it’s not Suzy?” He stuck his finger in the Bible and landed in Isaiah:

Slide Isaiah 55:12a

¹² You will go out with joy

So he looked around for a girl named Joy. Unfortunately, Joy didn’t want to go out with him. Then he was confused about what God wanted.

Sticking your finger in the Bible and picking a random verse out of context is a terrible way for discerning God’s will for your life. There’s the ever popular

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The open door method of hearing God’s voice

According to the open door method, whenever God opens a door for you, you ought to walk through that open door. Is that the way to figure out God’s will? God, if you open

up a door to this job, it's the one you want me to take. If you open up a door by securing the mortgage for this house then that's the one you want me to buy (even if it stretches our budget to the absolute limit). An open door doesn't necessarily mean that's what God has for you.

In 2 Corinthians 2, the Apostle Paul speaks about an open door. Here's what he says:

Slide 2 Corinthians 2:12-13

¹² Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, ¹³ I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.

Apparently, an open door simply means an opportunity. Not every opportunity is God's will for you. Paul felt free to not walk through an open door. Open doors are simply an opportunity for us to hear the voice of God about whether we should go through that door. They're not the voice of God.

One of the most common bad ways to hear the voice of God is called

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The opposite of what I want method of hearing God's voice

Some people believe that God's will is always going to be the opposite of what they want. I love living near my family and I can't imagine moving overseas. God probably wants me to move. I really don't like working with teenagers and I'm not very good at it. So God probably wants me to work with teens.

Years ago, I remember talking with a woman who said the reason she got married to her husband rather than the man she really loved was because she knew that God wanted to put her flesh to death. Her husband was precisely the kind of person that she didn't like. She said: This must be God because it will mature me and strengthen me spiritually. They have stayed together all these years, but it's been a really hard marriage.

You have to wonder what someone believes about a God who given a choice between two marriage proposals – one from someone they love and one from someone they didn't – would believe that God wanted them to marry the person they didn't love because that would be good for their soul.

Jesus, in John 10, presents us with what I would call a foundational thought for hearing God's voice.

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A foundational thought for hearing God's voice

Let me read John 10:3-4 along with verse 27.

Slide John 10:3-4, 27

³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

²⁷My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Do you understand what Jesus is saying here? Jesus is saying that he takes the same kind of responsibility for his people that a good shepherd takes for his sheep. Part of the responsibility of a good shepherd was to lead the sheep where they needed to go. A good shepherd in ancient Palestine wouldn't just race up ahead and say to the sheep, "Hey guys, you better keep up with me. If you wander off and nibble grass in another pasture and don't keep up with me, forget it! You're going to spend your life at the bottom of a cliff somewhere or stuck in some thorns or brambles."

It was the responsibility of the shepherd to lead the sheep where he wanted them to go. The shepherd would take any measure necessary, short of killing the sheep, to lead them safely from one pasture to another. If a sheep was straying from the fold, shepherds in ancient Palestine used a sling and a rock to fling it right by the nose of the sheep so the sheep would be startled and race back to the fold.

I've always loved the fact that Jesus compares his leadership to being that of a shepherd of sheep. He doesn't say that he's the foxmaster of foxes or the owl keeper of owls. He says he's the shepherd of sheep. Sheep are the prototype of stupid animals. Sheep are exceedingly stupid. They have no sense of direction. They can scarcely find their own feet without the help of the shepherd, much less find their own way.

So when Jesus wants to communicate this principle to us that he takes both the initiative and the responsibility to lead us – however stupid we may be, however lost or directionless and confused we are, however bad our hearing may be, however defective we are – Jesus uses the image of a shepherd and sheep.

Do you understand this? I need to constantly remind myself of who Jesus is and the responsibility he takes for my life whenever I think about discovering God's will for my life. Jesus is our good shepherd! My confidence and your confidence in finding God's will for our lives, the confidence that God knows what is right for us, how we can best use our talents and gifts, how we can partner with him in doing this thing called life – my confidence and your confidence that we won't miss it is not based on our great followership! It's based on Jesus' incredible leadership.

