

## WALKING IN THE WILL OF GOD

### ROMANS 12:1-8

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Once upon a time a farmer was in his fields when he noticed a strange cloud formation overhead. There in the sky he could make out the letters “P” and “C”.

He just knew the Lord was speaking to him. He concluded, “God must want me to *“Preach Christ!”*”

The farmer sold his farm, enrolled in Bible College, obtained his education, got his credentials, accepted a position as local pastor, and preached his first sermon.

But the fellow was awful. Boring with a capital “B.” His sermon stunk. Obviously, he was a terrible teacher.

One of the church members, familiar with his call to the ministry, approached him after the sermon and asked, “Pastor, when you saw that “PC” in the clouds are you sure the Lord wasn’t telling to *plant corn*?”

Without a doubt, here’s the most common question a pastor gets asked, “*How do I determine God’s will?*”

It’s a question that baffles many Christians... *but it really shouldn’t*. For finding God’s will for your life is really not that perplexing once you’ve taken certain steps and gotten your life in the proper position.

Walking in the will of God is like water-skiing on the lake. Maybe you’ve been water-skiing this summer...

Once you’re on your skis, skimming across the lake, skiing is a piece of cake. A tight grip - a little balance - is all that’s required. But the challenge is getting up!

You’ve got to buckle your lifejacket... adjust your skis... get your feet in the bindings... keep the toes of your skis out of the water... the rope between your skis... your weight back... and your arms straight...

And boom! The boat roars forward, and you hope you rise out of the water. But once you’re up, it’s just a matter of holding on. Getting started is what’s difficult!

And this is true of finding and walking in God’s will.

It's a struggle getting started, but once you're up and moving it's just a matter of trusting, abiding, holding on.

This morning, we're going to learn how to walk in the will of God. In the first eight verses of Romans 12 Paul lists for us six simple steps to walk in God's will...

If you're taking notes here they are:

Step One: **present your body**

Step Two: **renew your mind**

Step Three: **humble your heart**

Step Four: **exercise your faith**

Step Five: **find your place**

Step Six: **use your gift.**

Here's *step one*. Read again *verse 1*, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

The first step for any believer to live his or her life in the will of God is to **present your body to God**.

*Have you done this?* If not, you're still in the water.

The OT sacrifice was a butchered carcass, but God no longer likes His sacrifices well done. Today, He orders them rare. He wants them alive, still kicking and mooing on the plate. God is now into *living sacrifices*.

Abraham's son Isaac, was a living sacrifice.

He willingly offered his body to God and was literally bound to the altar. This meant Isaac had no plans of his own. There was nothing he had to do... no place he had to be... no one he had to see.. Isaac made himself available for whatever *the Father* had in mind.

It reminds me of the little boy sitting at the end of the pew. When the church offering plate passed by, he took it, sat it down in the aisle, and stepped inside it.

The usher asked, "Son, what are doing?" He replied, "I learned in Sunday School this morning that I'm suppose to give myself to God." How right he was!

Years ago the city of Portland sponsored a handball championship. Surprisingly, it was won by a man 39 years-old. In his quest for the title the man had to defeat challengers half his age, and in better condition.

In addition, this fellow was a Vietnam vet who'd lost an arm in combat. When asked how he had overcome such enormous obstacles to win the event he said...

"Decisions, handball is a game of decisions. With each play you have to decide if you're going to use your right hand or left hand. For me that decision is already made. I can concentrate elsewhere."

When we give ourselves to God totally and completely we're no longer torn in two directions.

It takes a lot of effort to straddle a fence. It's only after you decide who it is you intend to please that you can channel all your energy toward walking in His will!

The first step is to **present your body.**

The next step to live in God's will is in verse 2, “**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**”

I like how the Phillips translation renders verse two, “**Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.**” Resist the pressure to conform - to be like everyone else - to go with the flow - to join the pack...

The second step to walking in the will of God is to **renew your mind**. Learn to see from God’s viewpoint.

We usually think of peer pressure as an adolescent problem, but many adults are tempted as well.

I heard once of a retail store in Utah that bought several used cars and parked them in front of their shop. It created the impression it was the place to be!

Business increased immediately.

