

What is God's Will for My Life?

*\*Intro self, thank Shanon, taking her ideas and applying them more specifically.*

A lot of us, because we love God and want to be obedient to him, are very concerned about finding God's will for our lives.

*What should I major in?*

*Should I be a pastor or a missionary or should I work in my field or should I be a stay-at-home parent?*

*Who should I marry? Should I even get married?*

*What should I do this summer? Next year?*

***Take 30 seconds at your table - what is one question like this that you would really like the answer to - a decision that you want to know what God's will is?***

***Write it down!***

How do we answer these questions? How do we know if we're following God's plan for our lives?

Sometimes I have felt, if I just beg God harder, seek his will better, am more earnest in asking, then he will make his will for my life clear. Because, WHAT IF I MISS IT?!

Do you ever wish that God would just tell you directly what you should do?

Well, I started looking at some examples in the Scripture of people who had this kind of experience. God spoke to them directly and told them what to do with their lives, or at least the next stage of it. Let's take a look at three of these and see what we can see.

Split the room in thirds - one thirds read Exodus 3 (Moses). One third read Luke 1 (Mary). One third read Acts 16 (Paul)

At your table, read the story together and answer the question at the end of it:

*Did these people earnestly seek for God's will for their lives?*

Exodus 3

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

<sup>4</sup> When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father,[a] the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

#### Luke 1

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[b] the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

#### Acts 16

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

[Answer: no!]

I strongly believe in visions and dreams and divine revelation from God. But if God has not revealed a clear direction to you, you cannot force him to do so. None of these people were begging God to show them his will for their lives! God simply interrupted.

Mary was just going about her business, assuming she would have an ordinary life. Paul and his companions were trying to go other places, but God told them to go to Macedonia. Moses was *never* planning to go back to Egypt, and not asking God if he should!

Also, literally millions of God's people have never had this experience. So we can't sit around waiting for a vision! And don't think you can't hear from God if you don't have a dream! God can direct you in all these other ways, and he has been doing for thousands of years. If he doesn't want you to follow the normal patterns, he can always give you a dramatic encounter to re-direct you.

Many of you have heard the story of how Brady was directed by God to come back to Western and devote his life to university students here. It's one of the main reasons that we are here tonight. He was driving on I-5, and God showed him a picture of Western lit up on Sehome Hill, and said "A city on a hill cannot be hidden." Brady knew that God was telling him to come back and see Western become that for the world.

I asked Brady, were you looking for God's direction? Were you earnestly seeking God's individual will for your life?

He said this:

*"I was not praying, asking, or wondering. I was waiting to apply for teaching jobs when the Lord's grace attacked me like Abraham or Saul or any number of other young thick headed followers who needed such a clear awakening."*

The truth is, God may give any of us these kinds of experiences, but if you haven't had one, it's OK. I haven't either! Does this mean that I'm stuck? That I can't know God's will for my life? That I'm in danger of stepping outside of it?

I have some good news - we are not the first people to be concerned about this question. In fact, it's not even just a Christian question. (Good news for you if you're here and not a "Christian" - all kinds of people have asked this question).

I was surprised to learn that when we examine ancient texts, as in texts from several thousand years ago, nearly 80% of them have to do with this question! 80%!

Ancient societies were obsessed with finding the will of their god or gods. So the vast majority of what we've found is specific instructions about how to do this. I read some pretty cool stuff involving sheep livers.

But...what does one ancient text, the Bible, have to say about the subject? What has our God revealed to us about how to seek his will, and how we should think about it?

We're gonna look at a lot of Scriptures for the rest of the evening and we're going to discover quite a variety of commands and experiences to help us answer this question.

This leads us to step 1 to finding the guidance of God:

### **Step 1: Read Your Bible**

You can know the will of God! The Bible actually does tell you God's will for your life! God is not hiding his will from you! He has given you all that you need to make these big decisions. I will show you how.

