

HELPLESS— *NOT HOPELESS*

A STUDY OF THE WILL—
THE GOVERNING POWER IN HUMAN NATURE

“CHOOSE YE THIS DAY
WHOM YE WILL SERVE...
BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE,
WE WILL SERVE THE LORD.”
JOSHUA 24:15





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WELCOME TO THIS STUDY ON THE WILL

Dear Reader:

We trust that you will find in the following pages, at a minimum, three things:

- 1) an explanation of what the will is and what it is not.
- 2) clarification as to the true function of the will in life and especially in redemption.
- 3) encouragement to believe that by linking your will with God—you will be enabled to do things that might have seemed impossible before.

May God grant that you are sensitized to the magnitude of this topic. It is central to so many of the most important blessings made available to us. God is love—He does not force Himself upon any one. This means that while His blessings come near, it is for us to reach out and take hold of those blessings

Throughout this document you will see a variety of pictures. They each serve to highlight the crucial matter of choice, the outward manifestation of the will.

It is our prayer that you will sense the urgency of taking hold of God with greater determination—for He is our life. *“Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me” (Isaiah 27:5).*

Pr Steve Cook
Chaplain **Services**



LESSON ONE

WHAT IS THE WILL?

An Online Definition of “the will” as a noun: the faculty by which a person decides on and initiates action. A classic definition used on our campus here at Wildwood sees the will as “*the governing power in the nature of man—the power of decision, of choice*” (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p 176:1 all emphasis is mine throughout).

It is an invisible attribute that is seen in the countless choices that we human beings make on a daily basis. When and *whether* we get up in the morning. What to put on. What we eat. When we go to work and so on throughout our day.

There is the autonomic nervous system which controls so many important details of life, and there are a myriad of desires and wishes we might have from time to time. But these are not the will. There are matters of staggering importance that are left up to each one of us—choices that we and *only* we can make.

Our relationship with God must top the list. Who we choose as our life companion. Our work. Our place of residence. And the list goes on and on.

Ideally, from a Christian perspective, the will is that quality of the human essence which determines direction, under the sovereignty of God. From the choices we make on a daily basis the sum total of our character emerges. It has well been said:

Sow an act; reap a habit.
Sow a habit; reap a character.
Sow a character; reap a destiny.
—Selected

As you may imagine, such a monumental element of our being takes a prominent place in the sacred Scriptures. It is everywhere.

From the first God enlisted the will of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were given access to all of the garden. However, there was one restriction: “*But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*” (Genesis 2:17 KJV and throughout unless otherwise indicated). Here is the enlistment of the will.

But enlistment only went so far. The choice remained with Adam and Eve. And the Bible is explicit on this point: “*she [Eve] took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband [Adam] with her; and he did eat*” (Genesis 3:6). The choice was theirs...and theirs alone. True enough, tempting forces were acting upon

them. But motives as high as heaven had been given them to prevent this tragedy. Yet none of these could take the place of their *choice*—that is, the action of the will in *choosing* to eat or not eat of the forbidden fruit.

“By a momentary act of will you may place yourself in the power of Satan, but it will require more than a momentary act of will to break his fetters and reach for a higher, holier life. The purpose may be formed, the work begun, but its accomplishment will require toil, time, and perseverance, patience and sacrifice”

(Ellen G. White, *2 Selected Messages* 165:3).

The truth of this quotation is illustrated by the history of the human race. One momentary act—*“By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”* (Romans 5:12). The momentary act of the sin of Adam brought ruin that has been repeated throughout the ages. *“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). Sin is a choice. A disastrous and potentially fatal choice. Thank God, through the blessings of the gospel we can make *another* choice. This is what we must do. We must exercise our will in the right direction. We must use this priceless gift—this sovereign privilege—in the right way.

Only as we continually **place our will on the side of Jesus** can we experience restoration. How do we do that? What is the “right action of the will”?