Don’t you just go with the flow. Remember, **toilet paper goes with the flow - not Christians**. If we’re going to walk in God’s will we’ve got to learn to swim against the current. Faithfulness is upstream, not downstream.

Rather than *blend in* a Christian needs to *stand out*.

We need to think God's thoughts. Be not conformed to the world, but transformed. God wants to create in us new attitudes and perspectives. He wants us to be spiritually motivated. He hopes to renew our minds.

I've heard it said a Christian is either a **thermometer** or a **thermostat**. Some people are **thermometers**. They're always conforming to room temperature. They want to *"be cool"* or they gravitate toward *"what's hot."*

Whereas other people are **thermostats**. They don't register the prevailing temperature - they set it. Make it your goal to *change your world* not be *changed by it*. You be the trendsetter. *Don't conform, be transformed.*

We find God's will by **renewing our minds**.

Third, to walk in God's will requires that we **humble our hearts**. *"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly"*

When God begins to work in **our lives** our tendency is to let it go to **our heads**. We get proud, and assume the credit. We forget the scoreboard reads *"Me 0, God everything."* Don't think too highly of yourself!

In High School I played basketball and thought that I was pretty good. **"I was a legend in my own mind."**

One night I was particularly proud of the fact that I was in the starting line-up. We ran on to the floor, and I walked over to the bench to pull off my warm-ups.

It wasn't until my pants were half-way off that I realized I'd put on my warm-up pants without putting on my gym shorts. I was so embarrassed. I scored two points that night. I was so rattled I couldn't play. God has ways of releasing some air out of an inflated head.

Paul tells us we're to see ourselves "*soberly.*" The Greek word means "to be in one's right mind."

It was a legal term used in a "last will and testament." It validated the person's sanity. To think soberly is to think objectively, rationally, and honestly. To have a sane and objective estimation of yourself.

We should never be proud - but neither should we be self-deprecating or self-abasing. If I have a talent, or do a job well there's nothing wrong with acknowledging my skill - just as long as I keep myself in perspective.

One night after dinner, Teddy Roosevelt and an overnight guest, walked out onto the White House lawn to talk about important matters of national security.

After a long discussion, President Roosevelt peered into the heavens and pointed to a patch of faint light next to the constellation of Pegasus. He said, "That's the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It's as large as the Milky Way. It's one of 100 million galaxies and consists of 100 billion suns, each larger than our own."

Then he turned back to the White House and told him, "Now I think we're small enough. Let's go to bed."

Compare yourself to me and you'll *loom large* in your own eyes. But think soberly - stack yourself up against the God who *hung* the heavens and who *holds* them in the palm of His hand - and your stature will shrink.

Don't worry, *God is fine even when we go to bed.*

One step to walk in God's will is *humble your heart.*

A fourth step is to **exercise your faith**. Paul says in verse 3, to think soberly “**as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith...**” One way to miss God’s will is to be *too big*, to think too *highly* of yourself. But another way is to be *too small*, to think too *lowly* of yourself.

"Oh, who am I to serve the Lord! I can't possibly do anything for God. He would never want to use me."

**A false humility provides a convenient excuse.**

Sure you're a nobody, but God uses nobodies when we trust Him. Yes, God never likes *a head inflated with pride*, but He does desire *a heart inflated with faith*.

And to each of us God has given a measure of faith.

Don't tell me you don't have any faith. You demonstrate faith whenever you climb into your 1200 pound suicide machine and speed 60 mph down the freeway, trusting only in a sheet of metal a half inch thick to stop you from plowing into other motorists.

I'm just saying, to each of us God gives a measure of faith and He guides those of us who use that faith.

Horse racing enthusiasts will remember the famed thoroughbred and Triple Crown winner, Secretariat.

In the Kentucky Derby, a one mile race, Secretariat had a faster time for each successive quarter mile he ran. The horse got stronger as the race progressed.

And the same happens in the Christian life. Faith is like a muscle. Exercise it and it grows. And the more your faith grows the more guidance God supplies.

Truck drivers know it's awfully hard to steer an 18-wheeler while it's standing still, but get that big boy rolling and you can steer it with your pinky finger.

God guides us as we rise up and step out in faith.