Ephesians 1

With all wisdom and understanding,<sup>9</sup> **he[d] made known to us the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to **bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.**

God has already told you his will! His will is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

This is not a cop-out - this is what God has told us. Don't be dismissive of this - this is real!

1 Thessalonians 4

**3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified:** that you should **avoid sexual immorality**;  
**4** that each of you should **learn to control your own body[a] in a way that is holy and honorable**,<sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God;<sup>6</sup> and that in this matter **no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.[b]**

Eph 5:15-18

**15** Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but **understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine**, which leads to debauchery. Instead, **be filled with the Spirit**, **19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks** to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 4:12

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in **all the will of God, mature and fully assured.**

1 Thessalonians 5

**16 Rejoice** always, **17 pray** continually, **18 give thanks** in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 2:13-15

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority,<sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For **it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.**

I could talk for an hour about each of these, but instead I want you to go home and read these on your own in the next few days. Ask yourself, "Am I following God's will?" Write down your answer to each of these verses individually. Before you ask God to help you choose your major, or your job, or your spouse, it would be good for you to figure out if you even obey what God has already told you! Otherwise, what's the point of asking for more of God's will, right?

OK, that's a long enough stretch of me talking - talk at your tables again.

So here's a question: Does God even have an individual will or plan for my life?

*[Discuss at your table: do you think God has an individual, specific plan for your life?]*

So, does God have an individual plan for your life?

Answer: I don't know.

You are really getting your money's worth tonight!

The fact is, if you look at all God's people in the Bible, and in history since then, all the people who have been devoted to God and his kingdom...you'll find a variety of answers to this question. Some would clearly answer yes: Moses, Mary, Paul (only sometimes, as we'll see) jump to mind as a good examples.

But, the reality is, the vast majority of God's people throughout history have *not* had this experience. Did they miss it? Was God trying to get their attention and they were distracted?

I think not. Here's why: as I read through the Scripture, I don't see believers being instructed to seek God's individual will for their lives.

**Look at these Scriptures: what verb do you think goes in the blank?**

**Grammar test! What is a verb?**

**Is it seek? Find? Discover? Discern?**

**No. It's do.**

Heb 10:36

You need to persevere so that when you have **done** the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Heb 13:20-21

20 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for **doing** his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Eph 6:6

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, **doing** the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free.

1 Jn 2:17

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever **does** the will of God lives forever.

***The will of God is not something you find. It's something you DO!***

Obedience is the key! The fact is: God has revealed his will to us quite clearly, and we are called to obey it.

So how does this work when you face a major decision?

Consider this: you might already have the answer. Listen, if you are in a dating relationship with someone and they take advantage of you in any way - emotionally manipulative, sexually pressuring, drawing you away from other healthy friendships... read 1 Thessalonians 4:5. [Read it]. I think it is clear that God doesn't want you to marry that person. You don't have to keep on praying about it and asking God for direction. You need to *do* the will of God, if you are committed to living under his authority (the best way to live). That doesn't mean it won't be hard, but it is what needs to be done.

That's just one example - there are thousands of ways you could apply this, and thousands of other stories and commands and poems of Scripture that will help you know God's will.

Last thing on this - the Bible is much richer if you know what you're doing! I can't go into it now, but learning how to read the Bible, how to discover what the original authors meant when they said what they said, is so important. It's totally doable, and it will enrich your life forever, guaranteed. We did a Pizza Theology on this in the fall, which you can get a recording of. SICM students, we're gonna talk about this tomorrow! (Everyone else, come to SICM in June!).

So, this is great. But if we are honest, we know that we sometimes have to make decisions that the Scripture does not give us clarity about.

Example: what if I'm dating someone who *doesn't* take advantage of me? Does that mean I should marry them? If you're single, I certainly hope there is more than one person out there who won't take advantage of you. CCF is a healthier community than that. So how do I know if it's this girl or that girl? This guy or that guy?

Step 1 = read your Bible.

As we read our Bibles, we find that it gives us other tools as well. So, Let's see what other tools we have available to us.

