

KNOWING GOD'S WILL

By Winkie Pratney

"How can I know the will of God?" If you haven't asked this question openly or secretly you are probably not a Christian.

Walk through the halls of time and you will see the men of God who changed history. Look at them carefully. They were not special men. You will not often find the naturally gifted among their ranks. But all had one thing in common - they *knew* and *did* the will of God in their generation, and God did a work through them to shape the course of history. Those that God used in the past were just ordinary people with an extraordinary Master. They were not all champions of great faith, but little people who saw their own need, and put their small faith in a great God. The driving force in their lives was the sure conviction that God had called them to His work - and that as long as they were faithful to that call, He would work with them and through them against impossible odds to victory. They **KNEW** His will! Living in His purpose, they could be natural and let *Him* be supernatural.

Scripture is a record of common people who found the will of God. Jacob met an angel. Joseph, with his multicolored coat, had a dream. Paul saw a blinding light. Samuel heard a voice. John had a vision. God is wholly involved with us as human beings! He spoke to men then, and He has not changed. At every point of history, He waits to show the way.

God is looking for willing hearts - those who wholeheartedly decide to do the will of God. (*II Chron. 16:9*) You can know God's will! God has no favorites. You do not have to be special, but you have to be available. You do not have to be *clever*, but you must be *willing* to learn from Him. You do not have to be *talented*, but you must be willing to *obey* whatever He commands. You do not have to possess *much*, but you must give *everything* you have.

Has the "will of God" been a mystery to you? Have you longed to know what He wants for you, but somehow never found the way? Then read on. If you will faithfully apply these Biblical principles of guidance to your life, you can know the voice of God and do His will as surely as any man or woman of God that ever lived.

Goal and Plan

God's will for your life is a *goal*, not a blueprint. His one ultimate goal, or purpose, is for you to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. God's goal *never* changes. A goal is the point you are trying to get to - it sets your direction. While on your way to this ultimate goal, you will encounter many smaller goals and purposes along the way. Guidance is a lifelong process. God will reveal goals, help you reach them, then set new, higher ones. Therefore, knowing God's will for your life is a continued discovery of the present most effective plan to help you eventually reach, (through a series of sub-stages), His *ultimate* goal for you. Should you miss God and make a wrong decision at one of these sub-stages, all is not lost. However, many times there are consequences to pay. Sometimes you may miss an

opportunity that may never again come your way... and many times good years that belong to God are simply wasted. But the moment our self-dependence or mistakes are confessed to God, and His pardon obtained, He will take you where you are at and work with you, pointing out the best course to take daily, in order for you to reach His ultimate goal for you - to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus.

Conditions

You cannot expect to hear from God until you are fulfilling these essential conditions for knowing His will. Check your life against these before you ask for guidance:

1. **A Desire to know and do all the will of God.** Don't *ask* for guidance unless you are prepared to *act* on it! God is always willing to make His purpose known. If you "cannot" find an answer, it may be that you have some secret reservation in your heart. God will not show you His will if you are merely *considering* doing it. Unless you are prepared to trust His wisdom and love, and *do* whatever He shows you, don't ask Him. Many say they can't get God's guidance, when they really mean they wish He would show them an easier way. God promises to show us *only* if we are ready to *act* on His revelation. (*John 7:17*)
2. **Be a love-slave.** God guides the meek, or those with yielded wills. If we have unyielded rights or stubborn wills, we cannot expect His guidance. A love-slave lives *to serve*, not to *be served*. He owns nothing; power, possessions, or personal rights. He has no plans of his own that are not subject to the command of his Master. God does not guide those who want to run their own life. He only guides those who admit their need of His direction and rely on His wisdom. (*Matt. 10:24,37-39; Phil. 2:58; Psalm 25:9*)
3. **A willingness to be counted a fool.** Doing God's will often conflicts with what's going on in our surrounding selfish world. Some Christians don't really do anything for the Lord, excusing themselves by saying they are "not sure of God's will." We need not always expect a voice from the sky when the path of service is clear. God gave us common sense, and He expects us to use it. Most of the time, His will makes sense to our reason and intelligence. God's will is usually an area of general direction, within which He leaves us relatively free to work for Him. (*Proverbs 6:20-22, 11:3*) However, sometimes His direction cuts across all human reason, and even goes totally contrary to it! When the inner voice of God speaks clearly, obedience may be counted as madness in the eyes of the world. But if you are willing to be God's fool, then you will see His power. (*Matt. 11:25; Acts 26:24-25; Mark 3:21; 1 Cor. 3:18-20*)
4. **A clean conscience from the past.** Guidance will always be hindered or misunderstood if there is still sin in your life that God has urged you to get right. How can He show you more if you have not obeyed the things He has already shown you? (*Lk. 16:10*) Every time you kneel to pray, the finger of His Spirit will

point back to that thing He wants you to get right. A clear conscience is *absolutely essential* for distinguishing between the voice of God and the voice of the enemy. Unconfessed sin is a prime reason why many do not know God's will. It is the "pure in heart" who will see Him. (*Matt. 5:8,23-24; Psalm 24:3-6*)

