

God's Sovereign Will vs Free Will
Asking for a Friend

Daily Devotions and hC Material

Soul Food Day 1

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Having told us not to store up earthly treasures ([Matt. 6:19–24](#)), in today's passage Jesus anticipates an objection to His teaching. Sure, some may think, it is easy to tell us not to pursue earthly treasures, but we need money and other goods to meet our needs. Will we not worry if we do not go after such treasures? After all, how will we afford to eat, buy clothes, and so on without money?

Our Savior's answer to this unstated problem is simple: “Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on” (v. 25a).

In the examples that follow, Jesus shows us why we need not fret about such things. But before we get into these reasons, note that Christ is not here commending a lackadaisical approach to life in which we expect everything to fall into our laps. Nor does His teaching release us from the duty to feed our families. Scripture is clear that we should be industrious, just like the ants ([Prov. 6:6–11](#)), and that anyone who does not provide for his family is worse than the unbeliever who does ([1 Tim. 5:8](#)). Even so, toiling away out of fear for the future is not the same thing as God-glorifying labor. Life's pressures invite us to worry incessantly about tomorrow. Yet Christ says divine providence makes this anxiety foolish. Birds do not worry, they sing, and still they find food each day without sowing or reaping.

We as God's image-bearers have more worth than they and can be all the more confident that He will feed us as well ([Matt. 6:26](#); see [Gen. 1:26–27](#)). “The lilies of the field” neither toil nor spin. Their life and worth is so limited that they are fuel for our fires, yet their glory is far greater than Solomon's. Since the Father provides for these, He also will provide for us, His beloved people ([Matt. 6:28–30](#)). Far from compounding our anxiety, making God's kingdom the center of our lives frees us from anxiety. If we seek this kingdom first, He will meet all our needs (v. 33). Those who serve Him wholeheartedly and live out the ethics of God's kingdom will share what they have (5:42; 6:1–4), and thereby our Father will meet our needs through our efforts and the generosity of others. We need not worry about tomorrow, for God always takes care of His own ([Ps. 37:25](#)).

Some of us are more prone to anxiety than others. Yet as we read in today's passage, persistent worry is not our calling as Christians. We need not be anxious about tomorrow if we are serving Jesus, for while we may not get all of our wants, He will certainly give us all of our needs.

If you are struggling with anxiety this day, take your eyes off yourself and do a good deed for another person. Then, ask God to help you learn how to trust in Him confidently.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Adapted from: <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/daily-study/2008/03/antidote-worry/>

Soul Food Day 2

Ephesians 5:1-17

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷ Therefore do not be partners with them.

⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) ¹⁰ and find out what pleases the Lord. ¹¹ Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. ¹⁴ This is why it is said:

*“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”*

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Question: How do you find the mind of God when it comes to decisions?

Is it through coincidence, through dreams or visions, through a combination of circumstances or events, or by flipping a coin? Others, however, are not at all certain that God really cares whether you visit Israel or take your money and invest in the stock market.

There is one thing for certain. Each of us has a will of our own—a strong one, too. You were born with it, and it takes only a few days—sometimes even hours--after you've made your entrance in the world to start exercising your will. Your will is pitted against the will of your parents, and you quickly exert your desire to make your own decisions.

Before Christ came, finding God's will was more difficult than it is today. The psalmist of David's day said that we are not to be like the horse or mule whose direction is subject to a bit and bridle (Psalm 32:9). An animal who has a bit in its mouth learns very quickly that to exert its will against the will of the rider results in painful protest. The animal is no longer free to do as it pleases. Refusing the will of the rider results in suffering discomfort or even outright pain. The message here is that if you don't follow God's guidance, you'll face the consequences.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he instructed them not to be ignorant of God's will but rather to understand what is His will. Two words or concepts stand in opposition to each other: an ignorance of what God wants in contrast to an understanding of God's will which includes your mind and will. The word Paul uses to describe a lack of understanding is a strong one. It means ignorant, or—in the vernacular—just plain stupid. It's like ignoring a road map because you are too proud to admit you don't know where you are going, refusing to look at a compass thinking that you can figure out where to go and what to do without any help.

