

In
SEARCH
of
GOD'S
WILL

*Discerning a Life of
Faithfulness and Purpose*



TREVOR HUDSON

Trevor Hudson's friendship has been a gift. He is an exceptional communicator who unpacks complex concepts in a way that is simultaneously accessible, practical, experiential, and memorable. Trevor has spent a lifetime learning from a host of "veterans of the Spirit." And all the attributes of the author, and his remarkable journey, are beautifully on display in this magnum opus work on discernment. Take this journey with Trevor and find your special "message to deliver," "song to sing," "act of love to bestow" . . . and the special friendship with God that is yours to enjoy.

GARY W. MOON, MDIV, PHD, founding executive director of the Martin Institute and the Dallas Willard Center, director of Conversatio Divina at Westmont College, and author of *Apprenticeship with Jesus* and *Becoming Dallas Willard*

Trevor Hudson's *In Search of God's Will* serves as an extensive field guide for those of us who long to discern what we are to do with this one life God has given us. Hudson, in his inimitable wisdom, demonstrates that we need not be anxious in our efforts to figure out God's path for us and God's big dream for the world. When we know Jesus, we know God—and that God is completely loving toward us. Indeed, Hudson expertly leads us on a journey wherein we discover God has tenderly provided everything we need to know him and his will for our lives.

MARLENA GRAVES, author of *Bearing God*

How can I learn to discern God's will? is a question all Christians ask. We want our lives to matter. We don't want to wander off the path God has for us to travel. We want to journey well and wisely through our lives. How important it is to have a gentle, experienced guide as we walk with God. Trevor Hudson is just such a person. He has pondered discerning the will of God for a long time. Trevor provides a wise, tested road map for God's pilgrims in *In Search of God's Will*. Highly recommend.

CHRISTOPHER A. HALL, distinguished professor emeritus of theology at Eastern University and past president of Renovaré

Grounded in Scripture, real-life experiences, and examples, *In Search of God's Will* provides steps for the journey of maturing as a disciple of Christ. In his characteristic simple but compelling way, Trevor reminds us we each have a unique, God-given "song to sing," which is discovered through discernment in order to be aligned with God's dream for the world. That discovery is what every follower of Christ longs for. I recommend this book as a resource for individuals and small groups seeking growth into Christlikeness.

REV. N. PURITY MALINGA, presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

What a journey of discovery into the will of God! With insight, humility, and sincerity, Trevor Hudson helps us unveil the very heart of God. Throughout this beautiful book we are invited to draw close enough to God to discover the secrets and beauty of his will.

PROF. STEPHAN JOUBERT, leader of the South African church

We live in a chaotic and noisy world with many strange voices from the mass media, social media, and other sources competing for our attention and loyalty and seeking to program us in their own image. Trevor's latest offering is a generous and apt gift with practical steps to empower us to develop the spiritual art of discernment—listening to God and making right decisions for a time such as this.

REV. DR. SIDWELL MOKGOTHU, bishop of the Limpopo Synod of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

In a wonderfully lucid and practical way, Trevor Hudson helps us grapple with fundamental Christian questions: *How do I hear God? What is God's will? What is God asking from me?* Born from Trevor's own experience of living discerningly, this book opens the door for us to find God in ways we might not expect. Masterfully written, it is a must-read for anyone seeking to live discerningly . . . and in so doing, walk more closely with Jesus.

RUSSELL POLLITT, SJ, director of the Jesuit Institute South Africa

As a pastor, I often encounter questions about God's will. I am so thankful for a guide to conversations and discernment around this important question. Trevor's book is both practical and full of pastoral wisdom.

