

How To Know The Will Of God



By John Edmiston

Chapter 1 – The Idea Of The Will Of God



John 7:16-18 MKJV *Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. (17) If anyone desires to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or I speak from Myself. (18) He who speaks of himself seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.*

Ephesians 5:15-17 MKJV *See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, (16) redeeming the time, because the days are evil. (17) Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Colossians 1:9-12 MKJV *For this cause we also, since the day we heard, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, (10) that you might walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing, being fruitful in every work and increasing in the knowledge of God, (11) being empowered with all power, according to the might of His glory, to all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness, (12) giving thanks to the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*

Romans 12:2 MKJV *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God.*

1 John 2:17 MKJV *And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.*

Mark 3:35 MKJV *For whoever does the will of God, the same is My brother and My sister and My mother.*

1 Thessalonians 4:2-4 MKJV *(2) For we know what commands we gave you by the Lord Jesus. (3) For this is the will of God, your sanctification, for you to abstain from fornication, (4) each one of you to know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor*

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 MKJV *(17) Pray without ceasing. (18) In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

The above verses indicate that knowing the will of God comes from a prayerful and thankful heart, a renewed mind, and a wise, circumspect and holy lifestyle.

The phrase "the will of God" or "the will of the Lord" applies at several levels. At one level it is close to the concept of fate "if the Lord wills" (Romans 1:10, 15:32) or the outworking of Old Testament prophecies such as the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:4).

At another level it indicates a divine calling on a human life ordering it into a divine pattern. Paul often says that he is an apostle "by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 2 Timothy 1:1).

On yet another level it indicates God's moral law such as abstaining from fornication, or an appropriate Christian attitude such as thankfulness (1 Thessalonians 4:2-4, 5:17-18).

The concept of the will of God also involves difficult and arduous obedience under trial for which we will receive a reward. This is something we should "stand in" and "fulfill" (Colossians 4:12, Hebrews 10:36, 1 Peter 2:13-16, 3:15-17, 4:2,19).

Finally the will of God has an almost mystical level to it, bringing entrance into eternal life and causing us to "abide forever" (1 John 2:17) as the true brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus (Mark 3:35) and makes us to be "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Colossians 1:12).

The will of God is known by the wise, Spirit-filled Christian (Ephesians 5:15-20), with a renewed mind (Romans 12:1,2), who seeks to know the truth so he can do God's will (John 7:16-18) and this knowledge is something that he/she can be spiritually "filled with" (Colossians 1:9-12) through prayer (James 1:5-18, Colossians 1:9-12).

So we see that the will of God is primarily revealed to us so we can become holy. The will of God is not mainly about success in this world, which may be included, but is tangential to the real matter at hand - which is making holy disciples of Jesus Christ. Nor is "the will of God" even about success in ministry - because that also can pander to our pride. Rather it is about becoming obedient, holy, wise and enduring saints of God.

The will of God is to be loving, forgiving, kind, thankful, and pure in heart and life. We get terribly mixed up on this point because our agenda and life-script is often of another kind entirely. Our agenda can be the Great American (or Australian or Filipino etc) Dream - a set of personal ambitions and desires, that we ask God to bless and fulfill. So when we ask God for which career to do we can be thinking "law , medicine or architecture" and may be unprepared to be called to be a faith missionary!

Sometimes the will of God is not about "which one" but rather "which attitude". God might not care much whether you live in this neighborhood or that, instead what He wants is a person who loves their neighbor no matter where they are!

I think one area that many people are out of the will of God is in the area of selfishness. Some Christians are very hard-hearted and stingy and proud. Such a person is so far from "the spirit of Christ" that they are practically in apostasy! (1 John 3:16-18, 1 Timothy 5:8). Materialism is causing many Christians to chase wealth and to pierce themselves with many a pang as they stray from the faith and the will of God (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Another serious area where people get out of the will of God is in wrong inner attitudes such as unforgiveness, bitterness, clamor, wrath and the desire for revenge. Impurity, lust, fornication, pornography, the occult and so on are also things that can lead us far from God's will.

Thus the will of God is not so much about making the "right decision" (regarding career, marriage, house, church and so forth) as it is about being the "right person". The Bible gives us guidance about whom to marry (a single person of good character who is a true Christian believer) and we should start there. We have no mandate to ignore this and say

" I had a leading to marry Bob who is a non-Christian". God never leads in contradiction to the Bible which is His Word.

So in knowing God's will we should start with what the Bible says. Then if further guidance is necessary we should pray for wisdom and guidance (James 1:5-8) and listen for God's wisdom as it is revealed in various ways. God may reveal through a strong inner impression, a dream or vision, a word of knowledge or wisdom, advice from mature and wise counsel, and sometimes through circumstances. But as we do this we should be asking questions such as:

Is this in line with the revealed will of God in Scripture?

Does it glorify God?

Is it making me a good person?

Is it bearing good fruit?

Is it something Jesus would do?

Am I walking in the light?

Is it pure, truthful and honest?

Is it in line with my calling and with the prior work of God in my life?

Is it full of quietness, confidence and rest - or is it noisy, clamorous, proud, striving and ambitious?

Is lust, greed, anger, envy or selfish ambition involved?

Am I being stubborn and willful?

Can I face Jesus with this decision on the Day of Judgment?

Submission to what God wants - so that we are truly willing to do it, is the biblical prerequisite for divine guidance: *If anyone desires to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine* (John 7:17). Doing God's will may even involve suffering (as it did for the Christians the apostle Peter wrote to) and be difficult and arduous (as it was for the Hebrews). This is because becoming a holy person is no easy task.

The will of God is the divine pathway toward Christ-likeness. Sometimes it is simple obedience ("be thankful in all things") while at others it may involve missionary journeys and divine encounters with high officials such as Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Most of the time God's will is more about who we are becoming, than about where we are living.

Chapter 2 - Being On The Right Track In Life



In part one we dealt with the general issues concerning the will of God in our lives as mainly being God's "moral will" which is revealed in the Scriptures. We saw the "making the right decision" was not as important as "being the right person".

With this much said I would like to move on to issues of the will of God in our life and ministry and the question most Christians ask at some point: "Am I on the right track in life?". The following seven points assume that we have consulted Scripture first. The right track is always within the bounds of the Biblical commandments!

Being on the "right track" should always help us to also be the "right person" - that is **a more Christ-like individual**. If we are worn-out, grumpy, impatient and unloving then no matter how noble the track we may be on, it is probably the wrong one! Whenever I get involved in administration rather than teaching I find myself becoming frustrated, grumpy and irritable. As necessary as administration may be it is outside of my gifting and the spiritual effect is that "the fruit of the Spirit start falling off the tree". Love, joy, peace and patience all seem to vanish when I take on such roles. However as soon as I get back to teaching the love, joy and peace return. Thus one sign that I am on the right track is how I grow as a person when I am doing that particular thing. This especially applies to "activist" Christians who tend to take on too many projects. You can reach the point where good things turn into bad things because they make you into a bad person - who neglects friends, family, worship and quiet times and where the fruit of the Spirit have vanished, and have perhaps even morphed into into the "results of the ministry". God produces holy joyous saints, not hamsters on a treadmill!

Another guide to the will of God is a **clear conviction and a sense of inner peace**. If something leaves you inwardly uneasy so that you always have to justify it and find excuses for it - then it is never God's will. What is not from faith is sin! (Romans 14:23) On the other hand we are told to "let the peace of God rule (as umpire) in our hearts" (Colossians 3:15). This means that the peace of God, that inner tranquility of a clear Spirit-filled conscience, is a good guide to where the boundaries of action lie. If we push those boundaries too far we find ourselves in inner discomfort which is God's way of alerting us to a line that has been crossed.

