

**SUB TOPIC THEME:
WHAT DOES GOD
WANT FROM ME?**

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this lesson is to provide teens with practical guidance in discerning what God wants us to do (actions) and who he wants us to be (character). While Scripture contains general principles for both categories, slightly more attention should be given to our character because who we are precedes what we do.



Set Up Info:

Supplies Needed:

- Computer or Internet connection to watch online videos
- Copies of the Student Response sheet (printed below)
- Bibles so you can look up the Scripture story (or copy the ones below)
- A shoe or ball to help facilitate discussion
- A life of integrity where the leader's actions are in harmony with the words spoken. Teens need to see the difference before they hear the difference!

Instructive Prep:

Over the years, students have asked heartfelt questions regarding how they are to know God's will for their lives. Perhaps the same has been true for you. Real questions demand real answers – pie-in-the-sky type responses are simply not helpful.

That being the case, allow me to share with you some advice. First, let us resist the temptation to offer vague, ambiguous advice such as, "Well, just pray about it and God will make it clear" or "Just spend more time reading the Bible." While prayer and Bible reading should definitely be involved in the process, such responses cut short the discussion and are somewhat dismissive.

Second, it is impossible for us to know God's will completely, especially when it concerns the particulars of life. After all, there has to be some room for faith. Plus, his purposes span generations and millennia; he sees both the forests and trees. Because we are bound in time and space, our perspective is limited. This is not to say that *aspects* of God's will are unknowable. Scripture does provide trustworthy principles by which we can know with certainty his overarching plans

for humankind. For example, it is clear that God reveals a consistent theme of redemption from the curses of the Fall. It is equally clear that he permits a measure of pain and suffering that often transcends human understanding. (We address the problem of evil in another study.) This is what I mean when I say we cannot understand completely all of God’s will. As a result, a good bit of humility is required anytime students seek our advice in this area.

Our focus here will be on those “trustworthy principles” mentioned above. In a broad sense, we can categorize what God wants from us into (1) action-oriented activities, such as where to go to college, what profession to pursue, or who to date or marry, and (2) character-oriented issues on who God wants us to be. I believe God is far more concerned with the latter. In fact, God uses all of life’s circumstances to refine our character. Put another way, who we are is more important than what we do. We can know objectively who God wants us to be because Scripture is abundantly clear on this point. But discerning what God wants us to do – meaning college or career choice – is a more subjective process, requiring reflection on our life-story and unique personality make-up.

The progression of these studies is four-fold: *learn, feel, do and what next*. We want students to learn something new, connect at an emotional level, and participate in doing something during study that brings them to a point of decision. Finally, the *what next* focuses on a change of attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, the goal is a complete transformation in kids’ lives (i.e., spiritual, emotional, mental and behavioral), so the application section based on God’s truth is really the crux of the time together. Have fun and lead well!

INTRO:

One of the best questions you could ever ask is what God wants for your life. But sometimes figuring that out can be as clear as mud. This study is designed to sift through the confusion and uncover two guiding principles that can bring clarity as to what God wants from us. Enjoy!

INTRO STORY:

The year was 1924. The place was Paris, France. The occasion was the men’s Olympic 400 meter, and Scotsman Eric Liddell was in the starting blocks for Great Britain. The 400 was not Eric’s strongest race. His best event was actually the 100 meter dash. But a unique set of circumstances prevented him from competing. You see the race was scheduled for a Sunday, and Eric’s religious convictions would not allow him to dishonor the Lord’s Day of rest.

In fact, he never competed on Sunday. He was the son of missionary parents. Born in China on January 16, 1902, he grew up in a devoutly Christian home. At the age of 6, he and his older brother, Robert, moved back to Scotland to attend a boarding school. Even as a youngster, people recognized that this young man possessed remarkable talent. Eric eventually went on to attend the University of Edinburgh where he excelled in both cricket and rugby. But it was in running that he most felt the pleasure of God, so he set aside all other pursuits in order to better hone his skills. He became one of Scotland's fastest runners, which earned him the rare honor of representing Great Britain in the 1924 Olympic Games.

If it was his speed that attracted national attention, then it was his exceptional Christian character that earned him undying respect. Mention the name Eric Liddell in Scotland today, and people will likely first recognize him for his unwavering Christian convictions over his athletic accomplishments. Eric always seemed to know who he was and never mixed his priorities. He was a Christian first and running was the means by which he glorified God. For him, running was the expression of his faith. The two were inseparable.

So, when the Olympic committee announced that the 100 meter dash would be held on a Sunday, Eric's decision not to run was clear. No amount of persuasion could change his mind. Thus, he began training for the longer, more grueling 400 meter race. Many doubted his stamina. While he won the 1924 AAA championship in the 440 meter, his time of 49.6 seconds was anything but impressive for international competition. As he settled into the starting blocks, it was clear that he was not favored to win.