TOM SMITH, pastor at Fontainebleau Community Church

In this book, Trevor Hudson engages us in the awe-inspiring vision of how each of us is called in a unique and unrepeatable way to play our part in God's big dream for the world. We are invited on a journey to discover God's hopes and dreams for us. Trevor distills a wealth of wisdom from our Christian spiritual tradition, making it practical and accessible for every Christian seriously seeking to discover God's will. He shares heartwarming stories from his own discernment story showing the ups and downs of his journey of discovery. Trevor also invites us to engage in the simple yet powerful discernment exercises offered in each chapter. As we use the book, we become better able to sense the movement of the Holy Spirit and discover God's unfolding invitation in our own lives. This book is the fruit of a lifetime of learning how to live discerningly. I highly recommend it.

DR. ANNEMARIE PAULIN-CAMPBELL, head of spirituality at the Jesuit Institute South Africa

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of
G O D ' S
W I L L

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TREVOR HUDSON

NavPress 

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Foreword

When I first sat down to read *In Search of God's Will*, I found myself recalling a season long ago when I toured as the opening act for Christian singer-songwriter Rich Mullins. Something about Rich's music touched people in vulnerable places; it often helped them become aware of their deepest longings. After each concert, I loved sitting next to Rich at the autograph table, unabashedly eavesdropping on his conversations with his listeners. Often, those conversations turned serious and urgent.

On a few occasions, I heard someone ask Rich how to discern God's will. Each time, Rich offered some surprising counsel.

"I don't think finding God's plan for you has to be complicated," he'd say. "God's will is that you love him with all your heart and soul and mind, and also that you love your neighbor as yourself. Get busy with that, and then, if God wants you to do something unusual, he'll take care of it. Say, for example, he wants you to go to Egypt." Rich would pause for a moment before flashing his trademark grin. "If that's the case, he'll provide eleven jealous brothers, and they'll sell you into slavery."

I'm not sure whether this satisfied Rich's fans, but I suspect his

advice has stayed with them the same way it has with me. When I find myself wrestling with life decisions, I think of Rich's Egypt Principle. It makes me laugh, and then it asks me to get down to the serious business of determining which of my options best allows me to love God and other people. Such an approach usually rules out certain possibilities while affirming (and even creating) several others.

Sometimes, once I've narrowed down my alternatives in light of the Great Commandment, the determinative "jealous brothers" do show up. A scholarship comes through at one school rather than another. A job offer is escalated or rescinded. Other times, however, I'm left standing at the junction of several seemingly reasonable pathways, miserable with uncertainty. *How should I discern my next step?*¹

The book you hold in your hands offers invaluable responses to that very question. Yes, Trevor Hudson affirms, God's "general will" is quite evident in Scripture. But discovering God's "personal will" for our lives requires us to develop our capacity for discernment. It involves reflecting on what Trevor calls the "outer landscape" of our lives (from the big "jealous brothers" events to the smaller nuances of our everyday experiences). Critically, it also invites us to attend to our "inner landscape," where, Trevor argues, our thoughts, feelings, and emotions "can become wonderful signals that point us to the leading of God's Spirit in our lives."

Trevor tells us that this process of discernment helps us discover not only what we are called to *do* but also whom we are uniquely called to *be*. "Each one of us is called to live the truth of our unrepeatable uniqueness," Trevor writes. Gently, thoughtfully, and persuasively, Trevor makes the case that learning to become ourselves may be even more fundamentally important than figuring out what to do—and that the two quests are inextricably linked.

FOREWORD

Perhaps you, like me, have read John the Baptist's cry—"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, KJV)—and imagined your personality gradually receding into a generic Christlikeness. We forget, of course, that the prophet praying that prayer only became more completely his confrontational, unshaven, locust-eating self in Jesus' presence. I like to think he became *Johnny-er* and *Johnny-er* until his *entire being* was pointing to Jesus.

When I first met Trevor Hudson, I was struck (like so many others) by his gentleness, his thoughtfulness, his posture of listening, and his giftedness in accompanying others into a deeper awareness of God's personal love. In the years since, Trevor has only become *Trevor-er*, and this book is the fruit of his long obedience. As you read it, please don't miss the opportunity to engage with the discernment exercises sprinkled throughout the pages. If you do, you will discover that you are invited to use all the particularity of your unrepeatable heart, your unique soul, and your one-of-a-kind mind to love God and your neighbor in the way that *only you* can. For this, friend, is the "good, pleasing and perfect will" of God (Romans 12:2, NIV).

