

# DISCIPLESHIP. LESSON 43

<b>1</b>	PRAYER
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**Group leader. Pray** for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

<b>2</b>	WORSHIP (20 minutes)	<i>[ATTITUDE EXPRESSED]</i> THANKING GOD
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Meditation  
Worship is expressing your attitude towards God.  
Theme: Thanking God.

**Read** Psalm 107:1-9,10-16,17-22.

God answers prayers, performs miracles, teaches us good things and lessons to learn.

**Let a few people tell about** a prayer that God has answered in his life; a miracle that God has performed; or a good teaching or lesson he has taught you. For example:

- He saved your life
- He gave you a life partner
- He gave you a healthy self-esteem
- He helped you to forgive an enemy

Worship.

Take turns and thank God in one or two sentences for one of the above things.

<b>3</b>	SHARING (20 minutes)	<i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> ESTHER 2 - 5
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**Take turns and share (or read** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Esther 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

<b>4</b>	TEACHING (70 minutes)	<i>[LORDSHIP]</i> DISCOVERING THE WILL OF GOD
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“How can you experience God’s good plan for your life?”

“How does God’s character relate to his plan for your life?”

“What are the guiding principles for discovering God’s will with a view to decisions and choices you have to make?”

“Which freedom does God give you to make certain decisions and choices yourself?”

## A. GOD’S WILL OR PLAN IS RELATED TO GOD’S CHARACTER

### 1. God’s revealed will and plan.

Ephesians 1:11-12 says, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him (God) who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will ... in order that we might be for the praise of his glory.”

As a Christian you have the privilege and responsibility to discover his will and to seek his guidance in your life (Ephesians 5:10,17). God promises to guide you (Psalm 32:8-9). He has given the Bible to you, in which he reveals his will plan for your and his guidance. The Bible is God’s map and compass for your life (Psalm 119:105).

God has a plan for the whole world and his plan for your life fits perfectly into that plan. Your specific task and contribution in life is tailor-made to your personality. God has created you and devised his plan for your life at the same time. God will personally lead you in order to carry out his plan for your life.

But in order to discover and carry out God’s will and plan for your life, you must know God (the God of the Bible)! The better you know God’s character, the better you will trust him and his will and plan for your life (Psalm 145:8-9; Psalm 23:1-6). The better you know God’s truth (in the Bible), the better you will know God’s will and specific plan for your life.

## 2. God's hidden will or plan.

God does not reveal his whole plan for the world or for your life. A part of these remains hidden (Deuteronomy 29:29). That is why you sometimes cannot understand the reasons why he allows certain difficult circumstances in your life. But you may trust that the purpose of God's hidden will is always for your best (Romans 8:28). Luckily God reveals much of his will and plan. He does this so that you will have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ (God) and trust and obey him without hesitation.

But how does God reveal his will and plan to you? How can you discover God's will for the decisions and choices you have to make? God does this through giving to you instructions in the Bible. God gives specific and general instructions in the Bible about how you can discover and obey his will.

### B. THREE SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BIBLE ABOUT SEEKING GOD'S WILL

(1) What are specific instructions?

God has given three specific instructions with regard to *what you must do or not do*:

#### Instruction 1. GOD'S COMMANDS IN THE BIBLE

Obey all the commands that are applicable.

For example, God commands you to honour your parents (Exodus 20:12).

#### Instruction 2. GOD'S PROHIBITIONS IN THE BIBLE

Obey all the prohibitions that are applicable.

For example, God prohibits involvement in sexual immorality (Exodus 20:14).

#### Instruction 3. GOD'S TEACHINGS IN THE BIBLE

Obey all the teachings that are applicable.

For example, God teaches you to forgive people (Matthew 6:14-15).

All these specific instructions with regard to *what you must do or not do*, must be interpreted correctly (cf. Manual 3, lesson 29) and must be obeyed.

(2) Questions with specific instructions.

If you seek God's guidance with regard to a decision or choice you must make, you must always *first* discover and obey all God's specific instructions about the subject. Ask yourself the following questions:

Knowledge. What are God's specific instructions in the Bible about the subject? (Psalm 119:105; Luke 10:25-26; Romans 15:4a; 1 Corinthians 10:6,11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

*Explanation:* Which commands, prohibitions and teachings in the Bible are applicable? Study the Bible and gather all the Bible says about the subject. Always interpret the Bible correctly and within its context (2 Timothy 2:15).

