

How to Discover God's Will for Your Life

Rich Nathan

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The Holy Spirit: Learning to Ride the Wave of God's Spirit

Acts 22:6-10

The other day my wife, Marlene, asked if I would help her out by going to the grocery store to pick up six items for her mother. My mother-in-law is in her mid-80's. She is widowed. So I said sure. I really do enjoy helping her out.

How long do you think it took me to find six items for my mother-in-law in the grocery store? I was in the store about 25 minutes and it required 3-4 cell phone calls back to Marlene. I felt like I was on a scavenger hunt! My mother-in-law wanted Schweppes ginger ale in 12 oz. bottles. Have you ever really examined the soft drinks section of a grocery store? Well, I did the other day—in excruciating detail! The soft drink section of the grocery store is about 120 feet long, five shelves on both sides of the aisle. The Schweppes ginger ale section occupies about 4 inches of the top shelf of one of those 120 foot aisles. And I don't believe they've sold Schweppes in the 8 oz. or 12 oz. bottles since the 1950's.

She also wanted bread. What could be so hard about buying a loaf of bread? Well, she didn't just say: buy me bread. She wanted Pepperidge Farm Farmhouse Country White. First, you have to narrow down the bread section of the 120-foot aisle for baked goods. And among the breads you have Sunbeam, Wonder, Schwebels, Nickels, Hearth, Country Hearth, Stone Hearth, Roman Meal, Aunt Millie's,

Homepride, Beefsteak, FMV, Kroger's Brand, Natural Grains, Pillsbury, Brownberry, Baker's Inn, S. Rosen's, Private Selections, and then you get the Pepperidge Farm.

Well, having discovered the Pepperidge Farm section of the bread aisle, it still required another cell phone call to Marlene to remind me of what kind of Pepperidge Farm bread did her mother want? "Farmhouse Country White. How hard can that be, Rich?"

Well, not very hard except Pepperidge Farm has Swirl Cinnamon, Swirl Raisin Cinnamon, French Toast Swirl French Vanilla, French Toast Swirl Brown Sugar Cinnamon, Jewish Rye, Natural Whole Grain 9 Grain and Whole Wheat, Carb Style 7 Grain, Carb Style Wheat and White, Farmhouse White, Sourdough, Oatmeal, Country White, Sweet Buttermilk, Wheat, Country Oat, Honey Wheat Berry and Harvest 7 Grain, Family Style White, Sandwich White, Original White, Toast White, Very Thin White, Lite Style White, Lite Style Wheat, Lite Style Oatmeal and Lite Style 7 Grain, then Oatmeal and Stoned Ground Wheat...

What kind did she want again?

Toilet paper...now that's an easy one. Just get the toilet paper. Totally apart from brands of the toilet paper, you have single ply, double ply, multiple ply, patterned, colored, plain, generic, name brand, smooth and quilted, single or double sized rolls, packages of 1-2-4-8-12-16-24, septic tank safe, use only in city sewer systems. I'm

told that international students find the range of toilet paper in America the most amazing thing.

Do I need to talk about milk? There are at least 30 different brands of milk on the market. And there are about 150 different options of dairy and non-dairy milks.

Six items! I'm a reasonably intelligent person. I have a graduate school degree. I've been to the grocery store hundreds of times shopping.

A number of years ago when Henry Ford produced his Model T car, he said he offered it in any color the customer wanted so long as the color was black. Henry Ford would be bankrupt today trying to compete in our global market place.

The 21st century is the age of options for people living in America. And this is true not only regarding consumer products. It is true in every area of life. Folks are so mobile. You could work in Central Ohio, or you could work in California. You could work in Australia. You can work from home on your computer, or commute to your job in another state and come home on the weekends. You can do just about anything that you want to do. You can go to school, go to college, go to graduate school, or take a Bible program through a church like VLI or a Bible college or seminary. You could get married, not get married, have kids as a married couple, not have kids, have kids as a single parent, live with your boyfriend, live with your girlfriend, stay home and watch the kids, hire someone to watch the kids. It is all so incredibly overwhelming.