A third guide to the will of God is "**holy wisdom**": **James 3:17-18 MKJV** *But the wisdom that is from above is first truly pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* If the matter seems wise and peaceable and righteous and full of mercy and good fruits then it partakes of holy wisdom and is "from above".

By contrast James also writes: **James 3:14-16 MKJV** *But if you have bitter jealousy and strife in your hearts, do not glory and lie against the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom coming down from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. (16) For where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every foul deed.* So if the course of action springs from envy, selfish

ambition, strife, carnality, divisiveness, then it is "from below". This can easily sneak in disguised as a "business mentality" and completely ruin the ministry.

A fourth guide to the will of God is **godly outcomes**, otherwise known as "good fruits". Do you see people saved when you do X? Is the body of Christ built up and edified? Are churches planted, people disciplined and Christ proclaimed? Or on a more secular level – is a good worthy service provided? Are people helped? Is it constructive, good and helpful? This is why we have to think about our careers so carefully. Could you justify selling lottery tickets? Does that lead to godly outcomes?

The will of God for our life often contains a **consistent thread or pattern**, (which is our fifth point). I would be very surprised if God called me to be a stockbroker because so far He has always led me into a very simple and non-commercial lifestyle of consecration to the ministry. That is a consistent pattern for me over the last 26 years or so. God has a design for me which is "Franciscan", simple, non-materialistic, joyous and kind. I need to be able to practice kindness and tough commercial decisions are simply "not me". I am simply called to pray, think, write and teach. That is God's historical pattern for me. Yours may well be different. But by now you may have a sense of how God normally deals with you, and His will is normally found within that life-calling.

Point six is that **God's will is always freeing, and full of liberty and grace**. It is Satan who compels, hassles, hurries and nags. The cross takes away our guilt and what God has taken away He does not bring back! As the reformer Martin Luther once said "Hurry is not "of the Devil", it IS the Devil!". God does not manipulate, berate or intimidate us into anything. In fact He has called us to peace. If the only reason you are doing something is because you feel guilty, hassled or manipulated – then reconsider it immediately!

Lastly, point number seven is that **God's will always builds community**. God's will always leads to a deepening of love and fellowship because the central commandments of the Christian faith revolve around fellowship with God and man. If a building program starts tearing a church apart, then it needs to be slowed down or even stopped. Or if a grand missionary venture just ends up hurting all the missionaries involved then it needs to be revised or abandoned.

Proud, exclusive, competitive, isolating, divisive, angry or demanding behavior is never the will of God. These things tear apart the fabric of love and relationship that is at the heart of Christian fellowship and the grace of God. The end never justifies the means. We cannot say "this project is just so necessary that I don't care if everyone gets hurt in the process".

The question "Is this going to deepen my relationships with God and with others" is a vital one. No mortgage is worth the taking of a second job if the time commitment also means that there will be no time with God, family or church. No one on their deathbed ever says "I wish I had put in more time at the office!" But many regret not spending more time with their children or with the Lord.

Chapter 3 – Direct Guidance From God



In the first two parts of this series we looked at general issues surrounding the will of God such as conformity to Scripture and the outcomes of the decision for our sanctification. With that theological and pastoral groundwork established I would like to now examine direct means of guidance from God. The seven means of direct guidance from God I would like to look at in this study are:

1. Casting lots
2. Dreams and visions
3. Inner impressions and intuitions
4. Angels
5. The voice of the Holy Spirit
6. Illumination of a matter by God / Divine insight / Revelation
7. Prophecy

I will not include “circumstances” because I do not see that used as a positive, godly method of guidance in the New Testament.

Casting lots – was used by the 120 (in Acts 1) to replace Judas with Matthias, and is never used after that in the NT, the implication being that since Pentecost, guidance by the Holy Spirit has superseded this method.

Dreams and Visions: Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost quoted Joel's prophecy that “your old men would dream dreams and your young men would see visions”. Dreams and visions appear at critical junctures such as Peter going to the house of Cornelius and Paul going to Macedonia. Many Muslims are coming to Christ through such dreams and visions today.

Inner Impressions and Intuitions: The Holy Spirit is our main spiritual instructor (John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, 1 John 2:20,27) and teaches us in the “inner man” and this often comes across to us as impressions and intuitions from God. A bible verse may “speak to us” and we are thus intuitively aware of God's communication.

Angels: In the NT angels are everywhere – with Joseph, Peter, Paul and John. The entire book of Revelation is a tour of the future by the angel of the Lord (see the last chapter where he refuses worship). They lead Peter to Cornelius, advise Paul aboard a sinking ship and help Phillip find the Ethiopian eunuch.

The Voice Of The Holy Spirit: The phrase “the Holy Spirit said” and its equivalents appear often in the book of Acts (Acts 8:29, 10:19, 11:12, 13:2-4, 15:28, 16:6,7; 20:23, 21:11) indicating that verbal, propositional guidance, beyond mere impressions (such as “Set apart for Me, Saul and Barnabas for the work to which I have called them”) was received directly from the Third Person of the Trinity and was part of the spiritual dynamic of the early church.

Illumination Of A Matter By God: This is when God gives us a "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17) so that we understand those things that "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man...but God has revealed them to us by His Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10).

Prophecy: Prophets such as Agabus predicted famines, and the imprisonment of Paul if he went to Jerusalem Acts 11:28, 21:10). They also operated at a congregational level for encouragement and exhortation and edification (1 Corinthians 14) and some were in church leadership in Antioch (Acts 13:1-4).

Now the problems with these seven methods is that they can "go badly wrong" and many heretics and evil men have claimed to be prophets or to have dreams and visions! This has turned many people off. Now if you maintain that you have "heard from God" people are suspicious! The Thessalonians even got so wary of revelation that Paul had to tell them not to despise prophecy and thus 'quench the Spirit' (1 Thessalonians 5:19,20) . That is why I have laid the ground work of Scripture and sanctification before getting down to specific methods of hearing from God. The rebel will attract the false prophet while the saint will hear from the Lord!

We are now part of a New Covenant where the laws are not on stone tablets, or even in ink, but are written on human hearts through the Holy Spirit. In this new reality we can expect to hear from our spiritual instructor the Holy Spirit who will "teach us all things" (1 John 2:20,27) so that we even "have no need of a teacher" (as an intermediary between us and God).

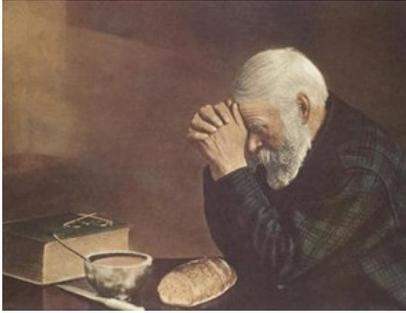
We are meant to hear directly from God, each of us, without the need of a "priest". God's language to us in a dream, vision or prophecy may seem strange at first but we need to accept it, write it down, then test it against Scripture. God even encourages such testing (1 John 4:1-4). No true leading of God will take us into sin!

Guidance sometimes came after worship, prayer and fasting (Acts 10:30, 13:2,3; 14:23) and indicate that some preparation is often needed. We need to get quiet before the Lord and listen for His will in an atmosphere of praise and thankfulness.

Much of the guidance in Acts was received "in community", in small groups praying and worshiping together. Thus one elder would balance out another and wisdom would flow out of the spiritual unity and harmony of believers gathered together. Guidance can be corporate as well as individual. We do not find guidance "by committee" however, or by the numbers or by the financial situation or by a majority vote (say on the admission of the Gentiles). There is always a searching for the voice of God on a matter, rather than for the ideas and ways of men.

God speaks, and if we really believe that God loves us, we should expect Him to talk to us directly.

