

Finding the Will of God

By Joe Zickafoose. Former campus pastor at Missouri State University and Missionary to Scotland; a man who loved students.

In *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer claims that finding the will of God is a problem for many Christians, not because they doubt that God guides His children, but because they are sure that He does. What worries them is whether or not they are receptive to the guidance that God offers. The apostle Paul speaks of finding the will of God in Romans 12.1-2:

Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

There is something very curious about Paul's approach to finding God's will. He offers no gimmicks or methods that will help us peer into the future or cajole God into giving us a sneak preview of "coming attractions." Instead, he tells us to totally surrender ourselves as living sacrifices to God. In humility we are to offer up to God our lives, our values, goals, and behavior - both present and future, as the ultimate act of spiritual worship. But Paul is mainly concerned about what this means in the present. It means two things. Negatively: that we will no longer conform to the values, goals, and behavior of the world. If your expectations of life are shaped by the world, how will you recognize the guidance of God when it comes? Positively: "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." By daily reflection and meditation on the Bible and by regular worship with other Christians, the Holy Spirit will transform us (the same word is used as when Jesus was "transformed" on the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew 17.2-8) in that our wants and attitudes will be changed. We will begin to desire what God desires. Then, Paul says, we will be able to discern and affirm what God's will is and we will discover that His will is "good, pleasing, and perfect."

Probably ninety percent of God's will for us is already revealed in the Bible. We generally fret the most about God's will in the areas of majors and occupations when we ought to concern ourselves more with God's will in our day to day lives. The Bible contains God's revelation to shape our values, attitudes, and morals. If you want to know God's will, you must be willing to do what you already know. When we are attending to these things we are much more likely to recognize God's guidance in these other areas when it does come.

When I was a new believer at Kent State University a brother in the Lord shared this bit of wisdom concerning God's will with me: "God is more concerned that we make a righteous decision than the 'right' decision." Errors in geography and matriculation are

much easier to straighten out than willful sin. Along with that I would say that God is more interested in a right relationship with us than anything else. It will not be hard for God to lead us if we are pursuing intimate communion with Him. If our #1 goal in life is to please God, all our other decisions will be shaped by that central commitment.

In times of soul-searching and self-questioning remember the principle of faithfulness: continue with your current assignment until you receive other orders. It is not reasonable to expect daily confirmation that you are on the right path. Pursue excellence in your current endeavor until you are sure that God is leading in a different direction. Self-questioning can be a stress reaction. If you are feeling some sort of impression that you should abandon your current pursuit while you are in the midst of stress, write down your impressions and set them aside until you have a clear head and can evaluate the impressions objectively. Decide not to decide until a more appropriate time.

If time permits, you might set aside some time between semesters to seek God for some specific guidance. Don't be pressured into making a major decision before you are ready. Remember: God leads but the devil shoves. J.I. Packer advises: "When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God. When action is needed, light will come" (*Knowing God*, p.217).

Fasting and prayer are appropriate. Not that you are going to twist God's arm to tell you something He would otherwise hide from you, but rather fasting along with prayer helps you to grow more in tune with the Holy Spirit and sensitive to the "still, small voice of God."

Solicit the prayers of others. Recently, I had a close friend call to ask me to pray for him concerning God's direction for his life. A few weeks later I happened to see him at a retreat. He told me that even though he still did not know specifically God's will beyond graduation, yet he had gained a great peace and confidence that when the time comes he will know the direction he should take and that he was learning to surrender his anxiety to God. I rejoiced with him because he had learned that the ability to trust God for the future is a greater gift than knowing the future.

Seek counsel that you trust. We have a rich resource in our brothers and sisters that we often overlook. If you are obeying the Lord in the area of fellowship; regularly gathering with a group of believers for worship and teaching (i.e. church and a campus fellowship), you have the resource of other people who know the Bible and your gifts and shortcomings better than you do. Even if you choose not to take the advice of your brothers and sisters, carefully weighing what they say can only do you good. A word of warning: Paul says that "each one should carry his own load" (Gal. 6.5, NIV). This means "the buck stops with you." It is you who must ultimately decide and then take responsibility for that decision. Remember: no one knows God's will for their whole life. Trust God to give you the guidance you need when you need it.

Questions:

1. Read Romans 12:1-2 again. Reflect upon the first two stages of development that lead to discerning God's perfect will and write down what that entails for you.
2. Have you ever stopped to ask why you feel so anxious about what you'll do, where you'll go, and who you'll be with? Are those motives trusting anticipation or covered in mistrust of God's goodness toward you?
3. Who's the person who could pray with you about God's will for your life?
4. Who's the more mature believer who can speak wisdom into your life about how God loves and leads us?

Recommended Reading:

1. Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*.