Carolyn Arends

recording artist, author, and
Renovaré director of education

Preface

Thank you for picking up this book. This theme of discerning God's personal will has a special place in my heart, and I hope it resonates with your heart too. In this preface I want to do just three things: tell you how this book came to be, share my hopes for it, and suggest how to enrich your reading experience.

How This Book Came to Be

Through the course of over forty years of working closely with people as a pastor, I have come across many who long to find God's will for their life. They say things like "I wish I knew what God wants me to do," "I really need God's guidance right now," and "I don't know which decision God wants me to make." Perhaps you've said similar things. Or maybe some of the following scenarios sound more familiar.

- You sometimes wonder how you can know when God is communicating with you.
- You would like to learn more about how you can discern God's personal calling in your life.

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- You are interested in exploring the relationship between what God desires and your own inmost desires.
- You would like to be able to identify where God is present and active in your everyday experience.
- You are puzzled by what others mean when they say they heard “God’s voice” or “God telling me.”
- You have wondered about the division of labor between God and you in the decision-making process.
- You face a dilemma right now where you are wondering what faithfulness to God looks like.

If any of these statements resonate with you, I hope you will keep reading. My prayer is that, through my words, God will shed light on your way.

The question *What should I do?* is one we ask ourselves many times in one day! To find answers to the myriad choices we face daily about how we should live our lives, we can't just type each question into Google and expect to receive a wise response that applies specifically to us and our unique situation in the moment. If we truly want to know God's personal will for our lives, we must develop our capacity for discernment.

Ever since my initial surrender to Jesus Christ, the theme of discernment has been a close and constant companion. Soon after this commitment moment, I wanted to know God's personal will for my one life here on earth. While I knew that God's general will could be found in Scripture, I deeply desired to discover God's specific will for my life. This desire has never left me. Right now, as I enter my seventies, discerning how God is leading me for this season continues to be an important task. The ongoing journey of discernment has turned my life into an adventure of faith for which I will always be immeasurably grateful to God.

PREFACE

In the decades since becoming a Christ follower, I have learned a great deal about the process of discernment. God's personal will is not usually written in bold letters across the sky or printed on a sheet of paper dropped from heaven. It is something we learn to discern. Because our personal calling is dynamic, ever evolving, and always moment to moment, the quest to discern God's will is an ongoing adventure. In my own faith journey, I have been fortunate to meet some veterans of the Spirit who have taught me much about discernment. I would like to share these insights that I have learned with you in the hope that my words will help you live more faithfully and purposefully as a Christ follower within those places where you live and work.

I want to explore an understanding of God's personal will that does not diminish the importance of our responsibility in the process of discernment. God does not always tell us what to do! God intends us to grow and mature into grown-up children of God. This involves learning how to explore options, making life-giving decisions, and taking responsibility for our actions. Character only develops as we learn to do this. Discerning what God wants, therefore, involves paying careful attention to what God is doing and saying *and* to what we think and feel about the choices we are facing.

Hoped-For Outcomes

I have three hopes for you as a reader and a fellow pilgrim. First, I hope to offer you an inviting, accessible, and compelling vision of God's personal will for your life. One of the most exciting truths of our faith is that each of us is called by name by God. This God-shaped vocation goes far beyond working out what we must do with our lives. It also involves discovering what kind of person we are called to become. As we live into the truth of our uniqueness,

God moves us toward the fullness of life that Jesus promised. I hope that you will catch glimpses of what it may mean for you to become the person you were destined to be from eternity.

Second, I would like to develop for you a clear understanding of what I mean by “discernment.” What does it mean to “discern God’s personal will”? These words get used often in church circles. What meanings do we attach to them? As we journey together, I would like us to carefully create a biblically shaped imagination around them. A wise mentor once reminded me that we live at the mercy of our ideas. Certainly this is the case when it comes to our ideas about discernment. There is much at stake in this regard. Sadly, we can go through our whole life without becoming the person God created us to be. Alternatively, when we truly become who God wants us to be and express our true personhood, we are able to contribute more to the healing of our broken world.

