

2 Scripture Passages Are Key to Discerning God's Will

I have never been one to make serious resolutions for each new year.

I am not opposed to making such resolutions, and I am certainly not cynical about those who make them and seriously try to keep them; I have just never really felt the need to make them.

Yet, as we begin the new year, I have been considering what I want 2013 to be for me.

For sure, I have personal goals like spending more time with my family, getting and staying in shape, and being a better person.

Moreover, I have professional goals to be better at my job and to improve my professional skills.

But as 2012 was coming to a close and 2013 was in its first hours of life, I began to think about what God really wants from me this year.

God's will can be very difficult to understand, and even more difficult to execute in my life.

Understanding God's will for me for 2013 can be tricky for the simple reason that my primary resource for knowing the will of God is the Bible and the life of Jesus.

The year 2013 is a long way away from the ancient world in which the Bible was written and in which Jesus lived.

Yet, it is vitally important that I start with these resources in order to understand and live out God's will for my life.

But the problem is more than just simply the distance in time between the biblical world and my own life.

The problem also comes in understanding what the Bible wants to say to me and which parts of the Bible might say these things more clearly.

Thus, seeking the will of God requires reading Scripture, reflecting on what

Scripture says, and using sound and critical reasoning to find the direction God desires for my life in the new year.

But is it necessary that I make this task so difficult? Yes, biblical interpretation is often difficult and gut-wrenching work if we are seeking to be serious with the text and serious about what the text says.

Despite what we hear from some preachers and teachers of the Bible who spout off nothing but watered-down theology that only skims the surface of the biblical texts and the life of Jesus, the Bible is not always clear and not always correct for our context.

Moreover, spiritualizing portions of the Bible just because we think that every part of Scripture must mean something for us now is not the answer and only abuses the sacred text.

But finding God's will for us can often be made even more difficult when we cannot see the forest because of the trees.

I am certainly not one to say that we ought not to consider the intricacies of Scripture and what Scripture says on issues with which we deal; but I am saying that we can face many questions we have in life and never find specific and crystal-clear answers from these ancient and distance texts.

However, I do think we can find God's will for all of us in the overall message of Scripture that is summed up in various ways, but two are pertinent for me.

Micah 6:8, from the Hebrew Bible, offers us the following, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God."

And Jesus stated that the law is summed up in this, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and everything that you are, and love your neighbor as you would love yourself."

These seem to me to be the most important creeds by which to live for a couple of important reasons.

First, each recognizes that life exists in relation to God and others. We are not alone and despite our tendency to be independent, the fullness of life can only be encountered in relationships with God and others that are based on love.

Second, both call us to action on the part of others. To do justice, to love mercy and to love others as we would want to be loved means that we ought to live our lives not in selfish gain, but in self-giving sacrifice; loving sacrifice expressed toward our friends, strangers and even enemies.

If I consider these verses, and others like them, to be the centerpiece of the biblical message, then these should become for me the moral and spiritual compass by which my life is guided.

And if these words are the moral and spiritual compass of my life, then they must become the basis from which I formulate resolutions, not only for a new year, but for each new day.

So, while I have never been keen about the whole new year's resolution tradition, I hope that I am serious about living my life the way God intends.

I hope that my life for 2013 is focused on loving God and loving others by doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God. And I hope it is the same for all of us.

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