If you are a woman, even up until just a few decades ago your life track was basically to be a wife and a mother. Only a few career options existed for you in the 1950's. You could be a nurse, or a teacher. There were just a handful of female law students or med students at Ohio State. The notion of serving in the church in leadership or teaching as a pastor in full-time ministry wasn't a possibility even 20 years ago. In the church, a woman could teach Sunday School, she could help with social functions like serving, baking and cleaning up, or a woman could teach children in Sunday School but to teach men, or serve on the church board, or get ordained as a pastor—forget about it!

Joseph Bailey, who is the President of a Christian college, said if there is a serious concern among Christian students today, it is for guidance. Holiness or soul winning or evangelizing the world may have been the passion of another generation – and I would add those things remain passions of young people today – but he says the basic theme of Christian students questions today concern knowing the will of God. What do you want me to do, Lord?

It is the case that it is not only the basic theme of what college students ask, but it is the basic theme of what middle-aged people ask, it's the basic theme of retirees—there are folks in their late 50s, in their 60's and 70's that I know who have completed their careers, they have a pension coming in from the State or from the military, and they are in the same place as someone who is 20 years old. They are

saying, “What does God want me to do with the rest of my life?” I think it’s tougher to find that out now because of the blinding array of options open to people.

I’ve been doing a series titled Learning to Ride the Wave of God’s Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit has been coming in greater power in our church. We saw it at our healing conference this past week. I think we saw the Holy Spirit come in some measure last weekend in our services. We’ve seen the Spirit of God come in the salvations that we’ve seen in the last six months.

One of the critical issues concerning riding the wave of God’s Spirit is learning to hear the voice of God. Now, I’m going to spend much more time next week talking about the gift of prophecy, but I want to, this week, contextualize hearing God’s voice and put it in the broader view of how we generally hear from God. I’m going to share with you five thoughts. If you embrace these thoughts they can assist you the rest of your life in making godly decisions that will honor the Lord and bring blessing to you. I’ve called today’s talk “How To Discover God’s Will For Your Life.” Let’s pray.

Here is thought #1: The foundation for knowing God’s will is to know God better.

SLIDE – Acts 22:6-10

About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, “Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” I asked. “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not

understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. “What shall I do, Lord?” I asked. “Get up,” the Lord said, and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.”

Now, notice the order of Paul’s two questions. Before he asked “What shall I do, Lord,” Paul asked, “Who are you, Lord?” And this is the proper order for discovering the will of God and for hearing God’s voice. First, we need to know who the Lord is. Only when we become intimately acquainted with the Lord can we find out what the Lord wants us to do.

And honestly, I think that many of us have such a defective view of God that it is no wonder that we are afraid of missing his will for our lives. Many people believe God likes to play a giant shell game with us. You are trying to follow God. You are trying to pray. You are trying to obey and you reach for one shell – whoops, no pea under there. You missed. What is behind door #2? The lion. I have heard teachers actually say that we have to nip at God’s heels because he is moving so quickly that if you don’t stay up with him he is just going to bless someone else. Do you believe God loves you and intends your best? Do you believe, truly believe, that God wants to communicate with you?

Discovering the will of God starts with a basic knowledge of how good a leader Jesus is. Listen to what Jesus says in John 10: 10-11

SLIDE

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the Good Shepherd.

Additionally, in v. 27 Jesus says,

SLIDE

My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand.

Do you understand what Jesus is getting at here? Throughout the text Jesus is saying that he takes the same kind of responsibility for his people that a good shepherd takes for his sheep. Part of the responsibility of a good shepherd was to lead the sheep where the sheep needed to go. And a good shepherd in ancient Palestine wouldn't race up ahead and shout to the sheep, "Hey, you guys better keep up with me. If you wander off and nibble grass in another pasture and don't keep up with me, forget you. You will spend your life at the bottom of a cliff somewhere or stuck in some thorns or brambles." It was the responsibility of the shepherd to make sure his sheep got to where he was leading.

