

Why Do I Keep Missing God's Will?

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Question: "Dear Pastor Tim, How to distinguish our true calling from our desire or Satanic involvement?" So hear the question. "How to distinguish our true calling..." what should I do in life? This may even come down to decisions that we make. But how can I distinguish my true calling or what God wants me to do in life, or what He wants me to do making certain decisions, how can I determine His will from my own desire - like my desire being self-willed. Not in accord with His desire. "...Or even satanic involvement." Being guided by the devil. Maybe being influenced or impressions or something. "As Proverbs 16:3 goes, 'Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.'" Now listen to this. "In the past few years, I have certain goals..." So, this is what he's coming down to as far as calling. He says he's got certain goals at work, certain goals as far as relationships, and certain goals as far as ministry. Then he tacks this on the end. "...To honor God and consistently pray for." So, he has these goals: work, relationships, ministry, that he says are to honor God, and he consistently prays for these things. He says, "I saw things..." that he thought were desirable... "...in my mind, and desirable..." as far as he's concerned, "in glorifying God. But at the end, they turn out to be desperate situations." They go bad. "I sometimes feel like I'm losing hope and heart in God. I even start to doubt myself on initiatives to start off these goals." I think what he means there is I even start to doubt as far as taking initiative towards any goals that have to do with relationships or work or ministry, because I've tried and they turn into desperate situations. "And I feel like I'm losing hope and heart in God." So, how do you distinguish God's will or a true calling from something that's our desire or satanic involvement?

Discussion: Now, here's the thing that struck me. Obviously, I have time to read these things over three or four times. But I got to think about this. Listen to what he says: "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." Now, he's taking a text: "Commit your ways unto the Lord, and your thoughts shall be established." Now, he throws that verse out, but then in the end, he says, the thing works out terrible and he's losing hope in God and heart in God. Does anybody see a problem with that? You know, the way I think he takes "commit your ways to the Lord, and He'll establish your thoughts," the way I think he takes that is well, I figure out what I want to do. I take my ways - the way I want to go, and I take it to God, and I expect Him to jump on the bandwagon and bless it. And if He doesn't, then I get upset. That's basically what's happening to this guy here. And I think Ulysses can tell something about distinguishing, just simply by looking at how he's responding in the end.

I mean, let me ask you this. If your way is truly surrendered to the Lord; if you bring your ways - not that you've already got figured out what you want to do, but you bring your ways to the Lord in the sense that: Lord, I'm surrendered as far as my ways go, I think this is what You might have me to do, but I'm not sure, so I'm acknowledging You in this and I'm bringing my ways to You. You see, the thing about Him establishing my thoughts is that if I'm truly surrendered, He's going to establish my thoughts as to the right way to go. And He's going to show me the way to

go. And as He takes me down the path He wants me to go, if all of a sudden, I break out in anger, or I stop trusting God, because I don't like the way He's leading me - you see, this is the problem with Ulysses is he's saying he's committing his ways, but in the end, when the way that he thinks he ought to go with regards to work and relationships and ministry - see, he's got it in his mind, this is the way to glorify God. But then he tries to go down that path and God causes it not to work out good. And then he's upset or he's not trusting the Lord.

But I would say this, isn't this the heart of all temptation? Isn't this the heart of all suffering? Isn't this the heart of the Christian life? Is basically to take my ambitions and my desires, my goals, and unless you forsake all that you have you can't be Christ's disciples, but isn't that the heart of it? Putting it all on the altar? Isn't the way to walk before the Lord, we acknowledge the Lord, but if the Lord causes it not to work out, if we're truly surrendered, we don't stop trusting the Lord. What we do is we trust the Lord. Ok, Lord, I thought you wanted me in the ministry. But as I strive to do this ministry, God's people aren't blessed, doors don't open. But you know what? That shouldn't leave us not trusting the Lord. If we're trusting the Lord; if we're committing our ways to Him, that should lead us to believe, Lord, that's not what You want me to do. Or just maybe it's not what You want me to do yet. I think how he responds here kind of shows where his heart is. And I think if we're wanting to weigh things out before the Lord; if we want to distinguish when our own will is involved versus if it's something God wants us to do.