I am not confident in my ability to hear God. But I am incredibly confident that Jesus, my leader, who is Lord of the universe, can arrange things so I can get to the place he wants me to get to.

Do you believe that about Jesus? Do you believe that if you took a fork in the road – let's say you're not listening to God, let's say you're just caught up with your own stuff, you're following the voice of the thief and you made some decisions that you now regret – do you think Jesus could move you back onto the right path for you? That he can still make you the kind of person he wants you to be? Do you believe in the great leadership of Jesus Christ even if you're terribly insecure about your own followership?

When I graduated from law school, I applied for jobs. I made a really bad choice regarding the particular law firm that I joined. Even though I prayed about it, my choice of the firm was motivated by a fear that I wouldn't get another job offer. It wasn't motivated by trust in the Lord. I made a really bad mistake. I went for the high salary because I was afraid that God wouldn't provide something else for me.

But Jesus Christ is a great leader. Even when we make mistakes, he can get us back on the right path. After a few months he led me out of that firm and a job was open at Ohio State and I got to teach there for seven years. All the while, God who is such a great leader, was developing me – not just as a teacher, but he was developing my heart

to pastor. He was growing me as a leader. He was maturing me as a husband. You can trust the leadership of Jesus in your life.

Let me just say something about making bad decisions. If you really want God's will for your life, you won't compound a bad decision by sinning against God to get out of that decision. I talk with people who say: God knows I married the wrong person. I wasn't paying attention to the Lord back then so I married outside the faith and our marriage is really hard. So God must want me to get out of that. But that's not what the Word of God tells us!

There were many people in the church in Corinth who were in mixed marriages. A believer was married to an unbeliever. Frequently, the marriage was really hard. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians

Slide 1 Corinthians 7:12-13

¹²To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

There are always two ways of escape in any situation. Satan's way and God's way.

Satan's way of escape is the way of sin. Breaking commitments, breaking vows, cover-

up, lie your way out, manipulate behind the scenes, politic, cut corners. God's way of escape is always full of integrity, full of trust in God, full of love for other people, full of self-sacrifice. Satan's way of escape makes you a worse person. God's way of escape makes you a better person.

How do we hear God's voice? In closing, here are three questions to ask ourselves to hear God's voice better.

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Three questions to ask ourselves to hear God's voice

Question 1:

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What are your sanctified desires?

What do I mean by "sanctified desires"? As you surrender your will to God, as you come before God and say: "Lord, I know you want what's best for me. I know the life you have for me is a full life. I know you're a good shepherd. I know that ultimately I'm going to live the freest, most joyful, most complete life if I follow you." If you offer yourself to God as you offer your body to the Lord, you offer your desires to God, one clear way to hear God's voice is through your desires. As you surrender your heart to

the Lord, God is at work in you creating desires for his will for your life. It's not just that God is out there somewhere in outer space and we're trying to reach up to God and grab ahold of God's will. God is working in us – not just out there, but in us. Here's what Philippians says:

Slide Philippians 2:12-13

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

In verse 13 where it says “God works in you”, the word for work in Greek is

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Energeo = energy

Paul is literally saying that God is energizing you on the inside in the direction of his will. God through his Spirit is motivating you. God is giving you the energy you need to agree with him regarding what's right for your life. When you surrender your will to the Lord, when you come before Jesus and say: Jesus, I give you my will. I surrender. I give you my body and all its parts. I give you my relationships. As you surrender yourself to the

Lord, God forms in you the desires which will move you in the direction he wants you to go in.

I wish someone would have told me that 40 years ago! No one ever told me that my sanctified desires were an indicator of God's will and that my lack of desire in an area, even after I've prayed about it, might be an indicator that it wasn't God's will for me. I always thought that if something was a good thing, that I probably ought to do it even if I had no desire to do it. But there's a million good things. They're not necessarily all God's best for you!

