

(Finding God's Will) 2. Conditions for Finding God's Will

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the essential conditions for finding God's will, including faith, self-distrust, obedience, and unconditional yieldedness.

Scripture: Psalm 37:5, Psalm 130:6, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 30:21, Jeremiah 29:13, Luke 11:34, Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 11:6, James 1:5-7

Topics: "Faith and Obedience", "Divine Guidance"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that finding God's will is deeply rooted in our personal relationship with Him, highlighting that many seek guidance without truly desiring God Himself. He outlines essential conditions for receiving divine guidance, including faith, self-distrust, obedience, unconditional yieldedness, and a renewed mind. Poonen stresses that faith must be coupled with earnestness and patience, while self-reliance must be replaced with a humble dependence on God. He also points out that we must be willing to submit to God's will in all areas of our lives and maintain a close, daily relationship with Him to discern His guidance. Ultimately, true guidance comes from a heart fully dedicated to seeking and obeying God.

Transcript

Divine guidance cannot be considered by itself apart from our personal relationship with God. Many desire the gifts but not the Giver. If we long for guidance but do not thirst for God Himself, we shall not obtain the guidance we seek.

A person must be in fellowship with God in order to experience His guidance in his life. This implies, first of all, that he should have come into a vital relationship with Christ through the new birth. But this alone is not enough. There are certain other essential conditions to be fulfilled if we are to know God's leading. These prerequisites are mentioned in two passages of Scripture, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New (Prov. 3:5,6; Rom. 12:1,2). Let us consider these passages in detail.

Faith

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and mind.....and He will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5,6).

There are many who never come to a knowledge of God's will, because they simply do not believe God will guide them. Faith is a prime prerequisite when we are seeking God's guidance. By faith we mean not merely a mental acceptance of truth but a confidence in God that comes through personal knowledge of Him.

When we lack wisdom (knowledge of God's mind in a certain situation) we are invited to ask God for this and we are promised that He will grant it to us in abundance - provided we ask in faith. The one who asks without faith invariably receives nothing (James 1:5-7).

Young believers may feel Divine guidance is available only to the mature who have grown in the knowledge of the Lord for several years. It is no doubt true that the more we walk with God, the better we can discern His mind. Nevertheless it is also true that God desires to guide all His children. What was said to Paul is true for all of us - " God.... has destined and appointed you to come progressively to know His will - that is, to perceive, to recognize more strongly and clearly and to become better and more intimately acquainted with His will" (Acts 22:14). A father gladly reveals to his children his desires and plans for them - not only to the older ones but to the younger ones as well. It is the same with our Heavenly Father. God has said in His Word that in this day of the New Covenant (or Testament) all His children - "from the least to the greatest" - will know Him personally (Heb. 8:10,11). Every one of us can then come to Him "with the full assurance of faith" that He delights to make His will known to His seeking children.

In Hebrews 11:6, we are told that without faith it is impossible to please God. The verse goes on to say that those who come to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him. The evidence of a person's faith is found in his persistence in prayer. The one who doubts will stop praying very soon. But the one who believes will lay hold of God until he gets an answer. God honours earnestness because it is the product of a strong faith. We cannot receive anything precious from God without intensely desiring it first. "He satisfies (only) the longing soul" (Psa. 107:9). God has said, "Then you will seek Me, inquire and require Me as a vital necessity and find Me; when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Is it not true that when seeking God's guidance we have often gone about it half-heartedly? When Jesus sought the Father's will in the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed again and again "in desperate prayer and the agony of tears" (Heb. 5:7-JBP). How casual our seeking is, when compared to that! We often seek God's will with no more earnestness than we would have when searching for a lost five-paisa coin! No wonder we don't find it. If we value the will of God as the greatest treasure on earth, we will seek it with all our hearts. Do we really believe that God rewards diligent seekers? Then our faith will manifest itself in importunate prayer. If we are consumed with earnest desire to fulfill His will in every area of our lives, God will undoubtedly reveal His mind to us. He cannot but honour a faith that lays hold of Him until it receives an answer.