A final thought: When you become a parent for the first time, you quickly learn that parenting is eighteen years of sometimes gently and sometimes forcibly struggling to determine who is going to be in charge—you or your child. And the same thing applies to you and your Heavenly Father. God's will is better than yours because He knows the end from the beginning. He also knows what's around the corner, the hidden hazards you can't see, and He's far more interested in your doing His will than even you are.

The word Paul uses when he talks of understanding God's will means you use your brain, you think and evaluate. It's a head decision—not an emotional or heart decision.

In His Word, the Bible, God has given us a blueprint, a roadmap, a compass, and a game plan for life. Most of our failures when it comes to understanding what God wants of us come because we make emotional decisions rather than rational ones based on the direction He has given to us through this book.

You can find His will when you seek it, and you can be sure that when you do, you will know, no matter what the digital clock may read.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Adapted from: <https://www.guidelines.org/devotional/how-to-understand-gods-will-for-you/>

Soul Food Day 3

James 4:13-17

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

The Bible is full of warnings about being presumptuous--of putting things off until tomorrow, of assuming that it is a sure thing.

James wrote, "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow." Then he asks a serious question: "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" ([James 4:13,14](#)).

At the same time, I think we often fail to see the importance of tomorrow. Living for today, we often ignore the reality that what happens today is going to affect my tomorrow. If I abuse my body today, it changes how I will feel tomorrow. If I yield to my passion and throw away moral restraints, my tomorrow is going to be vitally impacted. If I ignore common sense, and use my credit cards without thinking of how I can repay the debt, my tomorrow is going to be overclouded. That's the cause and effect relationship between today and tomorrow.

Hope that tomorrow can be different, though, is neither presumptuous nor empty. It is something that is often overlooked. The belief that God can and perhaps will do tomorrow what I have asked Him to do today isn't wishful thinking. It simply takes into account that God is never in a hurry – that, on occasion, His timetable is different from mine and that He is working while I sleep and accomplishing what I really want but doing it His way, not mine.

Hope has a counterforce--a kind of virus that eats away at the dawn of tomorrow's hope. It is worry, which causes you to think that tomorrow will be no different from today, or that yesterday's failure will catch up with you today and thus destroy tomorrow. Thank God there is His forgiveness which helps you through the minefield of human failure, though it doesn't cancel out all of the results of your failures. But knowing that God has forgiven you will help you take His hand and face tomorrow.

The marvelous grace of God gives tomorrow a golden hue as beautiful as the sunrise that paints the sky. Though we are undeserving we can hold on to hope that tomorrow can be different and not worry about what may happen, or what could happen. That's what grace is about, and what hope is about, and what God is about. It is what takes us through today and helps us face tomorrow without fear or worry.

Thank God, tomorrow can be different. It can be beautiful no matter what has happened today.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Adapted from: <https://www.guidelines.org/devotional/are-you-living-in-yesterday-today-or-tomorrow/>

Soul Food Day 4

Matthew 6:5-15

⁵ *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

⁹ *"This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

¹⁰ *your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation,^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one.^[b]*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

¹⁵ *But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Before they put astronauts aboard the spacecrafts that were sent to the moon, scientists used a rather elaborate system to keep the missiles on the right path in space. It seems that, in spite of their great accuracy, the missiles would deviate from the correct trajectory and wander off course. The slightest deviation would, of course, cause them to go hurtling off in space forever, and miss the moon entirely. To correct the deviation, scientists installed receivers in the rockets. From Cal-Tech's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, a message would be radioed through space to the missile. The receiver aboard the spacecraft would translate the message, causing the great retro-rockets to fire for a precise number of seconds to correct the course of the space missile gone astray.

In a sense, the human soul is something like the receiver that was installed in the construction of the spacecraft. The record of Genesis says that when God created man, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living creature, but then man rejected God's will and plan for his life, and that rebellion against God--called sin by the Bible--caused the soul of man to die.

Yet, when a person recognizes his spiritual need and turns to Christ, as his Savior, he becomes a new person, spiritually. It is like a radio receiver--burned out by a power shortage--replaced with one better than the old.