Attitude. To which extent am I willing to obey God's will, regardless what it is? (Matthew 21:28-32; Luke 6:46-49).

*Explanation:* God expects that you not only listen to what he says, but that you actually do what he says.

Obedience. To which extent am I obedient to what God has already revealed to me in the past? (Proverbs 1:32-33) (*Read Proverbs 1:22-33*).

*Explanation:* As long as you are not obedient to what God told you in the past, you cannot expect God to reveal to you new things he wants to teach you.

Touched. Which truth (promise) in the Bible touched me recently? What motivated me during my quiet time? (Psalm 119:130; Psalm 143:8,10; Isaiah 50:4-5).

*Explanation:* Expect God to speak to you when you have a quiet time, read or study the Bible. Take care that you do not twist the intention of God's words in the Bible, especially when you apply it.

### C. SEVEN GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BIBLE ABOUT SEEKING GOD'S WILL

(1) What are general instructions?

When there are no specific instructions in the Bible about the subject you study, then God gives you the freedom to make a wise decision on the basis of seven general instructions.

There are several general instructions in the Bible that help you make a wise decision. For example:

- Find out what the will of the Lord is. Try to understand what pleases the Lord (Ephesians 5:10)
- Consider what is wise (Ephesians 5:15-16).
- Make every effort to do what leads to peace (in relationships) and what edifies everyone concerned (Romans 14:19).
- Consider what is permissible, beneficial and constructive (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Besides the specific instructions in the Bible, God gives you seven general instructions to discover his will and seek his guidance. Regard these seven instructions as beacons that guide your ship safely into the harbour, that is, that help you to make the right decision. If you want to be very sure that God is guiding you into a specific direction, all seven beacons must come into one line!

(2) The seven general instructions to make a wise decision are the following:

**Instruction 1. WISDOM AND FREEDOM**  
Make a decision on the basis of wisdom.

God guides Christians through wisdom. The sources of wisdom are: God's Word (Psalm 119:97-100), God's Spirit (Isaiah 11:2), prayer (James 1:5), counsellors (Proverbs 11:14) and research (using your mind) (Nehemiah 2). In order to make a wise decision, you may ask yourself the following questions about the subject:

What is just good and what is really better? (1 Corinthians 7:1,9).

What causes trouble and what makes happy? (1 Corinthians 7:28,40).

What is merely permissible and what is really beneficial and constructive? (1 Corinthians 10:23).

What is only advisable and what is really necessary? (1 Corinthians 16:4; 2 Corinthians 9:5).

*Explanation:* Even when a particular matter is good, permitted and even advisable, it does not follow that another matter cannot be better, more beneficial and constructive!

Therefore, do not be content with what is merely "good", but seek what is "best"!

God's wisdom will usually guide you to just one possible choice or decision. But when several possibilities seem to be good, beneficial and constructive or even necessary, then God gives you the freedom to make a choice out of these possibilities. His sovereign rule will guide you into one correct and clear direction (Proverbs 16:33; Ruth 2).

The following examples show that sometimes there is more than one choice that pleases God and from which Christians are free to make a choice.

- Christians are free to eat everything or to eat only vegetables (Romans 14:1-4).
- Christians are free to regard all days as equal or to regard some days as special (Romans 14:5-6).
- Christians are free to marry or to remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:8-9,39).
- Christians are free to decide whom to support financially and how much they give (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

Of course, the freedom of Christians is bound to the teachings in the Bible as a whole.

**Instruction 2. ADVICE FROM WISE PEOPLE AND PARENTS**  
Only make a choice after considering the advice of others.

God gives wise people to advise you. God warns you not to be rebellious and independent (Isaiah 30:1-2a) so that you can make a wise decision. You may ask yourself the following *questions*:

What is the counsel of spiritually mature and righteous Christians with respect to the subject? What is the advice of wise non-Christians? (Proverbs 15:22).