Faith, in the Bible, is often coupled with patience. Both are necessary if we are to inherit God's promises (Heb. 6:12,15). David exhorts us (no doubt from his own experience), to commit our way to the Lord, trusting in Him and waiting patiently for His time and we are assured that He will not let us down (Psa. 37:5,7). One of the greatest temptations when seeking God's guidance is to fret and become impatient. But the believing heart is a restful one.

There are some decisions for which we don't need to wait for a perfectly clear indication of the mind of the Lord. For example, if you are seeking the Lord's will as to whether you should commence a journey on the 15th or the 16th of the month, you need not wait indefinitely for a clear word from Him.

Yet there are some decisions for which we must wait until we are perfectly clear about the will of God. When considering marriage, for example, we cannot afford to be uncertain. We have to be perfectly sure of God's will before deciding. Such a decision is obviously of greater moment than the former one, because its effects are more far-reaching. The more important the decision, the longer we usually have to wait to be sure of God's will.

If we trust in the Lord, we won't be afraid to wait. We will not seek to grab for ourselves ahead of God's time out of fear that we might lose the best by waiting. God is well able to safeguard the best for us in every realm. When we grab impatiently, we invariably miss the Lord's best. The Bible says that "he who believes.....will not make haste" (Isa. 28:16).

In the great "Guidance" Psalm - Psalm 25 - David speaks again and again of waiting on the Lord (v.3,5,21). None who wait for the Lord's time will ever regret having waited, for God "works and shows Himself active on behalf of him who (earnestly) waits for Him" (Isa. 64:4; cf.49:23).

Often, it is only as we wait that God can make His mind clear to us. James McConkey in his booklet, 'Guidance', has written, "Sometimes you draw from the tap a glass of water which is muddy and turbid. How do you clear it? You place the glass of muddy water on your table. Moment by moment the sediment deposits at the bottom of the glass. Gradually the water grows clearer. In a few moments it is so clear that you may distinguish objects through it. It has all been brought about simply by waiting. The law is the same in the realm of guidance. Here, too, God's great precipitant is waiting.....As we do so, the sediment slowly settles.....The trifling things assume their proper subordinate place. The big things loom up into their proper importance. Waiting is the solution of it all...The vast majority of our mistakes come from neglect of it. Haste is more often a trap of Satan than it is a necessity of guidance....."

"Sometimes our perplexity is so great that it seems no guidance will ever come. For such times the psalmist has a precious message in his word about the night-watchers. 'I am looking and waiting for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning' (Psa. 130:6). How do men, who wait in the night hours for the dawn, watch for the morning? The answer is four-fold:-

"They watch in darkness. They watch for that which comes slowly. They watch for that which is sure to come. They watch for that which when it does come brings the light of day."

"So it is with us who wait for guidance. Often our perplexity is so extreme that we seem to be waiting in total darkness. Often too as we wait, even as those who wait for the day, the first faint streaks of dawn seem to come, oh, so slowly! Then too, as there never yet has been a night of uncertainty as is sure to end in the dawn, so our night of uncertainty is sure to end in the dawning light of God's guidance. Lastly, as the slow-coming dawn, when it does arrive, brings light and blessing without measure, so when our God-given guidance at last breaks upon us it will so gladden our waiting souls and so illumine our beclouded path, we shall almost forget the long days when we waited in darkness."

Beware of being in a hurry. Impatience always stems from unbelief. It was said of the Israelites in the wilderness that "they did not (earnestly) wait for His plans (to develop) respecting them" (Psa. 106:13). They missed God's best thereby. May God save us from such a tragedy.

Self-distrust

"Do not rely on your own insight or understanding.....and He will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5,6).