Part 4 - Recognizing The Will Of God



This study will focus on the question: *How do we recognize the will of God when it is revealed to us?*

Page 44 of the current (March 2007) issue of Christianity Today has an article by an anonymous theology professor that shares his surprise at God speaking to him personally (about helping to sponsor a student's studies). The professor noticed a promising young man "X" who wanted to study music ministry at the expensive Christian college the professor taught at. The professor then prays to God asking that he might be able to help the student. God gives

the professor a great book idea and helps him write the book in two weeks flat and secures an advance ten times larger than normal. The professor wants to spend the money on a new roof for his house but God turns up and says "that's my money and I want you to use it to sponsor X". The professor struggles and God promises the roof would be taken care of. The professor's wife says "that God, the roof can wait". The money helps with the tuition, others also provide, unusual arrangements are made and X gets to study at the college. X is also mightily encouraged at how God has provided for him and the professor is shaken to his boots by the Lord.

Now this is "obviously God" at work overcoming human reluctance, teaching, encouraging, providing and the outcome is someone being prepared for the Lord's service who would not get the same education otherwise.

The professor was surprised to hear God speak to him personally. He thought he was having a "brain fit" but realized he wasn't because he was so reluctant to spend the money. This was "not his brain" doing the thinking – it was Jesus' brain! It was Christ within him popping up and saying something.

So one sign that it might be God's will is if it opposes the flesh, the ego and the desire for fame, comfort and self-promotion.

Galatians 5:16-18 MKJV *I say, then, Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

When you walk in the Spirit you are NOT satisfying the lusts of the flesh! God's will is not materialistic, fleshly or selfishly ambitious. I have never heard the Lord say to me "John make it your ambition to have an 84 inch flat panel plasma TV". God is not into "toys for the boys" or the fulfillment of carnal and sensual appetites.

But what about a new roof? Surely you need a roof that does not leak? The roof was not a wrong thing, but it was a lower priority. When God speaks He frequently rearranges my priorities from material to spiritual. My concern might be funding for my ministry but God's concern might be how anxious I am getting over it, or a project I should be working on instead of worrying about funding which God will supply in His time.

Ok if you hear a voice in your head that tells you to do something weird like "go and stand on your head in the middle of the freeway" - should you obey it just because it is the opposite of what you would normally do? No way! Everything has to be tested by Scripture, sanctification and fruitfulness first! That said, sometimes God's will is not what we first want to do. God is often trying to lead us to a higher level of Christian living and sometimes we are determined to live at our normal comfortable level instead!

Another aspect of God's will is that it often forms a surprising story that outwardly may look "normal" but inwardly is full of transformations. There are thousands of seminary students who get unusual provisions for college fees. But this particular provision truly shook this professor, his wife, the young student and the readers of Christianity Today to which the professor is a contributing editor. It was a small intervention with big consequences. I will tell a story from my own experience...

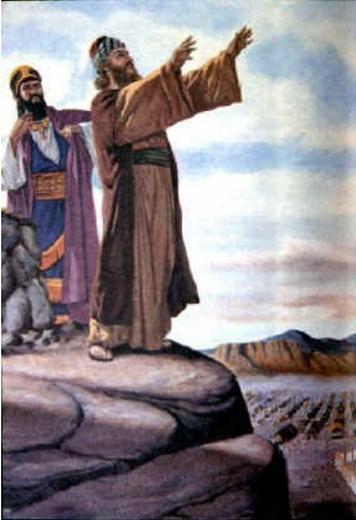
In 1988 I was working for a youth organization and part of my job was youth camping. Just as I was packing for a particular Surf Camp I heard the Lord say quite clearly "pack that black jumper" (In Australia we call sweaters "jumpers"). It was an old stretched, thin awful looking thing but I packed it anyway. It was a cool evening on the first night of camp so I wore it. Immediately I was latched onto by a group of five rather rowdy young girls from a particular school who were the "camp rebels". Black was "in" that year. The girls put gel in my hair, spiked it into a mohawk and adopted me as their leader. To cut a long story short all five came to Christ before the week long camp was over and a bible study group was started in that school as a result! Obeying God and wearing an old black sweater was the key to seeing five young people saved. Again it was a surprising story that outwardly seemed normal but inwardly was full of transformations. (By the way part of having these experiences is expecting them in the first place.)

This sort of leads to my next point - God's will is often part of an ongoing spiritual adventure of some sort. The professor's book idea, leads to the tuition help, which leads to a young man entering the ministry. The black sweater leads into the stories of five girls getting saved, which leads to a high school bible study and so on and so forth. Or Phillip meets the Ethiopian eunuch, who goes down and converts Ethiopia. We tend to think of God's will as "which car should I buy" which is probably a spiritual non-event that leads nowhere. God's will is not so much about us making a "right choice" and getting a tick on our heavenly score-sheet as it is about connecting human stories for the glory of God.

Finally for today - God's will tends to be humble, meek, hidden, quiet, peaceful, "mustard-seed", and "of the Kingdom". It is not about us being successful or famous but is about God getting the glory for changed lives. The apostles were not full of jealousy and ambition and set on being mega-stars, in fact they were "exhibited last of all as men condemned to death". James tells us that God's will partakes of this quietness of godly wisdom:

James 3:13-18 MKJV *Who is wise and knowing among you? Let him show his works by his good conduct with meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and strife in your hearts, do not glory and lie against the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom coming down from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. (16) For where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every foul deed. (17) But the wisdom that is from above is first truly pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Part 5 – Errors in Guidance



Today I will examine the issue of “guidance gone wrong”. This is a huge issue that stops many people from seeking the will of God at all and makes others skeptical of all but the most certain forms of guidance. This is partly due to what I call a Plan A / Plan B view of how God works in our lives. According to this view God has a “perfect plan A” for our lives, but if we “miss His will” at some point we end up with the “lesser plan B” and wander in the wilderness like Israel did for 40 years and die in the desert (or some other implied threat of a ruined destiny).

Let me blunt – this Plan A / Plan B view is completely unbiblical. God does not give the Devil that much power to ruin our lives! The problem with the Israelites was not “missing God's guidance” but rebelling against it when it was as plain as day! It was not a mistake in direction – it was persistent unbelief and defiant sin!

Mistakes are sometimes made in seeking God's guidance but God has a way of getting us back on track. God is able to draw straight lines with bent sticks and God can work all things together for good even when we really make a right royal mess of things!

First of all let's look at some of the reasons people make a poor decision even after seeking God's will for their lives:

1. *They have a strong compelling inner need that overrides everything else:* e.g. Paul deciding to go to Jerusalem to deliver his gift to the Hebrews despite all the warnings. It seems Paul had a strong need for affirmation from his fellow Jews that blinded him to God's guidance and cost him two years in jail. Other people have such a strong need to be married they ignore sound advice and suffer.
2. *Finances / Love of money:* (1 Timothy 6:6-10) by wanting to get rich they wander away from the faith and pierce themselves with many a pang – Judas, Annanias & Sapphira and Demas seem to fall into this category.
3. *Lack of trust in God:* God seems to slow or to unsure so they “go down to Egypt” and “rely on chariots and on men”. The Jews left in Israel by the Babylonians decided to go to Egypt and Jeremiah warned them it was a terrible mistake and that they would die there. (Jeremiah 42:1-22)
4. *Spiritual / emotional damage:* High levels of spiritual or emotional pain can cause people to be very erratic in their judgment, particularly after a divorce or other painful rejection.
5. *Being overly zealous for an idea, project, principle or ambition:* We can make “idols” out of our ideas, projects, principles or ambitions. The ideal can so overwhelm the real that people ignore warning signs and make foolish commitments that they would not otherwise make. They are too taken up with the idea and its inner logic to be sensitive to God's voice of wisdom.

