

DISCOVERING GOD'S DIRECTION FOR LIVING

(WILL OF GOD)

Many Christian authors have penned their thoughts about how to find God's will. In the majority of these writings, there has been a blend of certain Biblical principles that have commonly surfaced. My intention in this study is to outline some helpful information and insights that have been gleaned from many of the "bottom lines" in this area of decision making and seeking God's way. This is a study of Biblical principles which requires your looking up the Scripture references in order to see these statements in the context of Scripture, as well as discover further insights and answers.

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

There are two aspects to God's will in relation to discovering what God would have us do in a given situation: (1) Has God already revealed in His Word that which would answer the question and settle the matter of "moral decisions", such as, "Should I leave my spouse?" (I Cor.7:10-15), or "Should I date or marry a non-Christian?" (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1), or "Should I steal or lie?" (Ex.20). In the areas where Scripture clearly gives us guidance through direct commands or principles, the matter is settled. If we violate these principles by our disobedience, we will suffer the consequences. (2) The decisions in life in which God has given no specific instructions: These "non moral" decisions are not clearly or directly addressed or settled by Biblical principles. This would basically be a choice between two "good" or morally right options, such as, "Do I buy the green one or the blue one?" "Do I eat chicken or steak?", or "Do I go to college or get a job?" You will not find such guidance in the Word of God saying, "John, you must marry Susan." Any decision that would not involve a clear violation of Biblical principles from God's Word or already revealed will, would fall into this second area.

This, therefore, would be the first distinction you would want to make in decision making. What does God's Word say? If it says nothing specifically, there would be many other principles that would be key in making that choice, such as:

- MOTIVE - Why do you want to do it? (selfish)
- GOALS - What are you striving to accomplish?
- VALUES - Who/What do I consider more important?
- PRIORITIES - Is God really first in my life?
- NEED - Is this a necessity right now?
- RESPONSIBILITIES - Am I faithfully fulfilling my present responsibilities as unto the Lord?

These six words are just a checklist to use as a point of evaluation. We will look at other key principles at a later point.

As we study this matter of "God's Will" from the Scriptures, we find that there is an extremely important distinction between "God's plan" vs. "God's wish". Blaine Smith, in his book "Knowing God's Will" explains it very well. The following is his outline:

1. God's plan is His ultimate intention for our lives - a resolute plan which we cannot do anything to upset. The Greek word here (sometimes rendered God's will in the New Testament) is boule (Acts 2:23; 5:38-39; 13:36; 20:27; Rom.9:19; Eph.1:11; Heb.6:17). It is important to note that we are never told in the Bible to seek a knowledge of God's boule for our lives. (Cf. the numerous warnings in the Old Testament against fortune-telling, e.g. I Sam.28; Ex.22:18; Lev.19:26; Deut.18:10-11; Isa.2:6).

2. God's wish, on the other hand, is His desire for our decisions, a desire with which we have the freedom to cooperate or not. The Greek word here is thelema, the word most commonly rendered God's will in the New Testament (e.g. Matt.6:10; John 1:13; 5:30; Acts 13:22; Rom.1:10; 2:18; 12:2; I Cor.1:1; Eph.1:1; 1:5; 1:9; 1:11; 5:17; I Thes.4:3; 5:18; and many other places). Whenever the New Testament talks about our knowing God's will for our lives, the word used is always thelema. Our responsibility in seeking God's will for a decision, then, amounts to seeking His present wish, not attempting to pry into His future plan for us.
3. In the light of this distinction we should note that the guidance which we receive from God for a present decision should not be taken as a revelation of His future plan for us.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GOD'S WILL

1. Many people expect a 1-2-3 step magic formula that will pin down exactly what to do in every situation. That is wishful thinking. It's also second guessing God and putting Him in a box. God is God! And because of that, we cannot force Him into our own limitations or circumstances for "convenience". Even though He's revealed much in the Word of God, we can't predict the future, or say what He has not clearly said will happen. The Bible describes Him and His will as:

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| Isa.46:9-11 | Ps.102:27 |
| Prov.25:2 | Deut.29:29 |
| Rom.11:33-36 | Ps.139:1-6 |

(for further study, compare Ps.25:14 with Prov.3:32; Gen.18:17; Dan.2:19; Jn.7:17; 15:15)

