

God's Will and Your Life

VANCOUVER WORLD'S FAIR

When the World's Fair was coming to Vancouver, our association of churches was convinced God wanted us to try to reach the 22 million people who would come to our city. We had about 2,000 members in our churches. How in the world could our little group make much impact on such a mass of tourists from all over the world?

Two years before the fair, we began to set our plans in motion. The total income for our association was \$9,000. The following year it grew to \$16,000. The year of the World's Fair, we set a budget for \$202,000.¹ We had commitments that would provide 35 percent of that budget. Sixty-five percent of it depended on prayer. Can you operate a budget on prayer? Yes. But when you do that, you are attempting something only God can do. What do most of us do? We set the practical budget, which represents what we can do. Then we might set a second hope or faith budget. The budget we really trust and use, however, is the one we can reach by ourselves. We do not really trust God to make a practical difference in what we do.

As an association of churches, we decided God had definitely led us to the work that would cost \$202,000. That became our operating budget. All of our people began praying for God to provide for everything we believed He had led us to do during the World's Fair. At the end of the year, I asked our treasurer how much money we had received. From Canada, the United States, and other parts of the world we had received \$264,000. People from all over North America assisted us. During the fair we became a catalyst to see almost 20,000 people accept Jesus Christ. You cannot explain that except in terms of God's intervention. Only God could have done that. He accomplished it with a people who had determined to be servants and were moldable and available for their Master's use.

1. Throughout this book I will give illustrations that sometimes mention amounts of money. Don't get caught up in the amounts, since they are relative to the year when the event took place. Some amounts may seem small by current standards, while other amounts may seem inconceivably large in other cultures or economies. Focus instead on the faith required or the miraculous timing and provision of the Lord in regard to the need. In the case above, the amounts merely indicate the size of the faith required when the people compared the proposed budget to their previous experience.

DAY I

AS YOU FOLLOW
JESUS ONE DAY AT A
TIME, HE WILL KEEP
YOU IN THE CENTER
OF GOD'S WILL.



Real
Christianity
is not merely
a religion; it is
a relationship
with a Person.

1 Corinthians 2:14

"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."


Jesus Is Your Way

Jesus said, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The essence of eternal life and of this study is for you to know God and to know Jesus Christ, whom He has sent. Knowing God does not come through a program or a method. Real Christianity is not merely a religion; it is a relationship with a Person. It is an intimate love relationship with God. Through this relationship God reveals His will and invites you to join Him where He is at work. When you obey, God accomplishes through you something only He can do. Then you come to know God in a more intimate way by experiencing Him at work through your life.

I want to help you move into the kind of relationship with God through which you will experience eternal life to the fullest degree possible. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Would you like to experience life in its fullest measure? You can if you are willing to respond to God's invitation to an intimate love relationship with Him.


A Prerequisite—A Relationship with Jesus

In this course I assume you have already trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and have acknowledged Him as the Lord of your life. If you have not made this important decision, the rest of the course will have little meaning for you because spiritual matters can be understood only by those who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them (see **1 Cor. 2:14**).

1 If you sense a need to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, now is the time to settle this matter with God. Ask God to speak to you as you read the following Scriptures. 

- Romans 3:23: All have sinned.
- Romans 6:23: Eternal life is a free gift of God.
- Romans 5:8: Because of His love for you, Jesus paid the death penalty for your sins.
- Romans 10:9-10: Confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead.
- Romans 10:13: Ask God to save you, and He will.

To place your faith in Jesus and receive His gift of eternal life, you must—

- recognize you are a sinner who needs a saving relationship with Jesus Christ;
- confess (agree with God about) your sins; 
- repent of your sins (turn from sin to God);
- ask Jesus to save you by His grace;
- turn over the rule of your life to Jesus, letting Him be your Lord.

2 If you need help, call on your minister or a Christian friend for help. If you have just made this important decision, tell someone the good news of what God has done in your life. Then notify your church about

your decision so they can celebrate with you and help you grow in your relationship with Christ.

Looking for More in Your Experience of God?