6. *Expecting spiritual guidance when it is just a matter of common sense.* I know a woman who wrecked her car's engine because she waited four months to "get a sign" about which auto mechanic she should take it to. God also expects us to use the brain which He has given to us.
7. *Extreme distrust of the supernatural:* There are some folk who, if God appeared in a dream and told them something very important would put it down to "the pizza I ate last night". They discount anything that cannot be scientifically validated and distrust even their own sense of spiritual authenticity ("the ring of truth"). The Bible calls this "quenching the Spirit".
8. *Expecting total guidance:* In other words when they ask "what should I do Lord" they want the twenty year plan in an Excel spreadsheet, broken down into fifteen minute increments with a guaranteed happy ending. God's guidance is often much more immediate and short-term e.g. "Go up and join that chariot". God guides each one step at a time like the Israelites following the cloudy pillar one day at a time.
9. *They have their own agenda:* Some people have a definite life plan in mind such as: go to college, land a good job, find an attractive wife, get married, have kids, make a huge amount of money, become a bible study leader, retire in comfort. This can be "non-negotiable" for many people. In such cases they are effectively deaf to the will of God.
10. *Impulsiveness:* Some folk just suddenly "jump off the tracks" when they are suddenly and strongly moved by lust or anger. This seems to have been both Peter's and King David's weak point.
11. *Logic:* Some people expect God to think the way they think and to be calm, rational, logical and respectable. They are unprepared for guidance that takes them outside of that which is usual and normal – such as a prophetic vision.
12. *Stubbornness:* The Jews of Jesus' day were "stiff-necked and stubborn" despite and abundance of miracles. They simply would not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

This really just touches the tip of a very large iceberg. Basically we are frequently not as willing to do God's will as we would like to think we are. We have hidden conditions (on our obedience) that pop up about five minutes after the spiritual feelings have evaporated. God can tell us to do anything except if: it is difficult, involves learning a language or eating weird food, has any suffering or financial hardship associated with it, means I will remain single, and so on and so forth.

What should we do "the morning after" the dumb decision when we have messed everything up? Is someone who has married an unbeliever forever doomed to spiritual mediocrity? Not necessarily (and the answer in that particular situation is not necessarily divorce). You get back into fellowship with God by confessing your mistake and you work it out day by day from that point forward. Leave it to God to straighten out the lines. Do not give in to the Accuser and believe that it is "all over". Believe in redemption, forgiveness and grace and be simply obedient as best you can each day thereafter.

David, Peter, Moses and Paul all made catastrophic errors at some point from which they later recovered. God will not let your life be totally derailed unless you give in to your mistake. Faith in grace is the best way forward because we have a God who works all things together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

Chapter 6 – How To Avoid Making A Serious Mistake



In this study I will continue the topic of "mistakes in guidance" - with 40 principles on how to avoid them:

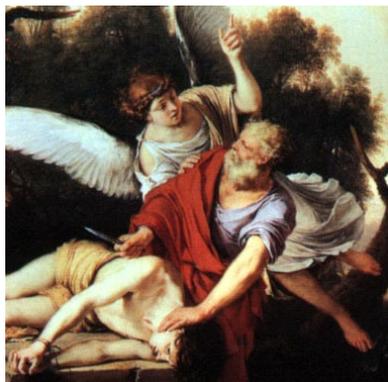
1. Pray for wisdom from God and for the filling of the Holy Spirit (James 1:5-8)
2. Surround yourself with good, wise people who can advise you well and then listen to them.
3. Become aware of your strong desires and their influence over your thinking.
4. Write down your decision and the reasons for it, then put it away for 24 hrs and come back to it and check it.
5. Don't give in to impulsiveness. Tell yourself "there is no rush".
6. Hand the matter entirely over to the Lord and to His sovereign will.
7. Wait until your spirit is calm and your mind is clear
8. Check with Scripture first, make daily bible study part of your life
9. Ask "What would Jesus do?" and look for godly examples in that area.
10. Make noble plans (Isaiah 32:8), that a saintly or truly noble person would do.
11. Never violate your conscience
12. Never do something if financial gain is the only reason that you are doing it
13. The need is not the calling. Do not feel that you "have to" do something because of a great need somewhere in the world. It is easy to end up very burned out and fragmented in soul if you do this. You cannot meet all the world's needs and fight all of its battles.
14. If you receive supernatural guidance such as a dream or vision, write it down and check it with godly, positive, faith-filled (non-negative) people who will help you to discern its implications for your life.
15. Do not share supernatural guidance with ungodly, unbelieving, skeptical, legalistic or negative people or with those who may be jealous of it.
16. Never give into the feeling that "but I just have to", compulsion is from the Devil
17. When in doubt – don't. At least check with someone else.
18. Trust your instincts when they tell you to "pause" and think it over.
19. Avoid manipulative people and high-pressure situations (even religious ones)
20. Write down all the alternatives that exist, eliminate the sinful ones, remove the foolish or unwise ones then pray over the rest.
21. Crunch the numbers and check the fine print before signing anything.
22. Stay in control. Maintain mastery. Do not let others control your decision-making. They may imply that you will be "nice" if you "just go along with them" but it is your life and your decision.
23. Have clear godly priorities and ask - do I really have the time to do this?
24. Know the difference between character and personality and have a healthy distrust of "charming" people.
25. Know the difference between facts, opinions and projections.
26. Carefully look at all aspects – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
27. Know the difference between inspiration and infatuation (with an idea)
28. Do not let pride and ego fashion the decision. Be prepared to be lowly and gentle.
29. If it seems rash and risky it probably is. Ask "who gains and how"?

30. Steer a steady course. Do not make major decisions without much prayer and consultation. Make the small "common-sense" decisions yourself and keep working on the main issue under God's guidance. "It is easier to steer a moving boat". For instance if you are seeking a job start by looking through advertisements and doing the footwork that you can do while praying for God to show you the job that He wants for you.
31. Follow love's leadings and do those things that build godly relationships.
32. Learn to distinguish the "voices in your head":
 - a) God's voice is loving, calm and authoritative, reassuring, humble, patient and wise and leaves a solid good feeling behind.
 - b) Your own voice tends to be skeptical, ambitious, anxious, impatient and needy, or is full of wild daydreams, romances and schemes for significance.
 - c) The Devil's voice is hard, powerful, insistent and accusing, proud, compelling or sometimes "sweet", persuasive and tempting. "Must, should, have to...right now"
33. Never make a significant decision when you are feeling harassed or are stressed, tired or hungry (A bit like the old adage "Never shop on an empty stomach").
34. Revenge is always the wrong decision. Pause for 24 hrs before sending an angry email!
35. If you are always "rationalizing" the decision and manufacturing excuses why you have to do it then you are probably trying to do something that your "better self" knows is dubious or wrong and it is trying to warn you.
36. Be prepared to "let go" of a cherished plan, idea or tradition if God has something better for you.
37. Trends are not necessarily from the Holy Spirit. Do not be blown here and there by whatever is "the latest".
38. Ask not only for the plan or the decision but the also for the method and for the means of implementation – even down to the very words that you will use. A great idea can be ruined by a wrong method of putting it into practice. Look for God's Kingdom methods of blessing, fruitfulness and multiplication.
39. Leave the long-term outcomes to God. Rest in His leading and trust in His hand.

Keeping a spiritual journal where you write down your ideas, prayers, insights, thoughts and decisions can also be a big help. It can assist you in reflecting deeply on things as we tend to go 'around and around in circles' if we try to do all the thinking just in our own minds. For those who are so inclined "mind-mapping" and diagramming can be useful and I personally recommend FreeMind software (its free) for this express purpose.

http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page (you will need to have Java runtime as well)

Chapter 7 - Supernatural Guidance



In this bible study I want to look some more at the area of 'supernatural' aspects of the revealing of God's will. Earlier in study 3 we saw the following seven means of God's guidance were found in the New Testament:

1. Casting lots
2. Dreams and visions
3. Inner impressions and intuitions
4. Angels
5. The voice of the Holy Spirit
6. Illumination of a matter by God / Divine insight / Revelation
7. Prophecy

At that point I just defined them and noted them and said that it was possible to end up in error but not to be afraid. The next three studies looked at recognizing the will of God, why we mistakes in finding the will of God, and how to avoid making those mistakes. Now we have covered that ground we can go back to the "supernatural stuff".

