

How God Guides & Different Approaches to God's Will

Discussion Questions:

1. When you can't figure out some assignment for class, what you are most likely to do first: consult your professor/instructor, consult the text book, consult a classmate, consult no one.

“Tools of the Trade”: Ways Christians seek God's will

Over the years... Christians have developed a number of tools discerning God's will... open doors, fleeces, random bible verses, and impressions. All four can be used wisely. And all four can be instruments of foolishness.” (Just Do Something, p.77)

1. **Open Doors**

How Christians view the “Open Door”

Christians often speak of an “open door” from the Lord, meaning, “God is giving me this great opportunity.” Conversely, when things don't seem to be going our way, we talk of God “closing a door,” or removing some possible opportunity. (p.77)

This sort of thinking can be good if we see the open door as an opportunity to do something we already know is good... In such cases, when we speak of open doors, we are merely referring to opportunities God has given us to do the good things we already wanted to do. (p.77)

Abuses of the “Open Door”

But there are foolish ways to use this “open door” theology. Christians are sometimes guilty of using the absence of an open door as an excuse for laziness: “I put my resumé on Monster.com last week and no one has contacted me. The Lord just isn't opening any doors.” Perhaps, but maybe you should make some phone calls, knock on some doors, and visit every employer in town before you blame your unemployment on God. (p.77-8)

Similarly, we sometimes take the easy way out and then spiritualize our cowardize by claiming, “It was an open door.” For example, don't think to yourself, I need to call and have a difficult conversation with my sister. I should really talk with her, but my cell phone is out of minutes, so the Lord must want me to send an e-mail instead. Don't think the convenient way is always God's way of making a comfortable way for you. Was an available ship sailing to Tarshish the Lord's open door for Jonah? (p.78)

Here's the bottom line: If God opens the door for you to do something you know is good or necessary, be thankful for the opportunity. But other than that, don't assume that the relative ease or difficulty of a new situation is God's way of telling you to do one thing or the other. (p.78)

2. **Fleeces**

What Christian, in the midst of a perplexing quandary, hasn't been inspired by Gideon to lay out a metaphorical fleece before God?... Humble goals and loosely held plans are good. Expecting God to do tricks for us is bad. Don't pray: “God, if you want me to go out on this date, then make my professors cancel all their assignments for the weekend. If you don't do that, I'll just tell Josh that it wasn't the Lord's will that we go out.” (p.79-80)

Reflection: Is it a fleece to say that if the congregation approves moving forward with expansion, then it's God's will? Is it a fleece to say that if we collect \$X million in pledges then it's God's will that we go ahead (or don't)?

3. **Random Bible Verses**

Let me just choose a few select examples:

I can imagine a young man dating a girl named Becky. He is considering marriage, but he's not sure. So he asks the Lord to give him a sign. Well, the day is January 24 and his Bible reading plan has him reading from Genesis 24 (NIV). He gets to the end of the chapter and reads "and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her." The young man takes it as a sure word from the Lord to propose to Bekcy.

Or what about the woman who turns at random to 2 Samuel 7:3: "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you?" Is that always good advice, straight from the Lord?

Maybe you've heard the joke about the man who was hoping to get a word from the Lord and happened to turn to Matthew 27:5 where it says that Judas "went and hanged himself." Not happy with this word for the day, the man flipped his Bible open to another page, where open his eyes descended upon Luke 10:37, "And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise.'"

Or what about these verses? Are they in context?

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Or what about this verse?

"... if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Why not pluck this verse?

"So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you." (Jeremiah 7:16)

4. **Impressions**

The problem with impressions is not that they are subjective. The problem is in assuming they are from the Lord. Here's my profound wisdom on the matter: Impressions are impressions. Don't confuse impressions, hunches, and subjective feelings with certain words from the lord.

The Classic Three

Most Christians know they should consult the Bible. But since the vast majority of decisions facing a person are not explicitly dealt with in the Bible, Christians have informally adopted a new trinity of discerning God's will.

1. **Aspirations** – passions, gifts
2. **Affirmation** – confirmation from many good counselors
3. **Opportunity** – "open doors"

Different Approaches to God's Will

The Specific-View of God's Will

As one supporter of the specific-will view remarks, "God doesn't want us to be confused. He wants us to know his plan for our lives. For people who want to discover his will, there are several avenues to follow." The means by which to discover God's will often include things like Scripture, prayer, circumstances, and counsel from fellow believers. (How Then Should We Choose?, ed. Douglas Huffman, p.24)

The Wisdom View of God's Will

... God's sovereign and moral will exist, but he asserts that a specific individual will for every detail in a person's life is a teaching not found in Scripture... God does not have any real preferences between options in non-commanded decision, but that it is the Christian's responsibility to make wise choices. (p.26)

The Relationship View of God's Will

The will of God, then, consists of one clear mandate—that we make God the absolute center of our lives." Perhaps believers should be investing in their relationships with God and not in mere formulas for discovery or in principles for wisdom. As Philip Yancey puts it, "The Bible contains little specific advice on the techniques of guidance, but much on the proper way to maintain a love relationship with God." (p28)

Enoch's Take *(not that my opinion matters, but here goes!)*

I see a connection and biblical basis for all three. All three are attempting to address errors or excesses in thinking. I think I believe in the achievement of the specific-view of God's will by cultivating a relationship-view and a wisdom-view of God's will. ☺