LESSON TWO

THE RIGHT ACTION OF THE WILL

The will is the power of choice. In some respects the choice is a decision, like turning a key in a car. It is an action of desire and purpose to take a certain course or go in a specific direction.

But now watch this point: IT IS NOT THE POWER TO DO THE ACTION. It is the power to *choose* that the action be done. No man can pull himself up by his own bootstraps. But no one can pull you up against your will (not for very long any way).

Even the devil cannot force himself upon us. This matter of the will is sovereign—a word that includes the idea of supreme and independent authority—a person’s destiny is right square in his or her own ‘front yard’. This only makes sense that we would have this kingly power, because we are made in the image of God. We are not sovereign in the sense that God rules the Universe. But we possess something akin to God’s rulership in our own personal life. Our soul is our dominion—yet even this is to be considered as a stewardship under God.

Early in the history of this world Cain and Abel had a strong disagreement about the worship of God. Abel chose God’s pre-stipulated way of showing confidence in the coming of the Promised Seed. He brought a sacrifice and laid it on the altar. Cain chose to modify God’s directions by bringing the fruits of his labor.

When his worship of God was rejected God’s words to him were significant: “*And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him*” (Genesis 4:6-7).

Note the words “sin lieth at the door”. That is at *Cain’s door*. It was Cain’s responsibility to “rule over” these desires for self-worship. Cain had a choice to make and unfortunately his choices added up to horrific consequences. He yielded to his sinful inclinations (“sow a habit”), then followed it by repeated action that became confirmed character.

What is the right action of the will? To choose the right because it is right. And leave the consequences with God. Here is another illustration: “*Daniel purposed in his heart [there is the right action of the will] that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself*” (Daniel 1:8). The decision

made in the heart was the beginning of the open act in making request to forego personal defilement. There are inner and outer manifestations of a choice. Most choices begin in the heart. There may be sudden circumstances that bring the inner decision to the front but “decisions” to condone and harbor inner thoughts are being carried on within over a longer time.

This is illustrated by the history of the apostasy of Israel at the Jordan.

*“It was when the Israelites were in a condition of outward ease and security that they were led into sin. They failed to keep God ever before them, they neglected prayer and cherished a spirit of self-confidence. **Ease and self-indulgence** left the citadel of the soul **unguarded**, and **debasing thoughts found entrance**. It is thus that Satan still seeks to compass the ruin of the soul. A long preparatory process, unknown to the world, goes on in the heart before the Christian commits open sin. The mind does not come down at once from purity and holiness to depravity, corruption, and crime. It takes time to degrade those formed in the image of God to the brutal or the satanic. By beholding we become changed. By the indulgence of impure thoughts man can so educate his mind that sin which he once loathed will become pleasant to him” (Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 459:1 emphasis added).*

On the other hand there are instances when the will sprang into action at a moment’s notice. When Joseph was propositioned by the wife of Potiphar there was no hesitation. Joseph was emphatic: *“he refused”* and explained the disloyalty of such an act; *“how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”* (Gen 39:8-9). Here as well we see that the right action of the will is one which places a decision on the foundation of the will of God. **This is the right action of the will. To choose the will of God.** This is what we can do and must do...leaving the consequences in His hands.

Again, this is powerfully demonstrated in the experience of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, better known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Confronted with a life and death decision whether to deny their God or honor him before the nation. Their decisive words ring down the halls of time to us in the early 21st century to encourage us to choose God’s way no matter what the appearances may seem to say: *“our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”* (Daniel 3:17-18). The choice was theirs to make—the consequences were in God’s hands!



LESSON THREE

HELPLESS: PROFILE OF A CAPTIVE

One of the striking characteristics of the long-promised Messiah of Israel is described in this passage: *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim **liberty** to the captives, and the **opening of the prison** to them that are bound.*” (Isaiah 61:1 emphasis added). What is this binding? And what is the prison that is to be opened? And what is the liberation of the captives?

Here again we read:

*Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the **captives** of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children*” (Isaiah 49:24-25 emphasis added).