The whole supernatural area has been a challenge for me. My Christian life started off with a great deal of very direct guidance from God in the forms of dreams, visions, callings and even direction as to who to witness to and so on. Then many of my friends and co-workers became enthusiastic proponents of a certain book on guidance by a Dr. F. The book aimed to combat legalistic extremes in the will of God and especially the idea of having an exact "dot" that you had to hit all the time, and other terrifying notions. This well-intended book emphasized God's sovereignty and our freedom to choose, both of which were good in their place. But it also scorned supernatural guidance, said it was rare and pretty much "only for apostles and super-Christians at key moments in history" and was especially scathing of "inner impressions". The emphasis was on using our godly wisdom within the constraints of God's moral will. Any such decision was "OK". My friends would argue day and night with me about this and they were sure my methods of "direct guidance" was wrong. This created doubt and spiritual confusion that lasted for many years.

Sure God is not going to condemn us for a decision made using godly wisdom within the parameters of the moral will of God as revealed in the commandments of Jesus Christ. And yes the "dot" theory is legalism and bondage, and yes we should use our common sense and God-given abilities and not worry about which shoe to put on first in the morning! That much of what Dr. F. says is right (as far as it goes) and it sure might be a help to those people who are caught up in hyper-legalism. But guidance is not just about "being right" or "not being wrong". It is also about being in the Spirit, in the dynamics of God's love and revelation and that involves the aspects I spoke of in study three – dreams, visions, prophecy, illumination of a matter by God, angels, inner impressions and intuitions and the direct voice of the Holy Spirit.

As we come out of bondage to legalism and the law (are we right or wrong) we are freed to "walk in the Spirit" and to move in these spiritual dimensions. These spiritual dimensions do not replace the freedom to reason, they work in tandem with the freedom

to reason. So in Acts chapter eight when the Spirit tells Philip to go up and join the chariot Philip complies and he sees the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah. Then Philip's brain clicks in as he recognizes the passage, asks some pertinent questions of the eunuch and then explains Christ from the Scriptures! We need our brains and our bible training if we are to do that sort of witnessing well. But we also need the Spirit to show us the divine opportunity!

Paul was smart but Paul was also Spirit-led. Paul could quote Greek philosophers, speak to government officials and organize training in the school of Tyrannus – but Paul also had dreams, visions and visits from angels. Reason and revelation go together. Reason often implements revelation. If God says “have a crusade in Smithsville” then reason works out many of the details – but always with an ear open for any extra cues from God.

God talks directly with His children and his household who we are (Ephesians 2:18,19), has written His laws on our hearts (Hebrews 10:16) and has brought us into an anointing (John 2:20,27) and into a New Covenant (Hebrews 8:10,11) where the old men shall dream dreams, the young men shall see visions and the menservants and maidservants shall prophesy Acts 2:17,18). That being so supernatural revelation is our birthright! We are still allowed to use our brains and can still make a decision without an angel telling us what to do, but we have an extra source of knowledge and revelation that we can call on by faith!

Faith plugs us into the supernatural. Faith enables us to receive from God – including receiving wisdom and revelation from the Holy Spirit that builds us up and edifies the Church. (This is not “revelation” as in writing another book of the Bible but the opening of our eyes to the things of God, and particularly to those things needed to glorify God in a particular ministry context).

Now supernatural guidance does not make you special. In fact Balaam's donkey saw an angel! (Numbers 22:23-27) Dreams and visions can puff some people up (Colossians 2:18) but that is not their purpose. They are there to edify you, guide you and show you the will of God. God probably will not show you the name of the anti-Christ or the date of the Second Coming or the fate of the Middle East – but He might just show you how to witness to your mother-in-law or where to plant a church.

When we make supernatural guidance compulsory for every decision in life we end up in the sort of unscriptural legalism that Dr. F. was trying to refute, but if we throw it out altogether we end up with practical unbelief, which is almost as bad and may even be worse. Reason alone, without the leading of the Holy Spirit, tends to give rise to bone-dry institutions that just become cathedrals for religious egos to strut around in. On the other hand revival that scorns reason can end up in ineffective chaos, division and sometimes even in heresy.

The supernatural is super-rational not irrational. God never told anyone that two plus two equaled five. Logic, wisdom, reason and supernatural guidance are actually in perfect agreement! When Paul got the “Macedonian call” it was not irrational. Paul did not think that he was a poached egg or that the CIA was out to get him! Paul's rational mind was probably working on where to go next when God provided the answer by supernatural means. Dreams, visions and prophecy can give us answers that are inaccessible to us

through our five senses but which make perfect sense once we perceive them. If we keep Scripture, reason and supernatural revelation together as one whole (because God Himself is Scriptural, rational and supernatural) then we are very unlikely to end up in spiritual deception!

So how do we experience God's spiritual leadings? We can glean some clues from the New Testament:

1. By faith, expecting God to reveal His will to us when we ask (James 1:5-8)
2. Through prayer, sometimes with worship and fasting, always with thankfulness (Acts 13:1-4)
3. By doing things that require supernatural guidance (such as evangelism or missionary work) so that God "turns up" to help us. (Acts chapters 8 and 10)
4. By tapping into the inner leadings of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-18, Romans 8:4-6, 14-26)
5. Through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, tongues and prophecy. (Acts 2, 1 Corinthians 14)
6. Through other believers ministering in the Spirit (Acts 13:1,2 ; Acts 21:4,10,11)
7. Through the impartation of a spirit of wisdom and revelation (Isaiah 11:2, Ephesians 1:17,18; Colossians 1:9,10; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, 1 John 2:20,27)

Yes there are "risks" but I have dealt with those risks in studies 5 & 6, and they must not stop you from seeking God. Fear of the Holy Spirit is demonic. Keep in the Word, maintain your freedom to think clearly and logically and also call on God for the leading of the Holy Spirit so that you might know all the mighty things that God has for your life. There is so much more to Christian ministry than business-like logic!

Chapter 8 – The Process of Receiving Supernatural Guidance



In the last chapter we started tackling the thorny topic of 'supernatural guidance' through dreams, visions, prophecy, inner impressions, the voice of the Holy Spirit, divine illumination of truth and the ministry of angels. In this series I have spent a lot of time trying to get rid of the 'fear factor' common to most of us from a Western background. God does not mislead and when He invented these means of guidance it was not so that He could mislead us! Today I want to tackle the actual process of receiving such guidance, what it feels like, sounds like and so on and so forth.

First of all we see that divine guidance is generally straightforward and verbal and unmistakable. Let's look at Peter's guidance in Acts chapter 10:

Acts 10:9-23 HCSB *The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to pray on the housetop at about noon. (10) Then he became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing something he went into a visionary state. (11) He saw heaven opened and an object coming down that resembled a large sheet being lowered to the earth by its four corners. (12) In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. (13) Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat!" (14) "No, Lord!" Peter said. "For I have never eaten anything common and unclean!" (15) Again, a second time, a voice said to him, "What God has made clean, you must not call common." (16) This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into heaven. (17) While Peter was deeply perplexed about what the vision he had seen might mean, the men who had been sent by Cornelius, having asked directions to Simon's house, stood at the gate. (18) They called out, asking if Simon, who was also named Peter, was lodging there. (19) While Peter was thinking about the vision, the Spirit told him, "Three men are here looking for you. (20) Get up, go downstairs, and accompany them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them." (21) Then Peter went down to the men and said, "Here I am, the one you're looking for. What is the reason you're here?" (22) They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who has a good reputation with the whole Jewish nation, was divinely directed by a holy angel to call you to his house and to hear a message from you." (23) Peter then invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went with him.*

1. Peter is in prayer and receives puzzling vision accompanied by divine instructions in plain language:

"Arise Peter, kill and eat".

