

## **Dr. Gary Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 16, Prominent Competing Models: Blackaby, Smith, Friesen Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 16, Prominent Competing Models: Blackaby, Smith, Friesen, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Gary Meadors' lecture** critiques three prominent models for discerning God's will: **Blackaby's experiential subjectivism**, which Meadors finds deeply flawed for its lack of rigorous biblical engagement and over-reliance on personal revelation; **Smith's reasoned subjectivism**, which Meadors respects for its theological grounding and cautious approach to personal experience, though he finds it still lacking; and **Friesen's Christian pragmatism**, which Meadors initially appreciated for opposing extreme subjectivism but ultimately finds insufficient in its development of wisdom and its connection to broader theological concepts like providence and the fall. **Meadors contrasts these views with his own**, which emphasizes a transformed mind and value system developed through deep scriptural study as the foundation for making decisions and understanding God's will, lamenting the biblical illiteracy he sees hindering this process in the church.

**2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 16 – Double  
click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Theology → Knowing the Will of God).**



**Meadors\_Will\_Sessi  
on16.mp3**

### **3. Briefing Document: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 16, Prominent Competing Models: Blackaby, Smith, Friesen**

#### **Briefing Document: Competing Models for Knowing God's Will**

**Purpose:** To review the main themes and most important ideas presented by Dr. Gary Meadors in Session 16 of his lectures on "Knowing God's Will," focusing on his critique of three prominent competing models: Blackaby, Smith, and Friesen. The briefing will also touch upon Meadors' own perspective as a "fourth view."

#### **Executive Summary:**

In this lecture, Dr. Gary Meadors outlines and critiques three popular models for discerning God's will, presented by Blackaby, Smith, and Friesen. Meadors characterizes Blackaby's view as "radical subjectivism," Smith's as "reasoned subjectivism," and Friesen's as "Christian pragmatism." He argues that his own approach represents a distinct "fourth view" that emphasizes a deeper engagement with Scripture and the development of a robust biblical worldview and values system. Meadors finds significant shortcomings in all three models, particularly regarding their use of Scripture, handling of subjectivism, and understanding of wisdom and the impact of the fall. He advocates for a more rigorous and theologically informed approach to decision-making, especially for church leaders.

#### **Main Themes and Important Ideas:**

##### **1. Introduction and Meadors' Perspective:**

- Meadors positions his lecture as an overview and critique of prominent alternative views on knowing God's will, which he presents as an "appendix" to his own model.
- He explicitly states that his view is a distinct "fourth view" and disagrees with the categorization of his model as similar to Friesen's.
- "My view is really a fourth view. When the book on three views was published, for whatever reason, the editor decided, I think in concert with Friesen, that my view was basically sort of like Friesen's view. Well, nothing could be farther from the church on that one."

- Meadors emphasizes the importance of reading the original works of these authors rather than relying solely on summaries or comparative volumes like "The Three Views." He specifically recommends Friesen's original publication.
- He admits his own model is "more challenging, particularly in the sense that you must study scripture in deeper ways than what typically lay people would do." He sees this as an "obligation" for leaders.

## 2. The Single-Will View: Radical Subjectivism (Blackaby):

- Meadors characterizes the Blackaby model as rooted in the Keswick movement and representing "rampant subjectivism" or "radical subjectivism."
- **Central Assumptions:** God has a specific, individual will for each person and communicates it directly.
- "The core belief of this perspective... is that God not only has a specific will for individuals but also communicates that will... to people so they can follow it."
- Believers must learn to recognize God's direct voice, which Meadors sees as competing with Scripture.
- God's voice comes in many ways outside of Scripture, emphasizing subjective feelings and experiences.
- The experiential side of life is the primary door to knowing God's will.
- The Bible is used as a "springboard" or stimulus for experiential understanding rather than for contextual interpretation.
- Every text in the Bible directly addresses knowing God's will without contextual boundaries, leading to proof-texting.
- Direct revelation from the Holy Spirit is assumed.
- **Critique of the Blackaby Model:** Demeans rational thought and focuses solely on subjective experience without critical evaluation.
- "The Blackabee clan... demeans the rationale for the experiential while never asking the question about how to decide whether their experiential reasoning is really God or just their own interpretation of their own experience."
- Treats the Bible subjectively and experientially, neglecting hermeneutical analysis of original intended meaning.