Listen, we know this. If a man desires the office of an overseer he desires a good thing. A desire for that isn't bad. Some people have this notion, well, it can't be God's will, if I desire it. Some people have that idea. If I desire to marry her, then that can't be God's will. I mean, if I'm going to marry her, it's got to be somebody I don't desire to marry. Or, if I'm truly called to the ministry, then I'm the guy that's going to try to run the other way all the time and I have no desire for it. I mean, some people view the Christian life that way, that you know, they lick their finger, and they're trying to figure out if it's God's will because it's the least desirable path. Now, sometimes God does call us to go down the least desirable path. But that isn't how you figure out God's will to look at the most horrific path possible and say, I guess that's the path God's always calling me to. That's just not true. That's not right.

What I want to look at is this: Jeremiah 42. As I was thinking about Ulysses, this just came to my mind. It often comes to my mind. Jeremiah 42. What's interesting about this is you remember Nebuchadnezzar came in, conquered Jerusalem. Basically destroyed the city, destroyed the temple. Do you remember what happened after that? Nebuchadnezzar appointed a man to be governor. He left some of the poor. He left some of the Jews - some of the people in Jerusalem. And he set a man by the name of Gedaliah. He set this man as governor over them. If you look in chapter 41, "Gedaliah Murdered" is basically the heading that I have in my ESV. What happened was this guy Ishmael - now, it's not Ishmael the brother of Isaac. This is another Ishmael. But he comes on the scene and some of the Jews are telling Gedaliah, look, this guy Ishmael's going to kill you. And Gedaliah played it down. He said no he's not. And he did. Ishmael killed him. Ishmael killed Gedaliah. And you know what happened to many of the Jews that were there? And they were being headed up by a guy named Johanan. They feared

because what they thought is the governor's dead. The Chaldeans are going to come back in here and they're going to kill us all. We've got to get out of here. We've got to run down to Egypt for safety. And that's kind of where we pick up in chapter 42. "Then all the commanders of the forces and Johanan, the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest came near, and said to Jeremiah the prophet, 'Let our plea for mercy...'" Now this is specifically what I want you to see. "Let our plea for mercy come before you and pray to the Lord your God for us, for all this remnant, because we are left with but a few as your eyes see us, that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go and the thing that we should do."

Here's what a lot of people do. They say, "We want to know God's will." They say it. And that's what's happening here. You see it. They're saying it. Jeremiah, we know you're a prophet of God. We're here. We want a word from the Lord. We want you to tell us what to do. And it all sounds really good right then. But you know what the problem was? You know what the big problem was? Verse 17 of the previous chapter. "They went and stayed at Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem intending to go to Egypt." You see that? In the previous chapter? Verse 17 They already intended to go to Egypt. That's the problem. And see, they come to the prophet, and they say, "Ask the Lord..." Verse 4: "Jeremiah the prophet said to them, 'I've heard you. Behold, I will pray to the Lord your God according to your request. Whatever the Lord answers you, I will tell you. I will keep nothing back from you.'" But what's the issue? The issue is that they already made up their mind to go, and he tells them. He tells them in verse 11. "'Don't fear the king of Babylon of whom you're afraid. Do not fear him,' declares the Lord. 'For I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand. I will grant you mercy.'" Listen to what God is saying to them. But look at chapter 43:1. "When Jeremiah finished speaking to all the people these words of the Lord their God with which the Lord their God had sent him to them, Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to Jeremiah, 'You're telling a lie. The Lord our God did not send you to say do not go to Egypt to live there.'"