*Explanation:* The more advice you ask, the more facts you have to consider. The better these people know you, your circumstances and the matter in question, the better advice they can give. When the matter in question is about spiritual and moral things, the counsellors must be Christians, because non-Christians do not have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:12-16). They must be spiritually mature, because immature Christians cannot discern good from bad (Hebrews 5:14). And they must be godly and righteous, because God does not listen to unrighteous people (1 Peter 3:12).

Which advice do my parents give about the subject in question? Especially when I am still under-age? (Proverbs 1:8-9).

*Explanation:* Especially when you are under age, God uses your parents to raise you. But when your parents clearly violate God's commands, you must definitely, but friendly refuse to obey them (Matthew 10:37, Acts 5:29).

Have I previously received advice, but have not done anything with it or have avoided following it? (Proverbs 1:25-26; Proverbs 19:20-21).

**Instruction 3. ABILITIES AND TASKS**  
Make a decision or choice that corresponds to your abilities and calling.

God has created you with a unique personality for a meaningful task. These enable you to live in accordance with his will and plan for your life. Your abilities and limitations are an indication from God for his will concerning you. In order to make a wise decision or choice, you may ask the following questions:

Which natural abilities and spiritual gifts has God given me and how does he want me to use these in order to carry out his will? (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

*Explanation:* God has created you with a special personality and for a specific task.

To what extent does my decision or choice promote or hinder the development of my personality or the execution (realisation) of my task? (2 Corinthians 13:10).

*Explanation:* Your personality consists of the following: your Christian convictions, values, emotions and behaviour. Your task consists of the following: your ordinary job, your long-term and short-term goals, your calling from God, and your God-given task (for example, Acts 20:24). Certain decisions you make in life could pollute your character, damage your personality and negatively influence your task. Consider those decisions and choices that would build up your character, develop your personality and promote your task.

You must immediately withdraw from those relationships and activities that have a negative influence on you (Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 1:10,15; 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1). Seek relationships and activities that spur you on to love and to good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Which activity or task does God want you to prioritise or gives you a sense that they are more important or more pressing than other activities or tasks? Why? (Matthew 6:33)

*Explanation:* Not all matters in life are equally important. Rather give your best time and energy to matters that remain for eternity (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:18; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 3:1-3).

#### Instruction 4. FACTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Make a decision on the basis of facts rather than circumstances.

God remains the sovereign King over your place and circumstances in life (Acts 14:16-17; Acts 17:26-27). In order to make a wise decision, you may ask yourself the following questions:

Have I gathered as much as possible facts (information) about the subject in question? (Proverbs 25:2; Nehemiah 2).

*Explanation:* Christians must gather the facts and learn good things from Christians and non-Christians. For example, if you have to choose a job, seek the following information:

- Your job description, terms of employment, working hours, the place you work and the circumstances where you work.
- The relationships at your work, the authority structure, responsibility to whom and for whom.
- Salary, benefits, pension, possibilities for promotion.
- How will I be respected and appreciated?
- How do my counsellors view this job?

What are my circumstances?

*Explanation:* Do your circumstances lead you in the same direction as God's guidance through the other six instructions? (1 Corinthians 16:8-9; Philippians 1:12).

Do I have a good conscience that I have not manipulated the circumstances in favour of my wishes?

*Explanation:* You cannot expect that God will lead you when you have a bad (guilty) conscience (Acts 24:16).

Do the hindrances I encounter come from God to stop me (Acts 16:6-10)?

Or do they come from Satan and challenge me to persevere in faith? (1 Thessalonians 2:18)?

*Explanation:* The Satan can influence your circumstances in order to stop you, but God can change your circumstances. Pray therefore that God gives you the discernment how these hindrances promote your perseverance and develop your character.

#### Instruction 5. THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Make a decision on the basis of sincere thoughts and feelings.

God expects you to love him with your mind and your heart (Mark 12:30). In order to make a wise decision, you may ask yourself the following question:

What are my real desires? What are the considerations of my mind (thoughts, deliberations, motives) and what is the attitude of my heart (my feelings)? (1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 37:4-6).

*Explanation:* Tell God what you really want, desire or feel. Discuss your motives with God. Discover whether your desires and motives are in accordance with God's will and thus strengthen God's will, or whether they try to persuade you not to do God's will, but rather make a decision that is less than good or even wrong.

