



Have you ever wished you could have lunch with Jesus?

Suppose you had 45 uninterrupted minutes with the Son of God to ask any question on your mind. What would you say? I know what I'd ask: "Lord Jesus, am I doing what you want me to do?" That's important because I don't want to come to the end of my life and find out I wasted it on things that didn't matter.

All of us have moments when we want to hear God's voice or receive some definite sign regarding a relationship, a business decision, a career choice, or a major expenditure.

Our choices matter. *We make our decisions, and our decisions turn around and make us.* We face so many questions:

- Should I get married? If the answer is yes, should I marry Joe or Jake or Susan or Sally?
- Should I go to college? If the answer is yes, should I go to Penn State or Georgia Tech or UCLA? What about Cedarville or Liberty?
- I've been offered a new job. It's a good opportunity, but I like my current job. Should I take the new job, or should I stay where I am?
- We have two children. We're thinking about having a third. Should we have another one, or should we think about adopting?
- Is God calling me to the mission field? How can I be sure? Three mission boards are interested in me. How do I know which one to choose?

It would be a lot easier if you could open the door one evening and be greeted by a chorus of angels chanting, “Georgia Tech! Georgia Tech! Georgia Tech!” Or if you got a special delivery letter from heaven that said, “Dear Beth, go to Moody Bible Institute. Love, God.” That would make it easy, but it doesn’t often happen that way. Most of the time we research, study, narrow the options, talk it over with trusted friends, pray about it, wait on the Lord, and then we make our choices and hope for the best.

Let’s begin with the following statement: *God wants you to know his will more than you want to know it. So he takes personal responsibility to see that you discover it. Knowing God’s will is God’s responsibility, not yours.* Let that last thought sink into your mind for a moment. You’ve probably never heard it put that way before.

Let me suggest what this means:

1. **He can put you exactly where he wants you to be.**
2. **He can arrange all the details years in advance.**
3. **He can open doors that seem shut tight.**
4. **He can remove any obstacle standing in your way.**
5. **He can take your choices and fit them into his plan so that you end up at the right place at the right time.**
6. **He can even take your mistakes and bring good out of them.**
7. **He can take tragedy and use it for your good and his glory.**

*All he needs—the only thing he requires—is a willing heart.* He just needs you to cooperate with him. That doesn’t mean you won’t have to make decisions. But it does take the pressure off because it means you can trust God to take your decisions and use them to accomplish his will in your life.

## A SHORT COURSE IN GOD’S WILL

That brings us to the most important passage in the Bible about knowing God’s will for your life:

**“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV).**

This text is striking in its simplicity. There is nothing difficult about it. It is so simple that the youngest believer can understand it, and yet it is a comfort to the oldest saint of God. It has been the hope and encouragement of God’s people across the centuries.

These words cling to the soul because they speak to a great need we all feel—the need for guidance. After all, there is no greater question than this: *Lord, what do you want me to do?* Proverbs 3:5-6 suggests the basis on which guidance will come. It is a short course in knowing God’s will for your life. Applying this passage in your daily life will make a profound difference when you face tough decisions.

Most of us have known these verses for a long time. *You may have sung these words in a chorus, or you may have memorized them years ago.* Sometimes when we know a passage so well, it loses its power to amaze us. We’ve heard it so often that we’ve never stopped to think about what it means.

When I studied these verses for the first time, I discovered that five words unlock the message of this text. These five words are the keys to unlocking the mystery of God’s will for your life.

## **KEY #1:** REST ALL THAT YOU ARE UPON ALL THAT GOD IS

**“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.”**

In English, the word trust means to rely upon or to have confidence in. But the Hebrew word is stronger. It means “to rest your full weight on something.” It’s what you do when you lie down on your bed every night. You lay your full weight on the bed because you know it will hold you up. To trust in the Lord means to rest all that you are upon all that he is.

## **KEY #2:** GO ALL IN

**“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.”**

The word “heart” doesn’t refer to the organ that pumps blood throughout your body. In the Bible the word “heart” refers to the “decision room” where life makes up its mind. Psalm 86:11 says, “Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” I like that prayer because many days I feel scattered in a thousand directions. A divided heart has no focus. But the unfocused heart will never trust in the Lord, and thus will never discover God’s will.

Are you ready to go all in for Jesus? If so, you can discover God’s will for your life.

## **KEY #3:**

# DON'T THINK YOU CAN FIGURE IT OUT ON YOUR OWN

**“Lean not on your own understanding.”**

To lean means to rest upon something for partial support. Leaning is what you do when you walk with a cane or hold on to a walker because you are unsteady. The Hebrew word was used for leaning against a tree or a stone cliff. You lean on something when you are not strong enough to stand alone.

