

Practical Steps to Guidance by R. Paul Stevens

Note: Three helpful Biblical metaphors for guidance are:

The Sheep & the Shepherd (John 10: 3,4); Parent & Child (Gal. 4:1-11); Friend & Friend (John 15: 13-16).

With these three images before us, we can indicate some positive, practical steps in discovering and doing the will of God.

Know and obey the Scriptures. The primary way we gain the mind of God is by exposing ourselves daily to reading and ingesting God's Word (see Spiritual Disciplines; Spiritual Growth). The Bible shows us (1) God's sovereign will (the mystery that is revealed: that God wants to restore the whole of creation in Christ), (2) God's moral will (so one does not need to ask whether premarital sex or gossiping is right or wrong) and (3) God's individual will (each of us is called to live for the praise of God's glory; Ephes. 1:12).

Pray. The most important fruit of prayer is not so much the guidance obtained but a deeper relationship with the Guide. Persons who live lives of unceasing prayer will normally find making decisions within God's will easy. Such persons become God's will.

Cultivate a renewed mind. When God's law is written within your heart (Psalm 40:8), your own biases, prejudices and fleshly stubbornness are dealt with day in and day out. What is needed is sound judgment (Acts 15:28), to think of ourselves "with sober judgment" (Romans 12:3). What we gain by seeking God in the midst of life is encouraged by a large section of the Old Testament and the book of James-wisdom.

Seek godly counsel (Proverbs 11:14). God leads us in the context of a community, as is amply illustrated by Paul's consultation with his companions after receiving a personal vision of a Macedonian man calling for help (Acts 16:9-10). Our primary Christian community, especially in a small group or house church, is the normal context for us to experience the leading of God. One caution, however, is this: sometimes people claiming to have a word from the Lord for us can be wrong, as Paul concluded in Acts 21:4.

Do the thing at hand for God's glory. Your present obedience will predispose you to be guided in the future. It is much easier to steer a moving car than a stalled one!

Be open to supernatural confirmation. But be focused on seeking the Lord, not signs from the Lord.

When you have made a decision, do not keep looking back. Trust God's sovereignty in your life. Doing God's will requires walking by faith, not by sight. We find our acceptance and approval in our relationship with God, not in reading favorable circumstances. You will probably not find out that you actually did God's will until long after, possibly until long, long after.