

# God Confirms His Will

John 6:1-15

As we continue in our study of Experiencing God, we are focusing on how God speaks to us. In Scripture we see that God speaks in a variety of ways. There is no one consistent way God always speaks. But what is consistent is that when God speaks, His people know it is HIM speaking and they know what He means. The same thing remains true today. **God makes Himself clear.** He confirms His will for us as we walk with Him.

This **Decision-Making Wheel** is a helpful tool found in Family Life Today's excellent premarital counseling material, *Preparing for Marriage*.

## Balanced Biblical Decision-Making



You can see there are four major spokes on this wheel - four ways we hear from the Lord to confirm His will for us. The vertical spokes are prayer and God's Word. The horizontal spokes are our desires and circumstances on one side and the godly counsel we get from the believers in our lives. At the center of Christian decision making, of course, is a relationship with Jesus. If you get nothing from the Experiencing God study, this point comes through loud and clear - **it is all about a RELATIONSHIP**. There is no formula to follow. God customizes His plans for each of His children.

And the outer rim of the wheel is the inner leading of the Holy Spirit - **the peace and confidence** and excitement we feel as we move forward in line with God's will for us. Today we are going to use John 6 as an illustration of how to confirm God's will for you. This decision making wheel will

provide our structure. Let's jump into the passage and see how God made His will clear for Philip in particular.

“And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick... Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming...” John 6:2,5

Here is ***the background for the feeding of the 5,000 miracle***. Word was getting out that a miracle-working healer was in the region of Galilee. Everyone wanted to see signs and wonders. Many wanted to be healed themselves. So - “because they saw the signs,” large crowds started chasing after Jesus. Skip to the end of the story, in verse 30.

““Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? ... Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness.’ ... Jesus said to them, ***I am the bread of life***; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” John 6:30,35

The people wanted a sign. Indeed, ***they demanded a sign*** - proof from Jesus that he was the Messiah. Think about that. He had just fed 5,000 men - a crowd of 15 - 20,000 people. And still they wanted a SIGN. What more could they expect?!? They were helpful to suggest a sign for Jesus - manna. Basically they said, “***Keep giving us magic bread*** to eat and then we will believe you're the Messiah and follow you!”

Jesus response is very revealing. “***I AM*** the bread of life.” Basically He was saying:

### **Don't seek a Sign, seek the Son**

““Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? ...Jesus said to them, ***I am the bread of life***; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” John 6:30,35

Let's try to feel this practically. We are all here thinking, “Those silly people - demanding a sign from Jesus when He just fed a huge crowd!” ***But how often do we do this very thing?!?*** Think of the last time God came through for you in a big way - some major provision or blessing in your life... How much time went by before you started asking for another blessing, another miracle? **Are you measuring in days or minutes?**

- In our **finances** - do we seek after Jesus or do we constantly beg God for a sign of His favor financially?
- In our **relationships** - do we seek after Jesus above all or do we come to the Lord again and again to fix our spouse or to fix our kids or to fix our boss...?
- In our **church** - do we seek Jesus in pure, sincere worship, or do we just look for the program that we want, the songs that we like, the topics that we want addressed right now...?

- In our **decision-making** - do we seek Jesus in humble, grateful faith, or do we continually ask for signs of His favor, signs of His direction?

Did you know that in the Bible **asking for a sign is BAD**? It is an expression of UNBELIEF - not belief. Jesus' enemies are the ones who asked for a sign, not his followers. Gideon is the classic example in the Bible - 'laying a fleece' out before the Lord. **Gideon is NOT a great example**. Did God graciously speak to Gideon through his little fleece exercises? Yes. But that is an example to us of God's merciful communication, not of Gideon's impressive faith and obedience. Gideon was a CHICKEN. He should have been like David and raced out to meet the enemy. Instead he hid and hesitated until God pried him out of fear into obedience. DON'T be like Gideon!

**Don't seek a SIGN. Seek the Son.** That is our main lesson today. Remember, at the center of our lives and our decision-making is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be given to you as well."* Food, clothes, jobs, safety, blessing - our Father in heaven knows that we need these things - and He has promised to provide them for us. But above all He wants us to trust Him, to seek Him - to put Him first.