5. **Regular time of prayer and reading the Word of God.** God's will is expressly revealed in His Word. It is indeed a foolish and inexcusable thing to neglect the Scriptures if you have access to them. Bible study shows us what God expects in daily living. No guidance will ever go against Scriptural principle. Prayer teaches us by experience what the presence of God is like, and how His voice sounds. Many do not recognize the call of God simply because *they have never taken the time to really talk with Him long enough to know what He is like*. It is not enough to know about Him - you must *know HIM!* (*Proverbs 6:23; Isaiah 58:9-11; John 17:3*)

Methods

God speaks and has spoken in many different ways. Guidance breaks down into three basic categories - personal, corporeal, and supernatural. Study the following examples in Scripture.

I. PERSONAL (Individual Direct Guidance)

1. **The Word of God** - The Holy Scriptures, the foundation of all guidance.
 - A. **Regular Bible Reading** - The "jigsaw" principle. You fill in a portion of a "puzzle" each time you read a section of the Bible. A key piece fitted in will suddenly reveal a whole picture.
 - B. **Open Page Method** - Definitely *not* to be abused! Ask God in faith to guide you to the right Scripture for your need. Open the Bible, trusting Him to speak to you from it.
 - C. **Mental Suggestion** - In prayer God will sometimes bring to mind a verse, a chapter, or a book of the Bible. Turn to the place and begin to read until God speaks to you.
 - D. **Recalled Memory Verse** - Often, during a time of temptation or difficulty, God will bring to your mind a verse of Scripture that will give clear instruction. It is to your benefit to know and memorize parts of the Word of God. (*Psalm 119:9-11, 15-16, 33-35, 65-68, 97-105; Proverbs 2:1-20, 3:1-6, 4:1-13; II Tim. 3:14-17*)
2. **The witness of the Holy Spirit** - An inner voice known by all true children of God.

The Holy Spirit is able to give you a "*check*" inside as to whether or not something is of God. You must *never* act on a doubtful impression, especially if it is accompanied by haste. God *leads*, not *pushes*! Rushed urgings are usually of the enemy. There is never a feeling of *worry* or *fear* with the voice of the Good Shepherd. His Voice is gentle, familiar-sounding, loving, and leaves you with a sense of spiritual uplift and

rejoicing; never *fright*. (*Jn. 10:3-5, 14-16, 27-28*) Test all of your spiritual leadings by the Word of God, especially whenever you feel a sense of uneasiness or fear. (*Rom. 8:14-16; John 14:16-17; 1 John 2:27, 4:1-3, 13; Col. 1:9-11*)

3. **Waiting on God** - Listening to Him in prayer and getting to know His voice.

God has *three answers* in guidance: "*Yes,*" "*No,*" and "*Wait*". We cannot have a demanding attitude towards God. Sometimes there must be delays. Our lives are bound up with others, and many times God has to wait until *they* are ready, (or until *we* are), before giving us the go-ahead. "*Wait*" is the most difficult of all answers, but sometimes it's the most necessary. Here is the test of a love-slave. (*Psalm 62:1, 5, 33:20, 25:5, 27:14, 40:1, 130:5, 37:7; Isaiah 40:31, 49:23; Hosea 12:6; 1 Chron. 28:9*)

II. CORPOREAL (Other Christians)

Although God greatly desires to speak to each of us personally, He also likes to use other members of the Body of Christ to pass on needed pieces of the "puzzle" to us. This helps teach us gratitude for His work in the lives of others, and the needed lesson that none of us are a law or light to ourselves. We can learn a lot from other Christians, although in the end, we are responsible to no one but Him.

1. **Godly men and women** - The advice of experienced Christians sought as confirmation.

Counsel from those who are known to have a pure and trustworthy walk with God is often of great value when seeking further light on some major decision. This counsel should be more in the area of *principles*, not *pronouncements*. Carefully concerned and loving suggestions aren't necessarily final or direct statements from the Lord. True godly counsel will of course always line up with the Word of God and Scriptural principles. (*Proverbs 15:22, 12:15, 13:10, 11:14, 24:6; 1 Thess. 2:11-15*)

2. **God's servants in the ministry** - Preaching under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes God will use a message or sermon anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring needed light when you are facing a difficult decision. Perhaps the word you need to help give you direction is waiting for you at the next meeting! (*Exodus 4:10-12; 1 Samuel 3:10-21, Isaiah 6:8-9; Rom. 10:14-15; 1 Cor. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:11*)

3. **The gifts of the Holy Spirit** - In line with previous leadings from the Lord and the Word of God.

