

How Can We Know God's Will?

I have found the five tests in the short book by Fr. Michael Scanlan, entitled [What Does God Want? A Practical Guide to Making Decisions](#), to be very helpful when evaluating a course of action. When prayerfully applied in a spirit of submission to the Lord and openness to the Holy Spirit, these five tests are invaluable in helping discern God's Will. These five tests are the Conformity, Conversion, Consistency, Confirmation, and Conviction Tests.

The Conformity Test First, the Conformity Test, asks us to compare our proposed decision or action to the will of God for His people as revealed in Scripture, Tradition, and the authoritative teachings of the Church. This test typically involves reading relevant sections from the Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, etc. It can also be helpful to talk with a trusted and knowledgeable friend or Priest if there is any question about what the Bible or Church teaches on this matter and why. Any decision or action that is not in conformity with God's law and the teaching of the Church should be rejected as something not of God.

The Conversion Test The second test, the Conversion Test, asks if the proposed action will draw us into a closer union with God or lead us away from Him. Each of our decisions, actions and relationships should bring us closer to God. The whole point of the Christian life is to grow in holiness and to prepare ourselves to be with God in eternity. So, the Conversion Test is, in a sense, the only one that really matters. Conversion is the process of becoming a holier person through the decisions and actions of our life. Holiness, however, doesn't just descend on us like a cloud from heaven. We often grow in holiness, by God's grace, through trial and challenge. St. Paul describes what a holy life should look like when he advises Titus to "reject worldly desires" and to "live temperately, justly and devoutly" (Titus 2:11-12). The Conversion Test is especially important when we are presented with a choice involving more money, fame or power. We need to ask if this choice will lead me closer to God, or if these "worldly desires" could offer special temptations and dangers to our spiritual life.

The Consistency Test The third test, the Consistency Test, asks if the option we are considering fits the kind of person we are and is it consistent with the way God has spoken to me or dealt with me in the past. Is this course of action consistent with my natural talents and abilities? Do I feel that the current guidance has been communicated to me in a way that I have seen before, such as when reading Scripture, praying, or talking with a friend? We often find that God has a plan for our life that unfolds over many years. Therefore, we need to determine if the current possibility under consideration is part of the unfolding of a larger plan that the Lord has previously set in motion and that we have already determined to be His Will.

The Confirmation Test The fourth test of God's Will, the Confirmation Test, asks us to seek confirmation of God's Will, in part, by circumstances that are either extraordinary or make the decision possible. Circumstances will often confirm or deny the validity of the proposition, such as when "doors" open or close, resources become available or don't, faithful Christians whom we know and trust are supportive or are not, or possibilities turn into solid realities or fade away. Some decisions are confirmed after the fact when we see the "fruit" they bring in our lives, such as an inner peace and joy. Occasionally, the Lord will confirm a decision through an extraordinary sign. We should carefully evaluate unexpected circumstances and startling "coincidences" with the "eyes of faith." The natural appearance of these events can cause us to miss their spiritual significance, which can come from their context and timing.

The Conviction Test The final test of a decision is the Conviction Test, which asks if I have an inner conviction that this course of action is indeed the right one. The first four tests emphasize the making up of the mind. Conviction is the test of the heart. Do I just "know" inside and feel deeply that this is the right thing for me to do? We need to pay special attention to the difference between peace in the heart and conclusion of the mind. Both should both be present in a major decision, but they are not the same thing.

After we prayerfully apply the Conformity, Conversion, Consistency, Confirmation, and Conviction Tests to find out what God wants us to do, we can venture forth in faith and step out in courage, knowing that God's grace is sufficient. For, as Christians we walk by faith and not by fear. Copyright © Steve Hemler.