Listen to John 6:35 and hear Jesus as He says to you - "I AM the bread of life.; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." Hear that. Believe that. Rest in it.

- Maybe you are here today with real **financial burdens**. Jesus promises you not only your daily bread but also HIMSELF as the full and eternal satisfaction for your soul!
- Maybe you are here today struggling with some **ongoing sin issue** - some recurring temptation you just can't shake. Jesus promises to set you free from that and to become the greatest joy in your life.
- Maybe you are here today feeling **lonely and depressed**. Jesus says to you, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

**He IS the bread of life.** Jesus will never disappoint you. If you seek HIM first and above all - He will satisfy your deepest longings and He will provide everything you need. But be very careful about asking God for a SIGN of His love for you. That is called TESTING God. And it is not recommended. Don't seek a sign. Seek the Son. Seek Jesus!

Ok, come back to Philip as the crowds were swarming around Jesus.

**"Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?'" John 6:5**

Isn't it interesting that of all the disciples, **Jesus said this to PHILIP?** We don't know much about Philip. John 1 says, "Jesus FOUND Philip," and called him to come, follow him. Doesn't that encourage you? Jesus FOUND this young man. In the same way, Jesus found you!

He knew you and came in pursuit of you, calling YOU to come and be His disciple. Philip not only came, but went and brought his friend Nathanael too. Back in John 6 -

**"Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do." John 6:5-6**

Jesus set this whole thing up as **a TEST for Philip**. It doesn't say it was a test for Peter or James or the others. This was for Philip. Notice who took the initiative. Jesus. Remember, God is always at work. God is the initiator - our job is to respond. When we initiate and ask God to respond, things don't work out very well. But when God initiates and we respond, things go much better.

Here we see Jesus initiating, deliberately to TEST Philip. Jesus knew what he would do. He must have smiled as the crowds came near. Jesus would blow the disciples away with this miracle. They would experience His power and glory in ways they could not have imagined. Aside from the resurrection itself, this is **the ONLY MIRACLE recorded in all four gospel accounts**. The only one!

Do you see that **God wants to work in miraculous ways** - doing things only HE can do? If we will just get our own egos and plans and desires out of the way, there is no limit to what God can do. This miracle shows us **how God confirms His will**. And the first step is:

### **1. God takes the Initiative through His Word**

**"Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do." John 6:5-6**

Jesus set this whole event in motion. It was HIS WORD to Philip that started this. And look what Jesus said, "Where are we to buy bread?" They were out in the country. There was no Publix around the corner - no Panera Bread to do a bagel run.

But look what Jesus was doing - He was drawing Philip's attention to the NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE. He was saying, "Look at this crowd. How can we serve them? How can we love them?" No doubt the crowds would have been hungry, having travelled a long way just to get there. **Instead of sending them away, Jesus challenged Philip to think about a way to serve them.**

Have you ever experienced this? ***As you read the Bible, the Lord lays someone on your heart.*** He leads you to pray for them. He gives you a great concern for them. God is the great INITIATOR. And the way God initiates in our lives is as His Holy Spirit speaks to us through His Word.

Many of us saw the film, *Blind Eyes Opened*, last month. It was produced by **Geoff and Kerri Rogers**, who founded the U.S. Institute Against Human Trafficking. As Geoff was advancing with IBM, his career felt increasingly hollow to him and the Lord began to lead him and his wife into a new season back in 2011. The way was not clear - but the first step was. God initiated as they prayed and studied Scripture together. And they agreed to respond in faith.

This is what God does. He initiates and speaks to us - and it is up to us to respond. When we do respond in faith, like Geoff and Kerri did, God can do miraculous things through us! But that's getting ahead of us here. The first step is that God initiates through His Word. Second,

## **2. God Directs us as we seek Him in Prayer**

**“Philip answered him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.’” John 6:7**

***Now, I realize this is not a very good prayer.*** But that should encourage us. It's not the amount of faith that matters, but the OBJECT of faith. What we see in Philip here is a tiny mustard seed. But he brings this question and concern to JESUS - and that is what matters.

Even when we don't understand - even when we are filled with doubts and fears - if we bring them to Jesus, He can work with them. He can help calm our fears and still work in us and through us.