- "However, the process of understanding text is purely subjective and experiential rather than contextual, hermeneutical analysis of the original intended meaning of a text."
- Uses biblical texts and stories as proof texts to support pre-existing experiential views.
- "Biblical texts and stories are used in a tabular manner and become proof texts to support our experiential views."
- Lacks "professional biblical awareness" and critical study of the text.
- Is captive to internal voices without providing a basis for critique. Meadors questions the nature and source of these "voices."
- "Their system is captive to internal voices... It does not provide a reason to critique of their self-authenticating, they're completely self-authenticating experiential assertions."
- Presents a contradictory view of revelation, seemingly implying new revelation while denying it.
- Reduces the Bible to a "dummy in the hands of ventriloquists" seeking personal guidance.
- Assumes personal revelation is necessary and subjectively validated without theological evaluation.
- Leads to potentially misguided actions based on subjective interpretations, illustrated by the story of the woman guided by voices at stop signs.
- "She had set up a false concept of how God communicates, and it was guiding her life in every way. I tell you, that's not a very good place to be in life..."

### **3. The Relational View: Christian Existentialism (Smith):**

- Meadors finds Gordon Smith's approach a "breath of fresh air" after Blackaby due to its engagement with Scripture and recognition of sin and human limitations. He terms it "reasoned subjectivism."
- **Central Assertions:** Humans are created in God's image with the capacity to choose, and God does not micromanage creation.

- Relationship with God and the Christian community creates a "matrix for decision-making." Meadors agrees with the importance of community, highlighting the example of the church evaluating a call to pastoral ministry.
- Rejects a "blueprint view" of finding a specific, predetermined will.
- Emphasizes the impact of sin on human discernment, seeing decision-making as a process of Christian maturation and sanctification within community.
- Decision-making is best understood within the context of an intimate union with Christ, guided by biblical understanding.
- Affirms that God speaks subtly and complexly, but avoids the assertion of "hearing" God's voice directly. Discernment requires critical reflection in faith and humility.
- Cautions against using proof texts and isolated biblical stories as normative guidance.
- **Critique of the Smith Model:** While acknowledging Smith's careful theological reflection and agreement on rejecting a specific individual will, Meadors notes a continued affirmation of an "internal guidance process."
- Meadors intends to define this internal guidance process himself, relating it to conscience, spirit, worldview, and values.
- Despite Smith's caution, Meadors still perceives a degree of "reasoned subjectivism" and suggests readers compare Smith's work with Meadors' own lectures to discern biblical guidance.

#### 4. Christian Pragmatism (Friesen):

- Meadors views Gary Friesen's work, particularly his initial book critiquing subjective views (proto-Blackaby), as a "bombshell" that correctly challenged the notion of a specific individual will.
- **Central Assumptions (primarily from Friesen's original book):** There is no specific, individual will of God to be discovered for each decision.
- God's will is primarily revealed in his commands, which must be obeyed.
- Where there is no command, God gives freedom and responsibility to choose, along with wisdom.

- When moral and wise choices are made, believers must trust God's sovereign working out of the details.
- **Critique of the Friesen Model:** While agreeing on the rejection of a specific will and the importance of obeying commands, Meadors finds Friesen's model lacking in several areas.
- Friesen's focus was too narrow, primarily targeting the Keswick movement and not adequately addressing broader theological traditions (Calvinistic, mainline Protestant, charismatic).
- Critique focuses on what Friesen *does not* say, such as a deep unpacking of wisdom as a biblical and philosophical construct. Meadors argues Friesen merely asserts "do the wise thing" without a sufficient framework for determining what is wise.
- "He never really unpacks wisdom as a biblical or philosophical construct. He never asserts it. He merely asserts, do the wise thing. Well, knowing what is the wise thing to do, there's no small matter."
- Meadors believes Friesen's concept of "wisdom" ultimately reverts to a new form of subjectivism and "spiritual expediency."
- Does not adequately connect God's sovereign will with the concept of God's providence and how it interacts with human freedom. Meadors asserts that human freedom is bounded by nature and providence.
- Does not adequately address the impact of sin on human nature and decision-making.
- Lacks a rational model for moving beyond direct biblical commands to make decisions in areas not explicitly addressed. The role of worldview and values is absent.
- Meadors suggests that Friesen's later work may have become even more subjective.