When we use our faith to apply what we know, God reveals more. To walk in God's will **exercise your faith.**

And the fifth step to walking in God's will is to **find your place.** Read verses 4-5, **“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”**

If you're an adult of average weight, its amazing what your body accomplishes every 24 hours...

**"Your heart beats 103,689 times, your blood travels 12,000 miles, you take 23,040 breaths, you inhale 438 cubic feet of air, you eat 3.25 pounds of food, you drink 2.9 quarts of liquid, you lose 7/8 of a pound of waste, you move 750 muscles, your nails grow .000046 of an inch, your hair grows .01714 of an inch (if it hasn't fallen out), and you exercise 7 million brain cells..."**

*No wonder you feel tired at the end of the day!*

Your body is a miracle of precision engineering. It's made up of several trillion cells all functioning as one unit - a blend of *unity*, and *diversity*, and *mutuality*.

And it's interesting that God chose to refer to His Church as a **“body.”** We're many members, but we're one body in Christ. We've been called to rub shoulders.

Every Christian has been called to lay aside their personal agendas, and cooperate for the greater good.

As much as we might cringe at the thought, *you need me and I need you*. Our spiritual health and our effectiveness is dependent on our togetherness.

Did you hear about the terrible controversy at the *First Church of the Hand Tools*. Some of the members griped about Brother Hammer. "He's too forceful. He's **pounding home his points and nailing the rest of us.**"

Hammer pointed to Brother Screwdriver, "I'm no worse than him. He's always going around in circles and Brother Punch has to help him to get started."

This angered Brother Screwdriver, "What about Brother Plane, all his work is surface, it has no depth."

Brother Plane then shouted at Brother Tape Measure, "You're so judgmental. You're measuring people, sizing them up. You always think you're right."

Brother Tape Measure then turned to Brother Sandpaper, "He's so rough and gritty. He rubs people the wrong way. *Why don't you all go back to the box!*"

When the Master Carpenter arrived, Jesus put on His apron and went to work building a pulpit from which the Word of God would be preached. He used the hammer, screwdriver, punch, plane, tape measure, and sandpaper - each in the *right way* and at the *right time*.

Finally, Brother Saw *saw it!* He rose up and informed the others, "**Brothers, we're all tools of equal importance in the hands of the Lord!**" *And so are we!*

God guides us when we acknowledge our interdependence, and stay committed to one another.

Fail to **find your place** in the body of Christ - go it alone - distance yourself from the rest of the church - and you'll hinder yourself from finding God's will.

The sixth and final step to walking in God's will is to **use your gift**. In verses 6-8 Paul lists several of the gifts of the Holy Spirit... "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Did you know God has given to each of us certain spiritual gifts? To some of you He's given *more than one*, but to each of you He's given *at least one!*

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 tells us, "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. and there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all."

Some Bible teachers see here three categories of spiritual gifts... The first category Paul calls "*gifts*" or "*charismata*." The second, are "*ministries*." The third are "*activities*" or in the Greek "*energeo*" or "*energies*."

Risking oversimplification this points to three types of spiritual gifts: **motivations, ministries, manifestations**.

The **manifestations** are listed in **1 Corinthians 12**. They include *tongues, healing, words of knowledge*.

The **ministries** are found in **Ephesians 4**. And there are four: *apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher*.

And the **motivations** are here in **Romans 12**.

That being true, the gifts listed in our text are basic motivations that the Holy Spirit places in our spirit at the time of our conversion. In doing so, God colors our perspective with a tint. The Spirit writes His will on our hearts by planting in us certain spiritual tendencies.

Our motivational gift will determine how we approach and react to situations. Recognizing and utilizing our spiritual gift is crucial to walking in the will of God.

Realize, a spiritual gift is not *a natural talent* or *a learned skill*. Its *a supernatural enabling*, that you'd never possess if it hadn't been given by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word is "**charismata**" - which combines two words "**charis**" or "**grace**" and "**mata**" or "**gifts**".

Your motivational gift is **a grace-gift!** You don't deserve it - you can't earn it - it's prompted by God's grace. And Paul lists seven possible motivational gifts.

The first gift is **prophecy**. Sometimes we hear the word "*prophecy*" used as a synonym for "*prediction*" or "*premonition*." We associate it with *fore-telling the future*, but it's primary meaning is that of *forth-telling*.