A good shepherd would take whatever measures necessary short of killing the sheep to lead them safely from one pasture to another. If a sheep was straying from the fold, shepherds in ancient Palestine used to use a sling and a rock and fling it right by the nose of the sheep so that the sheep would be startled and race back to the fold.

I love the fact that Jesus compares his leadership to being a shepherd of sheep. Not the fox master of foxes, or the owl-keeper of the owls. Sheep are the proto-type of stupid animals. They are exceedingly stupid. They have no sense of direction. They can scarcely find their feet without the help of the shepherd – much less find their way. And so when Jesus wants to communicate this principle that God takes both the initiative and the responsibility to get through to us, however stupid and confused we are, however lost and directionless, he uses the image of a shepherd and a sheep.

Do you get it? You don't quite get this yet. My confidence in discovering the will of God for my life is not based on my great followership. It is based on his incredible leadership. I am not confident in my capacity to hear, but I am very confident that my leader, Jesus, can speak loud enough so that I will get the message.

Do you understand that you don't have to be a super hero to find God's will? All you have to be is a sheep, just a follower. If you begin to allow your heart to rest on a solid knowledge of who God is then you can be free from so many different fears and bondages concerning the will of God. Like the fear that if you make a decision in faith, praying about it, and really wanting to do God's will, that you constantly have to reevaluate later on because you will find out that it was really outside of God's will. You don't have to rehash decisions over and over. Some of you do that continually. You constantly go back over the same ground, re-evaluating, introspecting, asking, did I take the right job? Did I do the right thing? Did I make the right decision? Did I marry the right person?

And even if you learn something later that you didn't know at the time, and had you known it, you would not have made that decision, you can trust that God led you even then. You asked to do his will; you were willing to do his will. You are a sheep; it is his responsibility to guide and to initiate and give you the information that you need for the decision.

You say, "Well, if God is so willing to lead me, why is it such a problem for me to get clear on what he wants?"

One of the struggles that we have is that we are passionate about getting information from God and God is far more passionate about formation in our lives. We want information, God wants formation. We want to know what kind of car we are to drive. God is far more interested in the person who drives the car. We want to know what house to buy. God is far more interested in the homeowner than the home. He is infinitely more interested in who you are than what you own or where you live.

In my 20's I started a Bible study on Thursday nights at this little church here in town. At the time I had just started my career teaching business law at OSU. We just had a baby. There was a lot of pressure from work. I was doing a bunch of ministry things—teaching on Sunday mornings at the predecessor to this church. And I had this Bible study going on Thursday nights. For one reason or another everybody basically dropped out of the group until there was just three of us. I was teaching two other people on Thursday nights. The third week of this I was so frustrated inside and

thinking, “This is just an enormous waste of time, forget this.” I remember the Lord arrested my attention one evening when I was particularly grumbling about preparing a study for these two other people. He stopped me and this question formed in my mind: Well, who are you doing this Bible study for, Rich?

I said, “Well, for you Lord, I am doing it for you.”

And so then he said, “Well then, why do you care how many people are here?”

Integrity check time. Before you are going to lead 3000 people, you get used to doing things for Jesus when there are only 3 people.

I am not saying, by the way, that if you have a group that is dying on the vine that you shouldn't ask God is it ok to close this group down or to make some changes. I am just saying that God is relentlessly forming a certain kind of heart in us. A heart that is not in bondage to how many people we have around us or in how successful we appear in our own eyes or in the eyes of someone else. Part of the reason we struggle with God's will is we forget what God's goal is in our lives. He is passionate about forming us, not just informing us.

You say, “I don't really hear God that well. Maybe he does speak. I can trust him to speak, but I don't hear him very well.”

If God is committed to lead and to speak, is there anything we must do or believe to hear his voice? What is my role? What is your role in hearing God's voice?

Let me share with you why the vast majority of you may struggle with hearing the voice of God. And again, I think it really has to do with your basic confidence in who God is. Years ago I was reading in the gospel of John. I came upon John 5:19. Here is what it said,

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Jesus gave this answer, 'I tell you the truth the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees the Father doing. Because whatever the Father does the Son also does.'