When the will is damaged the choice can still be activated—that is sovereign and remains free—but the follow-through is impaired because of the power of the evil one. It is this power that is defeated through the power of One greater—that is Jesus Christ.

This is dramatically highlighted in the testimony of the apostle Paul. Listen as he speaks of the experience of one who is a prisoner and is unable to carry out the choice of his own will. Comments added are in brackets.

*“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. **[This is spiritual slavery—the worst form of bondage.]** For that which I do I allow not: [“I do not understand my own actions”RSV] for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. **[He doesn’t understand what he is doing but he knows that he is doing the very opposite of what he wants to do!]** 17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. **[He has become so identified with this choice that his identity has become synonymous with the sin itself.]** 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. **[Notice that the choice is still there. But the follow through appears impossible. And if it were not for Jesus we would have remained the lawful captive of Satan.]***

*19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. **[There is no better summary of the predicament of imprisoned humanity than right here. We can see what we ought to do and what we’d like to do through the “bars” of our condition but liberation in our own strength is impossible!]** O wretched **[that is unfortunate, unhappy, despicable, contemptible... the word is strong to describe a person that has lost all that makes life worth living.]** man that I am!*

*who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. [His answer is emphatic: it is through Jesus. He is the only way out—Jesus is the door out of the prison of our past and present predicament.] So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. [What this last mysterious statement means is that we when we make a choice to do God's will in the name and power of Jesus we actually carry it out. But there is also the matter of spiritual "baggage". The flesh remains to haunt and taunt us. But the good news is that now it is to be imprisoned and can only clamor. The mind—that is the choice— is what is decisive.]*Read this:

*The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words flesh or fleshly or carnal lusts embrace the lower, corrupt nature; **the flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God.** {1MCP 236.2} (Romans 7:14-15; 17-19; 24-25).*

A living illustration of all of this is found in Jesus' deliverance of the demoniacs of Gadara. Truly theirs was a pitiful and wretched plight. The gospel writers sometimes refer to this incident with a singular man and others with two. The situation was dire. Luke describes "a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs." Lk 8:27. This was a living dead man. But notice that "When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not." The man evidently wanted to be set free but the only words he could utter were the foul words of the devil. But Jesus worked to set the man free and "had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man" This evil spirit had often "caught him" and as a result he was "kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness" His was a sorry situation. But Jesus set him free. And as a result of Jesus' power in setting him free, he was found "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind" (Luke 8:35).

The mind is the battle ground and is to be protected. Through the power of the gospel "every thought may be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).



LESSON FOUR

THE WILL AND SALVATION

Scripture can hardly make it plainer than the passage we just completed in Romans. We are helpless...without God. But, praise His name, we are not *hopeless*.

God purposes to redeem us, notwithstanding our weakened condition. It is very much like a lifeguard who plunges into the water to bring a drowning swimmer to safety. Without that help the person would die. Quickly. The lifeguard lives up to her name.

And God is the Ultimate Lifeguard. In Christ, all the resources of Heaven have been galvanized by plunging into the turbulence of this dark world to rescue fallen humanity. It is because of what *He* has done that we are saved. Notice how the following scriptures emphasize *His* work:

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:11-13).

Notice that man’s choice—his will—is respected by the Creator and Redeemer! He came unto his own—let those words sink in—we are not our own. We didn’t make ourselves. We don’t keep our hearts beating like God does, (see Acts 17:28). We don’t cause the sun to rise or the rain to fall...as God does. And yet He defers to our decision in the matter of our salvation.

Having said that we must emphasize the fact that HE CAME! HE CAME! He knew the reception that He would receive but He came—and continues to come—to the door of every one’s heart. He comes with redemption. He comes with a life of joy and happiness. He comes with eternal living, learning, laughing, loving and so much more than we can even imagine. His will is to come to us with all the blessings of His great salvation.

And notice that for those who do receive Him it is not their power that changes them. They have a choice and they have exercised it appropriately. They have “received him”. But it is not their will that creates a new person in God’s image. They are born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man”. They are born of the will of God.

