

SERIOUS LIFE MAGAZINE ~ SERIOUS FAITH ~ RIGGS FAMILY BLOG

Knowing The Will of God

*The Guide That
Teaches You How to
Confidently Determine
God's Will in Your Life*

Also inside:

The Evidence of True Salvation
Assurance of Salvation Tests

B R E N T R I G G S

Knowing The Will of God

*The Guide That
Teaches You How to
Confidently Determine
God's Will in Your Life*

Brent Riggs

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Knowing God's Will

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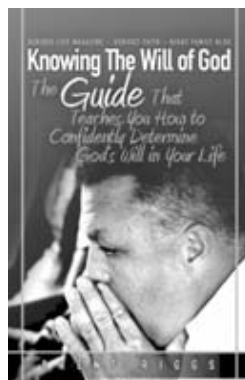
The gentleman on the cover photo is Matt Patterson. The Patterson's graduated one of their younger children to heaven this year... a crash course in learning how to know God's will in the most extreme circumstances. Visit their blog at www.forgottensawranch.com

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Before you begin reading:

I've written the chapters in such a way that you will benefit most by reading one chapter a day, or even one chapter a week.

Each new chapter reviews what has been learned and then builds on it. Given that, this guide would make a great Bible study series, family or personal devotional.

Also, in the back of the guide I have included lessons on "True Salvation". Knowing God's will is dependent on being truly saved. These lessons serve as a good evaluation for those who already profess Christ, and great evangelistic message to those who aren't sure or haven't considered that question.

Many people still consider themselves "followers of God" without realizing that to come through God you must meet His Beloved Son first. The salvation messages will confront the reader with "Are you saved?" or "Are you TRULY saved?"... the most important question we will ever answer.

Top top it all off, you'll find a brief adventure into the book of 1st John with a list of "tests" or "proofs" that give assurance of genuine salvation.

1

Two Parts of God's Will

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

Perhaps the most common question Christians have is “how do I know God’s will?” This can be voiced many ways:

- How do I know I’m doing what God wants?
- Will God approve of my decision?
- Is this the best decision I can make?
- Will God still bless me, care for me, protect me, and guide me if I make a decision that is not THE very best in His eyes?
- Can I be secure in my decision?
- Does my life overall reflect that I know God’s will for it?
- Is my life being affected because I’m not in God’s will?
- I want to do what God wants but how can I know for sure?

There has been much written on the topic ranging from the overly simplistic to the useless wishy-washy. God did not create us only to leave us hanging without a way to know what He would have us to do. No, it’s not a legalistic “A-B-C, 1-2-3” checklist but I’m convinced it’s not nearly as ethereal as commonly thought... nor is it attainable only for the “super Christian.”

In this humble little guide, I will present to you principles, questions, and of course Scripture, that lay out a predictable groundwork that will help you know God’s will about the entire scope of life... the big

questions, the little choices, and the life-changing opportunities that require a decision.

There are two parts to God's Will...

The answer to “what is God’s will” is two part: the first part being “simple,” and the second being an exercise in “working out your salvation.”

Philippians 2:12 – Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (NKJV)

To shed light on this passage, the rendered Greek for “work out” means to “**continually make an effort** to bring something to pass or completion.” From other Scripture, we know this can’t be speaking of earning your salvation by “works.” It refers to a Christian diligently seeking (“working out”) God’s will and then obeying it in order to become more Christ-like (sanctification).

Knowing God’s will is hard work. In our day and age of “fast,” “easy,” and “convenient” everything, there are few people who want to do the hard work of knowing the mind of Christ.

The two parts of God’s will are:

1. God’s plain, revealed Will in Scripture

- Examples: Should I cheat on my taxes? Should I get divorced because I love someone else? We’re engaged, can we sleep together? Is it okay to get drunk occasionally?

2. God’s will for the “gray” areas NOT plainly and directly addressed in the Bible

- Examples: Is it a sin to drink a glass of wine? Should kids go to public school or be homeschooled? Can you ever see a Rated-R movie, or any movies at all? What clothing is appropriate?

Should you celebrate Halloween or Christmas? Can a Christian be in the military and kill someone in a war?

We'll start with the "simple" part before looking at how to determine God's will for the "gray" areas. The "simple" part is where our questions are directly and plainly answered in Scripture. It's only "simple" however in the sense that we can know God's will; obedience however is frequently NOT so simple.

Now I want you to prepare yourself. I'm about to impart to you some incredible, ground-shaking wisdom. Here goes: when it comes to knowing God's will about those things that are plainly and directly addressed in Scripture...

Find out what the Bible says, and do it.

Okay, that wasn't exactly original or earth shattering but it is beautiful in its simplicity and incredible in its effectiveness. And, I have to confess, I didn't make it up either. Some dude named James beat me to the punch:

James 1:22 – But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (NKJV)

While in concept "finding and doing" is simple, it is NOT simple to actually achieve it. You have to diligently search the Scriptures (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11) and when you find a plain answer, you must obey it, or you are in danger of deceiving yourself about your walk with God.

IMPORTANT: you cannot hope to grasp the finer and less obvious points of knowing God's will if you aren't willing to simply obey the clearly revealed parts. I often have people ask me for advice or to pray for them to know God's will when they are ignoring what God has already plainly said.

For instance, a common scenario is a spouse wanting to leave a marriage for another person:

- I'm so unhappy.
- I feel so happy and blessed with the other person.
- I know God brought me and the new person together.
- I'm not sure if God ever wanted me and my spouse to marry.

"Is it God's will for me to stay married? Does the happiness I feel with this other person confirm God's approval? Can you help me figure out what God's will is?"

My answer: NO. I can't help you figure it out because there is nothing to figure out. You are refusing to acknowledge or obey God's clearly revealed will on marriage. The first step in knowing God's will is to find out what He has already written on the matter, and obey it.

Obedience has many benefits:

- You can rest peacefully knowing that you are in God's perfect will.
- You can be assured God is pleased with you.
- You don't have to worry you're doing the wrong thing.
- It brings assurance of salvation (1 John 5.2).
- You can trust that you aren't deceived about your faith (James 1.22).