But God sometimes has a funny way of rewarding faithful obedience. In this case, God inspired his servant in those final moments before the race. That inspiration carried Scotland's hero to run his fastest times ever in the 400 meter. Not only was his time of 47.6 seconds a personal best, but it was also good enough to claim the gold medal! But wait, there's more. It was also the fastest time anyone had ever run the 400 meters. That's right – he even set a new world record! What a moment! In the same games, Eric also took home a bronze medal in the 200 meter dash.

After the games, Eric graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a Bachelor of Science and returned to China to serve as a career missionary. Though he continued to compete, his real passion came in fulfilling God's greater purpose for his life. This commitment led to his early death at the age of 43 on February 21, 1945 while in a Japanese internment camp in China.

What makes Eric Liddell's life so compelling is his rare sense of purpose. His athletic feats on the track were a mere extension of who he was as a man of God. His *who* (identity) matched his *what* (purpose).

Take a moment to watch a clip from the 1981 movie “Chariots of Fire.” The scene is Eric’s world record gold medal performance.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwyltmUR3MU>

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Take a shoe or a ball and give it to one student. He or she can pass or toss it to another student to begin the discussion on question one. After answering, each person gets to pass it to someone who hasn’t answered. Do the same randomness through all the questions.

- What do you believe about meaning and purpose in this life? Do our lives have purpose? Why or why not? If so, is it possible to know for sure what our purpose is?
- Do you believe it is possible to find real meaning and purpose apart from God and the Bible? Talk more about that.
- Eric Liddell died a relatively young man (43 years old). Do you believe he lived his years well or that he died prematurely? How so?
- Do you know anyone who, like Eric Liddell, seems to live with a singular focus and purpose? If so, what do you find appealing about folks like this?
- Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt an undeniable sense that this is what you were designed for? If so, talk more about that.
- At this point in your life, how do you think God may want to use you to accomplish his greater purpose?

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES:

The following passages are selected because they focus our attention on who God desires us to imitate and what God wants us to do. In some way, each of the principles found in these verses can be tied back to the Greatest Commandment of loving God and neighbors found in Matthew 22:37-39.

Matthew 22:37-39 – *arguably one of the most important passages in all of Scripture, these verses focus our attention on the vertical and horizontal aspects of God’s overarching purpose for our lives.*

³⁷ Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the greatest and the most

important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'

2 Peter 3:9 – *this verse tells of God's desire to see all people come to repentance.*

⁹ The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.

Matthew 3:2 – *this verse, spoken by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, sums up God's desire for all to repent and reiterates Peter's message in the passage above.*

² "Turn away from your sins," he said, "because the Kingdom of heaven is near!"

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *this often quoted passage tells us that God's greatest gift to us is faith that leads to salvation.*

⁸⁻⁹ For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.

Ephesians 2:10 – *the verse immediately following is often overlooked. It tells us what God desires from us once we have entered into an abiding relationship with God through Jesus Christ.*

¹⁰ God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-7 – *these verses plainly tell us that following our salvation God desires that we grow in holiness.*

¹ Finally, our friends, you learned from us how you should live in order to please God. This is, of course, the way you have been living. And now we beg and urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to do even more. ² For you know the instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³ God wants you to be holy and completely free from sexual immorality. ⁴ Each of you should know how to live with your wife in a holy and honorable way, ⁵ not with a lustful desire, like the heathen who do not know God. ⁶ In this matter, then, none of you should do wrong to other Christians or take advantage of them. We have told you this before, and we strongly warned you that the Lord will punish those who do that. ⁷ God did not call us to live in immorality, but in holiness.

Philippians 2:12-16 – *here Paul admonishes his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to live blameless lives.*

¹² So then, dear friends, as you always obeyed me when I was with you, it is

even more important that you obey me now while I am away from you. Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, ¹³ because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose.

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be innocent and pure as God's perfect children, who live in a world of corrupt and sinful people. You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky, ¹⁶ as you offer them the message of life. If you do so, I shall have reason to be proud of you on the Day of Christ, because it will show that all my effort and work have not been wasted.

LIFE APPLICATION:

- Brainstorm ways that your small group can show “love for neighbor” and choose one of them to put into action in the coming days.
- Why is Jesus’ commandment to love God and neighbor so important? If you have an artistic flare, perhaps you could draw or paint a picture or write a poem that explains why Jesus elevates these commandments above all others.
- Challenge your group to have RAK (Random Acts of Kindness) Days where students can have a more intentional focus on representing God well by doing good for others.
- What areas of darkness do you perceive on your base or at your school? How might God want to use you to shine light in dark places?
- Don’t like these applications? Not quite right for your group of kids? Feel free to write your own!

STUDENT RESPONSE

As a result of this study, what are the two primary purposes that God wants for your life?

In your own words, describe why, if we claim to be followers of Jesus, it is important that we grow in holiness. How does your witness impact your testimony?

The most meaningful lesson I learned from today's small group discussion was...

Yes or No. I still have some lingering questions about God's purpose for my life and would like my leader to take me to the food court so we can talk some more.