

## From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, January 14, 2014

This week's *Laptop* is a continuation of Sunday's consideration of "staying in the center of God's will," and what I said on Sunday is an important precursor to what I'm going to say here. If you missed it, I've attached it with this email, and it's also available at [www.dcestancil.com](http://www.dcestancil.com). If you find yourself still wanting more to read, the three books that have been most helpful to me on this subject have been *The Will of God*, by Morris Ashcraft, *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby, and *Hearing God*, by Dallas Willard.

I've also found helpful these words from George Mueller. Mueller (1805-1898) lived in Bristol, England, and was one of the great prayer warriors of the nineteenth century. He transformed that city through his commitment to the care of orphans, long before such care was considered a Christian duty. Here are George's guidelines for discerning the will of God:

"I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people generally is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the knowledge of what His will is.

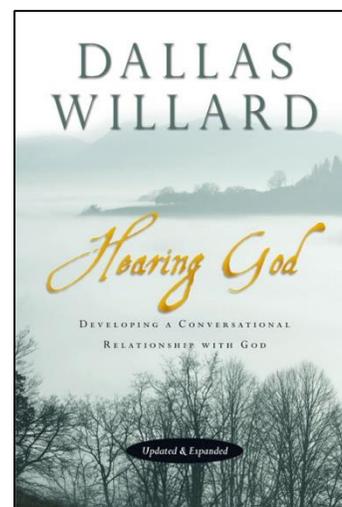
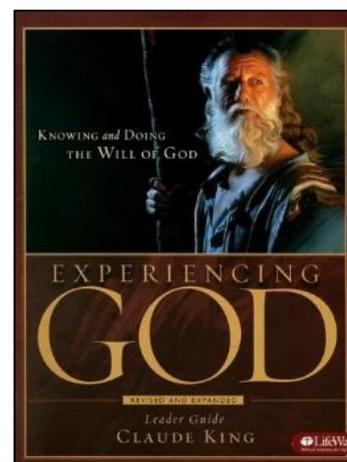
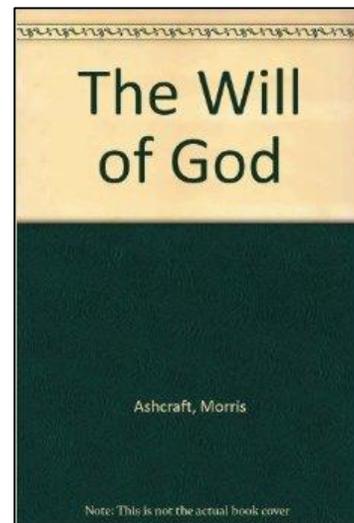
"Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impression. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions. I seek the Will of the Spirit of God through, or in connection with, the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. If the Holy Ghost guides us at all, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.

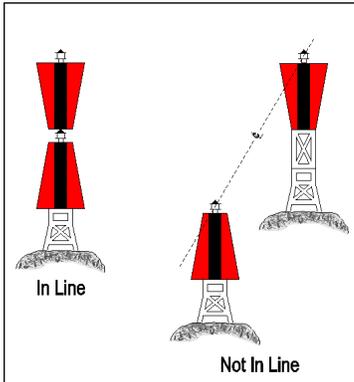
"Next I take into account providential circumstances. These often plainly indicate God's Will in connection with His Word and Spirit. I ask God in prayer to reveal His Will to me aright.

"Thus, (1) through prayer to God, (2) the study of the Word, and (3) reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly."

Having said all this, what follows is an attempt to describe the process I generally use when trying to discern the will of God in a matter. The process begins—unsurprisingly for those who know me—with a Navy story.

One of the things I enjoyed most as a "ship driver" was sailing down the Cooper River from the Navy Base at Charleston, South Carolina to the sea, a journey of some six miles. Like all inland waterways for deep-draft vessels, the deep-water channel was dredged only in the center of the river, and wandering outside that channel meant running your ship aground.





While there were several ways to stay in the center of the channel, the simplest and quickest way was to look at the two orange range markers at each end of each leg of the river. When the range markers were vertically aligned, you knew you were in the center of the channel. I want to suggest four “range markers” of a different sort that can be very helpful in discerning God’s leadership and direction in our lives.

**Range Marker #1: Opportunity** Mary Cosby, co-founder of The Church of the Saviour in The District, the church Jim Rouse attended, identified four signs of God’s leadership about what we’re to do next:

Mary said that God’s will is so **SIMPLE** that it can probably be stated in one sentence. At the same time, God’s will often seems so **IMPOSSIBLE** that we can’t imagine any way that we’d be able to accomplish it. Beyond this, God’s will is **PERSISTENT**, such that no matter how much we try to ignore it, it is nearly always at the edges of our consciousness. And finally, God’s will glorifies God; it is **NOT AN EGO-TRIP** for us (although it does allow us to experience the gladness of having God work in the world through our lives).