For questions to which there is a plain answer in Scripture, we must not fall prey to "relativism*" where we decide "some" situations are the exception to plain Scripture. Relativistic thinking may well be the number one cause of confusion for determining God's will.

****Relativism** is the idea that right and wrong are based on circumstances and individual perspectives. It might be okay for you to lie or leave your spouse because of your situation but not right for me (regardless of what the Bible says). Of course the reality is, with relativism, there is NO right or wrong and God's will is irrelevant.*

Fallen and sinful humans (that's you and me) are masters at making excuses and justifying sin. Once we open the door of "relative truth" then everything is up for grabs because we can always formulate a "reason" why we are the "exception" to God's Word.

Let me give a few examples where the Bible gives a black and white answer to certain questions about God's will:

- Can I divorce my spouse because of "irreconcilable differences"? No (Matthew 5:31; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16)
- Can we sleep together if we're engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
- Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
- Am I supposed to read my Bible EVERY day? Yes (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
- Should we go to church? Yes (Hebrews 10.25)
- Should I care for widows and orphans? Yes (James 1.27)
- My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
- Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)

These are just a few examples of God's will where the answer is "black and white." But you can't know these plain answers if you don't diligently search the Bible for them. God has promised to reward the sincere seeker of Scriptural wisdom (James 1.5).

How can we know God's will? First, find out if God's Word has a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance. If it does, then obey God regardless of whether you like it, agree with it, or how you feel about the answer that God has provided.

If there is no plain or direct answer in Scripture.... well, that's where we will pick up tomorrow.

Lord God, Thank you for making Scripture plain and clear for those things that You know we need direct answers for. Help us to find the answers, and we ask for Your grace and power to obey. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Contemplation: Do you know God's Word well enough to even know when God has given a direct answer about something? When you find a plain and clear answer in Scripture, are you prepared to obey without question?

Application: God has made the main things the plain things and vice versa. Many of our questions about "God's Will" are plainly answered. The problem is, we either don't know the Bible well enough, or we don't like the answer. When you want to know God's Will, the first step is to find out whether there is a plain, direct answer in Scripture. Assuming there is, the second step is to obey.

2

Necessity

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

“How can you know what God’s will is? Is it even possible?” At the beginning of each new chapter I am going to purposely review what we’ve learned to that point.

Repetition is the king of learning and driving these points home repeatedly will help you retain the principles, keeping them at the ready when the time comes to brandish them for yourself or to help someone else.

When trying to determine God’s will:

- First, does God’s Word contain a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance?
 - You have to diligently and regularly search God’s Word and do the hard work of finding out God’s revealed, written Word. (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
 - If you find a direct and clear answer, then it simply boils down to a matter of obedience; simple to understand, frequently not simple to actually do. (1 John 5.2; James 1.22)
 - A few examples of this might be:

- Can we sleep together if we're engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
 - Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thess 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
 - Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Working hard to know God's Word, praying for understanding, asking the Spirit for guidance.

The rest of this guide is dedicated to answering the "gray area" question. There are several questions and considerations that will help you determine God's will in those not-so-easy-to-figure-out circumstances.

None of the questions we will consider over the next few days BY THEMSELVES will give you a magic answer; but when considered as a whole, you should be able to make a Godly decision with confidence.

Let's look at the first question... when trying to discover God's will about a question or circumstance, ask yourself:

Is it really necessary?

Is the thing, choice, or action you are considering really necessary, or is it just something "extra" that you would LIKE to do but there is really no "necessity" involved?

- Can you live without it?
- Is it really very important?
- If you gave it up, would anything suffer or be neglected?
- Should you give it up in order to leave room or time for something better?

We burden ourselves unnecessarily with TOO MANY things, too many choices, too many commitments, and too many activities. God never meant for us to live a million miles an hour (1Thessalonians 4.11), a lesson I have not learned very well myself.

Sometimes it's easy to answer this question when it comes to the "non-sacred." We might easily conclude that more work, more sports, or more possessions aren't really necessary but it will take some deeper spiritual maturity to determine when more church, more ministry, and more Christian activity is too much. This is especially true when modern Christianity seems to be non-stop peer pressure to pray more, read more, do more, serve more, attend more, and be involved more, which is evidently supposed to lead to a deeper spiritual walk, greater fellowship with God, and finally, that fulfilling Christian life you dream of.

God has promised to give us the answer to "is it necessary?" when we ask in faith (James 1.5). Consider also the "weight" that will be added to your "faith race" if something is, in reality, unnecessary:

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (NKJV)

We are running a race. The Christian life is a race to the finish line: Jesus Christ. If the choice or decision you are pondering is one that involves holding on to sin, then we have a plain answer in Hebrews 12.1: **lay aside sin** because it ensnares you, traps you, and trips you up. But what about when the choice is amoral (wouldn't be sinful either way)?

Notice the admonition to those in the race:

Let us lay aside every weight!

The idea here is to throw off anything that will slow you down; anything that will make it harder to reach the finish line which is PERFECTION, becoming like Christ.

A runner doesn't carry around an extra 50 fifty pounds when he is trying to win a race. In fact, often embarrassingly, runners today are wearing almost nothing and certainly carrying nothing extra. Why? So there is no extra weight or burden to slow them down. The ancient Olympic runners competed "buck nekkid" (that's Oklahoman for 'naked'). This extreme "laying aside of everything that will hinder us from running" is exactly the mental picture the original readers of this verse would have in mind.

So ask yourself: is it really necessary? Will it slow me down in my race to be Christ-like? Does it contribute to the goal of finishing the race and winning the race? Will my walk with God be hindered or helped if I toss aside, or better yet, never pick up the extra weight (responsibility, commitment, activity, etc.) associated with this decision?

Another way to help you answer the question "is it really necessary" is to determine "will it matter?" What I mean by that is best demonstrated with a series of questions. When considering a choice or decision ask yourself: "if I do this thing" (or say yes, or commit, or take on this responsibility):

- Will it matter tomorrow?
- Will it make a difference two weeks from now?
- Will I really care two months from now?
- Will it have any lasting benefit two years from now?
- Will it matter in 20 years?
- Does it matter from an eternal perspective?