Scripture records incidents where God has confirmed direction through such gifts in His Body as prophesy, words of knowledge, and words of wisdom. Study their function in Scripture. Such words are simply spiritual parallels to individual godly counsel and preached messages, and should not be looked on with more authority than any of the other means the Lord chooses to use. *Never act solely on a "word" given to you by another.*

Remember, the key is *individual responsibility* for our own actions, and it is you that must make the final decision, and not someone else for you. (*Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:1-12, 27-31, 14:12,26-33,39-40; Eph. 4:8-11; II Tim. 1:6*)

III. SUPERNATURAL

The instances of "supernatural" guidance, or special Divine Intervention in our lives are more rarely recorded. These cases are rare, but *not* because there are only a few who ever reach the "exalted height" of such direct contact. In fact, God may sometimes choose to act in this way because those on the receiving end are so spiritually *insensitive* and dull that they might otherwise never hear or understand! Although it is not wise to generalize principles from such occasional interventions, it is certainly clear through Scripture and history that men and women have received authentic direction from such Divine channels of contact

1. **The audible voice of God.** God can and has spoken to people audibly. I know a very trustworthy person who became a Christian as a result of God answering his prayer for help in this way. He described the voice like this: "Like everyone I had ever loved in my life all rolled up into one, like someone I had known all my life, yet I knew I had never met." As in the case of Saul and the crowd that witnessed the Lord's baptism, it is apparently a real sound and not just a mental impression. Examples: Samuel (*I Samuel 3:1-10*); Elijah (*I Kgs. 19:9-13*); Saul (*Acts 9:1-7*); the Lord Jesus and the multitude (*John 12:27-30*).
2. **Visions and dreams.** The early Church gave much more attention to this subject than do most Christians today. A dream is like a spiritual TV commercial - short, easy to understand, and given at the time when our whole attention is undistracted. Visions, on the other hand, are *superimposed* over the normal visual reality around us, and do not have to happen when we are asleep. If you believe that God may be trying to speak to you in this way, prayerfully consider the details of your dream or vision, remembering that they may represent symbols or principles - not necessarily absolutes. And finally, talk it over with a trusted and mature friend in Christ. Both dreams and visions, when inspired by the Holy Spirit, can be powerful means by which God speaks to His people. Examples: Peter (*Acts 10:9-16*); Isaiah (*Isaiah 6:1-8*); Daniel (*Daniel 8:1-27, 7:1-28, 10:1-9*); John (*Rev. 1-20*); Elihu (*Job 33:14-18*); Joseph (*Matt. 1:19-21*).
3. **Visitation.** It appears that angels in Scripture do not "guide" in the same way as the Holy Spirit Himself does, but they have been sent to warn believers of danger, as well as provide for their physical needs and safety. They also have made significant announcements, as in the case of Mary. Many believers throughout history have had authentic vision or visitations - and many numbers of Christians

have seen either Jesus or ministering angels at their deathbeds. Examples: Abraham (Genesis 18:1-33); Moses (Ex. 33:19-23); Joshua (Joshua 5:13-15); Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30); Manoah (Judges 13:2-23); Zacherias (Luke 1:8-20); Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

A word of warning before we leave this area. Young Christians can easily become fascinated with the "special cases," and exalt these above the more simple and ordinary daily ways God uses to speak to us. To deliberately seek or glorify any form of guidance is an outright invitation to spiritual deception. We are not to seek or specify *how* God should speak, but only seek Him in any way that He wishes to make Himself known. And as previously mentioned, for God to have to use such methods is no guarantee at all of our superior spirituality; it may instead be an indication of spiritual *immaturity*.

Steps

The following method of receiving guidance combines most guidance principles into three basic steps:

1. **Give up your own desires.** Take your own desires to God in prayer and place them aside for the Lord to crucify. In prayer, give your desires to Him, and ask Him to give you *His* desires. Tell Him that you are willing to "die" to the things you want most to do, in order to do the things *He* has for you.
2. **Resist the devil.** Be on guard against the tactics of the enemy, and the temptations that may come your way. Each child of God has been given power over sin through Christ. Standing in His authority, drive back the enemy's voice. As Jesus did in the wilderness, you can quote an appropriate Scripture, and like the thrust of a sword, it will force the enemy to retreat. Do it simply and clearly, trusting that the power of Christ will back you up. (*Proverbs 18:10; Eph. 1:17-23; James 4:5-10; I John 3:78; I Pet. 5:6-9*)
3. **Listen to the voice of God.** The Lord *wants* to speak to you; He doesn't want to hide or make you play guessing games. If you have fulfilled His conditions, the lines of communication between you are open. Ask God to show you, in faith, expecting Him to answer. Look for an immediate, definite impression. Do what He tells you to do. If nothing comes immediately - thank God for His answer of "wait". Be faithful to what the Lord has shown you, and patient as you wait for further guidance. If you are being tempted, cry out to the Lord, for it is through Him that you will find your strength to stand firm in righteousness.

Your Move

Ahead of you is a generation that desperately needs a voice of authority. Men are tired of the constant failure of human wisdom; what they need most of all is to hear from Heaven. Can you be His vessel to proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord!" to a lost and dying world? Do *you* dare be guided by God? Will you accept the challenge to *hear His voice* and *do His will*?