I was reading John 5:19, "...The Son can do nothing of himself or by himself, he can only do what he sees the Father doing." I remember getting really discouraged as I knelt down and prayed. I said: Father, if Jesus could do nothing except by following your lead, what hope is there for me? I never know what you are saying. I am so dull to the leadership of your Holy Spirit.

The Lord said, "Well read v. 20."

V. 20 says,

SLIDE

For the Father loves the Son and he shows him everything that he is doing.

At that moment the Lord began speaking to me and he said, “Your problem is not that you can’t hear my voice. Your real problem is that you don’t have confidence that I love you enough to show you everything that I am doing.”

Here is what I am saying, men and women, if you struggle with wanting to hear God’s voice but feel like everyone hears it better than you, even if you are praying for people and you never get words or never have confidence in having a prophetic word – much less have confidence in discovering God’s will for your life – if you struggle with hearing God’s voice, I would encourage you to begin not just by praying, “O God, I need to hear you better” but “O God, I need to know your love for me better.”

Paul prayed this for the Christians in the Ephesian church. In Ephesians 3:17ff, the apostle Paul writes these words:

SLIDE

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

See it is confidence in God’s love for you that opens you up to hear. We don’t hear God’s voice, so that we might know his love. It is discovering God’s love that permits

us to hear his voice. I have seen this at work in my life over and over again. When I have a restful trust in God's love for me, I can hear really well. I get prophetic words, I get words of knowledge. I really feel like I am in touch with what God is saying and doing.

When I am very anxious and uptight and I feel defective, that there is something wrong with my wiring I am too logical, I am too analytical, then I can't hear anything. So it goes back to what I was saying at the beginning. Before we say to God, "What do you want me to do?" we need to say, "Who are you?" and allow the Lord to reveal himself to us as the lover of our souls.

Now, who does God speak to? Who will hear his voice?

God speaks to the forgiven. God speaks to us because he forgives us. Over and over in the Bible we read that God speaks to people who are cleansed and forgiven of their sins. This is the new covenant. In Jeremiah 31:33-34, Jeremiah says,

SLIDE

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time. [This is the new covenant, listen to this] I will put my laws in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor nor a man his brother saying, 'Know the Lord' because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

Jeremiah promises a time when God's voice will echo in your heart. Who gets to hear the voice of God echoing in their heart? Jeremiah 31:34,

SLIDE

For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more.

God speaks to the forgiven. To people whose hearts have been freed up from the guilt of their past actions.

You know while you have a log jam of past guilt in your life about your parenting, or your anger, or your sexual past, or your past in partying, or the fact that you really didn't recommit your life to Jesus until very recently — while you have a log jam of past guilt and shame, it is going to be very difficult to hear the voice of God. That logjam needs to be cleared out. Confess your sins; acknowledge your guilt; be honest with God about your sins and ask him to forgive you.

If you acknowledge your sins, and you ask the Lord to forgive you, there are just two great alternatives regarding God. Either God still takes note of every one of your sins and will continue to make you pay for all of them, or God takes responsibility for what you have done and says: My son's death is full payment for your sins. Charge it all to Christ's account. Either God still requires you to pay the bill, or God himself paid the bill. Either there is such a thing as grace — God giving you what you don't deserve, more than you deserve, better than you deserve, or there isn't. What do you really believe about your sin and God's grace?

When you are trying to hear the voice of God, you are either approaching God as an offensive, sin-stained wretch, someone who God can hardly look at because of the ways you've screwed up, or when you seek to hear the voice of God, you come into his presence innocent, clean, whole, and clothed with the righteousness of Christ. You are as clean and whole and righteous and innocent as the Holy Son of God.

There are only two alternatives. What do you believe God's perspective is of you? Do you understand the gospel? Do you understand what God has done on your behalf by placing your sins on his Son, the sin bearer?