After answering those, ask yourself the **NEGATIVE** versions of those questions: will it hurt tomorrow? Will I still be paying the consequences two months or 20 years from now? Will I lose eternal reward?

Remember, **these aren't quick and easy, magic-pill questions**. None of the questions we consider in this guide will give you an answer **by themselves**. But taken together you should be able to confidently determine God's will in the vast majority of circumstances.

First, see if the Bible has a plain answer. If you can't find a clear, direct answer in Scripture, then start the process by asking: **Is it really necessary?** Or just a low priority? An unneeded, extra distraction? Will it matter 10 days or 10 years or 10 lifetimes from now? Hold on to your answers, we'll look at another important question next.

Lord God, help us to understand the difference between "essential" and "extra." We pray for wisdom and discernment in choosing which things really matter, and which things really aren't necessary or might even be a hindrance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Contemplation: Do you ever ask "is this really needed" or do your feelings determine what's "necessary"? In other words, if you feel like you want it, feel like you need it, or feel like doing it... are your feelings in charge of deciding what you think is essential? Have you ever asked God "is this really a necessity"?

Application: This is a tough question to answer because if we **DESIRE** something, we are prone to rationalize its necessity. It helps sometimes to ask an objective, trusted spiritual mentor; being outside of the "feelings" allows another person to help you see clearly if something is an "extra" or a necessity. Also, if you pray and ask in faith, God will give you the wisdom to know (James 1.4).

3

Respond Like Christ

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

I doubt there has ever been a true Christian that has not struggled frequently with discerning God's will for their life, whether it's a simple decision facing them, or the general course of their entire life. Knowing God's will is not only possible... I believe that it does not have to be the mysterious frustration that it is for most.

Bible study, prayer, and meditation are the hard work of knowing God's will. And therein lies the problem: it is hard work. That's why it seems so elusive to many Christians. Let's review what we have learned so far. When trying to determine God's will:

- First off, does God's Word contain a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance?
 - You have to diligently and regularly search God's Word and do the hard work of finding out God's revealed, written Word. (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
 - If you find a direct and clear answer, then it simply boils down to a matter of obedience; simple to understand, frequently not simple to actually do. (1 John 5.2; James 1.22)
 - A few examples of this might be:

- Can we sleep together if we're engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
 - Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
 - Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Work hard to know God's Word, pray for understanding, and ask the Spirit for guidance.
 - Ask yourself "is this really necessary?"
 - Meditate on Hebrews 12.1; is there "extra weight" involved that could be thrown off?
 - Based on your decision, will it matter in two weeks or two months or in eternity? Will you still be suffering consequences in two years or 20 years?

As you can already guess, this is not an "easy" process. We have to work hard and diligently to discern God's will. What's more... the answer is not always a simple "yes" or "no," "black" or "white" answer. Sometimes both answers can be correct, or both incorrect. We might even be asking the wrong question.

**God may have uses for either answer.
Or you may get NO answer. Or a delayed answer.
Or an answer you don't understand.**

But don't let that frustrate you. It's all a part of learning the mind of Christ and "drawing near" to God. Let's look at another question...

when trying to discover God's will about a question or circumstance, ask yourself:

How would Christ respond?

It is regretful that this idea has been hijacked by such a commercial fad. The "what would Jesus do" craze is pretty much gone - not long ago it was all the rage. Like most fads it probably started from a sincere and well-meaning effort, but in the end, like most popular trends, there was very little authenticity on a large-scale. For a time everyone you saw, from the common guy on the street to the world-famous sports star, was wearing something that had W. W. J. D. plastered on it.

I can recall how ridiculous and hypocritical it was to see a famous and well-known female hip-hop artist at an awards show with W. W. J. D. showing very prominently. She was also half dressed, had just finished a very provocative and immodest dance number, and was surrounded by an entourage of dancers and band members who dressed and danced every bit as immorally as she did.

When she stepped up to the microphone, the first thing she did was thank her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for blessing her with all this success. How utterly sad that this is such an accurate example of the mentality of a very large segment of Christianity today whose primary concern is prosperity, success, and achievement in this lifetime. But that's a whole other lesson... I'm not always sure I know "what would Jesus do?" but I'm pretty sure He wouldn't be at the MTV awards applauding overtly sexual and immodest entertainment.

Regardless of the world's abuse of the phrase, it is still very applicable when trying to discern God's Will. What would Jesus do?
How can I respond or decide in a way that is Christ-like?

Any time and in any way we act like Christ, speak like Christ, or make decisions that Jesus would make, then of course it is the right thing

to do. But the trick here is knowing Christ well enough to be able to discern which decision He would make. That brings us back to the foundation of knowing God's Will: **Bible study, prayer, and meditation** (the common thread that ties this whole process together).

When we respond as Christ would respond, then we are walking the "worthy walk" (Colossians 1.10; 1Thessalonians 2.12). Consider this:

1 John 2:5-6 – But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (NKJV)

We know we truly belong to Christ when we keep His Word and anyone who is in Christ should walk as Christ walked. In other words we should choose as Jesus would choose, speak the words that Jesus would speak, and act the way Jesus would act. In doing so, we will of course know and be in the will of God.

But none of that is possible if we don't know Jesus intimately. And how do you accomplish that? Like a broken record I keep coming back to the same answer:

Bible study, prayer, time with God, and meditation.

I wish that I had some exciting new 10,step method, or seven secrets to spiritual success, or a three-day seminar that would magically replace the hard work of Bible study and prayer with an easy, fun, and entertaining process but it just doesn't work that way (and in all seriousness I'm glad it does not).

Do you want to know God's will? First, search the Bible for a clear and direct answer. If there is none, then ask yourself "is this really necessary?" and "how can I respond like Christ?" Hard work but worth the effort.

Holy God, help us to understand that asking “what would Jesus do” is not a fad, nor is it easy. We ask you to give us the wisdom and the discipline to truly be able to determine “what would Jesus do.” In His name we ask, Amen.