Third, I would like us to explore *how* we can intentionally go about discerning God’s personal will for our lives. A friend of mine, when he reads a book, often writes in the margins the letters *YBH*. When I asked him about what these letters stood for, he answered, “Yes, but how?” I hope that you will not need to write these letters in the margins of this book! Although discernment is certainly not a spiritual technique or a five-step plan, there are practices that can deepen our capacity to live discerningly. Throughout this book I will invite you to engage in these practices and discover their usefulness for yourself.

How Best to Use This Book

I intend this book to be primarily a user’s guide to discerning God’s personal will for our lives. The reason is straightforward. Learning to discern is like learning to swim. We do not learn to

PREFACE

swim by reading about swimming. We learn by getting into the water, having someone come alongside us to coach us, swallowing some water, sinking now and then, learning the different strokes, putting them to use, and discovering over time what swimming involves. As we practice our strokes, our ability to swim gets stronger and stronger.

It is the same with spiritual discernment. We learn to discern as we step into the unfathomable depths of God's love, ask the Holy Spirit to come alongside us, practice those discernment skills passed on to us by our sisters and brothers in the faith, reflect on those times when we sank underwater, and slowly discover what it means to trust the flow of God's loving will in our lives. This book has been designed to encourage you to do this. As the old proverb puts it, "Hear and forget; see and remember; do and understand."

For this reason, the discernment exercises throughout each chapter are the most important part of this book. These practices have been devised over the years as I have led courses and retreats on this theme of discerning God's personal will. This book is structured around these exercises. If you read this book without doing the exercises, it will be like standing at the side of the swimming pool and watching others swim but never swimming yourself. I hope I can encourage you to jump into the water!

This book can be used effectively in a group setting. It could be with fellow pilgrims from your local faith community, or an established small group, or simply a band of friends wanting to explore together what it means to discern God's personal will for each of your lives. If there is no such group available, I would strongly encourage you to find a partner with whom you can share your reflections as you read each chapter and engage with the discernment exercises. Our journey with Jesus should always involve others.

The best way to prepare for each meeting is to read the relevant chapter and do the suggested exercises beforehand. I have outlined a possible format for your group meeting so that you can share your learning from the week (see appendix 1). If you are unable to be part of a group or to discuss the material with a friend, my biggest encouragement is to read the book slowly, taking time to do the suggested exercises, and then perhaps make some notes in your journal.

Journeying with Jesus

Jesus is the only person who perfectly discerned God's personal will. He alone became wholly the person his Father wanted him to be. He alone did fully what his Father wanted him to do. He alone fulfilled his Father's calling with total surrender and complete faithfulness. Most wonderfully, as we seek to discern God's personal will for our lives, he lives today beyond crucifixion as the risen Christ and offers to walk alongside us as our ever-loving Friend and Lord. We can be sure that as we turn to our living Lord and keep our hand in his, he will shed his bright light on our way, one step at a time.

Trevor Hudson

Part One



INTRODUCING
GOD'S
WILL

Chapter 1

ANNOUNCING GOOD NEWS



I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has; . . . God knows me and calls me by my name.

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

I read this profound saying: “God sends each person into this world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special act of love to bestow.”¹ No one else can speak my message, or sing my song, or offer my act of love. These are entrusted only to me. Ever since I first read these words, they have warmed my heart. They not only touch me; whenever I share them, they resonate with others, too. Why is this?

One significant decision facing us all concerns the way we see our little life in this big universe. This choice is stark. On the one hand, do we see human life as simply random? Are we accidental specks of dust in an ultimately meaningless cosmos? After all, there are over eight billion of us—how can our one life really matter? On the other hand, does our existence here on earth have a purpose?

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Is there a unique space in this world where each of our lives is meant to shine? Do you and I have a specific purpose to fulfill in the years given to us?