***I wonder if Philip was an engineer.*** He was some kind of math guy. He saw the crowd of 15,000 or more people and tallied it up. A day's wage back then was one denarius. Today a minimum wage employee earns around \$75 per day. Multiply that by 200 you get \$15,000. A dollar per person would get you a bagette from Panera, I suppose. Maybe half a cookie each...

I wonder if Philip glanced over at Judas, who was **the treasurer for the group**. You can imagine Judas holding up like 5 denarii, with a smirk. No way did they have 200 denarii. I expect if I called Dave Depagter, our church treasurer, to ask if we had \$15,000 lying around to feed the masses at Gasparilla he would have given me a similar kind of smirk with a raised eyebrow. (No comparison with Judas intended, Dave - just trying to illustrate the amount of money we are talking about.)

The point is that Philip was having a conversation with Jesus. Jesus initiated it, Philip responded. This is how God works in our lives still today. He initiates through His Word. We respond in prayer - bringing our questions, concerns, fears and desires to Him. This is the beauty of prayer -

we don't have to know what to pray for. Prayer presumes we DON'T know what to pray for - but that God does know and that He will lead us in both how to pray and what to do.

What have you been praying about recently? ***How has the Lord been speaking to YOU through His Word?*** Our focus as a church is on reaching people with the gospel. We are praying for 30 new believers this year. Who are you praying for? God has spoken to us through His word - commissioning us to go and make disciples of all nations. We respond to Him in prayer - bringing to Him the people we are most concerned about. And He directs us as we seek Him in prayer.

Jesus pointed to the crowds and Philip expressed back to Jesus his assessment of the situation. God took the initiative through the word of Jesus. God directed Philip as he engaged in conversation with Jesus. Step three:

### **3. God Clarifies His will through wise Counselors**

***“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?’” John 6:8-9***

Here is a crowd of 15,000 people and the disciples do a **quick inventory** - what do we have. We don't have \$15,000. Even if we did, where would we go to buy bread for a crowd like this? Who brought a lunch? It seems just one boy. Wow. That's impressively bad planning by an entire crowd. But here we are..

This is a reminder to us of **the importance of being in community** with other believers. Faced with a massive challenge like feeding a huge crowd, wouldn't you be glad to have a dozen or more people beside you? Wouldn't you be glad for a TEAM?

One of the great blessings of being involved in a Bible believing local church is the connections it provides with wise, godly people. Kristin and I have been profoundly blessed since both of us were raised in church so we both have wise, godly parents who have encouraged and advised and supported us through our 20 years of marriage, ministry and family life.

One of the **providential flourishes** of our ministry here is remarkable. When I was a senior in college, up in Indiana, I had the flexibility in my schedule to do an independent study. I was engaged to Kristin and had gotten to know and respect her dad, so I asked him for a list of books to read to help me shape my philosophy of ministry. He sent me a list of 13 or 14 books and I started reading and processing those, discussing what I was learning with him along the way.

Now, at the SAME TIME that I was learning from my Father in law, whose name is Mike Maggard, he was serving right here at Oakwood, teaching the very same content to this church family in his Lay Pastor Training material - sharing his philosophy of discipling, multiplication and small groups. How cool is that? The Lord was at work long before any of us could have guessed how

the details would work out! And He worked greatly in my life through wise counselors like my father in law and many other people the Lord brought along the way.

***How have your friends and mentors in the church helped you to clarify God's will?*** Hopefully you can quickly think of dozens of examples. If not - you need to get more plugged in here! Do you see what happened with Philip and Andrew? Andrew was nearby and overheard what was happening. So he stepped in to join with Philip in the conversation with Jesus. Essentially, Andrew joined Philip in his prayer.

Here is a great exercise for your Community Group. Let's say one of your members has a significant challenge or a big decision to make. You can place that person in the middle of the group, inviting them to share what's going on. And then together as a group you can surround them with your prayers. If it's appropriate, you could even gather around them and place a hand on a shoulder or arm as you pray. This is a beautiful picture of Christian community - how we lift one another up before Jesus - knowing that HE IS THE ONE who has the answers and who has the power to intervene.

In the process of sharing our struggles and questions with one another, **the Lord will provide timely guidance** through the godly people in your life. Sometimes it will be ***positive affirmation*** of the direction you are going and other times it will be ***caution to slow down*** or turn away from the way you are going.

