

**HOW DO WE DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD IN THE VARIOUS DECISIONS WE
MAKE?**

INTRODUCTION: In seeking to be faithful stewards in relation to family, work, church, and the use of our time and money, we need to understand how best to make decisions that honor God.

1. **We work out the privilege and responsibility of decision making with the conviction that God is guiding us according to his sovereign plan.**

Prov. 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.

Prov. 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand.

- 1) **God's plan encompasses the fortuitous circumstances ("happening by chance or accident [providence] rather than by design") within which we make decisions.** Ex. Ruth went to glean in the field that "just happened" to belong to a man named Boaz.
- 2) **God's plan encompasses the dark providences within which we make decisions.** Ex. Daniel not only had to live in pagan Babylon, but also he had to live in the court of worldly, arrogant kings.
- 3) **God's plan encompasses our unwise decisions.** Ex. Joseph blurting out his dreams to his jealous brothers.
- 4) **God's plan encompasses our sinful decisions.** Ex. Judah impregnates Tamar; David's adultery and murder in relation to Bathsheba

A Favorite Promise of Guidance

Jer. 29:11 *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

APPLICATION: Judah's obstinate sin led to captivity. Most who first heard this promise would never return to the Land of Promise. Yet, the Lord gave them this precious promise of divine guidance. We too can cherish our God's plan for our lives, even when we are facing large heartache, confusion, or having to deal with our own moral and spiritual failures.

"All the way my Savior leads me, O the fullness of his love! Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above! When my spirit clothed immortal wings its flight to realms of day, this my song through endless ages, JESUS LED ME ALL THE WAY! This my song through endless ages, JESUS LED ME ALL THE WAY!"

2. We work out the privilege and responsibility of decision making within the framework of God having promised to give us direction.

Prov. 3:5-6 *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*

⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Ps. 32:8 *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.*

APPLICATION: Some decisions are very weighty. Coming to a decision can be extremely difficult. The final responsibility, however, does not rest on our shoulders but on the Lord's. While he generally does not make decisions for us, he has bound himself by promise to guide our steps. We must resist the temptation to unduly rely upon ourselves ("don't lean on your own

understanding”). We must also resist the temptation to distrust our heavenly Father. One of the primary roots of sinful anxiety is the practical absence or smallness of our faith.

Matt. 6:30-32 *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, **O you of little faith?** ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and **your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.***

Prov. 3:5 **Trust in the LORD** with all your heart...

3. We discern the will of God in decision making, not primarily through inward prompting, but through what he has revealed by the Spirit through the Scriptures.

Ps. 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

Rom. 12:1-2 *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is **the will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

1Pe 4:1-2 *Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions **but for the will of God.***

APPLICATION: Nothing is more basic to discerning the will of God than understanding accurately and clearly the teaching of the Bible. This is why being in a healthy, Bible-centered church is so vital. This is why engaging the Word personally is so important. We must apply

ourselves to understand the perspectives and priorities, the commands and prohibitions, the principles and patterns, and the examples found in the Scriptures.

The first and foundational place to discern the will of God regarding family, work, church, and the use of our money and time is the Bible. We need to study and ponder the relevant passages.

Our feelings may be important in a given area of decision-making, such as deciding whom to marry. Our subjective impressions, however, can also be deceptive and defiant. They are only safe when evaluated through the grid of Scripture.

1Sa 15:10-15 *The word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. ¹² And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” ¹⁴ And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” ¹⁵ Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.”*

Q: What was actually controlling King Saul’s feelings and decisions?

A: The fear of disappointing people whose favor he craved above that of the Lord. He thus yielded to the desires of the people rather than to the command of God.

Q: What are 2-3 of the most foundational ethical principles set forth in the Bible? These principles, given as commands, should profoundly shape our understanding of the will of God.

Answer:

1) God is light (holy), thus we too must be holy.

1John 1:5-7 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Eph. 5:6-11 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

2) God is love, thus we too must love.

1John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Eph. 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

3) Treat others as you would have them treat you.