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Sometimes the Scriptures don't tell us exactly what to do when we're facing a decision. Let's do a little case study - you'll have to answer a question, so pay attention.

"Jack and Betty" [these are top secret code names] are campus pastors at Western Washington University. After a long day of staff meetings, they don't really want to go home and cook dinner. "Betty" says, "Should we go to Boomer's for dinner? Oh, dang it, I left the blue book at home - we don't have any coupons."

"Jack" replies, "Maybe there are some at the office. How about this, if we there's a blue book at the office, we know it's God's will for us to go to Boomer's tonight. I'm teaching at Pizza Theology about finding the will of God, so I'm pretty much an expert about this."

They go to the office, there are no coupons, so they go home and make taco salad instead. [True story].

[If there are coupon books at the office, then it is God's will for us to eat there].

*Are you confident that "Jack and Betty" actually understood God's will? How do you know?*

## **Step 2: develop wisdom**

Let's read a couple more verses of Scripture.

Proverbs 4:7

Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get[\[a\]](#) wisdom.

Though it cost all you have,[\[b\]](#) get understanding.

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Now, many of us have read this verse and thought, “Aha! When I need to know God’s individual direction for my life, I should ask him. I don’t know who I should marry, or what job I should take - I lack wisdom, so I need to ask God.”

But James actually, later on in the letter, defines what he means by wisdom.

James 3

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Wisdom is a character trait. It’s not a sudden knowledge of what to do when you have no idea. Wisdom brings humility, purity, peace, mercy, sincerity, even submission. It permeates who you are deep inside. It comes with time, discipline, and prayer.

Wisdom is a way of life, not guidance for a particular decision. When James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom”, he’s not saying, “if any of you are confused about a major decision.” He’s saying, “If any of you find yourselves envious and selfishly ambitious, if any of you lack purity, peace, submissiveness, mercy, and sincerity...ask God! He will change reshape your character and you will become wise in the way of God, not of this corrupted world. This kind of wisdom is brought to our lives through prayer, through asking God for it.

What we want is a shortcut. “Lord, if the coupons are there, then we know you want us to go to Boomers” is an immature way of making decisions. I’m looking for an easy way to decide. God wants to develop my character - he wants me to think about how I spend my money, what kind of food I put in my body, and when, and how much. These decisions require wisdom - good character that God is shaping in me.

The good news is that I don’t have to obsess about whether or not to eat at Boomers! I already have grown in my character, in my maturity, I’ve made decisions about the kind of person I’m going to be. If I’ve grown in the the depth of my character, in wisdom gained over time with the Lord, then I am free to make the decision about going to Boomers.

Takes time. We want to instantly know the will of God, but that’s not how character works. Ask God to make you wise! The better your character is, the more confident you can be that you *want* what God wants. Remember what Shanon said about “proximity”? You will grow wise as you are close to the all-wise God. Your character will be shaped by him, deep down inside, so you can make good decisions.



Seek wisdom. Develop right character, and you will make good decisions about your future. That is the work God wants to do in you. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Get wisdom.

So, step 1 = read your Bible

Step 2 = develop wisdom

The book of the Bible that talks the most about wisdom is Proverbs. So, for the next step, I want us to look at several Proverbs that will guide us in these kinds of decisions. This will lead us to step 3.

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Prov 1:5, 11:14, 12:15, 13:10, 15:22, 19:20, 20:18, 27:9

let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance—

For lack of guidance a nation falls,  
but victory is won through many advisers.

The way of fools seems right to them,  
but the wise listen to advice.

Where there is strife, there is pride,  
but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

Plans fail for lack of counsel,  
but with many advisers they succeed.

Listen to advice and accept discipline,  
and at the end you will be counted among the wise.

Plans are established by seeking advice;  
so if you wage war, obtain guidance.

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart,  
and the pleasantness of a friend  
springs from their heartfelt advice.

What is the main message of these Proverbs?

**Step 3 = Get advice!**

Seek counsel!

When should I ask for advice about a major decision?

Well, there are two pitfalls that I've observed when it comes to asking for advice.