Contemplation: Did you get caught up in the W. W. J. D. fad? When you wore the T-shirts or bracelet did you really mean it? And when you determined what Jesus would do, did you actually do it? Do you know Christ well enough to know what He would do? Are you committed to doing what He would do when you determine what that is?

Application: Don't get me wrong, there is nothing inherently bad about the W. W. J. D. concept. Like all things that we sinners get our hands on, we have soiled a decent enough idea with hypocrisy and trendy shallowness. But getting past that, it is both profitable and necessary to genuinely ask ourselves “how would Jesus respond?” when trying to determine the will of God. But you have to work hard to know that answer, and even harder to always obey it.

4

Epitaph Worthy

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

I doubt there has ever been a true Christian that has not struggled frequently with discerning God's will for their life, whether it's a simple decision facing them, or the general course of their entire life. Knowing God's will is not only possible, I believe that it does not have to be the mysterious frustration that it is for most.

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 - A few examples of this might be:

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 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
 - Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Work hard to know God's Word, pray for understanding, and ask the Spirit for guidance.
 - Ask yourself "is this really necessary?"
 - Meditate on Hebrews 12.1; is there "extra weight" involved that could be thrown off?
 - Based on your decision, will it matter in two weeks or two months or in eternity? Will you still be suffering consequences in two years or 20 years?
 - How would Christ respond?
 - Walk as Jesus would walk; choose, speak, and decide the same way the Lord would in your situation (Colossians 1.10; 1Thessalonians 2.12)

Discerning God's will is not for the timid or lazy. We can't rely on coincidental "signs" and feelings. To know the heart of God on a matter takes good old-fashioned time and effort. And we may have to throw in a good dose of patience as well. God works on His own timetable, not ours. The sooner we learn that, the better.

Sometimes God uses our efforts to discover His will for a purpose that may have nothing to do with the actual circumstance or decision we are dealing with.

In other words, God may use the EFFORT of finding out His will to teach us something else, like patience. God may delay the answer to teach us to wait. Or He may give us an answer we don't understand to teach us faith. Or He may give an answer that we see as "unfair" to teach us humility.

But don't let that frustrate you. It's all a part of learning the mind of Christ and "drawing near" to God. Let's take a look at another question... when trying to discover God's will about a question or circumstance, ask yourself:

Is it worthy of my epitaph?

An epitaph is the words that are written on your tombstone. Often, this is the only lasting statement about a person. Most epitaphs are simply facts stating the name and the dates of birth and death.

If you were to have your epitaph written and engraved NOW while you are still alive, what would you want it say?

If it wasn't for the fact that an epitaph is written on a tombstone we would call the idea of a predetermined epitaph a "goal" (assuming you think it up BEFORE you die!).

An epitaph in a sense can become your life goal. If you could pre-write what people will say about you and what will be engraved on your tombstone for all the future world to read, what would you LIKE for it to say? I would like something like this:

"Here lies old Brent Riggs. He wasn't much of anybody, but he was devoted to prayer and God's Word in simple, consistent, disciplined daily devotion. He didn't achieve much by the world's standard but his life was

marked by increasing holiness and purposeful sacredness in everyday life. Brent had his priorities in line and lived a life worthy of our Lord's commendation, 'Thou good and faithful servant'."

Gee-willickers... I feel like a hypocrite just reading that.

Knowing what I would like people to read about me when I'm gone can help me to know God's will and make the right decisions while I'm still young (45 years young to be exact). This is only truly helpful if the epitaph you have written is one that is in line with the kind of life God prescribes.

Is it expedient?

Another way of asking this question is to ask **"is it expedient?"** Expediency means "the quality being suited to the end in view." In other words when you're trying to figure out God's will about something, it is helpful to see the "end" first, and make your decision on the desired result.

Knowing the end, helps us to make decisions about the beginning.

Think about your pending decision or circumstance and ask God to help you see the very best way your situation can end up, which means "how can it bring the most glory to God?" Formulate clearly in your mind what the ideal Godly end (goal) is, and it will help you to determine God's will for the present because the immediate decisions will be made in light of the ideal Godly result.

1 Corinthians 6:12 – All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

The word "helpful" in this verse carries with it the idea of expediency. When trying to discern God's Will, ask yourself if the

decision you are considering will be **helpful, useful, and productive in light of how you believe God would have things end up**. So while it may be permissible and moral for us to make certain decisions, that doesn't necessarily mean it is helpful or useful (expedient).

Do you want to know God's will?

- First, search the Bible for a clear and direct answer.
- If there is none, then ask yourself "is this really necessary?" and "how can I respond like Christ?"
- Try to determine the ideal Godly result, and ask yourself "what decision will help me achieve that result?" And "is this helpful or useful, or merely a simple desire that will make no real contribution to the end I know will glorify God the most?"

Discovering God's will can be pretty hard work but always worth the effort.

Father in Heaven, help us to see the end clearly in such a way that brings glory to You; then we pray that You will give us wisdom and clear direction on how to make decisions now that will help us achieve the result that will most honor You. In Jesus' name we ask, Amen.

Contemplation: Have you ever thought about how you would like your life to end up? If you were to write down the ideal result of your life, would your decisions today be helping you achieve that? Do you understand the difference between desirable and expedient?

Application: There can be many good things that are simply desirable but not necessarily expedient. For example, it is almost always good and desirable to engage in more ministry at your church, but it may not be expedient in light of what God is trying to do in your life. That is it hard question to answer, and only one that can be answered between you and God. In other words, you have to discover God's will. Lastly, if you have never given thought to how

you would like your life to end up, how in the world are you making decisions now that will achieve the result you would like to have?

5

Drawn or Turned

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

Trying to discern the will of God is a daily if not moment-by-moment requirement of the Christian walk. Many Christians today turn to “signs,” coincidences, gut feelings, or chance to determine God’s will... none of which are reliable. Our God is not a God of confusion, illogic, or disorder. He has given us what we need (2Timothy 3.16-16; 2Peter 1.3) to be able to know His will in our life.