"What God has made clean you must not call common",

"Three men are here looking for you. (20) Get up, go downstairs, and accompany them with no doubts at all, because I have sent them."

2. This is then confirmed by circumstances – he goes downstairs and there are three men and they claim they have seen an angel and been sent to get Peter to go and preach in Cornelius' house.

3. When Peter later gets to Cornelius' house he preaches, they believe, the Spirit falls and they prophesy and speak in tongues - this being divine confirmation of Peter having taken the correct course of action. (Acts 10:44-48)

God is not being subtle here! God speaks long sentences in 'plain English' (or Hebrew) and Peter is left in no doubt as to what he should do. There is also ample and immediate confirmation of the guidance. Notice also that God does not give a long theological explanation, but rather just gives a plain everyday instruction such as 'arise, kill and eat' or 'go downstairs'. He does not answer Peter's question but just commands 'do not call unclean what God has made clean'. Peter is stretched to breaking point, taken way out of his cultural comfort zone and sent to preach to Gentiles in the house of a heavily armed Roman centurion. This is also typical of God's guidance.

God's supernatural guidance tends to come when our own natural brain 'just cannot get there'. Peter on his own would never have entered a Gentile dwelling, he was too Jewish, too holy, holy, and too deeply acculturated into his categories of clean and unclean.

Supernatural guidance came because Peter (and the early church) needed a huge push in a certain direction.

You see our wisdom is limited by our brain, our culture, our training and our circumstances and we have huge blind spots we just cannot get around on our own. Or we just plain lack the information we need and have no way of getting it in time, or there are spiritual conditions that we cannot see in the natural that are really important and should be taken into account. In any of those circumstances we need guidance to be poured into our spirit by God. Let's look at another example – that of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Acts 8:26-39 HCSB *An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to desert Gaza." (27) So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem (28) and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. (29) The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot." (30) When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading... (35) So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.*

An angel turns up in verse 26 and gives Philip an easily understandable instruction in 'plain English' (or Hebrew) : *"Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to desert Gaza."*

This is followed by a brief instruction from the Holy Spirit: *"Go and join that chariot."* Again it is an easily understandable verbal instruction in plain language without any explanation or assurance of results.

There is no way that Philip 'in the natural', using his own wisdom, could have known about the Ethiopian eunuch. Supernatural guidance of an obedient servant was necessary if the Ethiopian was to be evangelized. And just like the case with Peter this instruction was a bit of a stretch, pulling Philip out of a major revival in Samaria to go and stand at a crossroads in the desert.

In both cases once they obeyed the divine guidance and saw the situation they immediately knew what to do in order to preach the gospel. The guidance took them into a situation for which God had spiritually prepared them to minister with power.

Now somewhere along the way I got the idea that God spoke through feelings and impressions and little emotional nudges. But I do not see this in the New Testament. Rather I see God communicating with words, sentences, pictures and so on. The Holy Spirit seems to speak in plain, easy to understand audio-visual language! There is no indication that feelings (other than a clear, peaceful conscience) are a guide to action. In fact in Peter's case his feelings were objecting to the whole idea!

We need to open up to the notion that God will speak to us plainly and unmistakably in our heart language and tell us to do something that we may never have thought of doing. And He probably won't explain it either! (Do you remember my story of the black sweater that led to five young girls finding salvation?)

Often this supernatural guidance came during times of prayer such as Peter on the rooftop or the elders praying and fasting in Antioch or during times of active ministry such as Philip in the Samaritan revival. These were people who were 'praying always in the Spirit' and open to divine revelation and who were immediately obedient to it.

So let's sum this up:

1. Supernatural revelation tends to come when we are 'in the Spirit' in some way - through prayer or during times of active ministry.
2. It comes as an instruction that we are to obey.
3. It may not have much explanation attached to it.
4. It may stretch us out of our comfort zone
5. It may communicate information that we would not otherwise have received because of cultural blind-spots or physical circumstances
6. It is in plain, easy-to-understand language
7. It is confirmed by later events

Chapter 9 – Making Business Decisions In The Will Of God



So far we have seen that the will of God is revealed to us, by the Holy Spirit; through conscience, Scripture, reason and wisdom, - and through various supernatural means. We have also seen that our weaknesses can mislead us, and looked at various checks and balances in finding God's will for our lives. Finally the conditions conducive to receiving supernatural revelation were looked at – faith, prayer, fasting, worship, active service, and willing obedience. Over the next few studies we will look at the practical applications of this to career, ministry, marriage and so forth.

Joe Business arrives at his office to a pile of papers and decisions. Being a good Christian he wants to make every decision “in God's will”. However Joe knows if he prays and fasts over every single piece of paper in his in-box that requires a decision he will miss all his work deadlines and may well be fired. How then can Joe Business make a godly decision?

First Joe has to sort his decisions into the following four categories:

1. Routine decisions that he is well-equipped to make due to his training and experience. He just goes ahead and makes these decisions peacefully, faithfully and wisely “as unto the Lord” knowing that God has prepared him for his work.
2. Big, complex decisions that will affect his career, the lives of others, or even the business as a whole. These he brings before the Lord and waits for an answer, of course he also uses his wisdom, and training and seeks advice from others including superiors and expert consultants.
3. Pressing matters that are time-bound but not that important. These Joe commits to the Lord with a brief “arrow prayer” to heaven and trusts God for the outcome.
4. The multitude of small details that are not really his work but which come across his desk. Like Moses acting on Jethro's advice, and like the apostles in Acts 6 – he delegates these minor matters to others. Some he even drops altogether.

Not all of life's decisions come into the “prayer and fasting” category. I do not have a huge decision-making problem over which Christian cartoon to put in the church bulletin in a given week or whether to plant roses or petunias in the church garden. We are not robots, we can make those sort of decisions with our God-given brains. However we do it we end up with some decisions that are planned and somewhat routine, and others that we definitely need to bring to the Lord in prayer.

Delegation is also part of being a godly decision-maker. Mission agencies have been ruined by an over-loaded administrator who refused to delegate and got further and further behind so that critical decisions received minimal attention because everything, large or small had to go through one person. In one mission agency I worked with our team support levels were 24 months “behind”, that is donations from two years ago were only just being acknowledged and put in the books! This caused enormous pain, confusion and consternation.

Humility is part of godliness and the humble person acknowledges that he or she "can only do so much" and that the rest must be done by others. So Joe Business will clear his desk of the minor matters and them dealt with by his staff or by his executive assistant.

Joe Business also knows the value of having a daily quiet time where he can lay matters before the Lord in the light of God's word and the blessedness of keeping himself pure in heart and collected in mind in invisible inward prayer during the day. Arrow prayers darted up to heaven at odd moments help to keep Joe Business conscious of the Lord even on the busiest of days.

Ethics are a big part of Joe's business life and certain decisions are just automatic. Joe does no shady deals and is honest in all his dealings with the government. Eventually this pays off in less litigation and in a good reputation among his peers and his customers.

Sometimes Joe gets a good idea that he acknowledges as being "from the Lord" and he has become sensitive to this guidance as well as to the inner promptings that tell him when someone is dishonest or when something is awry.

Joe follows biblical principles of giving and as a result he reaps a harvest. He is guided by God's Word in his 'sowing' to those who feed him spiritually. He also blesses Kingdom projects and is compassionate toward the poor and needy so that God is also kind toward him.