It's been said, "**A prophet was not known primarily for his *hindsight* or his *foresight*, but for his *insight*."**

With this gift, God stirs a heart, fills a mind, opens a mouth, and the prophet uses his faith to utter the specific message God has given him. The prophet is God's bullhorn. He *declares* God's truth loud and clear.

The person with this motivational gift is quick to take a stand. He's insists on correction and righteousness.

He or she sees issues in black and white.

They refuse to compromise. The prophet rises up in faith - and without any fear of offending - He boldly speaks the particular word God has laid on his heart.

The second motivational gift on the list is **ministry**.

The root word is "**servant**." We're all called to be servants, but the person with this gift goes above and beyond the call of duty. He *depicts* God's truth.

The person with the gift of ministry has a *supernatural knack* for helping others in practical ways.

He or she just loves serving the Lord!

I'll never forget, one Saturday I was at the church and saw a brother busy doing a handful of odd jobs we really needed done. I went to tell him how much I appreciated what he was doing. And his reply was classic, "**Don't mention it, that's what I'm here for.**"

This is a person with the gift of ministry.

The person with this gift seeks no recognition or payback. His reward is the fulfillment that comes from using his gift to the glory of God! He's at perfect peace because he knows *what he's here for* and he's doing it!

The third motivational gift is the gift of **teaching**. This is my gift! Nothing fires my engines more than studying God's Word and teaching His truth to His people.

William Magee observed, "**Teachers are divided into three classes: those you can listen to - those you can't listen to - and those you can't help listening to.**"

The latter is a person with the gift of teaching.

Teaching *defines* God's truth. A person with the gift of teaching can take profound truths and make them simple, easy to understand. It was said of a good teacher, "He put the cookies on the bottom shelf."

I've heard it put, "A teacher's task is to take a roomful of live wires and see to it they're properly grounded."

The fourth motivational gift is **exhortation**. Teaching instructs us what to do - exhortation encourages us to do it what we know to do! It *demand*s God's truth.

The person with this gift challenges, and motivates, and incites to action. He's the spiritual booster cables who jump starts brothers or sisters with weak batteries.

An ocean liner was in the midst of a storm when a woman fell overboard. The passengers were clinging to the ship's rail, watching - when suddenly a man dove into the icy waters and rescued the drowning gal.

Everyone was surprised when the hero turned out to be an 80 year-old man. Later the crew threw a party in his honor. The hero was called on to make a speech.

He stood and said, "I have just one thing to say: *who pushed me?*" At times we need a little push to do what we know is right. The person with the gift of exhortation knows how to apply a gentle "kick in the pants."

The fifth gift on Paul's list is **giving**. Again, *giving* is a discipline we all should develop, but the person with the *gift of giving* has a special knack for loosening the purse-strings to bless others and further God's work.

I'll never forget the guy who use to go to CC who had the gift of giving. God had blessed his business and he loved to give back to the Lord. And he had an interesting method for distributing his gifts. He'd give *\$100 handshakes*. The fellow would come up to shake your hand and he'd slip you a crisp new \$100 bill.

I never missed shaking hands with him after church!

Paul says he who has this gift needs to exercise it with "**liberality**." The word suggests we give with no ulterior motives - "*with no strings attached*." If you possess the gift of giving give *freely and selflessly*.

The sixth gift is the gift of **leading**. "**Spiritual management**" we could call it. 1 Corinthians 14:40 tells us, "**Let all things be done decently and in order**."

Recall when Jesus fed the 5000 He first organized the multitude into groups of fifty. Throughout the Bible we learn God is organized and we should be too.

It's been said, "**Don't agonize - organize**." That's why God has gifted certain individuals within the Body of Christ to help us organize, and mobilize our efforts.

Every year the makers of "**Duct Tape**" give a \$5000 award for the most creative use of their product.

One year the prize money went to Anthony Green who was scheduled on a flight from Honduras to Guatemala. The pilot announced there was a hole in the wing and the flight would be delayed. Green pulled out the Duct tape he always carried with him, patched the hole, and the airplane made its destination on time.

Some people help the church in the same way. They know how to *patch things up and make things fly*. God gives some members of the Body the gift of leading to help us reach our God-appointed destination on time.