“Understanding” refers to the mental processes by which you analyze a problem, break it down into its smaller parts, and then make a decision about what you are going to do. Early in the morning when you make a list of all the things you have to do that day, you use your understanding to sort out your priorities. It’s what you do on Sunday night when you map out the upcoming week. That’s understanding. You use it any time you plan your life or solve a problem. Understanding is the decision-making ability God has given you.

When you take the word “lean,” put it with the word “understanding” and add the negative, you get an idea like this: *“Use all your mental powers, but do not lean on them for total support.”* Use your brain, but don’t think you are smart enough to figure out God’s will on your own. Make your plans, but leave room for God. Remember Proverbs 16:9, “We make our own plans, but the LORD decides where we will go” (CEV). Lean on the Lord. Rest your weight on him.

## **KEY #4:**

# KNOW GOD DEEPLY!

**“In all your ways acknowledge him.”**

This deserves extra consideration because the word “acknowledge” can be hard to understand. In Hebrew this word is a command. You could translate this phrase by saying, “In all your ways know him.” It means to know someone deeply and intimately.

It’s the kind of knowing that comes with personal experience. For instance, somebody might say, “Do you know the President of the United States?” I would say, “Sure, I know the President.” If he walked into the room, I would know who he is. If I heard his voice on TV, I would recognize it. Or if I saw his picture on the front page of the newspaper, I would know it was the President. Now, I don’t really know him. I can’t pick up the phone,

call the White House, and say, “Mr. President, this is Ray Pritchard. Let’s do lunch this week.” He won’t take my call because I don’t know him personally.

There is another kind of knowing. My wife and I know each other in a completely different way. We’ve known each other intimately for over forty years. After being together that long, strange things begin to happen. I will be sitting in the car thinking about a song, and she’ll start singing it. How does that happen? I don’t know. Or I will be thinking about a question, and before I can ask it, she’ll blurt out the answer. How does she do that? I don’t know. Or I’ll start a sentence, and to my great consternation she will finish the sentence before I do. When I ask, “How can you do that?” she says with a smile, “I know what you are thinking even before you say it.”

Seen in that light, we might translate verse 5 this way: “In all your ways know God intimately, deeply, personally. When you know God like that in every area of your life, he will direct your paths.”

## **KEY #5:** WHEN YOU NEED TO KNOW, YOU’LL KNOW

**“He shall direct your paths.”**

That’s a good translation, but I think the English Standard Version makes it clearer: “He will make straight your paths.” Imagine you are driving along a road that appears to be impassable. The road winds through the mountains and down into the swamps. It seems to have a thousand switchbacks. As you travel on, you discover portions of the road are washed out, others are filled with potholes, and still others are blocked by huge boulders. In some places the road has apparently become a dead end.

*This is the road of your life.* It appears to be covered with boulders and rocks. Some parts of it seem to be filled with potholes; other sections appear to be going nowhere. That’s the way life is.

Here is God’s message to you. If you will know God in every area of your life, he takes personal responsibility to make your way smooth and straight. He will remove the obstacles if they need to be removed. He will fill in the potholes if they need to be filled. He will redirect the detour so that what seemed to be a dead end turns out to be the shortest way to reach your destination.

If you live according to Proverbs 3:5-6, you’ll end up in the right place. That’s the promise of God to you.

## PHILIP YANCEY'S DEFINITION

It won't always be easy or come quickly. For most of us, most of the time, the exact opposite will be true. Rarely will we know God's plan in advance. My favorite definition of faith comes from Philip Yancey: "Faith means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse."

Many people struggle at this very point. The Bible says, in all your ways know God intimately, know him deeply, know him personally. As a husband and wife know each other—know God that way. Know him to that depth. Know him with that kind of intimacy. So often we skip this. When we get up in the morning, we say, "O God, help me. I'm busy today. I've got so much to do. I don't even have time to pray—so here's my list. Bless it all, Lord. I've got to go." We throw our list up toward heaven while we run out the door. What we are saying is, "God, here's my schedule. Please rubber-stamp it with your blessing." And we wonder why our days are filled with frustration.

Many of us go through life leaning almost completely on our own understanding. We like to be in control. I number myself among that group. I like to know what's going on. This passage is a warning to all of us who make our plans and then say, "Here, God, stamp it with your blessing because I am going to go out and do it for you." God says, "I don't work that way. Know me first. Put me first in everything, including all your plans, all your thinking, and all your dreams. Put me first, and I will make your way straight."

## GET TO KNOW GOD!

Do you want to know the secret of knowing the will of God? Here it is: *In everything you do, know God*. But we want a formula. "I don't like that. Give me three steps." Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us the secret is a relationship with God. Let's talk about Joe, who has been dating Shirley for nine months. When he picks her up for their Friday night date, she asks the logical question: "Where are we going tonight?" "I don't know," Joe replies. "I want to take you someplace you like. I wish you would give me a three-step formula, so I could know where you want to go on Friday nights." How would Shirley feel? Angry, upset, frustrated. "How is it that we've been dating every week for nine months, and you don't know what I like and don't like? Where have you been all this time?" She would have a right to be angry.

