

**“Hearing the Voice of Christ”**

**Matthew 14:22-33**

**22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.

**23** After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Later that night, he was there alone,

**24** and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

**25** Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

**26** When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

“It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

**27** But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

**28** “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

**29** “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

**30** But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

**31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

“You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

**32** And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

**33** Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

**Introduction**

“Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come.” If it’s you. Peter’s statement, comment, query here is one every would-be follower of Jesus makes from time to time. Is it the voice of Christ? Or of someone or something else? “Lord, if it’s you...” Every serious Christian searches out the will of God in their lives, how this natural, mortal life becomes an arena for the activity of God. “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come.”

My journey in a personal faith in Jesus Christ began more than 40 years ago. Ever since March of 1971, I have been a serious Christian – not always attuned to his voice or obedient to his will, but always concerned with the Lord in my life. Like you, I suspect, I have struggled from time to time to know what God has in mind for me.

So, how can we know the will of the Lord? “Lord, if it’s you...”

**I. To Will God’s Will**

From that wind-tossed boat, Peter shows that he is willing to will God’s will. “Tell me to come to you on the water.” That’s probably a good place to start. Do you really want to know God’s purpose for your life? Or, as Pastor Rick Warren asks it, “What on earth am I here for?”

Hearing the voice of Christ or discerning God’s will isn’t as difficult as we imagine. We have way more to go on than Peter did. We have the Bible, especially the New Testament. Ninety percent of God’s

will for my life is the same 90% of God's will for you (with the familiar asterisk, \*actual results may vary). Most of God's plan for your life and mine is found in God's Word. "Love God and love others."

Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life* has sold over 60 million copies. Written in 2002, it was on the *New York Times* best seller list for 90 weeks. If you haven't read, read it. If you have read it, read it again. There are several copies in our library.

In five main ways, he describes much of the 90%. First: You were planned for God's pleasure. In Romans 12, we read, "Because of his great mercy, offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing him. This is the true worship that you should offer" (from Today's English Version). Each Sunday we have a Call to Worship. "O come let us worship and bow down" (Psalm 95). God's will is for us to praise and worship our Creator/Redeemer God. "Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

Second: You were formed for God's family. The Lord doesn't just want for us to know and love him, he also wants us to know and love each other in his family. God's will is for us to spend time, share life with other believers. Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone else in the world will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). The Lord wants us to meet and enjoy Christian friends.

Third: Jesus doesn't just want us to know about him, he wants to know him and become Christ-like. Paul's letters to the churches include much about discipleship, instructions for Christian living. In Ephesians 4, he writes, "In the knowledge of the Son of God, become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves (like the disciples in the boat), and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ... Be made new in the attitude of your minds; put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." How's that for a challenging piece of God's will? In this life, it is God's will for us to become more like Christ.

Fourth: You were shaped for serving God. The Bible says that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advanced for us to do." Knowing that we are "saved by grace, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast," we are also saved for service, for ministry, for good works (memorize those verses – Ephesians 2:8-10). Your spiritual gifts, your heart, your abilities, personality and experiences have been

shaped for serving others. So, yes, “You’re a piece of work!” You were made to create, lead, study, organize, heal, cultivate or teach. God has given us a holy task.

And, fifth: You were made for a mission, to work at bring others to faith in Jesus. Paul tells us how he has become “all things to all people” so that by all possible means he might save some. “I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (I Corinthians 9:22-23). In other words, whatever a person is like, try to find common ground with them so that they will let you tell them about Christ and let Christ save them.

## **II. To Do God’s Will**

John Ortberg tells one of many St. Peter at the Pearly Gates jokes: A man appears before the pearly gates. St. Peter asks, “Have you ever done anything of particular merit?” (Too often, access to heaven is based on our “merit.” Keep in mind: it’s only by the merits of Jesus, by what Jesus has fully accomplished for us that you and I have the gift of eternal life – “By grace alone by faith alone through Christ alone). Back to the joke as the man says, “Well, I can think of one thing: I came upon a gang of thugs who were threatening a young woman. I told them to leave her alone, but they wouldn’t listen. So, I approached the largest and most heavily tattooed one. I smacked him on the head, kicked his shins, ripped out his nose ring and threw it on the ground, and told him: Leave her alone now or you’ll answer to me.” St. Peter was impressed. “When did this happen?” “A couple of minutes ago.”

There’s a big difference between faith and foolishness. Peter didn’t immediately jump out of the boat. Peter actually put a hold on his typical impulsiveness. “Lord, if it’s you, bid me, tell me to come to you on the water.” He waited until Jesus said, “Come.”

“Dear Abby” occasionally referred her readers to their ministers. “Talk to your minister,” she said to a 14-year-old girl in love with a fifty-one-year-old married man, an auto mechanic in prison for rape. She pours out her love for him, believes in his innocence, that his wife never really loved him. (Why did Abby presume that a minister could deal with this?). All this pastor can think is, there is a definite line between “Thou shalt not be afraid” and “Thou shalt not be ridiculous.”

How do we know the difference? How can we know “Lord, if it’s you?” Worship – Fellowship – Discipleship – Ministry – Evangelism. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15). Doing the 90% will direct you to the 10%.

Pastor John Piper notes that, “There’s a way to live... There’s a way to do your job that expresses the true value of God. If you can’t find it, that may mean you should change jobs.” Many new situations may or may not be explicitly addressed in the Bible. The Bible doesn’t tell you which person to marry, which car to drive, whether to own a home, where you take your vacation, what cell phone plan to buy, or which brand of orange juice to drink. Frankly, I don’t think the Lord worries about these things for you.

God's will isn't monolithic. The Lord is happy with free choices we make. Like a mother who dresses her children until they're about three years old. Now she puts two outfits out on the bed and asks, "Which one would you like to wear today?" Mom is perfectly happy with their choice (of course, unless a tantrum ensues).

When faced with an important decision, the Society of Friends (Quakers) have a tradition of gathering a half-dozen friends to serve as a "clearness committee." It's good to ask Christian friends and family members to help you discern specific aspects of God's will. We recently preached from the Book of Proverbs, from Solomon's wisdom. Chapter 15, verse 22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. A person finds joy in giving an apt reply— and how good is a timely word!" And in 13:10, "Wisdom is found in those who take advice." We can learn from others. And by our own learning, we can be a benefit to others.

### **Conclusion**

Hearing the voice of Christ or discerning God's will isn't as difficult as we imagine. We have way more to go on than Peter did. Remember the 90%/10% concept. Immerse yourself in the Word of God. Then ask, "How does your life express your true giftedness and passion? Even from childhood, what activities have brought you the most internal joy and fulfillment? How clear are you on your sense of calling? Are there ways you could further explore God's specific will for Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Evangelism? "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Let's pray with and for one another.

### **Romans 12:1-2**

**1** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

**2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.