Let’s review what we have learned so far. When trying to determine God’s will:

- First off, does God’s Word contain a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance?
 - You have to diligently and regularly search God’s Word and do the hard work of finding out God’s revealed, written Word. (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
 - If you find a direct and clear answer, then it simply boils down to a matter of obedience; simple to understand, frequently not simple to actually do. (1 John 5.2; James 1.22)
 - A few examples of this might be:

- Can we sleep together if we're engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
 - Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
 - Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Work hard to know God's Word, pray for understanding, and ask the Spirit for guidance.
 - Ask yourself "is this really necessary?"
 - Meditate on Hebrews 12.1; is there "extra weight" involved that could be thrown off?
 - Based on your decision, will it matter in two weeks or two months or in eternity? Will you still be suffering consequences in two years or 20 years?
 - How would Christ respond?
 - Walk as Jesus would walk; choose, speak, and decide the same way the Lord would in your situation. (Colossians 1.10; 1Thessalonians 2.12)
 - Is it epitaph-worthy?
 - When you think of how you want your life to end up (glorifying God), does your impending decision help you reach that end?
 - God's will is always helpful and useful (1Corinthians 6.12), not merely a simple desire that does not promote His glory.

There are many benefits to the exercise of determining God's will that surpass simply coming to a decision. The process cultivates and

encourages meditation, thoughtfulness, devotion, discipline, and it kills impulsiveness.

Struggling to know God's will has many positive side effects: discipline, thoughtfulness, devotion, and not being impulsive.

It's hard work but it will always be fulfilling and worth the effort. It's all a part of learning the mind of Christ and "drawing near" to God. Let's look at the next question... when trying to discover God's will about a question or circumstance, ask yourself:

Will others be drawn to Christ or turned away?

We don't live in a vacuum. Every action and decision that we make is constantly being viewed and evaluated by our friends, family, and all those around us.

It is a paradox that while on the one hand it only matters what God thinks about our decisions, it remains a fact that those who view our life can frequently either be drawn closer to God by our actions or, unfortunately, be turned away from God. We make a personal determination about what we believe to be the will of God based solely on whether or not God is pleased with our decision, while keeping in mind that each choice we make is part of our overall personal evangelism.

Of course if we correctly choose God's will, the decision will serve God's purpose whether we see it or recognize it at all (even if we make the wrong choice, God's purpose will be served! That is one of the joys of Christianity - Romans 8:28).

We consider the "evangelism factor" because it helps us to discern God's will and reminds us of our primary mission as Christians.

When we profess Christianity our entire life becomes a journey of evangelism. It is a mistake to compartmentalize this aspect and think that only when you are sharing the Gospel are you engaging in evangelism.

Every word that comes out of your mouth, every choice that you make, and every determination of God's will that you make, become an evangelistic statement to those around you. As you go about trying to determine God's will, keep in mind that unbelievers may possibly be drawn to God, or be turned away from Him by what they see you do. As well, other Christians can either be encouraged or discouraged by watching how you choose God's will.

It's not the only factor to consider, but definitely part of it.

We always enjoy and desire the positive effects we have on others when they become more interested about the Lord because of something they see in us. But the "negative" reality is they can be just as easily pushed away from God by what they view in our life.

Colossians 4:5 – Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. (NKJV)

Let's examine the Greek rendering of each word in the verse to discover its meaning and application:

- **Walk** (peripateo): to move forward, to make your way, to progress or to regulate one's life
- **Wisdom** (sophia): intelligence, knowledge, or skill as it pertains to the management of affairs; in particular knowledge of God for upright living
- **Towards** (pros): to the advantage of, or with regards to
- **Those who are outside** (exo): to be outside of, away from or a stranger to; being outside the doorway
- **Redeeming** (exagorazo): to pay a price to recover something, to buy for one's use, to make a wise and sacred use of opportunity

- **Time** (kairos): a measured or definite period of time, the right time, or the due measure of time

Now taken altogether we might have an expounded modern sentence that goes something like this:

We should live our lives determined each day to discover and obey the knowledge of God, keeping in mind that there are those outside of the Kingdom of God who are watching. In this way we are properly using (and in a sense repaying) the opportunity of our time, all of which belongs to God. There is only a short, fixed amount of time and we should treat it as very valuable.

We need to realize that our lives are being watched by those who are unsaved. God has allotted to each of us a finite period of time bought by His grace and mercy and that time belongs to Him. By treating each moment of that time as an opportunity to draw others to God, we are in a sense “buying back” or repaying God for purchasing it for us.

As you try to discover God’s will for your life always weigh into the decision whether or not it will draw the unsaved around you closer to God or will push them even further away.

Do you want to know God’s will?

- First, search the Bible for a clear and direct answer.
- If there is none, then ask yourself “is this really necessary?” and “how can I respond like Christ?”
- Try to determine the ideal Godly result, and ask yourself “what decision will help me achieve that result?” And “is this helpful or useful, or merely a simple desire that will make no real contribution to the end I know will glorify God the most?”
- Ask yourself how your decision will affect the unsaved who are watching you. Will they be more or less interested in God by watching you?

Discovering God's will can be pretty hard work but always worth the effort.

Father, help us to understand that each moment is valuable because it belongs to You. It is NOT ours to do with as we wish. Help us to discern Your will by measuring the evangelistic effect of our choices. In Jesus' name we ask, Amen.

Contemplation: Are your choices, even concerning God's will, solely motivated by how it benefits you personally? Do you think it matters much what effect it has on others?

Application: Our time is not our own. Each decision and act should be to further God's purpose, which is primarily evangelistic. We share the life-changing power of God each time we make a choice or decision that is in tune with God's will.

6

Good or Better

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

Determining God's will can be tough because it's not always a simple matter of right and wrong. When we are struggling with discerning God's will, the answer becomes perfectly clear the moment we run across an aspect that is obviously "wrong" or "sinful" (the answer is easy, but admitting the answer not always is!).