## 5. Meadors' "Fourth View":

- Meadors' own model emphasizes the **application of a biblically informed worldview and values system** to life's decisions.
- He stresses the importance of a **transformed mind** (Romans 12:1-2) achieved through careful and deep study of Scripture.

- He believes leaders have a particular responsibility to develop this understanding and guide their congregations.
- Meadors critiques the "illiterate church" and "illiterate clergy" in America, who often engage with Scripture superficially through word association rather than contextual understanding.
- His model acknowledges the need to move beyond direct biblical teaching for many decisions, utilizing a biblical, philosophical, and ethical framework.
- He emphasizes that biblical wisdom is a unique literary genre, a product of a biblical mindset saturated by Scripture, and requires explanation ("why, why, why").
- "Wisdom is actually a form of knowledge in Scripture. To do the wise thing requires an explanation of why, why, why."
- Meadors sets a "pretty high bar" for understanding God's will, reflecting his belief that God's standards are high.

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Meadors concludes that the Blackaby model is deeply flawed due to its radical subjectivism and misuse of Scripture. He respects Smith's "reasoned subjectivism" and finds some common ground but still identifies limitations. While appreciating Friesen's initial challenge to subjective views, Meadors critiques his narrow focus, insufficient treatment of wisdom and other theological concepts, and a perceived drift towards a new form of subjectivism. Meadors strongly advocates for his own model, which centers on a deep engagement with Scripture to cultivate a transformed mind, leading to a robust biblical worldview and values system as the foundation for discerning and doing God's will, particularly for church leaders.

## 4. Study Guide: Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 16, Prominent Competing Models: Blackaby, Smith, Friesen

### Knowing God's Will: A Comparative Study Guide

#### Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Meadors, what is the central assertion of the Blackaby's model for knowing God's will?
2. What is Dr. Meadors' primary criticism of the Blackaby's approach to Scripture?
3. In what way does Gordon Smith's view on knowing God's will differ significantly from the Blackaby's model, according to Dr. Meadors?
4. What does Dr. Meadors mean by "reasoned subjectivism" in relation to Gordon Smith's perspective?
5. What specific movement within Christianity was Gary Friesen primarily responding to in his work on God's will?
6. What is Friesen's key assertion regarding the "specific will" of God, and why was this significant?
7. What is Dr. Meadors' main critique of Friesen's concept of "wisdom" in decision-making?
8. According to Dr. Meadors, what crucial element regarding human nature is inadequately addressed in the models of Blackaby and Friesen?
9. What does Dr. Meadors emphasize as the primary means by which believers can know and do God's will?
10. According to Dr. Meadors, what is the role of church leaders in helping believers understand God's will?

#### Answer Key

1. The core belief of the Blackaby's model is that God has a specific will for individuals and directly communicates that will to them through an intimate walk with Him, requiring believers to recognize God's voice and follow His revealed path.