A strong will a decisive will, a healthy will is a dependent will. It decides and then it abides under the shadow of the almighty.

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).

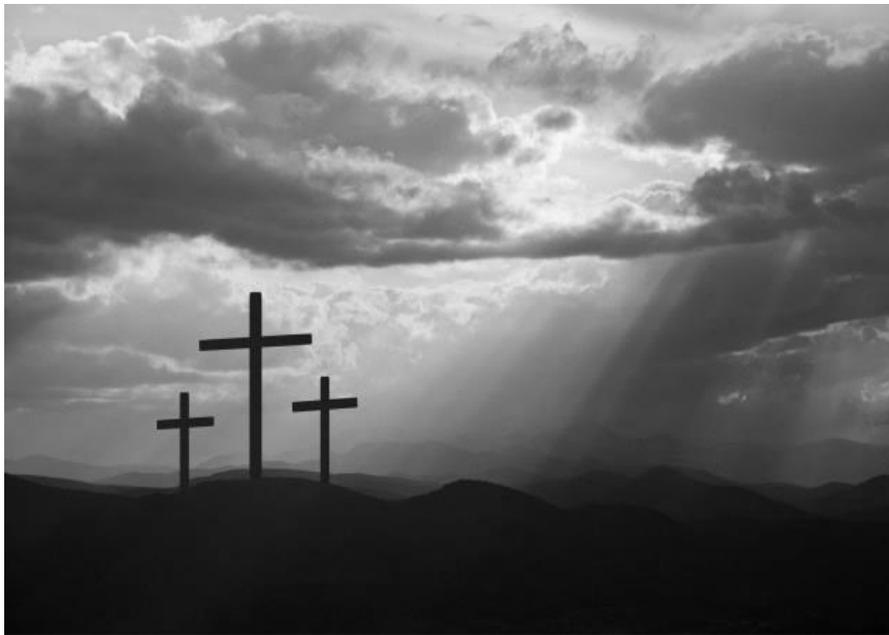
Here we are commanded to work out our personal salvation with fear and trembling. This speaks to the serious nature of Christian growth. It is a matter that must be taken in hand *personally*. No one else can make our choices. We may have the best training, the best parenting, the best opportunities, the best friends. None of these can take the place of our personal choice.

Having said all that, it must be added that God does the heavy lifting. The “work” that we have to do is to choose to cooperate with God.

*God calls upon all who will to come and drink of the waters of life freely. The power of God is the one element of efficiency in the grand work of obtaining the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil...Man can accomplish nothing without God, and God has arranged His plans so as to accomplish nothing in the restoration of the human race without the cooperation of the human with the divine. The part man is required to sustain is **immeasurably small**, yet in the plan of God it is just that part that is needed to make the work a success.*

Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, 319:3 *emphasis added*

So, there is a beautiful balance, appropriate tension, in these two concepts for God has made us in His image. We have the power of choice. And God only seeks to awaken us to co-operate with Him.



LESSON FIVE

FORTIFYING THE WILL

A person whose will is not fortified is a discouraged and anxious person. And there must be many with this condition. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimates that there are 40 million adults that are affected with this condition (<http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics> Accessed 7.27.2016).

The will appears to be neutralized. It has so long lain dormant that it seems to be helpless. But even this situation is not *hopeless*. Take for example the paralytic whom Jesus healed. He'd been in that condition for no less than thirty eight years (John 5:5)! At a word from Jesus the man willed to move his legs that had not moved for so long and they moved!

This was the power of God in cooperation with the feeble but significant power of man.

How do we connect with the power of God?

Connect With God Through Words of Encouragement—That You Speak

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

By looking at appearances and complaining when difficulties and pressure come, you give evidence of a sickly, enfeebled faith. Talk and act as if your faith was invincible. The Lord is rich in resources; He owns the world. Look heavenward in faith. Look to Him who has light and power and efficiency.

(Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 146.5)

Connect with Jesus through Prayer

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

*Prayer brings Jesus to our side, and gives to the fainting, perplexed soul new strength to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 250:2*

Connect With God Through The Bible

“For the word of God is living and powerful...” (Hebrews 4:12 New King James Version). There is nothing like the Bible to stimulate and strengthen the will. There are stories

which tell of weak people who, in spite of their weaknesses, were made strong. There are truths that will uplift and educate the humblest student. There are promises which, if personally applied, will bring courage to the most discouraged.

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. Luke 22:41-43

It is in reading accounts such as this that we may be encouraged to continue on in difficulties. And the Bible's vast scope and depth of truth develops the whole person.

The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character and sanctifies the soul.

Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 94:2

Contact with God Through Nature

In nature we are surrounded with the things that God has made and so our thoughts, even unconsciously, are led to consider His wisdom, power and love. Sights and sounds; even fragrances can create thoughts. When they are uplifting they simply cannot help but draw the will to turn to God.

*[T]he pure sights and sounds, the clear, invigorating air, and the sense of God's presence pervading all nature, tend to uplift the mind, to soften the heart, and to **strengthen the will** to resist temptation.* Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 11, 221 *emphasis added*.

Connect with God Through Praise and Song

The act of praising God has brought victory as recorded in sacred history (see 2 Chronicles 20:15-22). Notice this pointed summary statement: “*And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten*” (2 Chronicles 20:22).

“Song is a weapon that we can always use against discouragement. As we thus open the heart to the sunlight of the Saviour's presence, we shall have health and His blessing.” Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 254.



Look away from yourself to Jesus. Embrace Him as your Saviour. Cease to bemoan your helpless condition. Looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, you will be inspired with hope...When you feel tempted to mourn, force your lips to utter the praises of God...educate your lips to talk of His glory and to magnify His name. . .” Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, 116:4.

LESSON SIX

THE WILL AND HEALTH

This section is based principally on the writings of Mrs. Ellen G. White, a pioneer health reformer, and prolific author. Her classic work entitled *The Ministry of Healing* is still available over a hundred years after its initial publication.

Mrs. White makes plain that there is a close connection between the mind and the body. Scientists have observed this for years. It is commonly understood that at times the body responds in positive ways to “medicine” which is, in reality, no more than a sugar pill. This strongly suggests the power that the brain has on the sick person. Ellen G. White observes that there are :

*“many who are apparently feeble and are ever complaining are not so badly off as they **imagine** themselves to be. Some of these have a **powerful will, which, exercised in the right direction, would be a potent means of controlling the imagination and thus resisting disease.** But it is too frequently the case that the will is exercised in a wrong direction and stubbornly refuses to yield to reason. That will has settled the matter; invalids they are, and the attention due to invalids they will have, irrespective of the judgment of others”.*

*“Let the will be kept awake and rightly directed, and **it will impart energy to the whole being and will be a wonderful aid in the maintenance of health. It is a power also in dealing with disease....***

*“By the **exercise of the willpower** in placing themselves in right relation to life, patients can do much to cooperate with the physician's efforts for their recovery. **There are thousands who can recover health if they will.** The Lord does not want them to be sick. He desires them to be well and happy, and they should **make up their minds to be well.***

“Often invalids can resist disease simply by refusing to yield to ailments and settle down in a state of inactivity. Rising above their aches and pains, let them engage in useful employment suited to their strength. By such employment and the free use of air and sunlight, many an emaciated invalid might recover health and strength.