Consider matters as: chasing after a career, trying to win someone's favour, the desire to become rich, powerful or famous, being angry due to some injustice. Consider also: doing things that are fruitful, influential and help others to grow in their faith. Which desires and motives come from God? And which are temptations to make a decision or choice that is less than good or even wrong? Pray about your desires, feelings and thoughts.

To what extent does my decision or choice influence the destiny of people that are involved (for example, your wife and children)? What do they think and feel? (Philippians 2:3-4).

*Explanation:* Do not just consider your own interests, but consider the interests of people in your neighbourhood.

In God's eyes your wife and children are very important in most of your decisions or choices (Deuteronomy 24:5; Matthew 19:5-6; 1 Corinthians 9:5; 1 Timothy 3:2,4-5).

As I am considering all these instructions, do I experience lasting peace in my heart and a growing conviction that God is guiding me? (Isaiah 32:17). Or do I experience a growing uneasiness, impatience, confusion and struggle inside me? (Isaiah 57:20-21).

- Is this "peace" only a feeling free from doubt, anxious thoughts and feelings after you have made a decision or choice?
- Or is this "peace" a calm trust in God and his Word in spite of possible human doubts and emotional turmoil?

**Instruction 6. THE RIGHT TIME AND FAITH**

Do not make an overhasty decision or choice

God gives you enough time to do what you ought to do (Ecclesiastes 8:5b-6a). For everything there is a right time. In order to make a right decision or choice, you may ask yourself the following questions:

Are my desires and emotions pressing me to move too fast? (Proverbs 19:2).

*Explanation:* Do not make a decision or choice in haste. Take time to think through the different sides of a matter and the consequences of a matter, because you are able to make big mistakes due to selfish ambition, unholy zeal, little self-control, pride, revenge or impatience.

Or are my desires and emotions causing me to hold back (delay) too long before acting? Do my desires or feelings keep me from making a decision or choice, while I already know what God's will is? (Ephesians 5:15-16; James 1:5-8).

*Explanation:* If God has already given you an answer, do not stay uncertain and wait for another "email", "sms" or "app" from heaven. Waiting for *too* conclusive evidence or waiting due to selfish motives, self-protection, lack of faith and fear can cause you to miss a good opportunity. Thus, do not procrastinate.

Am I spiritually mature enough to discern the important issues involved? Or should I give more time to grow spiritually, until I am ready to make such an important decision? (Hebrews 5:14).

*Explanation:* In matters concerning dating, marriage and the special calling of God, a person need to be spiritually mature.

Does God want me to act by faith (take a step in faith) or to refrain from acting also by faith (and not take any step in faith)? (Hebrews 11:6).

*Explanation:* You are not yet sanctified completely and your understanding is limited. Making mistakes is human and acknowledging a mistake is genuine humility. When you sincerely understand something to be God's will, you should act by faith on it. However, if it later turns out to have been a wrong decision, then you should trust God to overrule and to take care of all the consequences for yourself and others. God is sovereign. At all times and in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28)!

**Instruction 7. PRAYER AND THE PROMPTING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Make a decision prayerfully and in line with God's Spirit.

God has given you direct access to himself through prayer (Luke 11:9; Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 4:16). The Holy Spirit convines you of the truth, convicts you of sin, teaches you righteousness (that is, the righteousness which Christ earned and the things that are right in his eyes) and warns you about judgement (that is, if you neglect his righteousness). The Holy Spirit will remind you about the words of Christ (John 16:8,13). In order to make a wise decision, you may ask yourself the following questions:

Have I prayed adequately about the information gained from the other six general principles? (Philippians 4:6-7).

*Explanation:* Do not be anxious about anything, but present your requests to God. Tell him your thoughts, feelings, and desires. Keep on praying until you know what you should do. It is possible that your prayer may change and that you pray less about the matter in question.

Does the Holy Spirit motivate me towards a particular course of action or away from that course of action? (Acts 11:12a; Acts 16:7)

*Explanation:* God has direct access to you. He has given the Holy Spirit to be his Representative with and in you in order to convince you of what is right and what is wrong, to lead you into all the truth and to remind you of his words in the Bible (John 16:8; John 16:13-14; John 14:26). The Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17)!

