



The Will of God

Leslie D. Weatherhead

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This is a reprint of five sermons delivered by Leslie D. Weatherhead to his congregation in 1944 on the question of the will of God.

The Will of God Details

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From Reader Review The Will of God for online ebook

Ginny Thurston says

Very thought-provoking and helpful although one should be aware of the historical context in which it was written...England during WW 2.

Adam Parker says

This book was chosen intentionally at this moment in time where my wife and I are making serious decisions and changes in our collective future, in hopes that they are the will of the Father. This book laid out a pretty good and informative description of what God's will is and ways in which we can discern it. His major point is the separation of the will of God into three distinct categories; Intentional Will of God, Circumstantial Will of God, Ultimate Will of God. His main issue is that people often confuse these different "wills" of the Lord, and thus wrongly attribute events to Him.

The author for the most part is sound in his reasoning, but he takes scripture out of context and blatantly disregards it while making other assertions. Still though, I recommend the read for those wanting to discern the will of the King in their lives, at least as a starting point in the subject. It certainly cleared up what is often a very foggy and subjective issue for me. It is also quite a short book and can be read in one sitting if that is the desire.

Amy says

A life changing book!

Chris Waks says

Good book, but had some fire quotes.

"Come with me to some slum home in the dark back streets of a huge city, where men's lives and services are means to other men's ends, where there is disease of body and distortion of mind, where evil festers and grows in sordid and terrible conditions, where men have not even the spirit to rebel, but accept their lot with a listless apathy that is more terrible than a revolution. And if you say concerning those stunted lives, "This is the will of God," I say to you that that is a greater blasphemy than the denial of the Holy Trinity. Industrial oppression, selfish greed, the denial of God's gifts to his own children because of the greed of a few, the horror of war--these things spell a great atheism than any verbal arguments man has devised. We turn back a hundred years and wonder that Christian men could sign humans to God while slavery was rife. But, lease God, a hundred years hence or descendants will turn back and become incredulous that we ever called ourselves by the name of Christ when his body was torn asunder in ur churches, trampled on in our streets, exploited in big business, left to disease when medical knowledge and skill were within reach the human family, and mutilated by bombs and burning steel we dropped on one another's cities. Call these things evil, call some of them inevitable evil because of widespread sin. but don't call them the will of God."

pcb says

Now that I have read this book, I will never look at events in the same way. It was life-changing.

Lora Lee Hensel says

This theologian (who write through the 1930's and 40's) writes of his perspective on the will of God, that there is the intentional will of God and when that is thwarted, the circumstantial will of God and always the ultimate will of God. Discerning the will of God for us is kept real here - with many suggestions for signposts and supports along our daily way.

In one brief section he asserts that part of God's intentional will for women is to bear children and be linked with a partner but when that doesn't happen, there is the circumstantial will for their well-being that comes into play (having contentment in other things) and though I agree with his premise that women's bodies are designed to have children, I believe that we have moved, with God's blessing, to women enjoying the full compliment of their gifts and skills without feeling they are compensating for what they don't have (children) - this brief section of the book spoke to me of his age and the culture in which he wrote. I decided to put that to the side and stay open to the continued thinking he shared through the rest of the text and I was very glad I did.

I have gained new insights into this challenging topic. It is a brief text, clearly written and is very well edited.

Karen Hartley says

A perfect little book that clearly states the differences between God's intentional will, his circumstantial will, and his ultimate will. I have read this book many times, trying to help people understand God's will. Great book for Bible Studies. Timeless in its teaching.

Casey Taylor says

While not entirely without problems, Leslie Weatherhead's book is a clear and direct exploration about what Christian's mean when we talk about God's will. It generally fits within a Wesleyan-Methodist theology, although Weatherhead himself is more aligned with 20th c. Liberal Protestantism than classical Methodism. Not entirely without problems, it is nevertheless an incredibly helpful book worth wrestling with. If nothing else, it should compel readers to be more specific about what we mean when we say, "That's God's will."

Eugene LeCouteur says

An exquisite little book that in five essays/sermons elucidates the various aspects of what we see and experience as the will of God. Written during WWII it seems to me to share timeless perspectives on what is

and is not the will of God. It also gives the reader a way of living into the mystery that is God's will.

Shelley Huber says

If you wonder where God is in the midst of your pain, joy, ambivalence...read this book!