The one who does not distrust his own natural wisdom in spiritual matters has yet to learn one of the fundamental lessons of the Christian life. Meager intelligence cannot by itself deprive a man of the knowledge of God's will, if the man leans upon God. But proud dependence on one's own cleverness and foresight can. Paul says in Philippians 3:3 that a believer should be characterized by a lack of confidence in himself.

Paul was a mighty intellectual, but he still had to distrust himself and lean upon God. From his own experience he writes to the Corinthian Christians, "If any man among you thinks himself one of the world's clever ones let him discard his cleverness that he may learn to be truly wise. For this world's cleverness is stupidity to God" (1 Cor. 3:18,19-JBP). Worldly wisdom is a hindrance to the knowing of God's will, and so must be discarded.

Lest this last statement be misunderstood, let me add a word of explanation. Rejecting worldly wisdom does not mean the non-use of our intellectual abilities. Paul used his and it is unthinkable that he would ever ask others not to use theirs. Worldly wisdom cannot refer to education and learning for both the learned Paul and the unlearned Corinthians (to whom he was writing) had to discard it. It refers to the measure of trust we put in our own cleverness, whether our learning be much or little. It is a malady that can afflict the learned and the unlearned alike.

The Bible likens believers to sheep. A sheep is a foolish animal, unable to find its own way around, and extremely short-sighted. Its only safety lies in following its shepherd wherever he goes. This is a very humiliating fact for self-confident man to acknowledge. His pride will rebel at the very suggestion of his being so stupid in spiritual matters. Yet this utter distrust of self is an inescapable preliminary to knowing God's guidance in our lives. David took the place of a sheep before the Lord and thereby experienced Divine guidance - "The Lord is my Shepherd.... He leads me.... He leads me" (Psa. 23:1-3).

Unless man humbles himself and takes this lowly place, he cannot know the ways of God. "He will teach the ways that are right and best to those who humbly turn to Him", said David in Psalm 25:9 (TLB). Self-confidence may be all right for the man of the world but certainly not for the child of God. Herein lies the reason why many believers miss God's plan for their lives. Confident of their own abilities, they do not earnestly seek the will of God. They depend instead upon their own genius and are thus led astray.

God often allows failure and confusion in our lives in order that we might see the total depravity of our hearts and the unreliability of our fallible intellects, and thus learn the necessity of clinging more closely to Him. One of the chief lessons which the Lord sought to teach His disciples was that without Him they could do nothing (John 15:5). They were very slow in learning this: so are we.

The humble man who recognizes his limitations and leans heavily upon God will ascertain the Divine will without difficulty. The self-confident Doctor of Theology, on the other hand, who depends on his Seminary training, will be left groping in the darkness.

Obedience in every area

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). We are sometimes eager to know God's guidance in one area of our lives, but not so keen on having His direction in other areas. For example, we may earnestly seek God's will in marriage, but may not do so when looking for a job. Or it could be vice-versa. Or perhaps we may seek God's guidance how and where to spend our month's annual leave, but may never ask Him how to spend our money.

This is because we are inclined to want God's guidance only when it is convenient for us. Selfish motives often lurk, unknown to us, in our hearts. We seek God's will in some matters because we don't want to make mistakes that might cause us suffering or loss. The motive is not that we might please God but that we might be comfortable and prosperous. Hence we fail to receive God's guidance, for He has promised to guide only those who acknowledge Him in all their ways, those who gladly accept His direction in every area of their lives.

There are many areas in which God's will is already revealed to us in the Scriptures. For instance, the Bible says that God wants us to be holy and thankful:

"This is the will of God that you should be consecrated - separated and set apart for pure and holy living....

"Thank God in everything - no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks; for this is the will of God for you (who are) in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:18).

Similarly, we are told that God expects us to love our neighbours as ourselves (Rom. 13:9). If we have received God's forgiveness and salvation, we should desire the same for our neighbours. God's will is clearly revealed in the New Testament: we are to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).