1. Asking advice before thinking for yourself. You must begin with Scripture and developing the character of wisdom.

Why?

How will you know whether the advice is sound if you aren't rooted in Scripture?

God's will is that you become mature! If you ask for advice hoping for a shortcut, hoping to not have to make a decision and live with the consequences, you are working against God's will for your life.

Don't be too dependent! This is step 3 for a reason.

2. Second danger: asking advice after making the decision already. This is when we ask for advice to be affirmed in what we already think. Example: I've decided to live in Birnam Wood next year. What do you think about that?

This is not seeking wise counsel. This is cheating. It has the appearance of wisdom, but actually it isn't. In case you're wondering, this is why we offer Pre-Engagement counseling. A lot of people think that's weird, but we think it's really wise. Once you're engaged, you've made a decision that is quite difficult to undo. It's hard to truly seek counsel about your relationship if you've already made a decision. So, for most people most of the time, we recommend getting this counsel before you get engaged.

Don't be too independent!

So, seek wise counsel after you look at the Scripture, develop your own heart for the Lord, but before you actually decide on these major decisions.

*I minute at your table: which is your tendency? Are you more in danger of asking too soon (hoping for a shortcut) or asking too late (hoping to be affirmed)?*

[Specifically for a future calling - being sent a missionary]

*Acts 13:1-4*

*1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

*4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.*

This example is instructive for a couple reasons.

1. This is Paul's first missionary calling. So he's still pretty young, and young in faith. Much like most of us.
2. Notice that they heard the mysterious voice of God together in community. Paul didn't hear it alone and then just go off by himself.
3. Note how they were sent by the community, which is apparently synonymous with being sent by the Holy Spirit. For those of you who think God has a particular calling on your life, even a mysterious, miraculous type of calling...make sure you are sent by a community. Even the Apostle Paul did this, and I think it is wise to see ourselves that way too.

### *1 Kings 12*

*Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone there to make him king. 2 When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from[a] Egypt. 3 So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: 4 "Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you."*

*5 Rehoboam answered, "Go away for three days and then come back to me." So the people went away.*

*6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked.*

*7 They replied, "If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants."*

*8 But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. 9 He asked them, "What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, 'Lighten the yoke your father put on us'?"*

*10 The young men who had grown up with him replied, "These people have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.' Now tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. 11 My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.'"*

*12 Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, "Come back to me in three days." 13 The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, 14 he followed the advice of the young men and said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."*

### *Elders vs peers*

It is unwise to just seek the counsel of people who are in the same situation as you. This does not mean that you shouldn't ask your friends, but don't let them be the only source of counsel for you. Look to those who have walked in faith and in life longer than you have.

### *Acts 17:11*

*Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

One last reminder on this: God's word takes precedence over the counsel of others. Everyone makes mistakes, even people of character. So always weigh the counsel of others against the Scripture. Luke calls the Berea's "noble" because they weighed counsel from the Apostle Paul against the Scripture. Do that. Again, the order here is important.

OK. Sometimes the Scripture gives us a green light, wisdom gives us a green light, our counselors give us a green light. Is that all we can learn? Oh no.

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Here's an interesting example from the life of the Apostle Paul:

*Rom 1:9-13*

*God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.*

*11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, [d] that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.*

Why didn't Paul go? No indication that the reason was Scripture, or wisdom, or counsel against it. The opportunity just wasn't there! Paul's travels were often dictated by simple opportunity.

Sometimes this just happens! I think we tend to assume that we can do whatever we want with our lives, so it may come as a shock to you that, though you have more opportunities than most people in history, you are not 100% unlimited.

Sometimes these are negative circumstances.

Your life direction may be determined by a health issue that God does not heal.

Or the job you want may not be offered to you.

Life is not always in our control

*James 4*

*13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

*15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

Sometimes the negative circumstances turn out better than we expected.

Or you may want to live in a Palestinian refugee camp, but the Israeli government may suddenly revoke your visa.