The bottom line is that we either view our lives as meaningless or as brimming over with more meaning than we can imagine. Our ideas about these questions have life-shaping consequences.

Early in my twenties, I read *Man's Search for Meaning*, written by Jewish psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who spent time in a concentration camp during the Second World War. He noticed something during his imprisonment that would shape his life's work. With his clinically trained eye, he observed that there were two groups of prisoners: those who just gave in to their horrific circumstances and those who lived through them with dignity and hope. As Frankl studied this second group, he noticed one common characteristic: They all had something meaningful to live for. In one unforgettable sentence, he underscored that the person "who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*."²

The astonishing good news that the Bible gives, as we will soon see, is that God has a personal will for each of us. Because we find this truth so hard to learn by heart, we need to hear it repeatedly. So let me repeat it to you right now:

You have been desired into existence by a Great Love. You are meant to be here. You are known by name. You have been chosen. You have been called by name. Your life has a unique, God-given meaning. Your unrepeatable life matters.

When this good news reverberates in the depths of our soul, our small life takes on an eternal significance in God's great universe.

Biblical Glimpses

The good news of God's personal will, or personal calling, weaves its way throughout the Bible. Let me offer you three brief glimpses.

1. In Psalm 139, we read, "It was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (verses 13-14). The psalmist reminds us that God has been creatively present in our lives from our very beginning. Each one of us has been uniquely, carefully, and marvelously made. You and I are not here by mistake. This astounding biblical truth opens our eyes to glimpse God's eternal intention for your life and mine.

Let me take the psalmist's assertion one step further. God has not put down those creative knitting needles! Sometimes we imagine that once God gave us life, the Creator then stood back and said, "Okay, I have done my job, and from now on I will not be involved in your life anymore." Nothing could be further from the truth. Our creation is not just a past event. God continues to give life to you and me—and to the whole expanding universe. Right now, the great and glorious I AM continues to create us, breathing breath into our being, calling us to become the fully alive human God wants us to be.

2. God's personal will can be seen in that evocative biblical phrase *called by name*. One example can be found in John chapter 10, where we read that the Good Shepherd "calls his own sheep by name" (verse 3). We are known personally by God. You and I are not merely one in a crowd, or the product of an assembly line, or an anonymous statistic. The God who has created every one of the over eight billion people on this planet has a personal and unique name for each one of

us. This gospel conviction about the mystery of who we are invites our astonishment, careful reflection, and meditation.

In biblical times, names carried great significance. They were not just how people were addressed, which is the general purpose they serve today. They described the essence of a person's character. Your name was a description of who you were and what your parents hoped you would become. Similarly, the God whose loving heart we see in Jesus has a personal name for each of us. This is our true name, our deepest identity, our divine calling. God's will is that you and I discover this truth of our uniqueness. Each of us is born to be who we are, not copies of one another.

3. We get a glimpse of God's personal will in Paul's words in the New Testament. He repeatedly underlines the importance of discerning our personal calling. He implores the Christ followers in Rome to offer themselves to God and to let their minds be transformed so that they would discern "what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Paul's letter to the Ephesians divides into two parts with his hinge verse challenging his readers "to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). Writing to the Corinthian believers, he says emphatically, "Let each of you lead the life . . . to which God called you" (1 Corinthians 7:17).

This good news of God's personal will, or personal calling, runs throughout the New Testament. It proves false the idea that only certain people, like missionaries and ministers, are called by God. I remember going to my boss at Firestone in my early twenties to tell him that I was leaving to explore becoming a minister in the Methodist church.

He said to me, “Oh, so you are one of those who have been called.” Even though I knew him to be a person of faith, he did not see himself as called. Often that is our understanding of how God works: God calls some people but not others. But that’s not the case. The good news is that God has a specific purpose for every one of us, including you!