2. Dr. Meadors criticizes the Blackaby's model for its subjective and experiential approach to Scripture, where the Bible becomes a tool to enhance personal feelings rather than a text to be understood through contextual and hermeneutical analysis.
3. Unlike the Blackaby's radical subjectivism focused on direct personal revelation, Smith's model emphasizes that God created humans with the capacity to choose and allows His creation to operate without micromanagement, with decision-making occurring within the context of our relationship with God, community, and Scripture.
4. Dr. Meadors uses "reasoned subjectivism" to describe Smith's view, acknowledging that Smith values subjective perceptions but also emphasizes critical reflection, faith, humility, and the importance of theological reasoning and community in discerning God's will.
5. Gary Friesen was primarily responding to the Keswick movement, a highly subjective and devotional movement that heavily influenced American churches and emphasized seeking direct personal guidance from God.
6. Friesen asserts that there is no specific individual will of God to be discovered for every decision. Instead, he emphasizes obeying God's commands and exercising freedom and responsibility within the boundaries of God's moral will and wisdom.
7. Dr. Meadors critiques Friesen's concept of wisdom for being asserted rather than unpacked as a biblical or philosophical construct. He argues that Friesen's model lacks a clear explanation of how to derive wise decisions from Scripture and can lead to a new form of subjectivism.
8. Dr. Meadors argues that the effect of the fall and the resultant darkening of the mind (the noetic effect of the fall) is not adequately factored into the models of Blackaby and Friesen, with Smith offering the most consideration of this aspect.
9. Dr. Meadors emphasizes the importance of developing a transformed mind and value system through careful and in-depth study of Scripture as the primary means for believers to understand and apply God's will to their lives.
10. Dr. Meadors believes church leaders have an obligation to be adequately trained in Scripture, theology, and history to provide wisdom and guidance to the congregation, helping them navigate life's decisions based on a sound biblical, philosophical, and ethical model.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the understanding of "revelation" in the models of Blackaby and Dr. Meadors. How does each perspective view the role and authority of Scripture in knowing God's will?
2. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of Gordon Smith's "reasoned subjectivism" as a model for discerning God's will, according to Dr. Meadors. In what ways does Smith's approach represent an improvement over the Blackaby model, and where does Dr. Meadors still find it lacking?
3. Evaluate Gary Friesen's critique of the "traditional view" of God's will. While Dr. Meadors initially appreciated Friesen's work, he later developed significant criticisms. What were these criticisms, and what alternative does Dr. Meadors propose?
4. Discuss the significance of developing a "transformed mind and value system" (Romans 12:1-2) in Dr. Meadors' model for knowing God's will. How does this emphasis differ from the approaches of Blackaby, Smith, and Friesen?
5. Consider the practical implications of each of the four models (Blackaby, Smith, Friesen, and Meadors) for making everyday decisions as a Christian. Which model do you find most biblically sound and practically helpful, and why?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Subjectivism:** The belief that knowledge, truth, and morality are based on individual feelings, experiences, and opinions rather than objective reality.
- **Radical Subjectivism:** An extreme form of subjectivism where personal experience is the ultimate and unquestionable source of truth and guidance, as Dr. Meadors characterizes the Blackaby model.
- **Blueprint View:** The idea that God has a detailed, specific plan or "dot" for every individual's life that needs to be discovered before they can act according to His will, a view rejected by Smith and Dr. Meadors.
- **Reasoned Subjectivism:** A perspective, attributed to Gordon Smith by Dr. Meadors, that acknowledges the role of personal experience and discernment but emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, theological reflection, community input, and grounding in Scripture.
- **Christian Pragmatism:** Dr. Meadors' label for Gary Friesen's model, suggesting that it emphasizes practical wisdom and freedom in decision-making within moral boundaries but can lack a deep grounding in biblical and philosophical reasoning.
- **Imperatives:** Direct commands found in Scripture. Dr. Meadors notes that while these are important, their application needs to be understood within their original context.
- **Wisdom Literature:** A genre of biblical writing (e.g., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) that focuses on practical living, moral principles, and understanding God's ways in the world. Dr. Meadors emphasizes the need for careful study of this genre.
- **Providence:** God's active involvement and guidance in the world and in the lives of individuals, working out His purposes. Dr. Meadors criticizes Friesen for not adequately connecting God's sovereign will with His providence.
- **Noetic Effect of the Fall:** The impact of sin on the human mind and understanding, leading to darkened thinking and a diminished capacity to discern truth. Dr. Meadors argues this is not sufficiently addressed by Blackaby and Friesen.
- **Worldview and Values:** A comprehensive framework of beliefs and principles that shape a person's understanding of reality and guide their decisions and actions. Dr. Meadors emphasizes the transformation of worldview and values through Scripture as central to knowing God's will.