Or you might end up taking Spanish Phonetics class because Arabic isn't offered at your university (yet), and you might end up meeting your wife in that class!

Here's an example of advice that Paul gives to slaves in Corinth.

1 oCr 7:21

Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.

Sometimes circumstances are just positive! Opportunity arises, you can take it!

You are a slave in Corinth and you have a chance to gain your freedom? Go for it!

You may want to work as a full time pastor or missionary, and you find yourself in a community with an excellent internship that you can apply for after you graduate. Do it!

Or you might get a great job offer that fits your skills and honors God by allowing you to do meaningful work. Go right ahead.

Theologians have called this idea “God’s providence”. The circumstances of life beyond our control can feel (and maybe even be) quite random. When Scripture, wisdom, and counsel don't lead us to a specific direction, we choose to see God's hand in chance. We look at the opportunities that are available to us and we thank God for them.

#### **I call Step 4: Accept God's Providence**

Notice: God's providence can mean both positive and negative experiences. And often we only see it in retrospect. But just because it's random doesn't mean it's unspiritual to take this into account. Again, Paul did it.

It's OK to say, the opportunity is there, so I'll take it! Or, the opportunity isn't there, so I'll do this other thing!

One caution here:

1 Samuel 24

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, “David is in the Desert of En Gedi.” 2 So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

3 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. 4 *The men said, “Today the Lord is saying to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’”* Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 6 He said to his men, “The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.” 7 With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

False! The Lord was not saying that! David knew that God had forbidden him from taking Saul’s life.

Again, the order matters. Circumstances do not always indicate God’s will. Rely on the other 3 things first.

Never, ever put circumstance over God’s clearly revealed word/will

But if they all are in agreement, it’s OK to say, “Well, I’ve been prevented from doing this.” or “Well, this is a great opportunity.”

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Sometimes, though, we are still stuck. I was surprised in my reading to discover so many stories that included this phrase:

“Do what seems best to you.”

In other words, **step 5 = does this make sense?**

Or, use your brain!

Take a look at the stories I put there in your notes.

People in the Bible did this *all the time*. It’s very normal to use your brain!

It’s OK to use common sense! It doesn’t mean you’re not a Christian!

Again, as always, note placement of this step: not above Scripture or other steps. God’s people are not allowed to leave God out! Sometimes God’s will seems unsound without faith.

Sometimes God calls us to things that don’t make sense. In God’s kingdom, obedience trumps logic. I hope you hear this, because some of you need to let go of your tidy little charts that say “this is my plan for my life” and *listen to God*. Sometimes it doesn’t seem best to obey what God has commanded. We are to do it anyway.

For others of you, if you read the Scripture, you have developed the character of wisdom, you have sought counsel, the opportunity is open, just do what you think is best! You don’t have to be paralyzed in these decisions.

You know, you may have a desire to do certain things for God, but if you just aren’t good at painting, don’t be a painter until you learn the skill! Don’t just go out and start selling your terrible paintings as a full time job! Use good sense.

All of these things are complicated. Notice how many cautions I've had to give about each of my main points? Read your Bible, but make sure you actually know how to do that. Seek wisdom, but it takes time. Get advice, but don't be too dependent or too independent. Accept God's providence, but not all circumstances are God's providence. Use your brain, but sometimes God calls you to do illogical things.

After hearing all of this, I hope you feel more free. What? How? I just feel more confused! Paul, Mary, David, James, Hannah, Moses, and the rest of the Scriptures are full of a myriad of examples of how people followed the will of God. Countless millions have never discovered God's individual will for their lives. But still lived joyful, missional, profoundly meaningful lives in Jesus by following what had already been revealed. So be free! There are many different experiences, and yours might not match mine. And all of that is OK.

*End: Remember how we shared at our tables before dinner, what is one question like this that you would really like the answer to - a decision that you want to know what God's will is?*

*Take a moment and think about it. Go through the steps.*

*Which ones have you done?*

*What is lacking so far in how you've thought about this decision?*

*After a minute, call Shanon up and we'll do some Q&A.*