Young people, ***let's say you meet a guy or meet a girl*** you are interested in. If all of the wise, godly people in your life are waving red and yellow flags about that person you should seriously consider slowing down in that relationship. The odds are that your parents and older friends see something that you don't! On the other hand, if they get to know your significant other and one after another they affirm what they see in that person and in the match between you, that should greatly encourage you to continue developing the relationship.

This is where the decision-making wheel came from - the **Preparing for Marriage** handbook. This is the step we encourage couples to take called Evaluating the Relationship - before sending out invites to the wedding. As you think about the person you might marry, as you get to know guys or girls, are you seeking God in His Word? Are you listening to Him in prayer - and bringing Him your questions, concerns and fears? Are you sharing with the wise, godly people in your life to see what they think? Above all, are you seeking JESUS?

The key to any good decision is this - **RUN HARD after Jesus** - seek Him first - and everything will work itself out. Guys, if you run hard after Jesus one day you will look up and see a young woman who is also running hard after Jesus. Because you're both pursuing the same thing - Jesus - you'll be running the same direction and the Lord will bring you together.



The problem with choosing a mate, as with many decisions we make, is that we don't have a balanced decision-making wheel with Scripture and prayer and godly counsel - typically we consult only **ONE SPOKE**, *the last one called desires and circumstances*.

**4. God calls us to Align our desires with His**

**“Jesus said, ‘Have the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number.” John 6:10**

Think what Philip would have done had he only consulted *his own desires and the circumstances* in front of him. 5,000 men. 15 or 20,000 people counting the women and children. A total of five little loaves of bread and two small fish. Almost no money. No bread stores nearby.

***What would your desire be in that circumstance?*** To run for the hills, right? But Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Would you have been tempted to correct Jesus? To say, “Lord, I think we should be practical here. There’s no way we can feed this many people. It just can’t be done!”

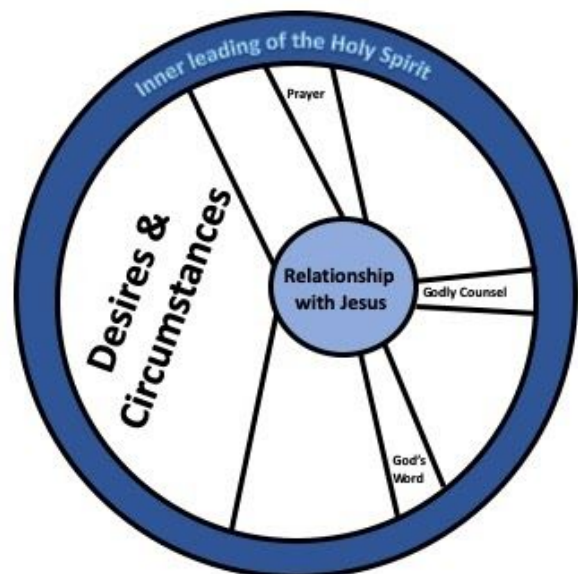
He would say to you - *“Of course it can’t be done with YOUR resources. But we aren’t working with only your resources; we are working with mine. Take a seat.”* So Philip had a choice: follow his own desires in this situation or submit to Jesus’ clear direction. Would he refuse Jesus and trust in his own understanding or would he lean not on his own understanding and instead acknowledge Jesus as Lord in this situation?

***That is our choice every day!*** Will we trust in our own wisdom and follow our own desires, or will we seek to align our desires with God’s will? If we used a balanced decision-making process, it will help us to align with the Lord. But often our decision making looks like this:

***We place the most weight on our own desires and the circumstances*** we are in, neglecting prayer, the study of God’s Word and the pursuit of godly counsel. You can see how this throws the wheel of decision making off kilter, sliding our relationship with Jesus out of center as SELF becomes more prominent.

Think of the last major decision you made. How balanced was your wheel? It might be for something major like a new house or a career change. Or it might be more small like the goals you set (or didn’t set) for 2020. How much

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prayer has gone into your new year's resolutions? How much have you studied Scripture to see what GOD desires for you this year? How much have you sought godly counsel to discern the priorities God would have for you?

