



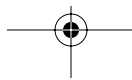
Preface

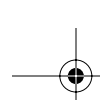
WILLING GOD'S WAY



This is a book that I resisted writing for months. I thought I had written enough about willfulness and surrender. I wanted to move on to other topics. I started another book but was unhappy with where it was going, troubled in my spirit. It was clearly my agenda—the fruit of my willful planning and resolve. How discouraging it was to again be reminded of the strength of my lust for self-determination and control, my deeply ingrained preference for my will over God's will.

I wish I could write about things that I have finally and solidly learned, things that are once and for all behind me. But my experience—and, I believe, the truth about the spiritual journey in general—is that past challenges and struggles are never fully behind us in this life. The route for the transformational journey of Christian spirituality is never direct. Typically it involves revisiting territory through which we have already passed, and doing so over and over again!





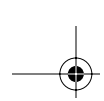
Doing things “my way” comes naturally for all of us. Egocentricity and self-control are fundamental dynamics of the human soul. We know we are supposed to surrender to God’s will and may genuinely want to, but most of us continue to face the almost irresistible tendency to assert our own will. We overhear Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane—“Not my will, but thine be done”—but have trouble honestly making it our own.

This book is an extension of ideas presented in the two previous books in this series—*Surrender to Love* and *The Gift of Being Yourself*.¹ Surrendering to God’s will makes little sense if we are not first convinced of the depths of God’s love for us. But surrender is far from complete and we have yet to unwrap the gift of our true-self-in-Christ until we are fully convinced of the absolute trustworthiness of God’s will. Learning to prefer God’s way to ours and discovering our identity and fulfillment in God’s kingdom way demands that we know Love, deeply and personally. Only then will it be possible to choose God with the totality of our being, not just our will.

The problem is that when we approach the task of choosing anything other than our own self and its immediate gratification, most of us automatically turn to willpower and resolve. Choosing God then becomes more a matter of grim determination than joyful surrender—closer to deciding to cut back on eating enjoyable foods than to following our heart to the Source of abundant life.

Another problem is that when we think of God’s will we normally assume that the challenge is how to *know* it rather than how to *choose* it. The focus on God’s will is thus misplaced—limited to points of major decisions. We fail to recognize that our problem is not so much knowing God’s way as being utterly





convinced that choosing God is choosing life.

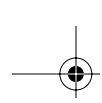
While the choices we make can be very important in our spiritual journey, we shall see in what follows that *how* we decide can often be as important as *what* we decide. Willpower, determination and discipline are not enough in Christ-following. The close interconnection of will and desire means that if Christ is to have our will, he must first have our heart.

The starting point in aligning our heart and will with the heart and will of God is to understand the difference between our natural willfulness and the God-given gift of willingness. The first three chapters each explore one important facet of this difference. In chapter one we examine the dark side of willfulness and the downside of discipline. Chapter two then looks at the differences between the ways of choosing associated with the kingdom of self and the kingdom of God, while chapter three takes what we learn about life in the kingdom of God and explores how our willing and choosing are transformed when they are shaped by love.

The next three chapters examine what it means to choose God. Chapter four focuses on learning attentive openness to the God who is attentively open and present to us. In chapter five we examine how willing God's way involves the heart's desires, not simply the head's resolve, while chapter six explores the role of taking up our cross in our choosing of God. Finally, chapter seven draws these strands together by examining the process of discernment—not just in making major decisions but in the moment-by-moment flow of ordinary days.

Learning to desire God's will is not something we can accomplish by resolve and willpower. As we shall see, it occurs only when we live so close to God's heart that the rhythm of our





own heartbeat comes to reflect the divine pulse. Then and only then will we be able to truly pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Then and only then will this prayer be our deepest desire.



Perhaps you can identify with me as one who has begun to know something of the depth of God's love but still resists fully surrendering to it. Perhaps you, like me, find yourself trying to co-opt God to fit your plans rather than submitting both your plans and your planning to divine willing. Perhaps you also have occasionally experienced the freedom that comes from floating in the river of life that is God but still spend much of your time swimming against the current. And perhaps you too find the battle for control to be one of the most discouraging and persistently nagging conflicts in your spiritual warfare.

Jesus is the only person who has lived a life of total surrender to God's loving will. He alone knew the absolute freedom and fulfillment of floating in the river of life that is God. He alone can lead us to the release from enslavement to an autonomous will. He alone can lead us to the freedom and fullness of life that is in God. It is my prayer that you and I alike may learn to prefer his way over our way as we journey together in what follows.

Hamilton, Canada

Pentecost

