

When we count on the Holy Spirit to instruct us in his will, we're usually talking about his will *for us*—our work, our family, our church, our own stuff. And that's perfectly all right because every child of God needs to know his will for these things.

Yes, he *does* have a plan for our job and vocation. He *does* have a plan for our marriage, our children. He *does* have a plan for our church and its ministries.

And we do well to find out what that is and to walk in it.

But as Henry Blackaby, author of *Experiencing God*, has helped millions of us see over the years, the best question to ask of the Holy Spirit is not, "What is your will for me?" but simply, "What is your will?" That's because inside this enormous question—and inside its even more panoramic answer—lies the eternal mission of God that frames our workday worlds in ultimate meaning and purpose.

A lot more is taking place in our lives than just what gets logged on the calendar or posted on the refrigerator. The Spirit wants to show us what that is. And class starts up again in the morning.

Read Nehemiah 9:19-21, 26, 29-31

The reconstituted nation of Israel was just getting back on its feet after many years lost to captivity, and its leaders were feeling the need to take the people back to square one. Reminds me of the old Vince Lombardi quote, when he decided his Green Bay Packers needed retooling after an especially sloppy loss. Assuming his central spot in the locker room, hoisting a pigskin into the air, the legendary coach began his refresher course by announcing to his troops, "Gentlemen, this is a football."

Back to basics. That's why Nehemiah 9 is pure highlight material, like a war documentary on The History Channel. It's a look back at centuries of Israelite lore that had likely been lost on many of the listeners in attendance. Although it reads with almost shopworn familiarity as we skim through it, much of it was probably headline news to those who heard it shouted that day from the speaker's stand.

Among its more important aspects was how it described the will of God—a plan conceived in his heart from the time he "created the heavens" (9:6), a plan for his people that included an everlasting covenant and a promised land.

Along the way this plan required a lot of direction on God's end as it played itself out in their lives, an equal-parts mixture of coaching and rescue, of both warnings and encouragement. It meant giving them pointers ahead of time, as well as midstream corrections where deemed necessary

Yet even when they ignored his instruction, the Spirit continued to teach, showing them how to recover, repent, and find restoration to remain in his will.

They didn't follow him perfectly. None of us do. Yet the Spirit kept reenrolling them. And his plan stayed the same. His plan stayed big—even bigger than their disobedience.

Back To School

God's people continued to need his teaching as time roared into the New Testament. Imagine the juggling act, for example, required of the early church leaders, dealing with all the dynamics that swirled around their new world order.

Jews who still wanted God without too much Jesus on the side. Gentiles who showed up without baggage but also without a lot of spiritual sense. Old-timers who felt entitled. Newcomers who felt enlightened.

Anyone see the Tylenol?

But when push came to shove—and nearly to blows—over the circumcision issue (whether or not Gentile converts should be required to submit to this Jewish rite of fellowship), the apostles and elders called time—out and convened in Jerusalem.

They prayed. They heard reports from the field. They read from the ancient Scriptures. And when it all settled out, “it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours” (Acts 15:28) to nix circumcision as the cost of admission. The Spirit made clear what he wanted done, and his people made sure they stayed in step with his wishes.

Eager To Learn

Today *we’re* the students in the Spirit’s classroom. But our lives are awfully busy. Our options are more numerous than any generation before us. We sometimes squirm in our seats and find ourselves staring out the window.

But deep down we really do want our lives to mesh with the plans he set in motion before the beginning of time. We want to believe that there’s nothing truly routine in a believer’s day, that there’s more involved in our decision to accept a new responsibility or contribute money to a new missionary—or even check out a new book from the library—than the surface issues that go along with it.

We need to know that “the Spirit of truth” will show us his will if we ask him. We need to know that he’s been sent to us by the Father to “guide [us] into all the truth.” We need to know that he doesn’t “speak on His own” but tells us only what he hears from the heart of God himself. And we need to know that his purpose is to “glorify” Christ, just as we want our purpose to be (John 16:13-14).

So teach us, Holy Spirit. Give us ears to hear and minds to understand. And legs and feet to live it out, to walk in the direction of your perfect will.

Nehemiah 9:20 “You sent Your good Spirit to instruct them.”

We often put “good” and “instruction” in opposite categories. But what makes the Spirit’s teaching really good?

Nehemiah 9:29 “Your ordinances . . . a person will live if he does them.”

Certainly we’re no longer under the law’s demands. But what can we still learn from its instructions?

Nehemiah 9:30 “Your Spirit warned them through Your prophets.”

Warning is in many ways an expression of love. How have his red flags been kind and helpful to you in the past?

The Spirit instructs us in the will of God. I’d say most of us live unsure about what the particulars of God’s will are. But we really need to trust both him and his Word enough to believe that by letting him speak and by listening in prayer, we can walk confidently into the unknowns and be assured of his direction. This is not just me trying to sound spiritual. This is God’s promise. And we can count on him.

Holy Spirit, help me want to do your will as much as I want to know your will. Make me, I pray, a better student.