2. Another misconception that people have is that "God's will is too mysterious, or mystical. It's a puzzle or game - "guess which door it's behind." We can take great comfort in what the following verses reveal about the large responsibility that God takes in disclosing His ways to us - observe His promises:

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| Ps.32:8 | Ps.73:24 |
| Ps.23:1-3 | Isa.48:17 |
| Ps.37:23 | Isa.58:11 |

3. A further misconception is "You will miss out on God's perfect will for your life because of sin." One who would respond to that statement with, "Oh, then I can sin and still have the best!" is really immature and deceived. Gal.6:7 - "You will reap what you sow" in the "perfect" plan of God because He foreknows it and has decreed His purposes! His plan cannot be thwarted by human sin, but will be carried out in spite of it! Read Jonah; Ex.7:9; Gen.40-50; Acts 3:13-18. If God had a plan "B" or "C" for your life, then it would automatically throw off other lives into the same "alternate" plans. Poor God, frustrated and having to rearrange the whole course of history just because someone married the wrong person or went to the wrong college! Incidentally, this is a whole different study entitled "The Sovereignty of God". I can't repeat it here or in the course of space to do it justice. So you will need to continue this concept in light of that study.

4. Here are some other "confusing" statements to be alert to that have been given as advice for "finding God's will": "I don't have a peace about it." "Deny all your self desires." "God's will is known through your intuition and impulses." "Only when you're completely living for Christ can you discover His plan!" (Sinlessly perfect? How much is "complete"?). The place of "feelings", impressions, desires, intuition, and impulses are discussed at a later point. Suffice it to say that, "Feelings are misleading. God directs through rational thought processes."

QUESTIONS TO THINK THROUGH

What is God's will? Define it.

What are some specific areas you want to know God's will about?

Is your seeking to know God's will actually seeking to know the future? Or just to know how to faithfully and responsibly do your part in making the right decision?

What would you say the prerequisites and primary principles are according to God's Word?

What have you done to determine "what the right choice is" in the past?

What is "out of your control" about certain decisions? In circumstances?

What is your responsibility and God's responsibility?

Have I taken into account "all" involved? (money, others...) How do these create problems?

What Biblical principles will govern this decision?

What are my goals, motives, priorities, values, and responsibilities in regard to this decision?

What is presently in your life that could keep you from discovering God's will?

Is this a "moral" or "non-moral" decision? If it's a "non-moral" decision, ask these questions:

1. Does it violate any scriptural principles?

I Jn.2:15-17

Rom.13:14

Phil.4:8

Rom.12:2

2. Will doing it make me a better (or worse) Christian?

I Cor.6:9-20

Heb.12:1

3. How will my engaging in this influence others? (to be better or worse Christians)

I Cor.8:13

4. Will doing it bring desirable or unfavorable results?

I Pet.4:14-16

5. Is it offensive to someone or a stumbling block?

I Cor.8:9-13

Rom.14:21

6. Can you do it as unto the Lord?

Col.3:17

7. Can you pray God's blessing upon it?

Prov.10:22

8. Does it have the appearance of evil?

I Thes.5:22

9. Does it produce the fruit of the Spirit?

Gal.5:22-23

10. Would Jesus do it?

I Jn.2:6

11. Will God be glorified from/by it?

I Cor.10:31

These are not to complicate the process, but to invoke further perspective on many of the issues involved in decision making. These questions will also serve to provide a point of definition and clarification in your own mind when discerning what direction God would have you to go. God will confirm that direction to you with various principles which we will consider at this time.

PREREQUISITES FOR SPECIAL GUIDANCE

1. One obvious point in order to know what God wants a person to do is for that person to be God's child. One can't expect to know God's desires if they don't know God. (II Pet.3:9) The following verses give reference to how one becomes a Christian. (Rom.3:10,23; 6:23; Jn.1:29; 2 Cor.5:21; Rom.5:8; Jn.3:16; 1:12; 5:24; Rev.3:20; Eph.2:8-10)
2. Next we must dedicate ourselves to God, being committed to obedience to His Word.
Rom.12:1
Rom.12:2
I Jn.2:15-17
I Thes.4:3-7

This means we must be willing to do God's will as well as seek it! God promises to prove His will through my life if I'm willing to be obedient to what He has already revealed. (Rom.12:1 and 2)

3. Note some further prerequisites or conditions that scripture reveals. These are important for they help us to realize what God expects.