David says

Written during WW II and clearly from another time -- comment that God's intention is for women to be married and have children will be controversial today in some circles. Overall, very useful in explaining the will of God to those who often are troubled about why bad things happen.

Jim Ament says

The Will of God, by Leslie D. Weatherhead (1893-1976), was written in 1944 and at only fifty-six pages long (my old publication), it remains a classic in helping to get one's thinking right about this subject. The book is actually a series of five sermons given at a very difficult time in England, "relevant to these days of loss and sorrow," yet also relevant to our current time of war and despicable world events.

Weatherhead says the phrase is used too loosely; often, after some horrible tragedy, someone will say, "It is the will of God." Weatherhead then offers a logical thought process which in essence says that one should not identify the will of God as something for which a man would be locked up! He argues that there are three distinct kinds of will:

The intentional will of God, the circumstantial will of God, and the ultimate will of God.

The confusion arises when we do not make the necessary distinctions about God's will. He gets right to the point: (1) "Was it God's intention from the beginning that Jesus should go to the Cross?...No...He came with the intention that men should follow him, not kill him. The discipleship of men, not the death of Christ, was the intentional will of God..." (2) "But when circumstances wrought by men's evil set up such a dilemma that Christ was compelled either to die or to run away, then in those circumstances the Cross was the will of God, but only in those circumstances which were themselves the fruit of evil." (3) The ultimate will deals with God's omnipotence. God cannot be finally defeated. Not "everything that happens is his will, but...nothing can happen which finally defeats his will."

The intentional will is about God pouring himself out in goodness and Wetherhead says "one of the first things we must do is to dissociate from the phrase 'the will of God' all that is evil and unpleasant and unhappy... [W]e must come to terms with the idea that the intentional will of God can be defeated by the will of man for the time being. If this were not true, then man would have no real freedom at all." Weatherhead spoke of many horrors of life, strongly declaring, "And if you say...'this is the will' of God, I say to you...blasphemy...these things spell a greater atheism than any verbal arguments man has devised...Call these things evil, call some of them inevitable evil because of widespread sin, but don't call them the will of God." (Leslie Weatherhead was clearly no wimp with these statements.)

He also confirms the idea that the "laws of the universe, which are themselves an expression of God's will,

were not set aside for Jesus" on the Cross. And while he explains that well, he ducked the obvious question about the resurrection defying the laws of the universe, or all the miracles of the Bible not in accordance with the laws of nature, at least the laws where scientific knowledge exists. (A principle of wisdom: We don't know what we don't know.) In charity to Weatherhead, to discuss that subject here would have been tangential to his main points of this sermon series (which I have observed is a problem with sermons: Major theological questions go unexplored, in the interest of time no doubt, but are nonetheless used to support a point being made.)

Weatherhead gives several clarifying examples of the most difficult aspect, circumstantial will—the baby falling out of a five-story building, cancer, and germs, wondering about the evolutionary function served. It is the intentional will that man be in good health, but "let every sufferer...realize that if he makes the right reaction to these circumstances [of disease] the ultimate will of God will be reached as effectively as if he had not been ill. God would not allow cancer if of itself it had the power to defeat him."

Weatherhead acknowledges that it is difficult to explain; that it seems "casual of God to allow these things to happen if they are not his intention" but he also says that Jesus did not say, "I have explained the world." He did say, "I have overcome the world."

He offers this thought about seeing in a mirror darkly: "Frankly, hard though it be to say so, it is a lack of faith not to be able to bear the thought of anything that God allows." My guess is Weatherhead would have been an advocate of "tough love" and I kept thinking of "Job" when I read this book long ago, and again in recent years.

God's ultimate will, in spite of our attempts to work mostly for our wills, is "the redemption of man." He seeks our choosing him. "The omnipotence of God...does not mean that by sheer exhibition of his superior might God gets his own way. If he did, man's freedom would be an illusion...No 'end' which God has in mind can be imposed from without; for his end, the at-one-ment of all souls with him, must come from man's choice of God's way, not the impression of God's will in irresistible might which leaves no room for choice." Weatherhead calls the exercise of that kind of deterministic power, "a confession of weakness."

Speaking to the time, Weatherhead says, "These are days full of loss and pain, of suffering and sorrow. But they are not days of waste...They are the fruit of the whole world's sin." And we are not to despair since, one day, we may find that we are sadder at our despair than any experienced loss. He obviously speaks of the need to trust in spite of contrary evidence.

