

**Practicing This One Thing:  
How to Pray to Determine God's Will  
Jeremiah 33:1-3**

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**Text Introduction:** We are in the middle of a prayer challenge. We are calling our challenge “This One Thing.” This is not only guiding our times together on Sunday morning as we examine the Scriptures about prayer, but we are also challenging one another about our discipline and habits of prayer. And what a time it is to pray! I could not have imagined the importance of this effort when God birthed this in my heart early this summer. But, now, all of this makes perfect sense, right?

Thank you, Church, for giving such attention and making the four nights of our Prayer Revival such a great experience. I pray that this is just the beginning of a mighty revival. I pray you feel more inspired and convicted to pray. I pray that we will be ready to pray about all things. I pray that we realize that by prayer, we bring God into every area of our lives.

Today, we are exploring one of the great opportunities in prayer—seeking the will of God. I believe many joining us today are needing to know the will of God about a particular matter.

Jeremiah's example is so instructive and encouraging. We have a great text in Jeremiah 33, but the backdrop to Jeremiah 33:1-3 is discovered in the preceding chapter.

**Text:** Jeremiah replied, “The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>7</sup> Watch! Hanamel, the son of your uncle Shallum, is coming to you to say, ‘Buy my field in Anathoth for yourself, for you own the right of redemption to buy it.’

<sup>8</sup> “Then my cousin Hanamel came to the guard's courtyard as the LORD had said and urged me, ‘Please buy my field in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for you own the right of inheritance and redemption. Buy it for yourself.’ Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> So I bought the field in Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and I weighed out to him the money—17 shekels of silver. <sup>10</sup> I recorded it on a scroll, sealed it, called in witnesses, and weighed out the silver in the scales. <sup>11</sup> I took the purchase agreement—the sealed copy with its terms and conditions and the open copy— <sup>12</sup> and gave the purchase agreement to Baruch son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah. I did this in the sight of my cousin Hanamel, the witnesses who were signing the purchase agreement, and all the Judeans sitting in the guard's courtyard.

<sup>13</sup> “I instructed Baruch in their sight, <sup>14</sup> ‘This is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Take these scrolls—this purchase agreement with the sealed copy and this open copy—and put them in an earthen storage jar so they will last a long time. <sup>15</sup> For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in this land.’

<sup>16</sup> “After I had given the purchase agreement to Baruch, son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD: <sup>17</sup> Oh, Lord GOD! You Yourself made the heavens and earth by Your great power and with Your outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for You!

While he was still confined in the guard's courtyard, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time: <sup>2</sup>"The LORD who made the earth, the LORD who forms it to establish it, Yahweh is His name, says this: <sup>3</sup>Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and incomprehensible things you do not know.

**Introduction:** In 1993, Ron Wolf was the General Manager of the pro football team, the Green Bay Packers. Mike Holmgren was the Head Coach. The late Reggie White, a devout Christian and free agent at the time, publicly declared, "I want to go where God wants me to go." Mike Holmgren called Reggie and said, "Reggie, this is God, go to Green Bay." Ron Wolf, reportedly called too and said, "Reggie, this is Ron Wolf of the Green Bay Packers. I would like to offer you 17 million dollars over 4 years for you to come to Green Bay." Finally, Brett Favre, quarterback of the Green Bay Packers called and said, "Reggie, I want you to come to Green Bay, so I can be assured that you won't hit me anymore."

How do you know the will of God? Wouldn't you like for God to write His will for you in the sky? "Jim, marry Jennifer!" "Take that job!" "Don't take that job!" "Go to UL!" "Go to LSU!" "Teach 1<sup>st</sup> grade Sunday School!" But all of us have lived long enough to know that since the coming of the Holy Spirit, rarely if ever to my knowledge, has God spoken in the kind of dramatic ways we read about in the Bible. So, how can we know God's will?