And the seventh and final motivational gift is the gift of **mercy**. "Mercy" has been defined as "your pain in my heart." It's two hearts tugging on the same load.

Again, we're all called to be merciful, but the believer with the gift of mercy has a special capacity to feel and identify and empathize with another person's suffering.

Paul tells those with the gift of mercy to exercise it with "**cheerfulness**." Because of their sensitivity and sympathy people with this gift can be drawn into the depression of the person they're trying to help.

The two empathizers end up in a huge pity party.

That's why when you exercise the gift of mercy you should reach out with a merry heart and stay upbeat.

It's the joy of the Lord that heals.

Now, the question arises, "Sandy, you say every believer has a spiritual gift, but how do I identify mine?"

And the answer is surprisingly easy.

Ask yourself the question, "If I were made the pastor of Calvary Chapel what would I immediately want to do? What would be the first changes I would make?"

If you say, "We'd get more involved in political issues. We'd take a more public stand for godliness." Then you probably have the gift of prophecy.

If you respond, "No, we need to get involved helping each other. Let's reach out to the elderly. Have more activities for the kids." You have the gift of ministry.

Or if you say, "We need classes that offer in-depth studies on cults, history, apologetics - even a course in New Testament Greek." Yep, that's the gift of teaching.

If your response is, "We need more home fellowships, small groups, opportunities to encourage and challenge one another." Then that's exhortation.

Or you might say, "We need to put more stress on giving to missions, and assisting the poor. Let's add to the benevolence fund." There's the gift is giving.

Or maybe your response is, "I'd love to be pastor because I'm so frustrated with the lack of organization around this place. We need better lines of communication." Perhaps your gift is the gift of leading.

Or if you say, "Let's start a prison ministry and visit the shut-ins." Well, that's the beautiful gift of mercy.

If you need more help identifying your gift here's another exercise. Let's say my grandson, Colt, makes a little potted plant for his mom in Sunday School.

Yet after church he decides he wants to see G-daddy, so he comes running down the aisle. Half-way down he trips and drops the plant - *crash* - dirt and pottery spill everywhere. *How would you react?*

If your first move is to jump up and start looking for a broom and dust pan you have the gift of **ministry**.

If your first reaction is to pull out your wallet and offer to pay for the broken pot your's is the gift of **giving**.

If you say to my grandson, "Young man let this be a warning. Thus saith the Lord, there'll be many opportunities to stumble in life and if you need to watch-eth your step-eth." That's the gift of **prophecy**.

Or if your first reaction is to show Colt a clever foot maneuver he can use to right himself the next time he starts to slip - then your gift is the gift of **teaching**.

If your first thought is "how can we rearrange these chairs so this will never happen again." That's **leading**.

Or maybe you'd put your arm around Colton and give him a pep talk. "That's okay Colt! Don't quit trying. Next time you'll do better." That's **exhortation**.

Or if you picked him up, and cuddled him, and kissed his "ittle-bitty-boo-boos" - you have the gift of **mercy**.

But realize if Colton fell in the aisle this morning, and broke his potted plant there would be seven diverse reactions among the people in this room today. All of which would be valid, God-ordained reactions!

If we realize this we can avoid a lot of conflict... Say you've got the gift of mercy and you see a guy with the gift of prophecy standing over Colton warning him about trip-ups - you might assume the guy is insensitive and callous. *Who does he think he is?*

Or if you have the gift of ministry and you see a fellow teaching Colt some steps - you could think, "Look at the lazy jerk, why doesn't he help clean up?"

It's everybody's tendency to judge other people in the Body on the basis of our own particular giftedness. Yet in so doing we can destroy harmony and unity.

Don't forget we all have *different gifts* that cause us to react to situations *differently*. Be glad everyone is not like you - that other points-of-view exist in the Body. A healthy church will appreciate it's spiritual diversity.

Well, how are you doing skiing across the lake of God's will? Maybe you just can't get out of the water...

If that's so, here's six steps you should take... Present your body - Renew your mind - Humble your heart - Exercise your faith - Find your place - Use your gift... follow those steps and your life will "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Walking in the will of God is not as complicated as we make it... we just need to get up and get moving!

I hope you'll begin that process today!