Well, ok, this is the issue. This is what I think is the problem with Ulysses. He already gets his mind made up about what he wants to do. And you see, what he wants is God to bless him in what he wants to do. And he feels vindicated because he feels like well, this is the way I'm going to glorify God. He mentions that twice distinctly. That this is the way he has figured out he is going to glorify God. And when God doesn't jump on that bandwagon to glorify Himself the way that Ulysses thinks that God should jump on the bandwagon, then he's upset. And you see that he's upset. In fact, he's ready to throw in the towel. He says that he is wondering whether he can take any initiative to do anything for one. But he feels like he's "losing hope and heart in God." He's losing hope in God. Why would you lose hope in God? See, that's like Johanan saying I just feel like I'm losing hope in God because what? Well, because I thought the thing to do that was going to glorify Him was to save all of the Israelites by going down to Egypt because certainly the king of Babylon is going to come in here now that Gedaliah's dead, and he's going to butcher us all. And so saving all of God's people by running down to Egypt, well that's the way to glorify God. And then when you find out, well, God's not even in that, then you deny it. Then you find fault. Then it's, well, that's all a lie. That's not what he said.

You see, this is the heart of suffering. This is the heart of trial. This is the heart of surrender is when things don't go the way that I think they should, am I going to deny the Lord? Am I going to throw in the towel? Am I going to lose hope in God? You see, God is in the business of calling us to go down paths that don't always make us comfortable and very often that are not in accord with our agenda. Very often, the very thing we wanted to do is the very thing that He doesn't want us to do.

You know, one of the things that you definitely find about the Christian life is that God is in the business of killing the idols. And listen, He is in the business of having us go up on Mt. Moriah and stick the knife in our Isaac's. And you know what? There are all sorts of things that become idols subtly over time. Even something we want to do. Even desires, even agendas. And it is interesting how often the Lord tests our resolve to follow Him. And it's a real test of maturity as to how well we respond to the Lord when He takes us down the path that we didn't want to go down. We have plans. It's not wrong to strategize. It's not wrong to have plans. It's not wrong to take initiative. It's not wrong to seek to set goals in life. But you know, the very spirit of acknowledging the Lord in all of our ways and He'll direct our path is that as we acknowledge Him in the ways, you know where we want to be? Lord, I'm acknowledging You here. I've examined all the facts. I've sought counsel. And I think I should move in this direction. In fact, that's the direction I desire to move in. And I don't see any reason not to. But Lord, if that's not the way that You want me to go, shut the door. And you know what? Sometimes, He does shut the door. But the last thing we want to do when He does that is say, well, I'm losing hope. We need to be like Job. We may go down a path and we may find out that this isn't just the path we don't want to walk down, this is a very difficult path. It's got a lot of sufferings, a lot of trial, and we need to be in a place where we can say, though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. And so this is a big test of maturity: how we respond when things don't go our way.

Any other thoughts on that before we go to the next one?

(from the room) Yeah, I'd just say, one trap he's falling into is I have this desire, so it must be from the Lord. But then, you know the heart is deceitful above all things. Who can understand it? So, I think we need to be careful. Just because I have this desire, doesn't mean it's necessarily from the Lord.

James: Some people really press that verse "delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." And they don't interpret that correctly. Why don't you give a correct interpretation?

Tim: Here's the thing, if I delight myself in the Lord - let's take Ulysses here. If my desire is really that God be glorified, and I was going to go to the right and God says to me, the way I'm really going to be glorified is if you go to the left. So you've got to take the first part of that. If I delight myself in the Lord, and He is my delight, and seeing Him glorified is my delight; seeing

Him made majestic and worshiped and lifted up and exalted - if that is my delight, then I want to go down the path that's going to most exalt Him. And that would be my desire.

I mean, listen to the Apostle Paul. His delight was in the Lord. And he said it doesn't matter - you tell me that if I go to Jerusalem, that they're going to do this to me. He says I'm ready to go. I'm ready to be thrown in jail. I'm ready to die. Why? Because Christ was everything to him. You see, the problem is that you get people that read these verses - kind of like this one: "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." Well, the problem is that maybe what it means to commit your works to the Lord - to surrender them to the Lord - maybe that's not really being understood. And perhaps "delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart," I think people pass over the first part of that way too quickly. What they're assuming because they come to church, or even because they profess to be Christians, they're assuming that somehow, ok, God's going to jump on the bandwagon of their desires and give them any desire that happens to cross their hearts and minds. But it's almost like there's this assumption. Well, yes, I commit my ways to the Lord. That's what I'm doing. There's this assumption: Well, of course, I delight in the Lord. I wouldn't be coming to church if I didn't. But when you really start to think about what it means to commit your ways to the Lord, it's the idea that I'm committing, I'm committing those to Him. I'm offering them to Him. I'm surrendering them to Him. Or if you really think about what it means to delight thyself in the Lord. He's your chief love. And if He's going to be most honored - you think about that.

