

Desiring God's Will - Dr. David G. Benner

I have by my desk, a little saying that goes - *"Everyone wants New Testament outcomes, without a New Testament life."* There's truth in this, and I am guilty of both this desire, and this failure. The book - Desiring God's Will - by Dr. David G. Benner is the third and final book in a trilogy of books that also includes Surrender to Love, and The Gift of Being Yourself. In a mere 115 pages, David Benner speaks with candor and clarity about why saying Yes to God is saying Yes to Life.

From the outset, Benner acknowledges that far too many Christians approach God's will like they approach New Year's resolutions. We know there's something we should be doing, and we may really intend on doing it, but, well.... you know, it's hard to want something that will probably just mess with our routine and preferences!

To this perspective, Benner writes -

***"...what a tragedy if we lump choosing God in with things that are not naturally attractive. Is it any wonder that the thought of surrendering to God's will evokes mixed feelings? Choosing God's dream for us feels like choosing to take bitter medicine." (Pg 17)***

Reading that, I can agree that equating "God's dream" with "bitter medicine" is probably unwise and wrong. But his next observation pulls no punches, and I'm forced to concede...

***"In each of us there lives a two-year-old with clenched fists, gritted teeth and defiance blazing in his or her eyes." (Pg 19)***

So how do we make the transition from "bitter medicine", to "God's dreams"? That is the focus of the rest of this wonderful book! And the first step is learning to pray the "prayer of release" - ***"not my will, but thine be done."*** These, of course, are the words of both Jesus, and also the words of his mother, Mary. ***"Mary agreed to allow God to deprive her of the one thing we count most basic among our natural rights - the right of self-control." (Pg 41)***

At the heart of our ability to desire God's will are the twin ideas of love and trust. Love, without trust leads to sentimentality. And trust without love leads to rigid self-discipline. Absent the other, love and trust are unable to produce in us the kind of release from self-control required to fully live into our desire to know and do God's will.

By chapter four, Benner is making suggestions like - ***"God wants to finish the work of transformation begun at our conversion. But we must give our assent."*** Hmmmmm...

And - ***"In every circumstance of our life our question should be Where is God in this?" (Pg 70)***

I rather suspect my decision-making might proceed along different lines if I learned to ask this question sooner, rather than later!

With Easter just having visited us, Benner's words concerning Jesus' willingness to say "Yes" to his Father's will seem especially appropriate for us. He writes -

***"When we think about this, the first thing that comes to mind is of course the physical cross he carried on the road to Calvary. But this external cross was merely the symbol of many inner crosses he had long before this day learned to bear in his choosing of God."***

***Had he not first learned to take up these inner crosses, he would have been unable to choose the external one... Everything that he would not naturally have chosen and that caused him suffering became for Jesus a cross to be taken up as he followed his heart toward the heart of God.” (Pp 88-89)***

Moving towards our own crosses, Benner adds -

***“The cross that I take up and carry in response to Jesus’ invitation to follow him becomes the place not only of my death but also of my resurrection. The way of Christian spirituality is the Way of the Cross. There is no alternate route. The Christian life is filled with little deaths and little resurrections, little Good Fridays and little Easter Sundays. Each embrace of my cross is a further step into the Kingdom of God which we can reach only on the other side of the death of our own kingdoms and queendoms of self-sufficiency and self-determination. (Pp 93-94)***

By the way, in case you were wondering... this is a New Testament life.

The book closes with a discussion on developing a discerning heart. It is so good! One last quote -

***God’s will is not primarily a matter of whether you take the job in Chicago or the one in Calgary, whether you marry this or that person, or whether you attend a Catholic or a Baptist church. God’s will is that you become the person that from eternity you were destined to be - your true self-in-Christ. God’s will is that you discover the fullness of life that is uniquely possible in surrendering to divine love and taking up your calling in the kingdom of God. Everything else is of secondary importance- of significant only as it facilitates or impedes this journey.” (Pg 97)***

Taken together, these three little books present a comprehensive picture of what our life in Christ looks like. And taken individually, each book in the series presents valuable observations about the deep levels of resistance our flesh presents against the invitation to know God and enjoy Him forever.

I’ve read each of these books multiple times, and recommend them to you with confidence. Without a doubt, these are deep waters, but Dr. Benner assures us that it is God who is teaching us to swim! It begins with saying Yes, to opening ourselves up to love, and to receiving the gift of who we are (not who we think we should be).

Dan Steinhart