***The power of the will** and the importance of self-control, both in the preservation and in the recovery of health, the depressing and even ruinous effect of anger, discontent, selfishness, or impurity and, on the other hand, the marvelous life-giving power to be found in cheerfulness, unselfishness, gratitude, should also be shown.*

*Evil habits and practices are bringing upon men disease of every kind. Let the understanding be convinced by education as to the sinfulness of abusing and degrading the powers that God has given. Let the mind become intelligent and **the will be placed on the Lord's side,** and there will be a wonderful improvement in the physical health.*

*But this can never be accomplished in mere human strength. With strenuous **efforts through the grace of Christ** to renounce all evil practices and associations and to observe temperance in all things, there must be an abiding persuasion that repentance for the past, as well as forgiveness, is to be sought of God through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.*

*There are some who use narcotics, and by indulgence are encouraging wrong habits that are obtaining a controlling **power over the will**, the thoughts, and the entire man. (Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 2, 689-91 emphasis added).*

*God calls upon His faithful ones, who believe in Him, to talk courage to those who are unbelieving and hopeless. Turn to the Lord, ye prisoners of hope. Seek strength from God, the living God. Show an unwavering, humble faith in His power and His willingness to save. When in faith we take hold of His strength, **He will change, wonderfully change, the most hopeless, discouraging outlook.** He will do this for the glory of His name. (Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* 260.2)*

The will is a natural and important ally in the recovery of health. (This is why encouragement is so important as it stimulates the will to proper effort.) Inaction is to be avoided as much as possible. It is

*“highly detrimental to health. **The power of the will must be asserted**; aversion to active exercise and the dread of all responsibility must be conquered. [The indolent] are to **shake off** this listless, dreamy condition of mind and **arouse themselves to action**” (Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol 2, p 604:2).*

*“Let invalids [A person who is weak and infirm; a person sickly or indisposed.—Webster’s Dictionary, 1828] do something instead of occupying their minds with a simple play, which lowers them in their own estimation and leads them to think their lives useless. **Keep the power of the will awake, for the will aroused and rightly directed is a potent soother of the nerves.** Invalids are far happier to be employed, and their recovery is more easily effected” (Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol 2, p 648:3 emphasis added).*

*“As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings. (Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 333)*



LESSON SEVEN

THE WILL AND EFFORT

A classic text on this subject is Philippians 2:12-13: “*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*”

We see from this passage that God works in us for a purpose. To restore purpose and life and energy. God is active and He longs that we experience something of this divine impetus in each one of us.

This has to do with striving and putting forth effort. The will is the spring to all effort. Without the will there will be no meaningful effort. Without purpose the life will be a clutter of ill-prompted decisions with half-fulfilled promises and broken dreams.

“*I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore **choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live*” (Deuteronomy 30:19 emphasis added).

“*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able*” (Luke 13:24).

To decide is but the beginning of decision making. There must be follow-through. While it is true that without the Lord we can do nothing, it is equally true that mental assent will amount to nothing without then acting on our decision. The Lord admonishes us to *strive*. This means to put forth effort. Behind every such effort there is a decision of the will. The will and effort are closely associated.

*The Spirit of God does not propose to do our part, either in the willing or the doing. This is the work of the human agent in cooperating with the divine agencies. As soon as we incline our will to harmonize with God's will, the grace of Christ stands to cooperate with the human agent; but it will not be the substitute to do our work independent of our **resolving and decidedly acting**. Therefore it is not the abundance of light, and evidence piled upon evidence, that will convert the soul; it is only the human agent accepting the light, **arousing the energies of the will**, realizing and acknowledging that which he knows is righteousness and truth, and thus cooperating with the heavenly ministrations appointed to God in the saving of the soul. Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, 691:3.*

This is the continued action of the person *over time*. Repeated action is what character is all about. The important matter is that it is repeated *right action*!

Do not underrate the importance of little things because they are little. By action and reaction these little defects accumulate and bind themselves together like rods of steel. That little action, that unguarded word, repeated, becomes habit, . . . and habit constitutes character. . . . Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, ch. 203.

The Lord does not propose to perform for us either the willing or the doing. His grace is given to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort. Our souls are to be aroused to co-operate. The Holy Spirit works in us, that we may work out our own salvation. This is the practical lesson the Holy Spirit is striving to teach us. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."
Ellen G. White, *Messages to Young People*, 147:2

As the classic Protestant hymn *A Mighty Fortress* declares:

“Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side, The man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus , it is He, Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.”