You remember how Jesus said to Peter, when you're young, you're going to do this. But when you get old, people are going to dress you and they're going to lead you somewhere you don't want to go. He told Peter this showing by what manner he was going to glorify God. But you see, if you hear that, really? History tells us what? He was crucified upside down? Whether that's exactly right or not we know that Jesus was definitely saying he was going to be murdered. And what was that? That was showing by what way he was going to glorify God. How about that? How about if you hear that? See, we think we've got it figured out. Oh, this is the way to glorify God. I'm going to be a music leader and I'm going to stand up before the church and I'm going to perform and everybody's going to worship and we're going to be lifted up to the Lord. Well, if Peter would have had that idea, he'd have been sore disappointed. Are we ready to say, Lord, if You want me crucified upside down, and that's going to bring You glory, so be it. Just please give me the grace to not deny You in the midst of it. I mean, that would be my hope. Just give me grace, Lord.

And as I just heard John Piper a little while ago say that Corrie Ten Boom when she was a child, she would tell her dad, "Papa, I'm afraid that I would deny Jesus if I was being martyred." And he said, "Corrie, do I give you the money for your train ticket weeks in advance of our trip?" She said, "No, daddy, you give me the money right when we're there and we need to buy the tickets at the ticket booth." And he said that's the same way God does it. He gives us the grace that we need when we need it.

Kevin, you had something?

Kevin: I thought of what Conrad Murrell said you'll never know the will of God until you're fully committed to it.

Tim: Exactly. (unintelligible) Yeah, the will being surrendered. That's the real issue. And I suspect - what you can see by the way Ulysses answers is his will's not surrendered to God's. That's a dead giveaway. And he's asking the question at the beginning, how can you distinguish? That's how you distinguish, right there. How do you respond when things don't go the way that you wanted them to go? Are you going to continue to embrace the Lord and trust Him? And praise His name? Anything else before we go on?

(from the room) Do you think in general that the Lord's will would be like what somebody's good at or gifted in? I remember having a conversation with Jeremy. He was saying I would hate to be working at home like I do, and I was saying, I'd hate to be studying all day...

Tim: Well, yes, there's ways that God designs us. I mean, I don't believe that our spiritual gifts are going to be the kinds of things that we despise doing or that we dread or we hate. Not that if a guy's called to the ministry - I'm reading Spurgeon's biography, and he just received the call to New Park Street, and you know, was there a certain terror that goes with that? Yes. But you know when they asked him, there was no long drawn out thing. He said I accept. Right off. I accept. Why? Because he believed it was God's will. He wanted to do it. I mean, he didn't not want to do it. I would say the same to a young man. If you're thinking about marrying, and there's a girl you just simply don't want to marry, well, don't marry her. I mean, you know, but I would ask this: why don't you want to? I think we need to examine our motives. I think we need to look at what makes us tick; what it is that we want; what drives us; what our motives are; what Scripture we're following. We want the light of God's Word to be a lamp unto our feet in all that we do. If we're constantly in the Word and it's shining on us, what we're going to find is it's often going to reveal motives and desires that are just downright wrong; evil. I mean, even if you're a genuine Christian, that doesn't mean you can't desire something that's wrong; that's not good. Or even that it might be good, but God doesn't think it's good for you. And He's not going to give it to you. I mean, there are things that God may give to you, but He'll never give to me. Even though I want it. It's very interesting how some people get something, but you know, you talk to them and it's like they don't even care that they have it. Whereas somebody else really wants it. But God never gives it to them. But vice versa as well. God is very protective of us as far as submitting to Him, not allowing idols to get a foothold in our lives. He's very protective. Ok. Well, let's move on.