Loving our neighbours implies a concern primarily for their spiritual needs, but does not exclude their other needs. God has said, "I want you to share your food with the hungry and bring right into your own homes those who are helpless, poor and destitute. Clothe those who are cold and don't hide from relatives who need your help. If you do these things, God will shed His own glorious light upon you.....Then when you call, the Lord will answer. `Yes, I am here.' He will quickly reply. All you need to do is to stop oppressing the weak, and to stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumours! Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day. And the Lord will guide you continually" (Isa. 58:7-11-TLB). God delights to reveal His mind to those who are unselfishly concerned with the needs of others.

If we fail to obey the Lord in these areas where He has already revealed His will, then we cannot expect Him to guide us in other spheres. It is a principle of Divine guidance that God never grants further light to one who ignores the light he already has. God will not show us the second step before we take the first. "As you go, step by step, I will open up the way before you", is His promise (Prov. 4:12 - Paraphrase). He is interested in our every step. "The steps of a (good) man are directed and established of the Lord, when He delights in his way and He busies Himself with his every step," (Psa. 37:23).

Here is another promise of guidance for the obedient: "I will instruct you (says the Lord) and guide you along the best pathway for your life; I will advise you and watch your progress, (but) don't be like a senseless horse or mule." (Psa. 32:8,9-TLB). (The horse is characterized by impatience always wanting to rush ahead whereas the mule is characterized by stubbornness often refusing to move forward. We must avoid both these attitudes).

God speaks to us through our consciences when we are disobedient. We should therefore be careful to heed the voice of conscience always. Jesus said, "Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound and fulfilling its office, your whole body is full of light" (Luke 11:34). What did Jesus mean by the eye? In Matthew 5:8, He connected spiritual vision with purity of heart. So the eye must refer to the conscience which when obeyed constantly, leads us to purity of heart.

By itself, conscience is not the voice of God, for it is educated and determined by the principles on which a person bases his life. But if it is obeyed constantly and brought in line with the teaching of the Bible, it will reflect God's standard increasingly. The promise in Luke 11:34, then is, that if we keep our conscience clean we shall have God's light flooding our lives - and thus we shall know His will. If we fail to listen to the voice of conscience in our daily lives, we shall fail to hear the voice of the Spirit when seeking God's guidance. Instant obedience to God whenever He speaks to us is one of the secrets of guidance.

Recently, I read of a fifteen-year-old boy, blind from birth, who flew and landed an aircraft safely. This remarkable feat was accomplished by his instantly obeying every order given by his instructor pilot. When facing life's manifold problems, we may feel like blind men trying to land a plane on an unknown and invisible runway. But if we develop the habit of instant obedience to God's commands, we shall find that we land safely.

Unconditional yieldedness

"Make a decisive dedication of your bodies - presenting all your members and faculties - as a living sacrifice, holy and well pleasing to God....so that you may prove (for yourselves) what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1,2).

The New Testament exhorts us to become bondslaves to the Lord. Paul called himself a willing bondservant of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, there were two classes of servants - the bondservant and the hired servant. A bondservant, unlike the hired servant was never paid. He was bought by his master for a price and as a result all that he was and all that he possessed belonged to his master. This is what every believer must recognize himself to be. Our time, money, talents, families, possessions, minds and bodies - all - belong to our Master and our Lord, for they are His by right of purchase on the Cross (1 Cor. 6:19,20).

We are therefore exhorted to present our bodies to God, once for all, as a living sacrifice, even as the burnt offering in the Old Testament. The burnt offering, unlike the sin offering, was wholly offered to God and signified the offerer's utter dedication unto Him. When a man offered a burnt offering, he received nothing back. God could do whatever He liked with that offering. It was symbolic of Calvary's Cross where the Lord Jesus offered Himself utterly to His Father saying, "Father, not My will but Thine be done." This is what it means to present our body as a living sacrifice to God: we must die to our own will and choice as to how and where our body should be used by Him. Only thus can we know His will.