Our text today gives us an example of one who wrestled with trying to understand God's will. In summary, here is Jeremiah's story as it relates to Jeremiah 32. Jeremiah was a prophet of God. Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of God, prophesied that a day was coming when the Babylonians would invade Judah. Jeremiah further prophesied that another day would come when a remnant would be restored to Israel. As is often the case for the messengers of God, Jeremiah's message was not well received and, as revealed in 32:2, Jeremiah is imprisoned for preaching this message of doom and gloom even though the Babylonian army is beginning the siege of Jerusalem. At that same time, God speaks to Jeremiah to reveal that he is going to have an offer to buy land. Don't miss the picture—Jeremiah is being asked to buy land that the enemy is about to claim. I believe this is God's way of asking Jeremiah whether Jeremiah really believes the promise of return. (32:25) My question today is how did Jeremiah know this was God? How do we know God speaks to us today? Notice, verse 8: "Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord." Wouldn't you like to get to that point? I know this is the word of the Lord. I know this is the will of God.

Let's consider several ideas of this text as we pray to determine God's will.

### **Praying and A Promise**

God wants to show us His will. He is not trying to hide His will from us.

- Jeremiah 33:3 "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and wondrous things, you do not know."
- James 1:5 "Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him."

"Without criticizing" comes from a verb that is used 9 times in the NT. This is the only time that it is used with the negative, *me*. The best parallel to give us a reference of meaning is in Matthew 11:20 when Jesus is said to have begun "to denounce the cities of which most of his miracles were done, because

they did not repent.” The cities in question are Chorazin and Bethsaida. The word is also used in the context of “insult” as in Matthew 5:11, “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute...”

But, used with the negative, the word implies God is not going to do this (criticize, reproach, rebuke) to us.

These passages promise us that God wants to make His will known to us.

## Praying and Principles

1. To know God’s Will, we must seek God. (Jeremiah 33)

We seek the answer, God seeks the relationship. God could give us the answer right away. He could write in the sky or speak audibly, but what we would lose is the process to a deep, abiding relationship with Him.

Just a bit earlier, in Jeremiah 29:13, we read, “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” We will know Him to the degree that we wish to know Him.

2. To Know God’s Will, we must believe that God will speak. (James 1:5-8)

Henry Blackaby wrote a classic work titled *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. In that book, Blackaby suggested that God speaks by the Holy Spirit through...

- Bible
- Prayer
- Circumstances
- Church

(Note: These 4 areas are expounded in Henry Blackaby’s classic work, *Experiencing God*.) I’m not going to expound on all four of these areas today, but I do want to share 2 keys to using these 4 ways.

### 2 Keys to Understanding God’s Will:

- Consistency in these 4 areas.

That is, you must constantly be searching to discover God’s will. If you believe that God speaks to you through the Bible, you must read, study, and meditate on the Bible so that God might speak.

- Consistency of these 4 areas.

That is, you know God is speaking when you begin to sense that these 4 areas are all saying the same thing.

3. To know God's Will, we must surrender any will of our own. (Luke 22:42)

This is the hard part.

### **Praying and the Problem**

I've learned that sometimes knowing God's will is not our struggle, but doing God's will is our real struggle. John Sartelle said, "Most of us do not want to know the will of God to do the will of God, but to consider doing the will of God."<sup>1</sup> George Truett, long time pastor of First Baptist, Dallas, said, "To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge; to do the will of God is the greatest achievement."

I'm afraid that many of us are like that sailor who got lost. Upon being rescued, someone said to him, "Why didn't you use your compass?" The sailor said, "I wanted to but I wanted to go north, but the compass kept telling me I was going southeast."

### **So What?**

- Be ready to receive.
- Focus on the relationship.
- Record what you believe God is saying.
- Resolve to Respond in obedience.

Say, "Yes, Lord" before you even know what His will is.

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<sup>1</sup> John Sartelle is a Presbyterian pastor in Tennessee. He made this statement in a sermon on a similar topic.