Joe walks in the Spirit and does not listen to the flesh or to its selfish ambitions. Consequently Joe is spared from those follies that come from over-extending a business. Joe does not engage in squabbles or fights or office politics and so builds trust and friendship that stands him in good stead when the times are tough. Joe often listens to the Lord's nudges about how to treat others and is known as someone who truly cares.

Joe meditates on God's Word day and night and ponders how to be a truly Christian businessman and how he should lead, not as a worldly dictator but as a humble servant leader and Christian example. Joe does not exalt himself over others but humbles himself before the Lord and so is exalted in due time. As Joe ponders the Scriptures God reveals precious principles about life and godliness and gives him wisdom regarding his business and his leadership.

Joe attends Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International and there he has found some buddies that he prays with and they have covenanted to keep each other accountable. Sometimes he even gets a prophecy or word of wisdom and knowledge that he writes down and keeps in a notebook that he prays over and watches over in the Spirit.

Joe walks with God in all his decision-making, as one who fears the Lord; Joe Business is like a green tree planted by streams of water and prospers in all that he does (Psalm 1).

Chapter 10 – Making Relationship Decisions In The Will Of God



How do we know the will of God for our most important relationships – who we marry, do business with, partner with in ministry and so on? The Bible specifically warns us against just following our feelings or going on attraction or charm:

Proverbs 31:30 HCSB *Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD will be praised.*

In fact Proverbs warns us against associating with 14 different categories of people:

1. The violent, angry man (lest you learn his ways)
2. Criminals, robbers and bandits who lie in wait for others and get punished
3. The unrighteous 'wicked' who do not fear God or obey His commandments
4. The 'harlot' or immoral woman (or man)
5. The overly naive, silly, unwise and undiscerning 'fool' who just goes from one disaster to another.
6. The unteachable stupid and boorish person
7. The 'sluggard' or chronically lazy person & the unreliable and irresponsible person
8. The insincere flatterer
9. The nagging, contentious and perpetually critical wife (or husband)
10. The loudmouth, the inappropriate jester, the mocker and scoffer
11. The drunkard, or the modern equivalents - the gambler, and drug addict
12. The emotionally and spiritually out-of-control person
13. The mean, selfish and stingy - particularly if they are wealthy and controlling
14. The proud and conceited person who is "wise on his own eyes"

In addition to these 14 people who will mess up our life the New Testament adds at least 6 others:

1. The heretic, false prophet or false teacher (Matthew 7:15, Romans 16:17, 2 John 1:10,11)
2. Quarrelsome people who get contentious over small matters (1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 2:16, Titus 3:9,10)
3. The legalistic (as in the Pharisees) (Matthew 10:17, 16:6,12)
4. Position-seeking religious leaders (as in the scribes and the Sadducees) (Mark 12:38, Matthew 16:6,12, Luke 20:46)
5. The unconverted - especially as a close partner who we are 'unequally yoked with' (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)
6. Those who have a form of godliness but who have no power (2 Timothy 3:5)

It may come as a surprise to many that the Bible warns us NOT to have close relationships with these 20 kinds of people, in the case of false teachers we are not even to give them the time of day (2 John 1:10,11)!

You see if you marry a heavy drinker or a drug addict you are asking for a life of misery and if you take a gambler into your business you are just asking for financial ruin – and even embezzlement! And you certainly don't want the counsel of a false prophet!

In the case of marrying unbelievers I have written a whole article on it which lists nine good biblical reasons why it is a huge mistake and you can find that at:
<http://www.aibi.ph/articles/noway.htm>

The Bible tells us to choose our friends, business partners, ministry partners - and of course our husband or wife with great care!

Finding God's will starts with following God's good advice in the first place! Your friends do not all have to be boring - but they do have to be good, wise and reliable. If you are caught up in a friendship that is destructive, first go to prayer and ask God to 'break the soul tie in Jesus' Name'. Break the emotional bond that holds you to that wrong person (I am not talking about a marriage here). Start moving away from the negative influence of that person as swiftly and as decisively as you can - even if they are very manipulative and charming.

I used to be very easily controlled by forceful and highly manipulative people. I wanted to "be nice" and to avoid conflict and to be cooperative and kind. People readily took advantage of me and I never even knew how! Until I read Proverbs and realized God did NOT want me to 'just accept' everyone and to readily associate with everyone! The godly person was also supposed to be wise and street-smart about people and their intentions!

Now I can still be fooled, but I am trying to be wise! God also helps me by giving me the Holy Spirit to open my eyes to the nature of people. God helps me to notice things like certain facts that do not add up, or the people they hang out with - or do not hang out with (e.g. are they always surrounded by "Yes Men"). God can help you to make wise relationship decisions!

God also arranges 'divine appointments' where we meet someone who becomes a good friend or a mentor or a source of encouragement or even our husband or our wife. God will lead you to frank, honest, born-again, Bible-believing folk who walk in the Spirit and the truth. They might not be the most comfortable people at first, they may even be very plain and unattractive at first glance, but they will bring a mighty blessing into your life!

Look at 'the fruit' - are they a good solid Christian? Do they have the fruit of the Spirit - particularly love, joy, peace, patience and humility? Have they achieved something with their life or are they 'just a load of hot air'? Do they treat their friends and family with gentleness, courtesy and respect? Are they generous and do they enjoy being a blessing or are they stingy and materialistic, a lover of money and of self? Are they positive and full of faith? Are they wise and prudent or are they someone who you will always have to 'pick up the pieces' after? What are their actions and reactions like? Does their life line up with the word of God?

Finally do they fill you with peace when you are with them? Does it feel good and solid and affirming to be around them - or are you always on edge? Do they feel safe and good and strong or does something tell you that this is 'risky'? Do these subjective tests AFTER you have checked them out using the other criteria because our feelings can fool us (especially when we want them to!).

The people in your life can make you or break you - so choose them carefully and prayerfully and follow God's good advice in the Bible!

Chapter 11 – Making Ministry Decisions In The Will Of God



How do we know the will of God for our ministry? In some ways this is the hardest of our questions because there is so much 'static' and misleading information around. On one hand we are encouraged to aim high, for instance to 'have the biggest church in the world' (which common sense tells us only one person can have at any one time) or we feel we must go to the most remote and difficult tribe or the most depressing slum if we are to have a 'real ministry', or alternatively we must work all the miracles of the Apostle Paul.

This kind of extreme thinking, that virtue only lies at the weird boundaries of reality, makes those of us with 'ordinary' ministries long for something different. When we pray for God's will we hope that it will be something wild, adventurous and highly significant. And that can lead to errors – a church that is built way too big for the congregation, or an intense evangelistic campaign that simply exhausts everyone.

God's will might just be faithfully pastoring a Baptist church of 75 members year after year and caring for the sheep with love and care and the Word of God! One analogy that helped me, when I was living near the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, was to think of the enormous variety of sea creatures around the reef. Some are immense like the whales or the grouper, others are tiny gleaming fish that swim among the corals, and then you have the mid-sized fish, the bream and the mackerel and the Red Emperor. Now each fish has its God-give size and God-given nature and God-given habitat. I think much the same applies to our ministries. God has a plan for us, a size of ministry that we can handle and be faithful to, a nature of ministry that we are suited to, and a place where we should best serve.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 makes it very clear that God is mainly concerned with the quality of our ministry, much more than the quantity. We are to build with "gold, silver, and precious stones" which are generally smaller and finer objects than those built with "wood, hay and stubble". You can build a huge haystack in a few days – but it might take a year to build something in gold! But it is the 'gold' ministry that God wants.

This leads us to a key question we can ask ourselves: "What can I do that is truly beautiful for God, that is gold, silver and precious stones, that shines with Christ and will bring Him honor, glory and worship?" When we ask that question we tend to banish all thoughts of rising up in the Christian hierarchy, or of some grand boastful self-exalting project! The will of God is not about our importance, it is about God's importance!