You may have been frustrated in your Christian experience because you know God has a more abundant life for you than you have experienced so far. Perhaps you have been a believer for many years, but your Christian life has become dry and monotonous. Maybe you have heard others excitedly talking about what God is doing in their lives, and you long to have a dynamic walk with God too. Or you may earnestly desire God's directions for your life and ministry. You may have experienced tragedy in your life. Standing bewildered in the middle of a broken life, you don't know what to do. Whatever your present circumstances may be, my earnest prayer is that during this study you will be able to—

- hear when God is speaking to you;
- clearly identify His activity in your life;
- believe Him to be and do everything He has promised;
- adjust your beliefs, character, and behavior to Him and His ways;
- recognize a direction He is taking in your life and identify what He wants to do through your life;
- clearly know what you need to do in response to His activity in your life;
- experience God doing through you what only He can do!

It is impossible for this course to achieve these goals in your life. These are things only God can do. I will serve as your guide, encourager, and catalyst (someone who assists in bringing about an action or a reaction) for a deeper walk with God. I will share with you the biblical truths by which God guides my life and ministry. I will tell you about some wonderful works the Lord has done as God's people have applied biblical truths to following Him. In the learning activities I will invite you to interact with God so He can reveal to you the ways He wants you to apply these truths in your life, ministry, and church.

The Holy Spirit will be your personal Teacher (see **John 14:26**) during this study. He will guide you to apply these truths according to God's will. He will work to reveal God, His purposes, and His ways to you. Jesus said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17). This will be true of this course as well. The Holy Spirit working in you will confirm in your heart the truth of Scripture. When I present what I see as a biblical truth, you can depend on the Holy Spirit to confirm whether that teaching comes from God. Therefore, your intimate relationship with God, cultivated through prayer, meditation, and Bible study, will be an indispensable part of this course.

The Bible is God's Word to you. The Holy Spirit honors and uses God's Word in speaking to you. The Scriptures are your source of authority for your faith and practice. You cannot depend on traditions, your experience, or others' experiences to be accurate authorities on God's will and ways. As you study this resource, use the suggested Scriptures to examine your experience and tradition against God's Word of truth.

Anything significant that happens in your life during this study will be the result of God's activity in your life. Let the Spirit of God lead you into an intimate relationship with the God of the universe, "who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:20).



The Holy Spirit
will be your
personal Teacher.

John 14:26

"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things."



The Scriptures
are your Source
of Authority.



The goal is not to finish this course but to have a life-transforming encounter with God.

This book is different from most material with which you may be familiar. It is not designed for you to sit down and read from cover to cover. I want you to study, understand, and apply biblical truths to your life. This challenging exercise takes time. To get the most from this course, you must take your time by studying only one day's lesson at a time. Do not try to study several lessons in a single day. You need time to let these truths sink into your understanding and practice. The goal is not to finish this course but to have a life-transforming encounter with God as you study these materials. You want to experience a Person—Jesus Christ. Time, meditation, and personal application are necessary to allow the Holy Spirit to make Christ real in your life.

Do not skip any learning activities. They are designed to help you learn and apply the truths to your life. They will help you establish a personal, daily walk with God. Many activities will lead you to interact with God through prayer, meditation, and Bible study. If you leave out these activities, you may miss an encounter with God that could radically change your life. You will learn that your relationship with God is the most important part of knowing and doing God's will. Without an intimate relationship with Him, you will miss what He wants to do in and through your life.

3 The learning activities are indicated by the symbol that appears beside this paragraph. Follow the instructions given. After you have completed the activity, continue reading.

Normally, you will be given answers following the activity so you can check your work. Write your own answer before reading mine. Sometimes your response to the activity will be your own opinion, and no right or wrong answer can be given. If you have difficulty with an activity or if you question the answers given, write a note in the margin. Discuss your concern with your leader or small group.

Once each week you should attend a small-group session designed to help you discuss the content you studied the previous week, share insights and testimonies, encourage one another, and pray together. Small groups should not have more than 10 members for maximal effectiveness. Larger groups will experience less closeness, less intimate sharing, more absenteeism, and more dropouts. If more than 10 persons want to study the course, enlist additional leaders for each group of 6 to 10.

If you have started studying *Experiencing God* but are not involved in a small group, enlist some friends or family to study the course with you. Other members of the body of Christ can help you more fully know and understand God's will. Apart from a small-group experience, you will miss much of the intended learning from this course.