I hope you now have a clearer biblical understanding of God’s personal will. On the one hand, God has a general will for how we are called to live. We witness this clearly in God’s guidelines for human living revealed in the Scriptures. This divine guidance includes things like learning to love those around us, working for justice, walking humbly through life, offering hospitality to strangers, and living in the light. Consider, too, that often-overlooked phrase in Jesus’ great commission where he expressed his intention for us to obey everything that he had taught us (Matthew 28:20).

On the other hand, God’s personal will involves discovering how all this takes shape in your life and mine—and this will look different for every Christ follower. It is about discovering the message that we are called to deliver, the song that we are called to sing, and that special act of love that we alone can give. No one else can convey our message, sing our song, or do our act of love. These are entrusted to us alone. This is our personal calling from God. It has two important dimensions that we will explore now: becoming the person God wants us to be and doing the works God wants us to do.

Becoming the Person God Wants Us to Be

Each one of us is called to live the truth of our unrepeatable uniqueness. We are not meant to model ourselves after others, however wonderful they may be. A delightful Jewish parable makes

this point. When Rabbi Eleazar died and arrived in heaven, as the legend goes, he was worried about his degree of holiness. He wondered whether God was going to be angry with him. He imagined God cross-questioning him about his way of life, saying, "Tell me, why did you not become like Abraham, the man of faith, or like Moses, the man of action?" However, when God approached the rabbi, the question was altogether different. "Tell me, my son," asked God quietly, "why did you not become Rabbi Eleazar?"³

Becoming the person God wants us to be is not as simple as it sounds. Certainly it has not been for me. Getting along in this world often means pretending to be who we are not. We wear masks that reflect how we want others to see us. We pretend to have it all together when we are really falling apart inside. We say that we are fine when we are struggling. We give the impression that we are strong when we feel fragile. We try to look brave when we are scared. We cover feelings of resentment with a veneer of niceness. In the end, we move further and further away from the person God wants us to be until we cannot distinguish between the masks we put on and who we really are.

In the chapters that follow, we will learn to discern how we can grow more fully into the person God wants us to be. As a starting point for this lifelong pilgrimage, here is a simple framework to guide us.⁴ I have found it helpful to recognize that we each have three selves. As we bring them all to God, a gradual transformation begins taking place within us. We begin to show up as the person God wants us to be. We embrace God's personal will for our lives.

- First, there is our *external self*. This is the self that we show to the world. It gets communicated through how we speak, what we say or do not say about ourselves, how we dress, how we carry ourselves, the words we use, and so forth. This

external self is not necessarily false; it often helps us carry out our responsibilities in the world. We cannot always wear our heart on our sleeve. However, we need to be careful that too big a gap does not develop between this external self and what is happening inside us. We feel discomfort when people say affirming things about us that we know are not true. Identifying ourselves completely with this external self exposes us to the dangers of self-deception and blocks us from becoming the person God wants us to be.

- Second, there is our *present self*. Each of us was uniquely created by God in our mother's womb. This present self consists of our fears, our pain, our tears, our childhood wounds, our longings, our gifts, our resentments, our betrayals, our competitiveness, and our powerful instinctual drives. All this lies a little beneath the surface of our lives. Sometimes we consciously hide these parts from others. I think especially of those powerful secret drives of our sexuality and aggression. While both are God-given with tremendous potential for good, these drives are often forced into hiding, with sometimes tragic consequences.
- Third, there is our *becoming self*. The good news of our faith is that, as we bring to God what we know about ourselves, God slowly knits together all the various threads of our lives into the unique person God wants us to be. In this way we cooperate with God in the ongoing transformation of our heart and mind into God's family likeness. Using the language of Paul, we are working out our salvation "with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Each of us has hidden within us the wondrous beauty of a personality that God wants us to shine forth for the sake of others.

This transformative journey involves a courageous honesty to acknowledge and accept who we really are, to share who we are with trusted companions, and to let God's Spirit birth that unique, loving person we were created to be.