However, often we struggle with deciding God's will concerning things that truly are NOT sinful. Deciding whether or not God wants you to do it can be a difficult task. First, let's review what we've learned so far. When trying to determine God's will:

- First off, does God's Word contain a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance?
 - You have to diligently and regularly search God's Word and do the hard work of finding out God's revealed, written Word. (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
 - If you find a direct and clear answer, then it simply boils down to a matter of obedience; simple to understand, frequently not simple to actually do. (1 John 5.2; James 1.22)
 - A few examples of this might be:

- Can we sleep together if we're engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
 - Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
 - Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Work hard to know God's Word, pray for understanding, and ask the Spirit for guidance.
 - Ask yourself "is this really necessary?"
 - Meditate on Hebrews 12.1; is there "extra weight" involved that could be thrown off?
 - Based on your decision, will it matter in two weeks or two months or in eternity? Will you still be suffering consequences in two years or 20 years?
 - How would Christ respond?
 - Walk as Jesus would walk; choose, speak, and decide the same way the Lord would in your situation. (Colossians 1.10; 1Thessalonians 2.12)
 - Is it epitaph-worthy?
 - When you think of how you want your life to end up (glorifying God), does your impending decision help you reach that end?
 - God's will is always helpful and useful (1Corinthians 6.12), not merely a simple desire that does not promote His glory.
 - Will others be drawn to Christ or turned away?
 - Will your family, friends, co-workers, and those viewing your life be drawn closer to Christ or become less

interested in God by your decision? It is important for us to make decisions that will make the best use of our time to fulfill God's purpose. (Colossians 4.5)

We need to learn that there are many considerations in determining God's will. It's not just about what we desire, or "right and wrong," or what's most advantageous to us. Biblically, our priority of concern flows down three levels in this order: God, others, and finally, us personally (Matthew 22.37; Romans 12.10).

We cannot discern God's will when we get the order wrong, which occurs when considering "me" before God and others.

Our next question that helps us in determining God's will is:

What is the most edifying decision I can make?

First let's define the word "edify":

- to instruct or improve spiritually, from Latin, to erect a house
- build; establish;
- to instruct and improve especially in moral and religious knowledge
- uplift; enlighten; inform

So as you can see from the definition we are not considering a choice between good or bad, right or wrong; we are trying to determine what is better, or the best... what is MOST edifying.

- Which choice will instruct or improve you the most spiritually?
- Which choice will build you up and help you establish a deeper relationship with God?
- Which choice will give you greater instruction and improvement, morally and spiritually?

- Which choice will enlighten you more about God and cause you to be more informed about the Lord?

This aspect of God's will is more difficult to discern because the answers are all **varying degrees of good**. Some choices will be good and perfectly okay with God. Other choices will be better and not only okay, they will also be of some noticeable benefit to you in your growth as a Christian.

And yet another choice may be the very best, and not only okay with God, it will be especially blessed because you have chosen what will bring the most glory to the Lord.

**Most times choosing the “best” over “better”
or “good” will also carry the highest price
in effort, discipline, and sacrifice.**

Choosing the best will rarely be synonymous with choosing the easiest. There are few things in the “worthy walk” that are easy (not to be confused with joyful, light, or peaceful). Easy is rarely “the best” in the sense that the most spiritual growth and depth would be the result.

The first thing to consider may sound too simple to bring up, but let's not make the mistake of assuming everyone will know to ask first: “is my choice edifying at all?”

1 Corinthians 10:23 – All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. (NKJV)

Some things may be **permissible** within the bounds of our Christian liberty, but that doesn't automatically mean that everything permissible is also **edifying**. We need to ask first, “IS this edifying to ANY degree?” If not, file thirteen it (that means to throw it away for all you young folks).

Now, **working under that assumption that our choice IS edifying**, then we need to consider the idea of “good, better, best.”

Sometimes “Option A ” is good, “Option B ” is better, and “Option C ” might be best. Just the effort it takes to recognize and understand that there is more than one choice is beneficial in and of itself.

What is MOST edifying will be what brings the MOST glory to God first, and what will bring the most fruit and maturity to our lives second. Being honest enough to see the difference, mature enough to consider it, and humble enough to keep from deceiving ourselves, are the ingredients of spiritual maturity.

I’m going to leave the point there and not beat it to death. This is not a simple consideration or idea. There are no pat answers or checklists to follow. It takes trust in God, prayer, and patience. But it’s worth the effort. Ask:

What is the most edifying decision I can make? Which choice or decision will bring about the most good from all angles?

Father in Heaven, help us to understand the idea of edification. Open our eyes to what is “best” in bringing glory to You. In Jesus’ name we ask, Amen.

Contemplation: When discerning God’s will, do you ever think of whether something “good” might not be the “best”? Which would you honestly prefer if you only had two choices: 1) something good that YOU desire the most? or 2) something better that brings God more glory, but YOU don’t really desire?

Application: On the surface, this concept seems simple enough but the potential for deceiving ourselves is huge. We are masters at rationalizing the “edification factor” to match our personal desire. But, it remains that determining God’s will sometimes involves finding out what is BEST in the face of other choices that may very well be good themselves. God receiving the most glory seems to be key to this particular aspect of determining His Will.

7

Glory Filter

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

There is another question that reaches far beyond just our effort to determine God's will. It should be a question that becomes an automated filter for everything in our life.

Far too often, we are concerned with not “crossing the line” into sin or a bad choice, so we want to know where the line is. Or we are trying to figure out what's best for us first. Oftentimes we just act impulsively and go with our emotions and immediate desires without ever thinking of anything else.

We need to learn to have a mindset of “what will bring God the most glory?” about every thought, every act, every word, and every decision. So as you meditate on this next question, realize that it is much farther reaching than what I can adequately expound on in this little guide.

Let's review what we have learned so far. When trying to determine God's will:

- First off, does God's Word contain a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance?