Jesus Is Your “Map”

For 12 years I pastored a church in a city surrounded by farming communities. One day a farmer invited me to visit him at his farm. His directions went something like this: “Go a quarter mile past the edge of the city, and you will see a big, red barn on your left. Go to the next road and turn to your left. Take that road for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. You'll see a large poplar tree. Go right for about 4 miles, and then you will see a big rock ...” I wrote all of this down, and only by God's grace did I eventually manage to find the farm!

The next time I went to the man's house, he was with me in the vehicle. Because there was more than one way to get to his house, he could have taken me any way he wanted to. You see, he was my map. What did I have to do? I simply had to listen to him and do what he said. Every time he said, “Turn,” I did what he said. He took me a

way I had never been and could not have discovered on my own. I could never retrace that route by myself. The farmer was my map; he knew the way.

4 When you come to the Lord Jesus to seek His will for your life, which of the following requests more closely resembles the way you generally ask? Check your response.

-  a. Lord, what do You want me to do? When do You want me to do it? How shall I do it? Where shall I do it? Whom do You want me to involve along the way? And please tell me what the outcome will be.
- b. Lord, as You go with me, tell me what to do one step at a time. I will do it.


Isn't the first response typical? We always ask God for a detailed road map. We say, "Lord, if You could just tell me where I am heading, then I will be able to set my course and go."

He says, "You don't need to. You need to follow Me one day at a time." This response comes only from those who have learned to walk closely with God and to trust Him to care for the details of their lives. We need to come to the place where the second response is ours. Who really knows the way for you to go to fulfill God's purpose for your life? Who knows how you can experience abundant life? God. Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6).

- He did not say, "I will show you the way."
- He did not say, "I will give you a road map."
- He did not say, "I will tell you which direction to go."
- He said, "I am the way." Jesus knows the way; He is your way.

5 If you do everything Jesus tells you one day at a time, will you always be in the center of where God wants you to be? Check your response.

- No, Jesus does not guide people specifically.
- No, by seeking to follow Jesus, I could end up going the wrong way.
- It is much wiser to wait until God tells me all the details before I begin moving my life in a particular direction.

-  Yes, if I follow Jesus one day at a time, I will be right in the center of God's will for my life.

When you get to the place in your life where you trust Jesus to guide you one step at a time, you experience tremendous freedom. If you don't trust Him to guide you this way, what happens if you don't know the way you should go with your life? You worry every time you make a decision. You may become immobilized with worry. This is not the way God intends for you to live.

I have found that when I release my way to God, then I immediately respond to everything He tells me each day. He gives me plenty to do to fill every day with meaning and purpose. If I do what He says, I am in the center of His will when He wants to use me for a special assignment. My primary concern should not be, What should I do with my life tomorrow? but, What does God want me to do today? As you follow Jesus one day at a time, He will keep you in the center of God's will.

Following One Day at a Time

Abram (later God changed his name to Abraham) is a good example of this approach to following God. He walked by faith and not by sight.

John 14:6


"I am the way and the truth and the life."

6 Read about Abram’s call to do God’s will. Notice how much detail he was given before God asked him to follow Him. Underline where he was to go and what he was to do.

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.

‘I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
And you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.’

“So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there” (Gen. 12:1-5).

What did God say? How specific was He? “Leave” and “go.” Go where? “To a land I will show you.” 

7 Are you ready to follow God’s will that way? Check your response.

- No, I don’t think God will ask me to go anywhere without showing me ahead of time where I am going.
- I’m not sure.
- Yes, I am willing to follow Him by faith and not by sight.
- Other: _____

Many times, as with Abram, God called people to simply follow Him. (Tomorrow you will read about several.) He is much more likely to ask you to follow Him one day at a time than He is to spell out all the details before you begin to obey Him. As we continue our study together, you will see this truth illustrated in the lives of many people in the Bible.

8 Read Matthew 6:33-34 in the margin; then pause and pray.

- Agree that God is absolutely trustworthy.
- Agree with God that you will follow Him one day at a time.
- Agree to follow Him even when He does not spell out all the details.
- Agree that you will let Him be your Way.

If you cannot agree to these now, openly confess your struggles to Him. Ask Him to help you want to do His will in His way. Claim the promise “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13).