- **Proof Text:** The practice of taking Bible verses out of their original context to support a pre-determined idea or personal experience, a method criticized by Dr. Meadors in relation to the Blackaby model.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and practice of interpreting texts, particularly Scripture. Dr. Meadors emphasizes the importance of sound hermeneutical principles for understanding the Bible.
- **Exegesis:** The careful and critical interpretation of a text, especially Scripture, to discover its original meaning. Dr. Meadors highlights the lack of rigorous exegesis in some models.
- **Wesleyan Quadrilateral:** A theological methodology popularized by John Wesley that includes Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as sources of authority in theology. Dr. Meadors notes that the "experiential" aspect is the one most often scrutinized.

## **5. FAQs on Meadors, Knowing the Will of God, Session 16, Prominent Competing Models: Blackaby, Smith, Friesen, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions on Knowing God's Will (Based on Dr. Meadors' Analysis)**

#### **1. What are the main contrasting views on knowing God's will discussed by Dr. Meadors, and how does his own perspective differ from them?**

Dr. Meadors outlines three prominent competing models for knowing God's will: the "radical subjectivism" of Blackaby, the "reasoned subjectivism" of Smith, and the "Christian pragmatism" of Friesen. Blackaby emphasizes direct personal revelation from God, often apart from in-depth scriptural study, leading to a highly experiential approach. Smith, while acknowledging subjective experience and community, places more emphasis on scriptural engagement and reasoned discernment within a Wesleyan framework. Friesen stresses that God's will is primarily found in his commands, and where there is no command, believers have freedom and responsibility to choose wisely.

Meadors argues for a distinct fourth view centered on the application of a transformed worldview and values system, developed through deep and careful study of Scripture. He critiques Blackaby for undervaluing rigorous biblical analysis and overemphasizing subjective feelings. While he finds Smith's approach more theologically grounded and respectful of Scripture, he believes it still gives too much credence to internal guidance without a sufficiently defined framework. He agrees with Friesen's rejection of a specific individual will but finds his understanding of wisdom and freedom lacking in theological and philosophical depth, sometimes leading to a new form of subjectivism. Meadors' view emphasizes the ongoing transformation of the mind through Scripture as the primary means of discerning and doing God's will, particularly in areas where the Bible does not offer direct commands.

#### **2. What are the key criticisms Dr. Meadors levels against the Blackaby model of knowing God's will?**

Meadors strongly critiques the Blackaby model for several reasons: its "radical subjectivism" that prioritizes personal experience and direct revelation over rigorous biblical study; its assumption that God directly communicates specific content of his will to individuals; its tendency to use biblical texts as springboards for personal experiences and proof texts out of context; its downplaying of the need for critical hermeneutics and theological awareness; its reliance on internal voices without a means of objective

critique; and its ultimately undermining of sound biblical theology by focusing on experiential validation rather than the intended meaning of Scripture. Meadors believes this model leads to a self-authenticating system that is difficult to challenge and can result in misinterpreting personal feelings as the voice of God.

### **3. How does Dr. Meadors describe Gordon Smith's "reasoned subjectivism" and what are his main points of appreciation and critique of this view?**

Meadors characterizes Gordon Smith's view as "reasoned subjectivism" because it acknowledges the subjective aspects of Christian experience and the role of the Holy Spirit but emphasizes discernment through critical reflection grounded in faith and humility. He appreciates Smith's authentic engagement with Scripture, his recognition of the impact of sin on human discernment, his emphasis on the importance of community in decision-making, and his caution against proof-texting. However, Meadors' main critique is that while Smith affirms an internal guidance process, he doesn't fully define it in the way Meadors understands it (related to conscience and a transformed worldview). Meadors finds Smith's approach more theologically sound than Blackaby's but still leans into the subjective realm in a way that requires more careful definition and grounding in a thoroughly developed biblical worldview and values system.

### **4. What are Gary Friesen's central assumptions about knowing God's will, and why does Dr. Meadors call his view "Christian pragmatism" and offer significant criticisms?**

Friesen's central assumptions include the belief that there is no specific individual will of God to be discovered, but rather a sovereign and moral will revealed in Scripture. He posits that where God commands, we must obey, and where there is no command, we have freedom and responsibility to choose wisely, relying on God-given wisdom and trusting in his sovereignty. Meadors labels Friesen's view "Christian pragmatism" because he believes Friesen's emphasis on "doing the wise thing" without a robust biblical and philosophical framework for defining wisdom ultimately leads to a new form of subjectivism. Meadors' criticisms include Friesen's narrow focus on critiquing radical subjectivism, his failure to adequately address crucial issues like the noetic effects of the fall and God's providence, his lack of a deep unpacking of wisdom as a biblical and philosophical construct, and his limited model for moving beyond direct biblical commands to make decisions in contemporary life.