Ps.25:7	2 Cor.5:17
Eph.2:10	Ps.32:1-7
Prov.28:13	Prov.3:5-6
I Cor.6:20	Ps.18:20-32
Matt.6:33	

PRINCIPLES OF GUIDANCE

1. Observe from the following verses the importance of the Word of God in decision making. It is imperative to realize that the Word of God is the very revealed will of God!

Ps.1:1-6	Ps.18:20-32
Ps.119:25	I Cor.2:12-14
Ps.119:105	II Tim.3:15-17
Josh.1:8	II Pet.1:3

Whatever we decide to do in a certain situation, it should never contradict God's Word! We don't ever need to pray about doing something that God's Word already reveals as sin. And in the same way, if God's Word clearly tells us to do something, we don't need to ask God if He would want us to do it.

2. Note the importance of the place that God's Spirit has in guidance.

Rom.8:9
Rom.8:14
Gal.5:16,18

Eph.5:18
Acts 15:36 - 16:10

Does God's Spirit ever direct us apart from the Word? Obviously not, so we should be sure that what we want to do should never compromise or violate God's truth.

3. Observe what the following verses clearly say about God's will.

Eph.5:15-18
Col.3:16
I Tim.3:12

I Thes.4:3-7
I Thes.5:18
I Pet.2:13-15

Incidentally, if you are saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, and submissively obedient to God's Word, it is evident that God is running your life and you can then claim this promise - Ps.37:4.

You can trust your desires when you are delighting in the Lord! But let's go on with further principles that scripture puts forth for us to consider in this matter.

4. Now look up the following and observe how prayer is a part of our responsibility in being alert to God's direction in decision making. I Thes.3:10-11

Ps.5:8
Ps.16:11
Ps.27:11
Ps.31:3
Ps.25:4,5

Matt.26:39
Mark 11:24
Js.1:5
Js.4:2-3
Js.4:13-16

"Those who are in constant communion with the Lord are least likely to be troubled about His will."

5. The following verses inform us to seek the counsel of other godly people. These would include parents, pastors, teachers, elders, employers, friends, etc...

I Sam.3:1-10
Prov.11:14
Prov.12:15
Prov.15:22
Prov.19:20
Prov.20:18

Prov.24:6
Acts 15:19,22,28
Eph.6:1-3
Heb.13:7
Heb.13:17

In weighing and assessing their counsel, we need to remember the following:

- Is what they've said based on Scripture?
- Remember, they can't possibly see the whole picture or know all the facts.
- They may have answered from their own prejudices, values, attitudes, desires...
- The majority isn't always right.
- Before I trust anyone else, I must be trusting the Lord with all my heart (Prov.3:5-6).

You should not expect others to be the final authority in telling you what to do, because ultimately you are the one responsible to God for your decision. Others will give their insights and thoughts which may shed new light and perspective on the matter, a different angle that may need serious consideration.

6. In looking at the following verses, in what way do they show how circumstances ("opened" or "closed" doors) should effect our decision making?

Acts 8:5-8

Gal.6:10

Acts 15:36-16:10

Phil.1:12-14

Col.4:3

I Cor.16:8,9

Rev.3:8-9

Eccl.7:13-14

In weighing and interpreting the circumstances which are often times confusing, keep in mind the following:

- Circumstances can be interpreted 5 different ways by 5 different people.
- They are not necessarily the final deciding factor.
- God may give us several options, all of which may turn out.
- "Open doors" may lead to elevator shafts.
- Are your emotions confusing the issue? How?
- A "closed door" does not always mean NO! It may indicate "not God's timing", such as having children, changing jobs, moving, ...
- Weigh carefully the pros and cons, thoroughly and logically asking God for the wisdom.
- Have you examined all of the possible alternatives and options?
- Circumstances must be interpreted in light of the knowledge of God's Word and that area of decision that you have at the time. Also your relationship to the Lord. Motive and willingness to trust the outcome to God is important in assessing circumstances. Whatever would be "out of your control" you can confidently trust in the hands of God and His sovereign control. God may be seeking to prove Himself in some way in spite of the "obstacles." Ultimately, how are you going to respond if it doesn't work out the way you plan? Have you read Ps.37:5? Are you still trusting God to be God in spite of the outcome?