Lack of such yieldedness is usually the main reason why we are unable to ascertain God's will. Our yieldedness to the Lord is often with reservations. We are not really willing to accept anything that God may offer.

I met a brother once who was willing to take up any vocation except full-time Christian service. I told him that it was this reservation that kept him from being clear about God's plan for his life. When he finally yielded all to the Lord, he immediately gained a deeper assurance of God's will. God did not call him to full-time Christian service, but He wanted him to be willing.

Many who come to God under the pretext of wanting to know His will really want only His approval of the path they have already chosen for themselves. Hence they receive no answer from Him. How soon our problems of guidance would be solved, if only we gave ourselves without any reserve to our Lord saying, "Lord, I am willing to accept anything, if Thou wilt only assure me that it is Thy will. Choose Thou for me, my Lord. I have no choice of my own in this matter." It was Abraham's willingness to go anywhere and to

do anything at any time for God that made him the "Friend of God."

George Muller of Bristol (England) was a man of great faith and one who could ascertain the will of God with remarkable accuracy. He has said in this connection, "I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the trouble with people is just here. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this stage, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is."

Some want to know God's will first before deciding whether to obey or not. But God does not reveal His will to such people. Jesus said, "If any man desires to do His will, he will know....." (John 7:17). A willingness to do anything that God commands will alone qualify us to know what His perfect will is. This applies to small matters as well as big.

A renewed mind

"Do not be conformed to this world....But be transformed by the (entire) renewal of your mind - by its new ideals and its new attitude - so that you may prove (for yourselves) what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Worldliness plugs our spirit's ears preventing us from hearing God's voice. Every person living in this world is affected by its spirit. No one has escaped its influence. From our childhood every one of us imbibes, day by day, either more or less of the spirit of this world into himself - by what we hear, see and read. This especially affects our minds and influences our thinking. The decisions we take then come primarily from worldly considerations.

The Spirit of God Who comes to live in us, when we are "born again" is opposed to the spirit of this world and therefore desires to renew our thinking completely. God's ultimate purpose for us is that we might be conformed to the image of His Son.

This is the primary part of His will for all of us. Everything else - whom we should marry, where we should live and work - is secondary. All of God's dealings with us are directed towards this end - that we might become like Jesus (see Romans 8:28 and 29). But this can be fulfilled in us only as we allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds daily. The more our minds are thus renewed, the more accurately shall we be able to discern the will of God at life's crossroads.

Worldliness is not basically something external - such as attending cinemas, drinking, smoking, wearing expensive and fashionable clothes and ornaments, or living extravagantly. These may denote a worldly person, but they are only outward expressions of his worldly thought-processes. Conformity to the world exists essentially in a person's mind and shows itself in various ways, especially in his decisions. For example, when considering a job or a career, a worldly person will be governed by factors such as salary, promotion-prospects, comfort, ease, convenience, etc. And when contemplating marriage, he will be influenced by points such as family-status, caste, dowry available, position in life, physical beauty, or wealth.

A believer's decisions, on the other hand, should be governed primarily by spiritual factors, although other considerations should not be neglected. The glory of God's Name and the extension of His Kingdom should be our first concern. This is why the Lord taught us first to pray, "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy

Kingdom come", and only then, "Thy will be done".

The process of discerning and eliminating worldly motives is vital if we are to know the will of God. To say, "God led me", when our motives were selfish, is blasphemy. Far better in such cases to say the decision was our own than to take God's Name in vain and give a cloak of spirituality to our worldliness. We gain nothing by merely convincing others (or even ourselves) that we are doing God's will. After all, God cannot be fooled. As the Bible says, "We can always prove that we are right, but is the Lord convinced?... We can justify our every deed but God looks at our motives" (Prov. 16:2; 21:2-TLB).