## 5. What is Dr. Meadors' alternative model for knowing God's will, and what are its key components?

Dr. Meadors advocates for a model centered on the application of a biblically transformed worldview and values system to life's decisions. The key components of his model include:

- \* **Deep and Consistent Study of Scripture:** This is foundational for developing a transformed mind and understanding God's character, commands, and principles.
- \* **Development of a Biblical Worldview and Values System:** Through rigorous scriptural engagement, believers develop a framework for understanding the world and making value judgments consistent with God's Word.
- \* **Discernment through Application:** Knowing God's will involves applying this transformed worldview and values system to specific situations, especially where the Bible does not provide direct commands.
- \* **Understanding Different Types of Biblical Guidance:** Recognizing direct commands, implied principles, and constructive reasoning based on biblical themes is crucial.
- \* **Consideration of the Church Community:** While not the primary source of revelation, the wisdom and guidance of mature Christian communities play a supportive role.
- \* **Awareness of the Noetic Effects of the Fall:** Recognizing that our thinking is affected by sin necessitates careful reliance on Scripture to shape our worldview and values.

## 6. Why does Dr. Meadors emphasize the importance of studying Scripture in depth for knowing God's will, and how does this contrast with other models?

Meadors emphasizes in-depth scriptural study because he believes it is the primary means by which believers develop a transformed mind, a biblical worldview, and a sound value system. This transformed understanding then serves as the basis for discerning and doing God's will, especially in areas not explicitly addressed by direct commands. This contrasts sharply with Blackaby's model, which prioritizes direct personal revelation and experiential encounters over rigorous biblical engagement. While Smith acknowledges the importance of Scripture, Meadors believes his model still leans significantly on subjective experience. Friesen emphasizes obedience to direct commands, but Meadors finds his treatment of wisdom, derived from Scripture, to be underdeveloped and potentially subjective without a deeper hermeneutical approach to biblical wisdom literature.

**7. According to Dr. Meadors, what role does "wisdom" play in knowing God's will, and why does he find the treatment of wisdom in the other models inadequate?**

For Meadors, wisdom in the context of knowing God's will is not simply spiritual expediency or subjective feeling but rather a form of knowledge derived from being saturated with a biblical worldview and values mindset developed through in-depth study of Scripture, particularly the wisdom literature. He argues that to act wisely requires an explanation rooted in scriptural understanding, whether direct, implied, or through constructive reasoning. He finds the treatment of wisdom in the other models inadequate because Blackaby largely bypasses intellectual engagement with Scripture in favor of experience. Friesen, while emphasizing wisdom, fails to unpack it as a robust biblical and philosophical construct, often resorting to a pragmatic "do the wise thing" without providing a clear methodology for discerning what is truly wise according to biblical principles. Meadors believes a deeper hermeneutical understanding of biblical wisdom literature is crucial for a more objective approach to decision-making.

**8. What challenges does Dr. Meadors identify within contemporary Christianity regarding the ability of believers to know and do God's will, and what solutions does he suggest?**

Meadors identifies a significant challenge in the "illiterate church," including an "illiterate clergy," where there is a lack of deep engagement with Scripture, languages, theology, and history. He believes this hinders the ability of both leaders and congregations to develop the transformed minds and biblical worldviews necessary for discerning God's will in complex situations. He critiques superficial Bible reading focused on personal feelings and word association rather than understanding the original meaning and context of the text. His primary solution is a renewed emphasis on rigorous biblical study and theological training for church leaders, enabling them to mentor believers in developing a transformed understanding of Scripture and applying it to the challenges of life. He advocates for taking seriously the process of mind transformation described in Romans 12:1-2 as the foundation for knowing and living out God's will.