Discerning the will of God is an easily recognized problem—the jihadists behead infidels in the name of their version of God and Fred Phelps pickets soldier's funerals in the name of what, I don't know. (And I'm not conflating the two examples suggesting a relative evil.) Weatherhead suggests the following in helping us discern the will of God: Conscience, common sense, advice from a friend, reading great literature plus the Bible, consulting the church, the Holy spirit that he refers to the "inner light." He also acknowledges severe dangers with any of these but then asks, "Do I really want to discern God's will, or do I want to get his sanction for my own?...This is what I'm going to do. Please approve, because I want so badly to do it." Frankly, the whole gay marriage issue came to mind when I read that. He then asks, "Have I got the courage to do God's will when I discern it?" Figuring out the will of God is one thing; doing the will is quite another.

Weatherhead sees "In his will is our peace," for these reasons: (1) We lose the fear of getting lost. (2) The dread of responsibility for what happens is removed. Weatherhead is suggesting a deontological ethic (Kant). Do the right thing, under God's guidance, and God will deal with the consequences. This is as opposed to utilitarianism or consequentialism which suggests that the ends justify the means. (3) In God's will, man's conflicts are resolved. Weatherhead speaks of the value of conflict and the weakness of indecision but then says a guiding principle is "I will do God's will as far as I can see it." My interpretation of his bottom line message in this section is, "Fear not," and "Trust and obey" as therein lies man's peace. I know a few people

who have this kind of inner peace; and for the record, they are mostly older women. I don't know what that implies....

Theologian Albert Outler once said, "What God asks of us is determined by who He is." Working on both elements of that aphorism is therefore a rather important project for the Christian.

Of course, none of this matters if you don't believe in God; or you do believe in a god of some sort, but a weak-willed god.

Chad Mcswain says

One of the most frequent questions I have and get asked is, how do you know the will of God? "The Will of God" by Leslie D. Weatherhead is a practical book on the subject. The book has the pastoral touch as it collects five sermons delivered in London, England during World War II. With illustrations relating to any time period, the book is accessible to those that would like clarity on the day-to-day walk with God. Less than 100 pages, the book highlights the "intentional, circumstantial, and ultimate" will of God with chapters on discernment and living at peace. Those looking to plum the theological depths of the issue will not like this book. I plan to keep a few on my bookshelf for those looking to begin a conversation on how one might know the will of God.

Lana says

Very interesting and thought-provoking book on the will of God. The author divides the will of God into three categories: intentional (only wishing good, like the love of a parent for a child), circumstantial (taking into account that something bad has happened because of sin or people's actions and what God wants you to do about it), and ultimate will (that is God using the bad events that were not in his intentional will for his ultimate purpose). So if a small child dies or some terrible injustice occurs, he explains that is not necessarily a part of God's intentional will but due to some other circumstance like evil, sin, war, but it is a part of his circumstantial will in that He allowed it to happen under the circumstances. It explains so much and gives great examples and really brings back the concept of personal responsibility, which sometimes seems to go missing in religion and Christianity. It is not God's will for children to go hungry or die in wars or many of the other horrors that people blame on God. I really loved this book, this could definitely be a life-changing book.

"when the storm is raging it is too late to talk about the anchor that should have been put down before the storm began." page 10.

"He who hides in an idea about God which is not true will, in the hour of real need, be left as comfortless as atheism would leave him." page 22.

"by doing the circumstantial will of God we open up the way to God's ultimate triumph with no loss of anything of value to ourselves." page 32

"if we do faithfully that which we see to be the will of God in the circumstances which evil thrusts upon us, we can rest our minds in the assurance that circumstances which God allows, reacted to in faith and trust and

courage, can never defeat purposes which God ultimately wills." page 46

"It is one thing to say, "This evil has been done. How can I win good from it? it is another thing to say, "I will deliberately do evil in order to win good from it." page 53

Norman Hutchinson says

Having read this book four times and used it in an Adult Sunday School class about three times I can recommend it to anyone who questions outcomes in life that seem to be outside the will of God. Weatherhead clearly explains the three wills of God that he calls God's Intentional Will, God's Circumstantial Will, and God's Ultimate Will. His explanations and examples are clear and to the point. They will bring you to that Ah-ha moment of insight.