Matt. 7:12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

4) **What would Jesus do?** 1Pe 2:21 "...so that you might follow in his steps"

4. We discern the will of God in matters not explicitly addressed in the Bible by prayerfully applying principles of wisdom.

- 1) There are various matters that hugely define our lives in which Scripture does not explicitly tell us what to do. What vocation should I pursue? Should I marry? If so, whom? How many children should we plan to have? Where should I live? Where should I worship and serve in a local church? How should I spend discretionary funds? Etc.
- 2) Chapter and verse alone will not determine any of these decisions. One large factor, in our culture, will be the question of what we prefer.

Acts 4:34-37 *There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

1Chron 17:1-2 *Now when David lived in his house, David said to Nathan the prophet, "Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent."² And Nathan said to David, "Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you."*

1Ti 6:17-19 *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they*

may take hold of that which is truly life. [**NOTE:** The rich were not rebuked for being rich, nor were they directed to so give away their wealth that they were reduced to poverty.]

5. **Key Dangers to Avoid in Making Decisions that the Bible does not Explicitly**

Address (indebted to JI Packer, Knowing God, “Thou our Guide”)

1) **Unwillingness to Think**

Deut. 32:29 If they were **wise**, they would **understand** this; they would **discern** their latter end!

Luke 12:23-27 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ **Consider** the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁶ If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ²⁷ **Consider** the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

2) **Unwillingness to Think Ahead**

Deut. 32:29 If they were wise, they would understand this; they would discern **their latter end!**

Prov. 22:3 The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

3) **Unwillingness to Take Advice**

Prov. 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

4) **Unwillingness to Suspect Oneself**

Jer. 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Prov. 3:5-7 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, **and do not lean on your own understanding.**

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ **Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.**

Rom. 12:3 *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think**, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

From Knowing God: *“We dislike being realistic with ourselves, and we do not know ourselves at all well; we can recognize rationalizations in others and quite overlook them in ourselves. ‘Feelings’ with an ego-boosting, or escapist, or self-indulging, or self-aggrandizing base, must be detected, and discredited, not mistaken for guidance. This is particularly true of sexual, or sexually conditioned, feelings” (JIP, p216).*

5) Unwillingness to Discount Personal Magnetism

Gal. 1:6-10 *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

APPLICATION: No matter how charismatic or persuasive a given pastor, blogger, mentor, or friend may be, Christ alone is Lord. Like the Bereans of old, we must search the Scriptures diligently in order to wisely evaluate the teaching, counsel, or example we are inclined to follow (Acts 17:11). There is no ONE WAY of nursing infants, or educating our children, or

maintaining romance in marriage. We should be willing to consider those that have credibility, but we must exercise our own judgment before the Lord.

6) Unwillingness to Wait

*Ps. 37:7-9, 34 Be still before the LORD and **wait patiently for him**; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! ⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. ⁹ For the evildoers shall be cut off, but **those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.** V34 **Wait for the LORD and keep his way,** and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.*

From Knowing God: “‘Wait on the Lord’ is a constant refrain in the Psalms, and it is a necessary word, for God often keeps us waiting. He is not in such a hurry as we are, and it is not His way to give us more light on the future than we need for action in the present, or to guide us more than one step at a time. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God. When action is needed, light will come” (JIP, p217).

6. Key Questions to Ask in Seeking to Discern God’s Will

1) Is it lawful?

1Co 6:7-10 *To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? **Do not be deceived**: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

2) Is it profitable?

1Co 6:12 *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful.*

3) Is it enslaving?

1Co 6:12 *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.*

4) Is it consistent with Christ’s Lordship?

1Co 6¹⁸ *Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

5) Is it helpful to others?

1Co 10:23-24 *“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor*

6) Is it consistent with biblical examples?

1Co 11:1 *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

CONCLUSION: Our heavenly Father is committed to working out his holy, wise, and gracious plan in the lives of his children corporately and personally.

- This plan inevitably involves suffering in this present age.
- This plan always ends in glory and everlasting joy.
- Both now and in the age to come, God’s plan centers on his Son, Jesus Christ.