



Discerning God's Will

In his book, *Just Do Something*, Kevin DeYoung starts by posing a question. "If God loves me and has a wonderful plan for my life, then why doesn't He tell me what it is? Have you ever felt that way?"

Often we are paralyzed by all of the potential options we have in our culture today. There are hundreds of possible career opportunities. There are thousands of possible mates. It seems like having a plethora of choices would be liberating, but in actuality it has proved to be agonizing and debilitating at times. Because we know that to say yes to one thing is to say no to 100 other things.

As a result, we come to God and **we want Him to just tell us what to do**. And we want Him to tell us in a way that is unmistakable. If we are really honest, part of the reason is because **we don't want to carry the responsibility** of making decisions ourselves. We don't want to think we could have messed up our lives. And if God will just tell us, well, then it is His responsibility and we are just being obedient.

What if there is a different way? What if God's will isn't so mysterious?

Here is the big revolutionary part of this article: **Most of the time, God's way of guidance is not through subjective or crisis experiences. His usual way of guidance is through wisdom!** He guides us through transforming our heart and mind through the power of His Spirit and through the instruction of Scripture. Instead of just feeding us all the answers, He gives us His heart and His mind so that we can make good decisions in wisdom.

God doesn't expect us to grope around in the dark for some hidden will or direction. Our lives are **not a tightrope act** where we have to nail every step of the way or we mess up our lives and plunge to our demise. We don't see that in Scripture. Instead, we should start looking to our glorious and loving God, and know that He is the one who holds our future and we can trust Him even when we don't know what that may hold. What I believe God does expect is this: **He expects us to trust Him and be wise**. This means as people submitted to God, we can take a deep breath, walk in wisdom and trust God. This changes God's will from a perspective of fear to a perspective of faith.

So what about the places in the Scripture where **God shows up in miraculous events and speaks to His people in surprising ways**? For instance, we see **Paul** get a vision of a Macedonian man to go to Macedonia. We see **Peter** have a vision to go to Cornelius' house. We see **Philip** have an angelic visitation to reach the Ethiopian Eunuch.

You may think, "but don't you believe that God still does that?" Yes, I do. I definitely believe that the gifts of the Spirit are for today. But here is what you will notice as you read the book of Acts: **these people were not seeking visions, angels or other extraordinary means of guidance** when they had them. In other words, miraculous guidance was given during times when wisdom alone may not have led them where God wanted them to go.

Peter needed a vision to go against Jewish custom and enter into the house of a Gentile. Paul needed a vision to change his current strategy of going through Asia Minor. Philip needed a divine intervention to



get him to leave a revival to go into the desert to reach one person. Wise thinking may not have been sufficient to lead any of these three in the direction God wanted them to go. So, He intervened to get them to where He wanted them.

Here is what we can rest in: As we walk in wisdom submitted to God, if we need a supernatural event to fulfill something that God has for us, He will give us what we need when we need it. But this is not the norm and not what the people in the book of Acts were seeking when it happened.

When we face a decision there are three options:

1. That God doesn't really care which way we choose. Either option would be good.
2. He does care and He will lead you through the path of wisdom.
3. He does care and will intervene in a specific way if wise thinking isn't enough to get you there.

So, now let's look at how we can use wisdom to make decisions—**How does God guide us in wisdom? What is the path of wisdom?**

1. He guides us through Scriptures.

Proverbs 1:5 tells us that we can receive guidance from the Scriptures. The fact is, we know 99% of God's will for our lives. Throughout the book of Proverbs often uses the image of the path—going on the right path, **knowing the right** path—but every time it mentions the path it is speaking of **how to live morally**.

So, when choosing a major or career we look to Scripture. You are not going to get a lot specifically laid out, but you do get some principles. **Can you glorify God in it?** For most legal jobs the answer to this question is yes. Another question may be, "**Can I provide** for a family with it?" because 1 Tim 5:8 says, we should provide for our family. We also know that God cares about our involvement in the body of Christ—so we ask if there is a **good local church** in the city of your employment. These are some examples of some of the principles we glean from the Scriptures.

2. He guides us through our wise thinking and reflection. (Proverbs 20:5)

This can look as simple as pro/con list for what you are considering. As you make decisions related to a career let me tell you two things you should consider.

Desires of your sanctified heart: (Romans 12:1-2) Psalm 37:4 talks about this. As we delight ourselves in the Lord, it says that He will give us the desires of our heart. So, as we walk with Him, **He begins to download certain passions or desires**. And as our hearts are transformed, then we can start to trust our hearts more. When we think about God's will for our career, we need to pay attention to our desires. What we do **enjoy**, what gives us **energy**? Some people love languages, others business, others sciences, others psychology or kids. God may have wired or rewired you with that passion. We should pay attention to that.

