

“What’s the Big Deal About Decision- Making?”

Making decisions is as big of a challenge as any. We love the options but hate to decide. Too many Christians’ lives are like a cafeteria line where one can select anything he chooses. On the one hand they seem to be overwhelmed with the choices but love to stand and look. On the other hand, they may feel they have to try everything before they decide. They are option oriented... but an option overload! The menu of choices is tantalizing and enjoyable, but they fear ordering!

What do you do when you are facing a difficult decision? What job to take, what school to attend, who to marry, where to live, what trip to take? Paul said, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17). David realized he had to be taught the Lord’s will when he said, “Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness” (Ps. 143:10). How do you seek God’s will for life’s most important decisions?

Here are 9 critical action steps to clarifying confusion in decision-making:

I. Set Aside Concentrated Time Alone. (Get away from normal environment.)

A. God’s will is not vindictive.

From the testimonies of some Christians, it is possible to receive the distinct impression that God forces us to do whatever seems most undesirable to us. I have heard well-meaning testimonies affirm, I told God I would go anywhere but Africa [or Dunbar, or Dodge City] – and guess where I went!” No doubt such experiences have occurred, but the impression left may be disastrous.

B. God’s will is not lost.

When someone says, “I am trying to discover God’s will for my life,” one might be tempted to reply, “Why? Is it lost? Has He hid it somewhere?” Of course not! God has a desired will for your life, and He wants you to know it (Col. 1:9). In fact, Paul affirmed that it is foolish (“unwise,” A.V.) for a Christian to be ignorant of God’s desired will (Eph 5:17).

II. Read Your Bible in Bulk. (Massive portions!)

It helps you to think Biblically:

A. You are not an apostle or prophet.

One of the most frequent causes of confusion with regard to God’s will is the common failure to recognize the distinctiveness of God’s dealings with those whom and by whom He chose to reveal Himself in the sacred Scriptures. You are not a Moses, Joshua, Abraham, Gideon, Ezekiel, Daniel, Matthew, John, or Paul! You are not to expect the kind of revelation they received. God’s methods in dealing with them have not been His normal methods of dealing with believers in any age. The signs, wonders, and miracles by which they clearly perceived the will of God were done to reveal and to authenticate that revelation. Consequently, you should not expect God to miraculously reveal His will by dreams or visions (Acts 16:9, 13:1-3).

B. The panoramic view of God directing man:

1. Personal contact - Adam and Eve (Gen 2-3).
2. Pillar and cloud - (Ex. 14:19-20).
3. Urim and Thumim - (Ex. 28:30).
4. Specific authority – prophets/kings/fathers (Deut. 6).
5. Christ, the living Word – (John 1).
6. Holy Spirit – personal fellowship – (John 15)

God, the Holy spirit, has been present down through mankind’s history.

C. You Should not trust your “feelings.”

Nearly two hundred years ago, John Wesley spoke very pointedly about this issue; “do not hastily ascribe things to God. Do not easily suppose dreams, voices, impressions, visions, or revelations to be from God. They may be from Him. They may be nature. They may be from the devil. Therefore, believe not every spirit, but test the spirits whether they be from God.”

Christians have often said, “God showed me that...,” or “God told me that...” such statements can be dangerously misleading. Sure, we can look back with hindsight and be convinced that God has led us in our decisions. But He did not “speak” to us, “tell,” us, or “reveal” anything to us. What we mean is that we have become convinced that God has been at work in our lives.

The fact is that we cannot know whether our feelings are from God or not! We can test our feelings by the Scriptures and in some cases determine that they are not from God, but even if we find no Scripture to contradict our feelings, this does not prove that they are from God.

Once we assume an equation between our feelings and the guidance of the Spirit, the tendency is to become experience-oriented rather than Scripture-oriented. As humans, we try to eliminate the element of faith! (Heb. 11)

III. Pray in sincerity. (Ps. 91:15, Jer. 29:13, Jn. 15:7, 1 Jn. 3:22).

A. Acknowledge your willingness to do His will. (Luke 22:42, 1 Chron. 16:11)

B. Have a correct thinking of God’s mode of leading. (Rom 8:26)

Your choices just might be evidence of God’s goodness, not a trap to test your obedience.

IV. Fast if necessary. (Ps. 35:13, 1 Cor 7:5, 2 Cor 6:5)

V. Think prudently (Prov. 8:12, Eph 1:6).

A. Prioritize your options.

B. Consider the timing. (Acts 27:9-13)

VI. Talk things out loud

A. Vocalize it privately.

B. Choose 2 or 3 advisors carefully and prayerfully. (Prov 15:22)

Select those that have a “history” with you. Realize the “multitude of counselors” doesn’t mean “the more the merrier”. This could get more confusing than clarifying. In addition, they are there to advise you not decide for you!

VII. Document your data

Write down your thought process, logic, and ideas you have discovered. It will be valuable in the future for other decisions.

VIII. Wait and watch – be patient. (Psalm 40)

You should not wait for a “call.”

No verse in the Bible suggests that Christians are to wait for a “call” before they make plans to serve God. If you are waiting for a call like Isaiah or Paul received, you will be waiting a long time!

Many people look for a dramatic and sudden call from God to go into the ministry. Because this hasn’t happened to them, they have concluded that they have no call at all! How do you know God has called you? God’s call is more normal like Timothy’s call. (Acts 9:3-20, 16:6-10)

It is true that Christian leaders often speak of their “call,” but they are looking back with hindsight and referring to their conviction that God has been at work in the circumstances and decisions of their lives. Such a conviction is essential for a Christian leader, but it is not a “call.” In view of the fact that young people are often confused by this terminology and led to expect some supernatural revelation regarding their vocation, perhaps it would be wise to drop the term “call” as reference to such a conviction regarding our lifework.

IX. Then... be decisive! (Josh. 24:14-15, Eccl. 5:4-5, Prov 3:26).

Conclusion: The big deal about decision-making “is” a big deal to those who are facing major decisions! God is not a “cosmic confuser” but a caring Father.

(Some notes taken from David L. Burggraff, Theological Forum, 1994, at NBBC)