If you would doubt that we desperately need the guidance of God in our lives, take a look at people you know, who, in spite of the direction God gives in the Word, have made shipwrecks of their lives. The man who is unsaved is like the captain of a ship who refuses to use the radar unit, because he says, "I am the captain of my fate," not knowing what lies ahead in uncharted waters, when the radar unit could guide him through dangerous seas.

Perhaps you are thinking, "Do you really mean that God, through His Holy Spirit, will give us guidance today in the 21st century?" I mean to say just that, but like the volume control of a radio receiver, it is possible to turn the volume so low, spiritually, that we do not hear the voice of God.

You may be like the person who stopped on the corner of a downtown street to talk to a blind friend. The noise of the traffic made conversation almost impossible, and yet the blind man stopped and said, "Did you drop a coin?" Sure enough, the friend looked at his feet and there was a coin that had dropped out of his pocket as he reached for his keys. "How could you hear that?" asked his friend. "Oh," he replied, "you hear what you are trained to hear." The man without his sight had trained his ears to compensate for his lack of vision.

With the darkness of the world pressing upon us, we need to train our ears to hear the voice of God. Incidentally, God's voice is a quiet one that can be drowned out by the clamor of our own ambition and desires. If you are uncertain if what you feel is God's will, ask three questions: 1. Have I honestly put aside my will? Can you whole-heartedly pray, "Have Thine own way, Lord"? 2. Have you determined that you will do God's will when He shows it to you? 3. Is the direction you feel in your heart, consistent with the teaching of God's Word? If you can answer yes to all these questions you may be reasonably sure that what you feel is the will of God.

Do not be afraid, for it means for us all good, all grace, all glory from God, who wants His kingdom on earth to be as it is in heaven.

Application

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Adapted from: <https://www.guidelines.org/devotional/how-to-hear-gods-voice/>

Soul Food Day 5

Philippians 3:7-14

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in^[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Much is being written these days about purpose—that is, about finding your personal reason for being on Planet Earth. What does God want you to do with your life?

The apostle Paul was concerned about purpose as well. He said that his desire was that he could lay hold of that purpose for which Christ Jesus laid hold of him (Philippians 3:12).

You may remember that before he was a believer, Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, when God stopped him in his tracks with a blinding light. Paul was never the same after that. He did a 180 degree turn and began to tell people about Jesus with all the same fervor that he had used to persecute believers. So, it's logical that Paul would want to know why God brought about such a drastic change in his life.

Finding God's purpose is, to me, both a challenge and a comfort. It's a challenge because only God fully knows what that purpose is. I have many indications—what I'm good at, what I'm passionate about, what I'd be willing to do if I were never paid a penny for it. Even the circumstances of my life indicate God's direction. But working out His purpose in our lives requires that we stay close to the Lord so that He can direct us.

Yet, endeavoring to fulfill God's purpose is also comforting because you don't have to fill anyone else's shoes. Although He stretches us at times, God seldom asks us to do what we're no good at. The way you fulfill God's purpose doesn't have to be important in the eyes of the world—just in God's eyes. His purpose for you is individually designed. And He will reveal it one day at a time as you look to Him for guidance.

If you haven't done so already, ask God today to help you lay hold of His purpose for your life. Then get ready for a life of fulfillment.

Application

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Adapted from: <https://www.guidelines.org/devotional/what-does-god-want-you-to-do-with-your-life/>

hC Material

1. Have different readers read the Bible passage from 2 or more different translations.

2. Reflect & meditate between each reading

3. Scripture:

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

4. Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
4. Share any of the above discoveries with your houseChurch. Ask each other, “What is your nugget?”

5. Discussion Questions

- 1) The passage starts with “Therefore.” This means He was drawing a conclusion to what He had spoken earlier. What was he talking about and how does it apply to this conclusion? See verses 19-24.
- 2) What examples did Jesus give that enable us to see that God cares for His creation? How can reflecting on God’s care for His creation help us to worry less and trust Him more? (Hint: Examine the latter half of v.26)
- 3) How many times in this passage does the word “do not worry” (do not be anxious) occur? How has anxiety and worry affected you in your life? How can we combat the anxiety that we feel? Read: Phil. 4:4–7.
- 4) What has been your biggest struggle with worry about material things? How has God helped you trust him more? Where do you still need some work in this area?

Now talk to Jesus...