The most beautiful thing you can do for God might be to start a prayer meeting, or help the poor, or to minister to the disabled or to teach bible students who are thirsty for God's Word, or to visit the sick in hospital and to pray for them and for their families.

I have ceased wondering why 'everyone' is not on the mission field and I no longer think that 'being radical' is terribly necessary. Each servant of God has their place and the vast bulk are 'in the middle of the Bell curve' so to speak – because that is precisely where God wants them to be!

That said we should take our God-given place very seriously and go about it with zeal, energy and dedication, with much prayer, and with much sensitivity to the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

God's will for our ministry is often grounded in our previous life preparation. If someone has grown up in a pastor's family, maybe the Lord was also preparing him for a life as a clergyman. If someone has traveled extensively and relates well to other cultures, perhaps they should be a missionary. If teaching sets them on fire, then perhaps they should be a bible teacher. God builds our lives and ministries brick by wonderful brick. And the newer blocks tend to be laid upon the old foundation.

God's will for our ministry is also generally something that stretches us out of our comfort zone a little! God wants us to grow in the process. We might not have to go and minister to cannibals, but we might be called to pastor a tough and difficult church or to work long hours or to teach courses that require a lot of new preparation. God's will is often something we know we should do, but are a bit reluctant to take on for some reason.

However God's will is never destructive. It does not tear our family apart or endanger other people. Extreme stress and extreme risk is rarely ever God's will and in most cases such risk-taking is generally more related to spiritual pride than to the Holy Spirit. (Remember In Acts chapters 20 & 21 the Holy Spirit told Paul NOT to go to Jerusalem, but he foolishly went and it was a disaster). God is wise and His will is generally a path of love, peace and wisdom.

This brings me to my next point. God's will for your ministry is always for an increase in love. If it is just a mere increase in activity, in busyness, in striving and in impatience and exhaustion – then you are just out in the field building haystacks all over again! Are the fruit of the Holy Spirit ripening on the tree? Is there much more love, joy, peace and kindness as a result of what you are doing? Or are the fruit going rotten and falling off the tree? Is love falling off and control taking over? Has peace become impatience? Has joy become hurry? Has kindness become high expectations?

God is Spirit and those who worship Him must do so in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:24) and that means that if your ministry is to become part of the true worship of God it will be deeply spiritual and deeply truthful and very Christ-like. It will be beautiful, faithful, precious, loving, peaceful, gracious and kind.

Now what can you do that is like that?

Chapter 12 – Making Employment Decisions In The Will Of God



In this final installment in our series on Knowing The Will of God we will examine the area of godly decision-making in the area of one's employment.

The first principle is that any legitimate employment will be ethical, positive, productive and useful; something that is a blessing to others; that reflects our original role as stewards of God's Creation - and which allows us to diligently apply the wisdom and knowledge that God gives us.

You can be a street-sweeper or a surgeon, a nurse or a nuclear scientist, anything that is good and productive and honorable. However some careers are clearly not God's will:

The first category are jobs that are clearly forbidden to Christians. These are jobs that are illegal or unethical, or which involve deceit, lying and manipulation on a daily basis. You cannot be a Christian burglar, Christian drug-dealer or Christian con-artist. Jobs involving blatant dishonesty, misrepresentation of products, financial short-cuts, tax-minimization scams, immigration scams and so on are clearly not for the believer. Some forms of deceptive multi-level marketing and "hard-selling" would also fit in this category. Also jobs that require you to deny Christ or promote idolatry such as working in a New Age bookstore or selling idols and witchcraft paraphernalia. If you cannot have a clear Christian conscience in your employment then you should not be doing the work.

The next category of "doubtful" jobs are those that involve pure buying and selling, that are purely speculative and unproductive – such as a gold speculator, foreign exchange trader, buyer and seller of commodities, or day trader of stocks. These jobs neither help people's growth nor produce useful products. They are not part of our stewardship of Creation and they are without compassion. No gold trader considers the poor! In Christian terms these jobs are sub-optimal as nothing useful is actually created. They just involve the movement of pieces of paper. Ezekiel 28 calls Satan the prince of trade and it was his ruthless violent trading that caused his fall from heaven. While the Bible celebrates soldiers, kings, fishermen, craftsmen, and small businessmen there is not a single merchant, trader or banker among the major heroes of faith in the Bible. It seems that you really cannot serve both God and Mammon.

The third category of jobs that Christians should stay away from are those jobs that while OK in themselves are part of organizations that have very negative impact on society such as cigarette manufacturing, running a liquor store, selling lottery tickets, producing banned agricultural chemicals or carcinogenic substances, 'sweatshop' style manufacturing, and firms that are very ruthless with their franchisees and suppliers. The Christian may be just a pay clerk - but they are enabling an operation that is detrimental to society as a whole. Alternative employment should be considered, if at all possible.

What then might the Holy Spirit want you to do? God was fine with Jesus being a carpenter until He was 30, and God has blessed people in many different kinds of businesses and occupations.

However God is wise, creative, faithful, positive and responsible and does high quality work, so therefore you as a His son or daughter should also aim to do work that reflects these characteristics. The first Spirit-filled person in the Bible was Bezalel who was the artisan who made the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. High quality workmanship was the result of Bezalel's being filled with the Spirit of God (Exodus 31:1-11, 35:30-35). And in Acts, Dorcas was praised for her handcrafts on behalf of the poor (Acts 9:36-41).

Whatever your employment it should be just, righteous and productive, and preferably creative in some positive way. You should be able to come home at the end of the day and be deeply satisfied with what you have done. You should feel that, in some small way, you have made the world a better place to live in. On a personal level your employment should use your abilities, talents and ideas and be something that flows from your own godly inner motivations. It should also provide for your daily needs.

You may be wondering 'should I be a dentist or an architect' or should I work for company X or company Y. By all means pray about it and seek advice, but also do your homework and find out about the company or career. Career guidance tests such as John Holland's *Self-Directed Search* can also be very accurate and helpful. The book *What Color Is Your Parachute* by Richard N. Bolles is a career guidance book written by a Christian minister who regards work as 'vocation'. It is full of good exercises to help you make wise career choices. I just checked and the 2007 edition is available for \$12 on Amazon.com

One helpful question is "Can I see my work as my ministry?" - many school-teachers, nurses, doctors, policemen and even car mechanics see their work as a service to others and a ministry to God. They are thankful that they can do their work 'heartily as unto the Lord'. When the work can be viewed as a ministry there is a much greater sense of personal fulfillment.

Make your employment a matter of prayer and do not let friends and family push you into a wrong decision. Much of your waking life will be spent at work and your work will even shape and mold you as the years go by - so be careful how you choose. Take pen and paper and think deeply. While financial considerations are important, ethical considerations and personal satisfaction with the job are even more important!

Ask God to show you yourself, your abilities, and your optimal direction in life. Let God show you what is holy, beautiful, good, wise and lovely. Seek to do that which is highest and best (Philippians 4:8) and which involves 'noble plans' (Isaiah 32:8). Try to untangle the motivations of your heart so that you follow the Spirit and not the flesh (Galatians 5:16-18, Romans 8:4-6). The best may seem impossible, but remember with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26) and you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13). Then follow that path and work with all diligence (Proverbs 10:4) - for diligence is part of what makes godly dreams come true (Proverbs 21:5).

Ask God to give you a personal vision for your life. He may just say 'trust Me', or He may reveal a long-term pathway for you, or even a calling to the ministry. Take time to fast and pray and wait on God. Even take whole day or two as a retreat. God has a beautiful plan for your life and He will guide you every step of the way as you obey Him and listen to His voice!