I want to take the first three of these together as Range Marker #1, which I call **OPPORTUNITY**. In considering God’s direction for your life, *consider first of all that which presents itself to you as a simple, impossible, and persistent opportunity.* Of course, ideas that are simple, impossible and persistent can also be both irrational and insane, so we need more range markers to sense God’s direction.

**Range Marker #2: God’s Word** Second, is this idea, this opportunity, consistent with the Bible as a whole? Is it consistent with the teaching of Jesus? God will *never* ask you to do anything that is inconsistent with the Word, but you have to *know* the Word in order to apply this test.

**Range Marker #3: God’s Kingdom** Third, will this idea, this opportunity, help God’s Kingdom to “*come on earth as it is in heaven,*” or is this something that honesty would have to call selfishness and self-interest? Life is not about accumulating a lot of stuff, and neither is it really about you. All of creation is moving toward the fulfillment of God’s purposes, and, while following God’s guidance calls out the best that we have to give and brings great adventure and satisfaction, God’s guidance never leads us to magnify ourselves. Following God’s guidance is not an ego-trip.

**Range Marker #4: God’s Spirit** Finally, if God is in an opportunity, you’ll have spiritual peace about pursuing it, even if you have to move forward with unanswered questions. **You’ll miss most of the adventure God plans for you if you choose safety over obedience.** Jesus told us, “*If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life*” (Luke 9:24).

**So when the range markers begin to line up, know that adventure lies ahead!** But while such moments are exciting, they’re also scary. Henry Blackaby pointed out that “Anytime God leads you to do something that has God-sized dimensions, you will face a crisis of belief. When you face a crisis of belief, what you do next reveals what you really believe about God.” This is the crisis point, where many decide not to follow what they sense God is leading them to do.”

What would have happened if . . .

- Noah had said, “I don’t do arks”;
- Abraham had said, “I don’t do destinations unknown”;
- Moses had said, “I don’t do Pharaohs”;

- Ruth had said, “I don’t do Mothers-in-Law”;
- David had said, “I don’t do giants”;
- Mary had said, “I don’t do virgin births”;
- Peter had said, “I don’t do Gentiles”;
- Paul had said, “I don’t do letters”;
- Jesus had said, “I don’t do crosses”?

All of these people got orders that were simple, impossible, and persistent, that were consistent with God’s Word, God’s Kingdom, and God’s Spirit, and yet they were tempted to say, we are, “*I’m sorry. I’m not going to do that*” . . . but they didn’t.

I conclude with these words from a song by Steven Curtis Chapman: “The long-awaited rains have fallen hard upon the thirsty ground and carved their way to where the wild and rushing river can be found. And like the rains, I have been carried here to where the river flows.

“My heart is racing and my knees are weak as I walk to the edge. I know there is no turning back once my feet have left the ledge, and in the rush I hear a Voice that’s telling me it’s time to take the leap of faith. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

### **What would you do if you were not afraid?**

Dave



**THERE’S MORE . . . !**

<sup>1</sup> Steven Curtis Chapman, “The Dive,” lyrics by Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic, © EMI Music Publishing, Universal Music Publishing Group.

# ***The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know*** **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

## **Week Two**

The verse for week two is one that most people have heard of, even if they've never looked it up or learned it. John 3:16 is ubiquitous, whether on billboards, on the shirt of "the Rainbow Man," or on the face paint of Tim Tebow, just to mention a few examples. As I'm sure you know, the verse goes like this:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Angel Martinez, the late evangelist who had memorized the entire New Testament, referred to John 3:16 as salvation's formula and observed that it contained four very insightful truths. It is the gospel in one verse. It reveals to us salvation's cause, its cost, its condition, and its consequence:

### **SALVATION'S CAUSE**

***"For God so loved the world"***

### **SALVATION'S COST**

***"that He gave His only begotten Son"***

### **SALVATION'S CONDITION**

***"that whoever believes in Him"***

### **SALVATION'S CONSEQUENCE**

***"should not perish but have everlasting life"***

While I continue to encourage you to get Dr. Hawkins's book so you can read all the commentary I'm not giving you, it's more important as you learn or review this verse this week that you let it sink deep into your soul that God really does love you, and God has a wonderful plan for your life.