–Martin Luther , 1529

*Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, "**Take me, O Lord**, as wholly Thine. **I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today** in Thy service. **Abide with me**, and let all my work be wrought in Thee." ...Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God...*
Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 70:1

No outward observances can take the place of simple faith and entire renunciation of self. But no man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be,

**Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it.
It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee.
Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self.
Mold me, fashion me, raise me
into a pure and holy atmosphere,
where the rich current of Thy love
can flow through my soul.**

Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 159:3



LESSON EIGHT

THE WILL OF GOD

*“I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will,
but the will of him who sent me.”*

John 6:38

That which binds us together with God above is our will—our choice. For love is abundantly filled with choice. If there is no choice there is no will. God’s love is manifested in His choices. Daily. Hourly. Moment by moment, He is choosing for us the things which belong to our peace.

For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother. Mark 3:35 Jesus states emphatically that a) there is “the will of God” and b) how we relate to the will of God makes plain our relationship to Him.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Colossians 4:12. A worker in the early Church was commended for completeness of his spiritual labor to lead the people to stand in “all the will of God”.

What is the will of God...for us as His people? *“For **this is the will of God, even your sanctification...**”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13). It is God’s will that we become sanctified or set apart for His purposes (see also Romans 8:28 last part). To be sanctified is to be more and more in harmony with the will of God. Yes, this is why Jesus Christ came into this world, to die for us and more. To bring us back into harmony with the will of God. *“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he **no longer should live** the rest of his time in the flesh **to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.**”* (1 Peter 4:1-2).

The destiny of all who place their will on the side of trust and truth—that is on the side of Jesus Christ—will triumph with Him! *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but **he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.**”* (1 John 2:16-17).

When Jesus was on earth, he was emphatic about the will of God: *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do **the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.**”* (John 4:34). This fact marked His ministry from His earliest sense of His mission: *“wist [know] ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”* (Luke 2:49). His purpose to do the will of God marked His words, His actions, His sufferings, His death. All of this was to fulfill the will of God!

In the crisis of His life, in the garden of Gethsemane, He wrestled to surrender to God's will on the matter of His approaching sacrifice. Over and over His prayer arose to heaven: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but **as thou wilt** (Matthew 26:39). The second time He prayed: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, **thy will be done**" (Matthew 26:42). Finally, as Matthew records it, the third time He prayed "he used the same words" (Matthew 26:44).

Somewhere in the midst of this spiritual struggle Luke makes plain the difficulty that Jesus wrestled with in His own submission to the will of God: "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44). We should ponder the words of Jesus: "**not my will, but thine, be done**" (Luke 22:42). They are the central value of His mission.

What Jesus said in Gethsemane demonstrates the "right action of the will". It is to surrender to the will of God. It is true, that for us and our future *EVERYTHING* depended on this! Because He was willing we can be willing.

We have read that "Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. **You can give Him your will**; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.

Desires for goodness and holiness are right as far as they go; but if you stop here, they will avail nothing. Many will be lost while hoping and desiring to be Christians. They do not come to the point of **yielding the will** to God. They do not now **choose** to be Christians.

Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 47-48

God wishes us to have the mastery over ourselves. But He cannot help us without our consent and co-operation. The divine Spirit works through the powers and faculties given to man. Of ourselves, we are not able to bring the purposes and desires and inclinations into harmony with **the will of God**; but if we are "**willing to be made willing**," the Saviour will accomplish this for us, "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 482-483

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

And be not conformed to this world:
but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind,
that ye may prove what is that
good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
(Romans 12:2)



*I call heaven and earth to record...
that I have set before you life and death,
blessing and cursing:
therefore choose life,
that both thou and thy seed may live:
That thou mayest love the LORD thy God,
and that thou mayest obey his voice,
and that thou mayest cleave unto him:
for he is thy life,
and the length of thy days...
Deuteronomy 30: 19-20*