And God speaks not only to his loved ones and to those who have been forgiven, but he speaks to the willing, to those who have surrendered to God. Romans 12:1-2 says this,

SLIDE

Therefore, I urge your brothers [sisters], in view of God's mercy offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

This passage makes an incredible promise about the will of God. The Word of God promises that we can test and approve of what it is. The idea is that as we surrender

to Christ, more and more we will experience knowing God's will and we will have the strength to do it, as we know it.

The first condition is that we present our bodies as living sacrifices. This is the commitment of your whole being to the Lord. This word "present" is written in a tense that indicates a one-time action that has continuing force. An analogy would be your wedding day where you offer yourself and your body to another person. Your one-time presentation of yourself has consequences for the rest of your life. Another analogy is Christian conversion. You give yourself to Christ. You present your bodies, your whole being to Jesus. This one time act of surrender has continuing force for the rest of our lives.

So the first condition that Paul lays on us in hearing God's voice is total surrender at some point in your life. You won't be able to hear God's voice or discover his will if you have not completely surrendered your life to Christ.

Let me ask you a personal question: Have you ever come to Christ and totally given him control of your life, your choices, your future, and your past? Have you surrendered your life to Christ?

Paul also speaks of daily surrender. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed." And the tense of this is daily action, not a one time action, but daily action. We must stop resisting God regarding things that we know he wants. Can you name places in your life where you are clearly resisting God? You

can't hear God or discover his will when you are resisting him, or rebelling against him in significant areas of your life.

The positive side is that you constantly yield your mind to the control of Jesus. The bottom line is that God reveals his will to those who surrender and are willing. To those who don't put up a whole bunch of conditions. I've already determined what I want. I want to marry so and so despite what the Word says and despite what you say. I want to take this job. I want to file this lawsuit, so I am bound and determined to do it.

I don't want to lead a group. I don't want to go on a missions trip. I don't want to give several thousand dollars to the cause of Christ, despite what I sense from God's Spirit. Well, I will hear you God, but only if you speak to me in this and this way and meet my four conditions for a happy life. To discover God's will and hear his voice, we must say what the child Samuel said to God: Samuel said, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." I give you a blank check of my life and I say to you that you can write anything you want on it. You can ask anything you want of me today.

Do you do that with the Lord? Do you try to say to the Lord each day, "God, whatever you want. Wherever you call me to. Whatever you call me to, I am willing to follow."

You say, "O, I am afraid to do that because I know what God will call me to."

You need to be released from the bondage of fear. God loves you. He wants your very best. God forgives you. God wishes to speak to you for your best in life.

Why can you sign a blank check with the Lord? Why can you do Romans 12 about being willing to do his will and to present your body as a sacrifice? Why? Because you are presenting yourself – body and soul, present and future – to one who created you with certain desires and formed your heart and put in you certain gifts and desires. God wants to fulfill your sanctified desires.

Of course, our desires get changed over time as we walk with God and as we soak our minds in God's word. That is what the whole business of not being conformed to this world, but transforming our minds has to do with. It is soaking your mind in the word of God. But as your mind gets soaked in God's Word, as you mature as a follower, you can have basic confidence that God wants you to fulfill the deepest purified desires of your heart.

God doesn't need your big sacrifice. He's not trying to make you into a super man. He just wants you willing to do his will. He wants you to pray for a softness to his leading. He wants you to ask him to change your heart about lots of things. He doesn't want your sacrifice. And so many folks are burned out on the mission field after a year or two years because that was never their deepest heart's desire. That's why lots of people quit pastoring. Four out of every five seminary grads are not in pastoral ministry five years after graduation. They never were being energized internally by the Holy Spirit in this direction. They just had this view that it was right

and that it would be a noble thing to do. God's will is consistent with the sanctified desires of a surrendered person. God doesn't ask for your sacrifice, but he does ask for your surrender.

God provides others to help you with your decision, but they are not there to make your decision.

It is absolutely unthinkable that a Christian would spend his or her life unconnected to a church with real leaders. Not just a church of your own making where you get to hang out with just a few people you like, but a church that is multi-generational, full-orbed, and kingdom-centered. It has all of the biblical purposes of church worked out in them — worship, evangelism, social justice, world missions, biblical preaching, community expressed in small groups.