- You have to diligently and regularly search God's Word and do the hard work of finding out God's revealed, written Word. (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
- If you find a direct and clear answer, then it simply boils down to a matter of obedience; simple to understand, frequently not simple to actually do. (1 John 5.2; James 1.22)
- A few examples of this might be:
 - Can we sleep together if we're engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
 - Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)
 - Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Work hard to know God's Word, pray for understanding, and ask the Spirit for guidance.
 - Ask yourself "is this really necessary?"
 - Meditate on Hebrews 12.1; is there "extra weight" involved that could be thrown off?
 - Based on your decision, will it matter in two weeks or two months or in eternity? Will you still be suffering consequences in two years or 20 years?
 - How would Christ respond?
 - Walk as Jesus would walk; choose, speak, and decide the same way the Lord would in your situation. (Colossians 1.10; 1Thessalonians 2.12)
 - Is it epitaph-worthy?

- When you think of how you want your life to end up (glorifying God), does your impending decision help you reach that end?
- God's will is always helpful and useful (1Corinthians 6.12), not merely a simple desire that does not promote His glory.
- Will others be drawn to Christ or turned away?
 - Will your family, friends, co-workers, and those viewing your life be drawn closer to Christ or become less interested in God by your decision? It is important for us to make decisions that will make the best use of our time to fulfill God's purpose. (Colossians 4.5)
- What is the most edifying decision I can make?
 - Is any choice edifying? If yes, is one choice better than another and bring more glory to God? (1Corinthians 10.23)

Now consider this:

How will God receive the most glory?

This question takes patience and effort because there may be many possible answers. The more important God's glory becomes to us, the more effort and diligence we will apply to contemplating it. As SELF is mortified (put to death) in our life, the way will be clear for us to filter our life instinctively through God's eyes instead of ours.

Our flesh has a natural instinct to want to do just enough to be in "the club" (Christianity); and get away with as much as possible without crossing the line and get booted from the club (guilt-free fellowship with God). Consider these common questions that betray this mentality:

- How much sexual contact can we (an unmarried couple) have and not be sinning?
- How much can I "fudge" on my taxes and not be cheating?
- Do I have to give 10% on my gross or net income?
- How short can my skirt be and not be immodest?

- Is profanity okay if those words are commonly accepted?
- Is it okay to watch “tasteful” sex scenes in movies if we are married?

The list of these types of questions could go on and on. The questions themselves are not the issue... they betray a heart trying to embrace a LESSER good that robs God of His deserved glory. The maturing Christian will have thoughts more of this nature as they grow in the Lord:

- God will be most glorified through our purity and self-control.
- Honesty and integrity are signs of a Spirit-controlled person and God is honored by our concern to obey the laws of those He has placed in authority over us.
- I will give as much as possible with a cheerful heart because it will bring glory to the One who saved me from my sins and is the Giver of everything I have.
- I will honor Christ with my modesty and purity; anything that might in anyway be inappropriate or cause another to lust after me is not going to be my choice of clothing.
- While no one around me will condemn me or think I am doing anything wrong, I know that God is glorified the most when the Word of God becomes my criteria for language, not societal acceptance. The tongue reveals the contents of the heart.
- I want my marriage to be pure and holy, bringing glory to God by protecting and honoring the sanctity of my heart and eyes.

These statements come from a mindset of “how can God be most glorified?” rather than “what can I do and not break the rules?” The Bible is very clear on this attitude:

1 Corinthians 10:31 – Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (NKJV)

WHATEVER we do.... not just “church stuff”; **everything**. God can either be glorified or dishonored by anything we say or do or think. When God is glorified, there may be times when another available choice represents an opportunity to bring GREATER glory to Him.

There is never any finer reason or motivation than to bring God the greatest amount of glory possible.

God’s glory is a higher consideration than simply not “crossing the line” into sin, especially when our standard of sin is determined by being “better than the world,” instead of being developed using the standard of Jesus Christ. Understand me here... if our mindset is to “not cross the line” of sin, then it is **likely** that our way of drawing that line is to draw it just short of how “bad” the world is. As the world gets worse, our line moves.

My friend, John Barnett, describes this as the “two-second rule” in driving. Whether you are going 55 mph or 80 mph, it is “safe” to be at least “two seconds” behind the car in front of you. This works great for driving, but for holiness it is a disaster.

When God commands us to do “55” in modesty or honesty, we are sinning by doing 65 even if the world is doing 90. Staying a safe distance behind the world is not our standard (though it appears to be oftentimes), God’s Word is.

By changing our mentality from “don’t cross the line” to “how can God be most glorified,” we are not likely to drift into self-deception about sin. **God’s glory must be our goal and Jesus Christ our standard.** You can NEVER go wrong by asking “how can God be most glorified?” and then deciding and acting based on that.

Father, help us to learn to filter our actions, words, and choices through the motive of what will bring You the most glory. Teach us that there is no greater reason or purpose. In Jesus’ name we ask, Amen.

Contemplation: Are you guilty of having the “club” mentality (how little can I do and still be a Christian)? Do you find yourself thinking “how much and still not be sin”? Have you ever tried to develop the mindset and instinctive reaction of “how can I most glorify God”?

Application: “What will bring the most glory to God?” Conducting your life through this “filter” will very infrequently be the easiest choice, but will always be the most fruitful and fulfilling choice.

8

More Questions

1 John 2:17 – And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (NKJV)

I wanted to wrap up our thoughts on “Knowing the Will of God” by giving you a full summary of the series, along with some additional closing questions. When trying to determine God’s will:

- First off, does God’s Word contain a plain and direct answer to your question or circumstance?
 - You have to diligently and regularly search God’s Word and do the hard work of finding out God’s revealed, written Word. (2Timothy 2.15; Acts 17.11)
 - If you find a direct and clear answer, then it simply boils down to a matter of obedience; simple to understand, frequently not simple to actually do. (1 John 5.2; James 1.22)
 - A few examples of this might be:
 - Can we sleep together if we’re engaged and in love? No (Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.4)
 - Is it okay to gossip for any reason? No (Matthew 12.36; Proverbs 17.9)
 - My employer treats me bad; do I still have to work hard? Yes (1Thessalonians 4.11-12; Colossians 3.17; 1Peter 2.18-19)