7. Scripture also indicates that common sense and consideration of our own abilities, limitations, training, personal needs, education, gifts, talents and desires come into play in decision making. This means we don't ignore our own logical thinking, nor do we fear God will stick us in some situation we will hate.

Ps.37:4

Rom.12:3-

Rom.12:3

Phil.2:13

I Cor.11:29-31

Titus 2:12

II Tim.1:7

In evaluating yourself accurately, ask such questions as:

- Am I presently cooperating with God's working in my life now? How?
- Am I developing my spiritual gifts in the body of Christ? How? (I Cor.12; Rom.12; Eph.4)
- What have I done in the past successfully, unsuccessfully?
- What can I do? What can't I do? What can I learn to do?
- Am I being a faithful steward of what God has entrusted me with so far?
- What do I want to do?
- Will I need further experience, education or training?
- What are my interests, desires, abilities, talents...?
- What is more beneficial for me? Others?
- What is my motive for pursuing this? (I Cor.10:31)
- Note the warning in Scripture about our desires. (Ps.106:13-15)

8. At this point, make a plan and get moving in some direction. You can't steer a parked car. Scripture says, "I was in the way and the Lord directed me."

Gen.24:27

Prov.19:21

Prov.16:1-3

Js.4:13-16

Prov.16:9

Note that James is not condemning the idea of planning but the boastful, arrogant attitude of doing apart from "if God wills it..."

Also, read Lk.14:28-32 and observe the wisdom in "counting the cost" before undertaking a task.

9. What about "impressions", "feelings", "impulses", "fleece", "urges", or "a peace"? We don't need to seek such supernatural or mystically feeling oriented criteria to base a decision on because those things change like the wind. For instance, a child certainly wouldn't have "a peace" about going to the doctor, so it's obvious that peace wouldn't be the basis of a decision. Peace should only be a resulting confirmation, having trusted the Lord to make the decision you did! Read Isa.26:3. Blaine Smith explains adequately and competently what Scripture says about these things in his book, "Knowing God's Will", which I highly recommend.
10. Once you are sure that what you are going to do is biblical, go ahead with your plan! You should never act until you are sure that what you are about to do is not sin!

Rom.14:5

Rom.14:23

And when you act on that decision, with the right attitude, according to these verses, the result will be:

Matt.26:39 (utter abandonment of self-will and complete surrender to God's will as in this example of Christ's.)

Js.4:13-16 "if God wills"...

You can trust God that He will not allow you to make a wrong decision. If you give Him the right to "veto your plans", "change your course in midstream", He will shut the door if that's not what He wants and redirect you clearly. Do you think for one minute He would allow you to make a "wrong" decision outside of His plan when you're trusting and obeying Him? (Prov.3:5-6) He is ultimately more concerned about us doing His will than we are, since He desires our fulfillment and fruitfulness.

CONCLUSION

I trust that this study has expanded your thinking into this relevant area of our Christian living. It obviously involves a lifestyle and not just a "formula" to apply to a crucial point of major decisions. Since God has decreed and ordained all that shall come to pass, we should desire all the more to fulfill our responsibility righteously and faithfully, so we can "fit" into His plan rather than "kicking and bucking" God like Jonah!

This study has attempted to blend together many of the common Biblical prerequisites and principles of guidance, as well as expose many misconceptions about God's will. As you realize the place of God Himself, His Word, The Spirit of God, your spiritual condition, prayer, the counsel of others, your gifts, abilities, desires, circumstances, and your plan of action in discerning God's will, remember that all of these things work together in achieving God's best for you and others. In light of that, God expects us to think through and evaluate by studying His Word and asking questions that will help clarify what's important and what our responsibility is. Hopefully, the scripture and the evaluation questions will help you to evaluate, interpret and "weed" through the different angles of each decision - not to confuse or complicate, but to clarify biblically and accurately.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Knowing God's Will, Blaine Smith (Inter-Varsity Press)

Choosing Your Career, Martin E. Clark (Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co.)

Decision Making and The Will of God, Garry Friesen

More Than Redemption, Dr. Jay E. Adams, chapter 3, "Counseling & Special Revelation"