Let me share with you a really important principle at this point. The principle is that God doesn't need your noble sacrifice or my noble sacrifice. In fact, any time you get in your mind "what I'm doing is so noble. I'm giving myself to world missions, isn't that noble? I'm so heroic. I'm giving up a well-paying job to go into ministry, aren't I a great hero?" Anytime you think to yourself that you're being noble or heroic, that's probably not God's will for you because it's the opposite of humility.

God just wants us to be willing to do his will. I've seen so many folks burned out on the mission field after a couple of years because doing mission work was never their deepest heart's desire. They were never being energized internally by the Holy Spirit. They just had a view that this was the right thing to do and so they went ahead and did it because it was noble. It seemed self-sacrificial.

Jesus wants to give us life to the full. How do we hear God's voice? Ask yourself what are your sanctified desires?

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What are your gifts and talents?

Some of you listening to me, especially if you're young, might say I don't have a clue regarding what my gifts or talents are. One of the things that you'll want to do is look at where you experience great joy and effectiveness? What do you thoroughly enjoy doing? What are the things in your life where you're really effective?

As a young person, you may not have had very many experiences and you may not know yourself very well. You have to give yourself lots of opportunities to try different things. I enjoy explaining things to people. I love explaining God's Word. I love explaining almost anything. I can hardly not teach. I find joy and effectiveness in leading. I love leading people to Jesus.

Where do you experience joy? Jesus came to give life and to give it to the full. What makes you go off like a bottle rocket? What are you really good at? That's an indicator of God's will for your life.

Third,

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What do wise mentors say?

We can discover God's will by listening to the wisdom of other people who are known for their maturity and their own ability to hear from God. That's a constant refrain from the book of Proverbs.

Slide Proverbs 12:15

¹⁵ The way of fools seems right to them,
but the wise listen to advice.

And

Slide Proverbs 15:22

²² Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed.

And in

Slide Proverbs 19:20

²⁰ Listen to advice and accept discipline,
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

It is really important, friends, who you go to for counsel and advice. Let me just say parenthetically if you're seeking counsel for your marriage, who should you go to? Do you go to a friend or family member or a counselor or marriage therapist who is not committed or submitted to God and the authority of God's Word? What kind of counsel do you think you'd get from someone about marriage or your investments or about a major life decision when the person you're talking with is not a mature follower of Jesus? Why would you think you'd get the mind of God from someone who doesn't care anything about God's mind? If you're trying to hear God's voice, find a good mentor who is known to hear God's voice. Here are some of the qualities you should look for in a mentor: The person should be objective. They shouldn't have a personal interest in the decision I'm making one way or the other. They shouldn't be affected by the decision. The person ought to be a good listener. The person ought to have strong self-esteem. They shouldn't need you to affirm them. They ought to be able to confront you and challenge you, even about things you feel strongly about.

If you are in your 20s, we have started some intergenerational small groups led by folks in their 40s who are a few steps ahead of you. So if you are a young adult and are seeking a mentor or some wisdom for your life we have started multigenerational small

groups for you to attend.

We also have some new ones that are starting, so if you're interested in joining one of these groups you can check out the this week page on the website

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Vineyardcolumbus.org/thisweek

or if you're with us in person our small groups pastors are in the lobby and would love to chat with you.

The point is if we really want to hear God's voice, we're not going to make independent decisions. I know people I respect might object to this decision regarding this relationship, regarding this move, this career choice, so I'm going to keep it secret. Keeping things secret or hiding what you're doing from godly people because you anticipate them objecting is a great sign that you're not listening to the Lord.

Being transparent, being open, being in the light is a sign that you want to follow the good shepherd.

Gospel call

How to Discover God's Will for Your Life

Rich Nathan
November 6 & 7, 2021
Recover Your Life
John 10:1-10

1. Bad ways to hear God's voice
 - a. The finger in the Bible method of hearing God's voice
 - b. The open door method of hearing God's voice
 - c. The opposite of what I want method of hearing God's voice
2. A foundational thought for hearing God's voice
3. Three questions to ask ourselves to hear God's voice
 - a. What are your sanctified desires?
 - b. What are your gifts and talents?
 - c. What do wise mentors say?