Our giftings. (1 Peter 4:10) If we believe that God gives us all specific gifts, we should really consider what we are good at. When I was in college, I ended up being a business major because it came easy to me. Not only did I like it, but I got it. Now, foreign languages that is a different story all together. What are you good at?



3. God guides us on the basis of wise counsel. (Proverbs 12:15, 15:22, 19:20, 20:18)

Time after time, the Proverbs share the wisdom of getting wise counsel. In our individualistic culture, we often attempt to discern God's will on our own. We have this picture of going into our prayer closet, or even going on a personal retreat and discerning God's will, and then coming out and telling people what God told us.

This removes Christian community and mentors from the discernment process. Over and over again, we see in Proverbs the folly of not involving our community in our decision making. We make wiser decisions when we involve **people who are wise, faithful, and who know us well**. Additionally, we will have less angst and emotional upheaval in the process, because we won't feel like it is all resting on us.

When you do get counsel and wisdom, **don't start the conversation by saying "God told me...and I have a peace."** At that point, they are unable to give feedback. You are really looking for a rubber stamp of approval not wisdom and counsel. Instead, lay out the situation that you are considering and humbly ask them what they think. If the community that knows you and loves you cannot affirm your sense of direction, you should probably back off.

In his book, *When the Church was a Family*, Joseph Hellerman, talked about a great idea that his church implements. When they have someone in their church making a big decision, they get people together for what they call a "**wisdom council**". From their church they will invite a pastor or leader, some close friends, and maybe a respected older couple who have made a similar decision, and they get together for dinner. Over dinner, the people share about the decision to be made, and the wisdom council openly discusses the pros and cons associated with each option. Then they pray together. What a great way to walk in community and wisdom!

4. God guides us through Providence.

Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans of a man's heart but it is the Lord's purposes that prevail." There are times **God guides us by putting us in the middle of circumstances that makes it possible** for us to go in a direction. For example, we have sent many Chi Alpha alumni to the mission field in Cairo, Egypt and Granada, Spain. The reason why many of them went to these locations is because in the Providence of God they were in Chi Alpha, and as their hearts began to desire to give a year on the mission field they were exposed to missionaries in Cairo, Egypt or Granada, Spain. As a result of our partnerships with these missionaries, these students went to the field and served with them. It was because of circumstances that this was made possible.

5. God guides through divine intervention.

As I mentioned before, I do believe the gifts of the Spirit are for today and that God uses them to guide. However, I believe that it is not the norm and should not be the focus.

We should pray when making big decisions, but we don't see people in the New Testament praying asking God to show them the future. We should pray for God to lead us in wise thinking—help us to have proper motives; to not make decisions out of insecurity, desire for esteem, or love of money; to see accurately; to be honest with ourselves. We should pray for God to give us wisdom through wise counsel, to guide us by His providence, and yes, if that is not going to lead us in a place God desires us to go, then we keep our hearts open to Divine Intervention.



But what I often see is that people tend to think God only guides through this one means. The point of this article is to say no, **God guides us in many ways**. Many of us God has been guiding for years and years, giving us desires and giftings. He has been arranging providential circumstances and leading you through the Scriptures. He holds our future and yes, we can trust that He will intervene if necessary, but not as a default method.

Remember, when we face a decision there are three options:

1. That God doesn't really care which way we choose. Either option would be good. We are free to choose!
2. He does care and He will lead you through the path of wisdom.
3. He does care and will intervene in a specific way if wise thinking isn't enough to get you there.

With hearts that are submitted to Jesus and open to the Spirit, we can walk through life not full of angst, pressure and fear, but we can take a deep breath and by the grace of God we can walk in wisdom and faith!

Questions for Discussion

- Before reading this article, when you thought about making major decisions what emotions did you experience?
- How have you seen God lead you in the past? How did He do it? What step in the Path of Wisdom was the most influential?
- Is there an area right now that you are seeking guidance? If so, take time to walk through the path of wisdom and discuss it:
 - What Scriptural principles apply?
 - What do you discover through wise thinking?
 - What does faith filled, wise counsel say?
 - What circumstances are before you?
 - Has there been some supernatural gift of the Spirit related to this decision?
 - Finally, what is holding you back from making a decision? What do you need to know that will help you move forward?
- What was your biggest takeaway from the article?

Recommended Reading

Just Do Something by Kevin DeYoung

When the Church was a Family, Chapter 8 "Decision Making in the Family of God" Pg 163-181