What the Holy Spirit says to you subjectively in your heart will never contradict what he says to you objectively in the Bible (Ephesians 6:17)! A Christian must discern between the voice of Christ (Isaiah 8:20; Romans 10:17; 1 John 4:4) and the voice of evil spirits (Isaiah 8:19; Matthew 24:24; 1 Timothy 4:1 and 1 John 4:1).

## D. HOW DO YOU MAKE A WISE DECISION?

God desires to lead Christians. He promises, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you” (Psalm 32:8). But Christians remain responsible to search/research what the will of God is (Ephesians 5:10,17).

### 1. Make wise decisions on the basis of the specific and seven general instructions in the Bible.

Always first consider the specific instructions in the Bible about the matter in question.

Then consider the seven general instructions.

In this way God will show you the way you should go. Do the following:

(1) Gather information.

Record the information gathered from the specific and general instructions in three columns.

<u>Advantages</u>	<u>Disadvantages</u>	<u>Alternative possibilities</u>
-	-	-
-	-	-
-	-	-

(2) Wait.

If you can still not make a decision or choice, do more research and pray more.

(3) Be wise.

If the subject in question is emotionally heavy (as for example dating, marriage, healing and calling), give a higher priority to the specific instructions in the Bible and the counsel of mature Christians who respect God.

(4) Interpret correctly.

Do not take for granted that God leads people through only one single Bible verse that touches you, but interpret that Bible verse correctly according to biblical hermeneutics and in the right context (2 Timothy 2:15)<sup>1</sup>.

(5) Decide and act.

When all the facts point clearly in one direction, make a decision and act by faith.

(6) Keep on trusting God.

When the going becomes tough, “do not doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light”. Continue to act in faith on what God has told you before.

(7) Submission.

The last condition for discovering God’s will is to be willing to accept God’s perfect will and to submit to it (Matthew 6:10). Therefore you should always pray, “Let not my will, but your (perfect) will be done” (Luke 22:42b).

### 2. Choose things that please God.

**Read** Romans 12:1 and the examples in Philippians 2:3-7; Luke 2:46-52; Luke 14:10-14.

**Discover and discuss.** Which kind of self-sacrificial decisions or choices please God?

(1) The interests of the other.

Instead of striving/looking after your own interests, you could also look after the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4).

(2) Your family.

Instead of pursuing a successful career at the cost of the wellbeing of your family, you could commit yourself to manage your own family well (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

(3) The poor.

Instead of inviting your friends, neighbours and other important people for a meal at your home, you could invite the poor, the cripple, the lame and the blind (Luke 14:12-14).

### 3. Obey the conditions for walking according to God’s will.

**Discover and discuss.** What are the conditions for walking in accordance with God’s will?

(1) Develop a relationship with God.

Exert yourself to have a personal and trustful relationship with God (John 15:5).

(2) Decide to obey.

Make a resolution to do what God says in the Bible (Luke 6:46-49; Philippians 4:9)

(3) Submit to God’s hidden will.

Often your circumstances are related to God’s hidden will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of all those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

<sup>1</sup> See manual 3 lesson 29, rule 5

(4) Change your thinking.

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8).

On the one hand, you should not allow the attractions of the evil world or the wrong kind of peer-pressure to shape you. For example, watch out that you don’t speak dirty or offensive language. Refrain from singing or listening to obscene or offensive music. Do not read filthy books and magazines. Watch out that you don’t wear tempting clothes. Avoid getting involved in questionable activities. Refrain from associating on intimate terms with worldly companions.

On the other hand, you should renew the thoughts of your mind and the attitudes of your heart by reading the Bible, obeying God’s Spirit, having fellowship with Christians, etc.

### E. A SUMMARY ILLUSTRATION OF SEEKING GOD’S WILL

**Teach.** A summary of the principles with regard to discovering God’s will on which you must base your decisions and choices.