Do you see how it's about aligning our desires with God's? This is how God speaks to us and confirms His will for us! He wants us to keep Jesus in the center - so it's all about a relationship with Christ. ***Don't seek a SIGN, seek the Son.*** If our days, months and years are devoted to loving and serving Jesus, everything else will fall into place.

Keep Jesus at the center through prayer and Bible study. This is why we are using **Experiencing God** this year - to encourage and enable all of us to take the time to cultivate a love relationship with God. This pushes us to study God's word prayerfully and in community with other godly believers.

Our own desires and circumstances play a part in hearing from God and confirming His will - but they should not be the central or only part. We need to keep our decision making balanced to be biblical. And when we do, **God will confirm His will for us.** We will feel that inner sense of PEACE as the Holy Spirit uses His "still, small voice" to encourage us, "This is the way - walk in it."

And the result is that **God can work in ways beyond what we can do on our own.** Philip and the disciples certainly experienced this with the feeding of the multitude. We are praying we will begin to experience this here at Oakwood and in Tampa this year.

When we were serving a church in Louisville, KY, I connected with a pastor named **Doug Abner.** He was from the small town of Manchester in eastern Kentucky, near Hazard County, where the Dukes of Hazard was filmed. Manchester, and that whole region of the hill country, was struggling in the late '90s and into the 2000s. Most people who were able to move away, did. Local businesses failed due to government corruption and crime continually increased as police corruption allowed drugs to be sold. By 2004 the small town of Manchester was conducting nearly one funeral every week as their teenagers overdosed on prescription drugs and other narcotics.

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Doug had been faithfully preaching and serving in that town for years. He even led **a little prayer meeting** that drew a handful of other pastors. Doug is from the Pentecostal movement, but one of his closest friends was Pastor Ken Bolin, a conservative Baptist.

Notice **the progression of what happened**, as you look at the decision making wheel.

1. God took the initiative through His Word as Doug and Ken sought to preach the gospel and lead in their area.
2. God directed Doug and Ken, and some other pastors as they gathered to pray.
3. God clarified His will through wise counselors.
4. And God called these leaders to align their desires and plans with His.

These faithful pastors prayed for 20 years leading up to a historic moment in 2004. They sensed the Lord was doing something as their little prayer meeting began to gain momentum. A small handful became 20-25. They changed to Saturday morning prayer and saw up to 100 people coming in to join in calling on God to move. There was a desperation in Manchester for God to do something that only He could do. But no one was sure what that was.

Then one day **Ken's wife had a dream**. Doug laughed about this. As a Pentecostal, he said, if he or his wife had a spiritual dream no one would have thought anything of it. They had dreams all the time. But Ken and his wife were the conservative "non dreamers" so this dream got their attention. It was of a large march - a big demonstration.

Now, the whole town of Manchester only had a couple of thousand people living there. So the dream of a march with multiple thousands of people felt very impossible. But the pastors sensed this was the Lord leading them - so they set aside their desires and plans and fears and began to move toward some kind of march. They scheduled it for May 2nd, 2004.

**63 pastors** from all over the county agreed to come together and lead this march. On the morning of the march, a couple of the pastors received death threats to them and their families. It was no small thing they were attempting. And they had no idea how many would come.

In the end 3,500 people came to join in this march. It wasn't a protest AGAINST the local government or leaders. It was a cry for help to God. The 63 pastors led the march through town to the central park in Manchester. And there in the park those 63 leaders got on their knees and publicly repented for their lack of love, lack of unity, lack of compassion for the people of their city - and asked God to heal them, to change them and to change their city.

The story is told in the film **An Appalachian Dawn**.

(<https://www.ac4t.org/product-page/an-appalachian-dawn>) See the church blog for more of the story. After that historic prayer gathering, everything began to change in town. Drug dealers who had been untouchable were captured. Police and government corruption was uncovered and

prosecuted. Just a couple of years later a Christian mayor was elected who started to bring godly values into all areas of their government. The city of darkness became the city of HOPE. God did a work of transformation that only He could do.

That is the kind of transformation we are praying for and pursuing here in Tampa. Only God can turn a city upside down. But just as Jesus assured Philip and the others - "It's ok. I'm here. Have the people sit down." So Jesus tells us - "We are not just working with your resources; we are working with MY RESOURCES." With Him, all things are possible!

Let's pray!