We want to reduce our relationship with God to a formula. But God says, "Know me. Spend time with me. Put me first in every area of your life because when you do that, I will take care of all those details."

## MINNESOTA OR SOUTH CAROLINA?

We're hung up on the decisions of life. Should I go here? Should I go there? Should I live in Minnesota or South Carolina? Should I marry Jane or Sue or Ellen or Sherry? Should I take the job, or should I say no? Here is the teaching of Proverbs 3:5-6 in one sentence: *God cares more about who you are than where you are.* When you say, "Lord, should I go to Minnesota or South Carolina?" you are asking the wrong question. The question is not where you are going to go, but what kind of person you are going to be wherever you go. The question is not, who should I marry, but what kind of person am I going to be no matter whom I marry?

While you are wrestling with the question of relocation, God wants to know, "Are you going to be my man or my woman, whether you go to Minnesota or South Carolina or whether you stay in Santa Fe?" If you decide to put God first in everything, it doesn't matter where you live. And if you are not going to put God first in everything, it doesn't matter where you live either. We focus all our energy on decisions. But God says, "Know me, and I will take care of the details." We want specific direction. God says, "In all your ways know me, and everything else will fall into place."

But what if you don't know today what you need to do tomorrow? That sentence describes all of us nearly all the time. *Only God knows the future.* When people ask me, "Does God have a blueprint for my life?" I tell them, "Yes, he does, but it's locked up on the 4th floor of the Administration Building in heaven. I don't know any way you can get a copy."

God usually reveals his will one step at a time. I saw this principle in action when a young couple, recently graduated from Bible college, came to see me with the good news that God was calling them to the mission field. "Where do you want to go?" I asked. "We don't know," the husband replied. So I looked at the wife, and she smiled in agreement. "You mean you have no idea at all?" "No." I held up my hand and moved it as if I were twirling a globe. "You mean that in all the world, you don't have even a tiny idea where you would like to go?" "No." As I pondered the situation, I realized no one had ever said anything like that to me before. Suddenly I had a flash of inspiration. Looking at that young couple, I said, "I've got the answer. The reason you don't know is because you don't need to know because if you needed to know, you would know, but since you don't know, you must not need to know, because if you had needed to know by now, you would know, but since you don't know, you must not need to know because when you need to know, you'll know. If God is God, that must be true." They laughed, we prayed together, and they went on their way.

A month later they came to tell me they knew where they were going. What happened in the interim? They met someone who knew someone who "happened" to know a woman whom they met almost by chance. She came over to talk to them, and one thing led to another, and now they were going overseas. The whole story was positively Byzantine in its

complexity. I couldn't draw it on a chart if I tried. They ended up spending many years serving the Lord on the other side of the world.

I am amazed as I think about how God led my friends. But on second thought, why be amazed? That's how God works, isn't it? When you need to know, you'll know. Not one day sooner, not one day later. If today you don't know what to do next week, it's because you don't need to know. Because if you needed to know, you would know. If God is God, that must be true.

Even when we are confused, God is not. He knows where he wants us to end up.

## “LORD, HERE ARE MY HANDS”

Knowing God means using all your energies for him.

*Lord, here are my hands.*

*Lord, here are my lips.*

*Lord, here are my eyes.*

*Lord, here are my ears.*

*Lord, here are my feet.*

Knowing God means taking all that you have and placing it at the disposal of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. God is able to remove the obstacles in front of you. He is able to fill in the potholes and turn a dead end into a four-lane highway. God rewards those who show regard for him by leading them to the right end and removing all the obstacles along the way.

Remember the five keys to unlocking God's will:

**Key #1: Rest All That You Are on All That God Is.**

**Key #2: Go All In.**

**Key #3: Don't Try to Figure It Out on Your Own.**

**Key #4: Know God Deeply!**

**Key #5: When You Need to Know, You'll Know.**

Life is a mysterious journey, full of unexpected twists and turns. The path ahead is a mystery to us all. No one can say for sure what is around the next bend. It may be a smooth road through a lovely valley, or we may discover the bridge is washed out, and we have to find a way to cross a deep river. Often the road will seem to disappear, or it may suddenly branch in three different directions, and we won't know which way to go. But there is One who knows the way because the past, present, and future are all the same to him, and the darkness is as the light of day. He knows the way we should go. He promised to direct your path, and he will do it. You can count on it.

Fear not, child of God. The Lord will not leave you alone as you journey from earth to heaven.

When you need to know, you'll know. If God is God, that must be true.