**1. When there is a specific instruction.**

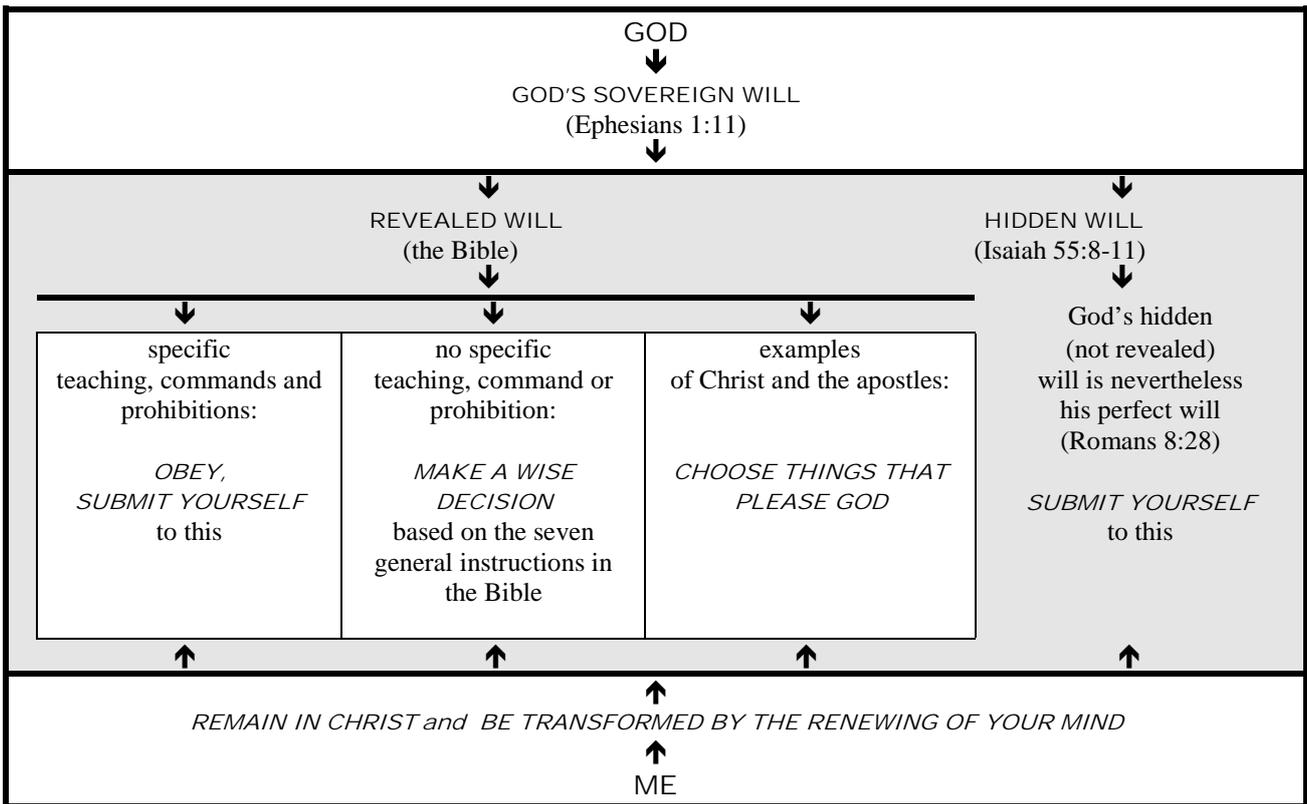
If there is a specific instruction in the Bible (command, prohibition, teaching) about the matter in question, you must obey it!

**2. When there are only general instructions.**

If there is no specific command, prohibition or teaching in the Bible, you must make a wise decision or choice on the basis of the seven general principles in the Bible. Or you may follow the good example of someone in the Bible (1 Corinthians 11:1).

**3. When there are only hidden matters.**

All other instances you must entrust to God’s sovereign rule, that is, you must submit yourself to his perfect hidden will.



<b>5</b>	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<span style="color: blue;">[REACTIONS]</span> <span style="color: blue;">PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD</span>
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**Take turns in the group to pray** short to God in response to what you have learned today. Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

*(Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples.  
Preach, teach or study the teaching of “Discovering God’s will” together with another person or group of people.  
Memorise the 7 general instructions with regard to discerning God’s will. Use the questions under the principles to make an important decision you are facing now.
2. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Esther 6, 7, 8 and 9 each day.  
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
3. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. (4) 1 Peter 2:11-25. Theme: Suffering in the world.  
Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
4. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. Update your notebook on making disciples. Include the worship notes and teaching notes and this preparation.