Discernment Exercise

You can begin this transforming journey right now. Here are some simple steps: Know that you are infinitely precious to God, who always delights in you. Give thanks to God for the hidden mystery of your being. Reflect on that gap between the external self you show to those around you and your present self, with all its light and darkness. Put your arms around all the beautiful, bruised, and broken bits of your life. Celebrate the good news that you are known, loved, and accepted by God in Christ as you are. Remind yourself that you do not need to pretend in the company of the Divine Presence. Offer all of yourself to the Compassionate One, who longs to welcome you. Give consent to the Holy Spirit, who wants to help you become fully yourself. Repeat this practice often as you embark on this discerning journey into God's personal will for your life.

Doing the Works God Wants Us to Do

Many years ago, I watched a documentary on the remarkable ministry of Mother Teresa among the poverty-stricken people of Calcutta. At one stage there was a moving exchange between her and the commentator. He asked her whether she did not find her work futile and hopeless given the immensity of human need facing her and her sisters. In her typically humble fashion, she responded, "I was not called to be successful but faithful. Each one of us is called to do something beautiful for God."⁵

You are not alone if you struggle to believe this. Often, we feel our smallness. We are filled with self-doubt and have little sense of how we can play our part in God's big dream of healing this broken world. So when someone like Mother Teresa suggests that each of us has something beautiful to accomplish in our lifetime, we are only half convinced. Yet there are specific works that God wants each one of us to do. Consider these words written by Paul to the Ephesians: "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

This is a wonderfully challenging verse. It reminds us that God has good works for each of us to do. These are intimately connected to how, as God's creative handiwork, we have been knitted together in our mother's womb. God's personal will is that you and I live out our little piece of God's dream for this world, with actions that fit the shape of our being. This outward journey in serving those around us is intimately linked with our inward journey to become the person God wants us to be. Becoming who we were created to be, we find ourselves doing those works God wants us to do. Or, putting it the other way 'round, discovering what we are called to do introduces us to who we truly are.

This life-giving insight from Paul's letter is motivating. Many voices try to tell us what to do, how to live, and what goals we must set. Some of these voices can be helpful. Many of us have received help from significant others who have called forth our gifts, expressed appreciation when we have done something well, and encouraged us to step out beyond our comfort zones. I will always be grateful to the mentors in my life who encouraged me to write, even though I found the prospect quite daunting and overwhelming. Without their support and challenge, I would not have written.

However, if the shape of our life is *defined* by these voices, we may neglect what we know deep down in our heart we are called to do. We can easily end up living from the outside in and not from the inside out. The consequences are sad. We live reactively rather than responsively. We experience an absence of meaning in what we are doing. Our lives are shaped by others' expectations rather than by any sense of doing what God wants us to do. We seldom listen to the quiet whispers of our own hearts. Saddest of all is that we forget we were created to be different, with a specific calling that no other human being can fulfill for us. We miss God's personal will.

Thankfully, it does not have to always be this way. We can choose—*right now*—to open our heart and mind to the good news that God has good works in mind for each of us to do. You have something beautiful to do for God, and so do I. These special assignments express who we have been uniquely created to be. Few things are more important than taking this challenge seriously. We are never too old to begin this quest and to discover what these good works may look like in our life.

Discernment Exercise

We can start discerning God's personal will wherever we are right now. Here is an exercise you may like to try. Make a list of all your tasks, responsibilities, and roles. Write down your feelings and thoughts about each one. (You may have both positive and negative feelings about the same activity.) Be as honest as you can. Which of these activities seem to express who you are? Which of them seem to conflict with who you are? Which make you feel more alive? Which deaden your spirit? You may find it helpful to talk this over with God and to listen to what God may be saying to you.

Fullness of Life

God's will for each of us is fullness of life. This includes showing up in this world as the person God wants us to be. It is about discovering our lines while we are on the stage of our one life. It is about delivering our special message, singing our special song, and bestowing our special act of love. It is about discerning the *why* to our existence so we can face the hard realities of our lives with hope, courage, and dignity. There may be no greater tragedy than going through our lives and totally missing this. But we are alive right now, so let us respond to the good news that God has a personal calling for each one of us by discerning it day by day, beginning now.