Christ calls to himself. Christ calls us to the church. And Christ calls us to his great cause. His great cause is spreading the kingdom of God through the world via evangelism and world missions.

Now let's talk about counsel. There is a recurring admonition in the book of Proverbs regarding the importance of seeking counsel to discover God's will for your life.

Proverbs 12:15 says,

SLIDE

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 15:22 says,

SLIDE

Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisors they succeed.

Proverbs 19:20 says,

SLIDE

Listen to advice and accept instruction that you may gain wisdom for the future.

Proverbs 24:6 says,

SLIDE

By wise guidance you can wage your war and in the abundance of counselors there is victory.

If three, or four, or five people who have no interest in your decision, who don't stand to gain one way or the other by the decision you make and who are known for spiritual wisdom, who know God well and who know you well, three, four, or five people all give you the same kind of counsel, you would be foolish not to weigh that very seriously. I would say that the burden of proof is on you to show why you are going to disregard their counsel.

I think of this in regards to particularly major decisions such as moving, or entering a business, or regarding marital decisions. When a young couple sits down in my office in premarital counseling and they are gushing about how much they love each other and how there has never been a love like theirs. The angels in heaven are now singing and rejoicing over their match. Now this may be, I have no idea if the angels are singing in celebration or a song of lament, but one of the first questions I ask couples to bring them down to earth and tether their hot air balloon is, “what are other people saying about your relationship?”

What are significant members in your community saying? Remember, “plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.” Is there anyone who is significant in your community, a family member, a close friend, a pastor, small group leader, women’s group leader – is there anyone significant telling you that you ought not to get married, or at least to wait for a significant period of time before you marry? If I hear back a statement like, “Well, a number of people are upset that I marrying John. They think he is not right for me, but honestly no one sees in him what I see. They don’t see his sweet side the way I do. They don’t see that underneath his violent outbursts is really a kind heart. And underneath his seemingly lazy, absolutely ambitionless, directionless, lostness is really a puppy that just wants to be loved. Plus, he’s so charming and romantic. And he’s the first guy who makes me feel this good. And he told me that he loves me.”

I would say, “Well, why don’t other people see what you see? Could it be as Proverbs 26:12 says,

SLIDE

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

If no one else sees what you see in this other person, then you may just be deluding yourself. I would take Proverbs 26:12 and post it on my face, tattoo it on my right hand because it very well may be that the reason why people around you don’t see what you see is because what you see is not there or what you see is such a small part of the picture that this other part of the picture is going to turn out to be disastrous for you.

No one else is responsible for your marriage decision. You are. No one else is responsible for your decisions, your ministry decisions, and your financial decisions. But as you make the decision, you absolutely need to listen to people’s counsel. You want to deeply weigh in the spiritual advice of godly mature believers because that is God’s way of confirming his will to you for your life.

What about the role of prophecy in discovering God’s will for your life? Over the years, I have received literally dozens – I am not exaggerating – I have received literally dozens of inaccurate prophecies concerning my life. I remember a strongly prophetic individual in a conference setting stood me up and said, “Thus sayeth the

Lord, 'Go west, young man, go west.'" And then I received a bunch of words about how I was being called to go to Vineyard Anaheim. I had no inclination in that direction. God had not said anything personally to me about that. But people were sending me words and they had dreams about me going to Vineyard Anaheim.

So, how do we sort all of this out? How do we think about prophecies that were spoken over our life in the past or may be spoken over our life in the future? As a general rule, and you can write this down, personal directional words of prophecy ought to be followed only when they underline or confirm what God is already saying to you. Personal or directional words of prophecy ought to be followed only when they underline or confirm what God is already saying to you.

I like to think about prophecy as being a yellow highlighter. God is already saying something. He is speaking to you through your desires, through counsel and through your gifting. Or you have been praying about something, and you have an inner impression that this is what God wants. Then that word of prophecy comes and it underlines what the Lord is already doing. It communicates, "This is me it is not just you son. It is not just your desire daughter. It is me." It is like God just lights it on fire.