Matthew 6:33-34
“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Daily Review

At the end of each day's lesson, I will ask you to review the lesson and pray. Ask God to identify for you one or more statements or Scriptures from the material that He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. This is a personal-application question that has no wrong answer. If God makes a statement or Scripture meaningful to you, that is the correct response. I will also ask you to reword that statement or Scripture into a prayer of response for your life. Pray about what God wants you to do in response to that truth. This should become a time of prayer and meditation each day as you ask God what He wants you to do in response to the truths you encountered in the lesson. You may want to take notes in the margin each day as you study. God may reveal several responses He wants you to make to a particular lesson. Don't let those thoughts get away from you. Write them down so you can review them. When God speaks, it is important to write down what He says. You may want to keep a notebook for recording your spiritual journey. I will talk to you more about journaling in a later unit.

After today's lesson a person might have responded like this:

- What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?
"Jesus is my Way. I don't need a complete road map to stay in the center of God's will."
- Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.
"Lord, I will follow You even if I don't know where You are leading."
- What does God want you to do in response to today's study? "I need to quit worrying about tomorrow and trust Jesus to guide me one day at a time."

9 Each week I have given you a verse of Scripture to memorize. You will find memory cards for these Scriptures in the back of the book. Cut out the card for unit 1 (John 15:5). If you prefer, you may use a different translation for the memory verses in this study. The verses on the cards are from the New International Version. Read through John 15:5 several times. Then begin memorizing it one phrase at a time. Write your memory verse for this unit. Practice your memory verses daily.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

As I follow Jesus one day at a time, He will keep me in the center of God's will.

Jesus is my Way. I don't need any other road map.

Review today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more statements or Scriptures He wants you to understand, learn, or practice. Underline them. Then respond to the following.

What was the most meaningful statement or Scripture you read today?



Reword the statement or Scripture into a prayer of response to God.



What does God want you to do in response to today's study?



DAY 2

JESUS WATCHED TO
SEE WHERE THE FA-
THER WAS AT WORK
AND JOINED HIM.



Look to see
what God
says and how
He works in
the Scriptures.
Make your
decisions and
evaluate your
experiences
based on bibli-
cal truths.

Malachi 3:6

"I the LORD do not change."

Jesus Is Your Model

During this course and throughout your life, you will have times when you want to respond to situations based on your own experiences or your own wisdom. Such an approach will get you in trouble. This should be your guideline: always go to the Bible and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth of your situation to you. Look to see what God says and how He works in the Scriptures. Make your decisions and evaluate your experiences based on biblical truths.

When you study the Scriptures, do not base your decision on one isolated verse or story. Look to see how God generally works throughout the Scriptures. When you learn how God has consistently related to people throughout history, you can expect Him to work in a similar way with you. Your experience is valid only as it is confirmed in the Scriptures. I never deny anyone's personal experience. I always reserve the right, however, to interpret it according to what I understand from Scripture. At times individuals get upset with me and say, "I don't care what you say. I've experienced this." I kindly respond, "I do not deny your experience, but I question your interpretation of what happened because it is contrary to what I see in God's Word." Our experiences cannot be our guide. Every event in your life must be understood and interpreted by the Scriptures, for the God revealed in Scripture does not change (see [Mal. 3:6](#)).

1 Mark the following statements *T* (true) or *F* (false).

- a. I can trust my experiences as an effective way to know and follow God.
- b. I should always evaluate my experiences based on the truths I find in God's Word.
- c. I may get a distorted understanding of God if I do not check my experiences against the truths of Scripture.
- d. I can trust God to work in my life similarly to ways I see Him working throughout the Scriptures.

Statements b, c, and d are true. The first statement is false because your experiences must be interpreted in light of the Scriptures. Experience alone is not a trustworthy guide. You must be cautious about isolating a single event from the context of Scripture. Instead, observe the way God works throughout the Bible. You will never go wrong if, under the Holy Spirit's instruction, you let the Bible be your guide.

The Bible Is Your Guide

Christians are becoming more and more unfamiliar with the Bible as a guide for their daily living. Consequently, they turn to worldly solutions, programs, and methods that appear to be answers to spiritual problems. I use God's Word as a guide to what I should do. Some people say, "Henry, that is not practical." They want me to disregard the Bible and to rely on the world's ways or on personal experience. But as a Christian disciple, I cannot abandon the guidance I find in the Bible. The Bible is my guide for how to relate to God and how to live my life.