The renewal of our minds will result in our beginning to think as the Lord thinks and to view situations and people as He views them. Paul's mind was so renewed that he could dare to say that he had the mind of Christ and that he no longer looked at people from a merely human point of view (1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:16). His prayer for the Colossian believers was that they too might be thus transformed - "We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from His point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding" (Col. 1:9 - JBP).

Such a transformation of our minds will enable us to know what pleases God and what does not please Him, and thus we shall be able to discern His will easily in the different situations we face. God's promise to us in this New Testament age is, "This is the new agreement (testament)...I will write My laws in their minds so that they will know what I want them to do without My even telling them.....I will write My laws into their minds so that they will always know My will" (Heb. 8:10; 10:16-TLB).

Such a renewal will give us an understanding not only of God's will, but also of His method and of His purpose - we will know, not only what God wants us to do, but also how He wants us to do it, and why. Doing the will of God can be drudgery if we do not appreciate God's purposes. When we do appreciate them, the will of God becomes for us what it was to Jesus - a delight. It is because of our ignorance of God's nature that we fear His will. If we knew Him better, we would rejoice to do His every bidding.

How can our minds be renewed? A wife living close to her husband in heart-companionship comes to know more and more of his mind and of his ways as the years go by. The same applies to the believer and his God. The new birth is like a marriage with the Lord Jesus. We should go on from that point to walk in close fellowship with the Lord, conversing with Him day by day.

We must also let Him speak to our hearts daily, both through His Word as well as through the discipline of trials that He sends into our lives. Thus we shall find ourselves growingly conformed to the image of our Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). If we neglect daily meditation on God's Word and prayer-fellowship with the Lord, we will find it extremely difficult to ascertain God's mind. Meditation on God's Word can straighten our warped and crooked ways of thinking and make us spiritually minded and sensitive to God's Voice.

We can recognise the Lord's voice only by becoming accustomed to hearing it. A new convert once asked a mature servant of God why it was that though Christ had said, "My sheep know My voice", yet he could not hear the Lord's voice. The servant of God replied, "Yes, it is true that His sheep know His voice, but it is also true that the lambs have to learn it."

A son identifies his father's voice easily only because he has heard it so often. Even so, it is only by constantly listening to the voice of the Lord, that we will be able to distinguish it above the din and clamour of other voices that will ring in our minds when we seek God's will. If you are habituated to listening to the Lord's voice, then in times of emergency, His promise is, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying,

This is the way, walk in it; when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left" (Isa. 30:21).

If, on the other hand, we turn to the Lord only in times of emergency, we are not likely to hear His voice at all. Some of God's children are so busy that they have no time to listen to the Lord in their daily lives and yet in times of crisis they want to know His will immediately. Speaking of such believers, G Christian Weiss has said that the spirit of their prayers in an emergency is something like this - "Lord Jesus, I've been awfully busy and haven't had much time to talk with you. Forgive me. But now, Lord, I'm in a predicament, and I must know Your will in this very important matter by 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. So please, Lord, hurry up and reveal it to me. Amen." God's will is not revealed in that way, nor indeed to such persons.

Daily fellowship with God in meditation and in prayer is vital, if we wish to have God's guidance in our lives.

Summary

If we want to find God's will, we must first fulfil the following conditions:

1. We must believe that God will reveal His will to us. Such faith will be characterised by earnest desire and patience. We should be willing to wait for God's time.
2. We must distrust our own cleverness and humbly lean upon God. We do not have to discard our intellectual abilities, but our confidence must be in God and not in ourselves.
3. We must be willing to do God's will in every area of our lives, and not just in a few. We must be obedient to the light God has already given us, and should keep our consciences clean always.
4. We must yield ourselves without reserve to God and be willing to accept anything He chooses for us.
5. We must walk with God daily, listening to what He has to say. We must allow Him thus to renew our minds and deliver us from worldly thought-processes.

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