About fourteen years ago, our church was meeting in a little church building south of Morse Road, right off of Cleveland Avenue. The church was growing rapidly. We had about 700-800 people in three Sunday morning services, and we had exactly one

men's urinal for 400 men. I share that with you to tell you the situation was desperate.

So we began a search of the north end of Columbus for where our church might move. We finally settled on an athletic club that we were going to remodel. The club had a boxing ring in where Buster Douglas trained before he won the heavyweight boxing championship against Mike Tyson.

Well, I was entering negotiations with the owner of the athletic club. We had a prophecy conference and invited a person who is strongly gifted in the prophetic. I picked him up at the airport and dropped him off at his room. We had absolutely no conversation about our building search.

That evening, before the meeting, he said, "Rich, I have something to share with you at the end of tonight's talk. I had the most unusual experience when I fell asleep today. I believe God has a word for you."

So all evening I was anticipating the word. I was hoping it would be something like, "I am with you," says the Lord, "to bless you in your purchase of this athletic club, and I'm going to give you a million dollars to pay for it because you are my son." Or something along those lines.

Well, at the end of the meeting, our conference speaker said to me, "Rich, when I fell asleep, I had a vision of your city. The Lord took me around to different locations and

different churches in the city.” He accurately described what was going on in different churches. In fact, he was aware of some of the sins in different churches.

Then he said, “The Lord took me to an athletic club. Inside this club there was a boxing ring.”

Now, there was no way this guy would know about our negotiations with the athletic club, or that there would be a boxing ring in the club. He had spoken to no one. We had talked with no one in the congregation about our plans and thoughts, since our negotiations were very preliminary.

I was waiting for the word: “ am giving you that athletic club Rich, says the Lord.” Instead, this guy looked at me and he said, “The Lord says that if you purchase that athletic club, it will plunge you into an unbelievable legal nightmare. But don’t worry, I have a surprise for you.”

I thought, “OH NO!” This athletic club was my dream. The other leaders were really excited about it. We were already talking about how we were going to redesign it. “Don’t purchase the athletic club. It will plunge you into an unbelievable legal nightmare.”

We prayed as a leadership team and the counsel I got was to proceed with extreme caution, since the word was so specific, and see if the Lord reveals the legal nightmare.

A few days later, our attorney said, “Rich, you don’t want to go forward on this building.”

I said, “Why not?”

He said, “Well, the building was bought through a foreclosure action. There are all kinds of clouds on the title. And the building is built over the property line of the neighbor. You actually could only buy three walls of the building. And there are other legal problems with the title. Rich, it would take me five years to sort out this mess. It is a nightmare.”

I thought: OK! Thank you Jesus for protecting your people from making a huge mistake. Thank you for speaking. It wasn’t more than two weeks later when a realtor called us up and said, “A piece of property just came on the market on Cooper Road. It has been owned by a family for several generations. The owners are getting old and they are ready to sell it.” And so we bought one of the very last remaining large parcels of land within the outer-belt on the entire north side of Columbus. That’s how we came to this location. It was God’s voice. We discovered his will.

Conclusion.

How to Discover God's Will for Your Life

Rich Nathan

May 22-23, 2004

The Holy Spirit: Learning to Ride the Wave of God's Spirit

Acts 22:6-10

- I. The Beginning Point: Who is God?
 - A. Jesus: A Great Leader (John 10)
 - B. God's Passion: Our Formation
- II. Hearing God's Voice: Who Must We Be?
 - A. Loved By God (John 5:19, 20; Ephesians 3:17, 18)
 - B. Forgiven By God (Jeremiah 31:34; Romans 4:5-8)
 - C. Surrendered To God (Romans 12:1,2)
- III. Hearing God's Voice: Where Does The Church Fit In?
 - A. The Role of Counsel (Proverbs 26:12)
 - B. The Role of Prophecy