- Is it okay to treat some people better than others based on their social status or income? No (James 2.2-4)
- If there is no direct answer in the Bible, how do you know God's will for the "gray areas" (those things the Scriptures don't address plainly or directly)?
 - This is the idea of "working out your salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2.12)
 - Work hard to know God's Word, pray for understanding, and ask the Spirit for guidance.
 - Ask yourself "is this really necessary?"
 - Meditate on Hebrews 12.1; is there "extra weight" involved that could be thrown off?
 - Based on your decision, will it matter in two weeks or two months or in eternity? Will you still be suffering consequences in two years or 20 years?
 - How would Christ respond?
 - Walk as Jesus would walk; choose, speak, and decide the same way the Lord would in your situation. (Colossians 1.10; 1Thessalonians 2.12)
 - Is it epitaph-worthy?
 - When you think of how you want your life to end up (glorifying God), does your impending decision help you reach that end?
 - God's will is always helpful and useful (1Corinthians 6.12), not merely a simple desire that does not promote His glory.
 - Will others be drawn to Christ or turned away?
 - Will your family, friends, co-workers, and those viewing your life be drawn closer to Christ or become less interested in God by your decision? It is important for us to make decisions that will make the best use of our time to fulfill God's purpose. (Colossians 4.5)
 - What is the most edifying decision I can make?
 - Is any choice edifying? If yes, is one choice better than another and bring more glory to God? (1Corinthians 10.23)
 - Which decision will result in God receiving the most glory?

- Don't ask "what can I do but still not be sinning?" rather, ask "what can I do to bring God the most glory?" (1Corinthians 10.31)
- There is no higher motivation for making decisions that making the one that will glorify God the greatest.

Here are some more questions to consider:

How will this decision affect God's other revealed will in my life?

- Has God already led you to some other decision? How does the current decision play into the already known will of God? Will you be unable to fulfill God's will if you pursue a certain course now?
- God has revealed that we should be godly parents, godly employees, godly spouses... will this decision adversely affect your known responsibilities?

Will my ministry suffer based on the decision I am considering?

- Will the ministry work you currently participate in suffer in light of this decision? Will you be unable to fulfill or continue your God-given ministry at church, to others, or to your family? Or will the ministry work suffer?

Does the choice I'm considering give pause?

- Holy-Spirit-indwelt believers have a God-sensitive conscience. If you are feeling a pause, seeing red flags, or sensing something is wrong, then you probably have good reason. Slow down, find some Godly friends, and get their advice.

Do I feel the need to keep this decision secret from everyone?

- Granted, some things are private, and at times just between you and God. Past that, do you feel like you want to hide this choice from your Christian friends and spiritual mentors? If yes, then there is probably something wrong. Don't hide it. Seek Godly counsel instead of being impulsive or stubborn.

The **good news** is we can determine God's will with confidence by putting some effort into it.

The **bad news** is we can determine God's will with confidence, so we don't really have an excuse for NOT doing it.

The Lord will bless your sincere effort to want to glorify Him through the process of discovering His Will.

Father, thank You for giving us a way to know Your will for our daily lives. Help us to have sincere hearts, a discerning spirit, and a heart that wants to glorify You. In Jesus' name we ask, Amen.

Contemplation: Do you seek God's will in all things? Most things? Some things? When things get bad? Or is finding God's will reserved only for the "important" things?

Application: The Lord doesn't want us to take a "shot in the dark" and "hope for the best." He has promised to lead us, teach us, instruct us, and give us wisdom if we seek it diligently in faith.

9

Bonus Stuff

I've included some related messages I hope you'll enjoy. At the end I finished up with some messages on what true salvation is not only for Christians (who can evaluate their spiritual lives) but for the unsaved who may think they are seeking God's will but have not yet sought Him first in salvation.

The Kingdom of Heaven - Doing God's Will

Matthew 3:2: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (NKJV)

The kingdom of heaven is very exclusive. That's not very popular in today's feel-good, relativistic age; but it is no less true even if the whole world finds it distasteful. There is only one kingdom of heaven, only one way to get there, and only one person who makes it possible. Frankly, rather than finding that to be "intolerant," I find it comforting.

God did not complicate things. We don't have to search every religion and find the best version. We don't have to wonder if we've got the "right" truth, or done enough to earn our salvation, or wait through endless cycles of lifetimes until we become good enough for salvation.... we just have to believe the simple and exclusive truth that God has revealed.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only

begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)

Thank you Lord, for not complicating it. It's amazing (not really) that the world hates God for saying there is only one way. You would think that mankind would be grateful that the Lord has provided and shown us the exact way to eternal salvation. But the very sinful pride that made it necessary that Jesus should come to earth and die, is the same sinful pride that spits and curses at the truth of the Gospel.

The kingdom of God belongs to those who repent. True repentance is a compilation of sorrow, remorse, and contrition concerning personal sin followed by a change of heart, purpose, motivation, and intention. In short, it is the authentic exchange of my way for God's way after acknowledging that I have violated God's way. God is right; I am wrong (where I do not agree with and conform to God).

Scriptures that demonstrate how repentance manifests itself: Isa 45:22; Mt 6:19-21; Ac 14:15; 2Co 5:17; Col 3:2; 1Th 1:9; Heb 12:1,2

The kingdom of God belongs to the helpless in need of rescue; the "poor in spirit" (Matt 5.3). Repentance springs from the heart of those who are not only truly sorry for their sin, who realize the necessity of turning way from sin, but also realize that they are helpless to change their predicament unless God does it for them.

The kingdom of God belongs to the persecuted, those who suffer solely because of their relationship with Christ (Matt 5.10). The world hates Jesus, and they will hate those follow Him. We don't have to go looking for persecution, it will find us when we serve the Lord.

**You are great in the kingdom of heaven
by doing what God commands.**

Matthew 5:19-20: Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in

the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. (NKJV)

Any violation of God's law (apart from Christ) makes us "least" or outside of God's Kingdom (Gal 3.10; Rom 3.23) and we have all occupied the place of "least" at some time in our life. By teaching and DOING God's commands you will be called "great in the kingdom of heaven". All of us have the opportunity to do and teach... we teach ourselves, our family and friends, and those we share the Gospel with.

To understand what Jesus was trying to say, remember who Jesus was talking to. The Pharisees had perverted and transformed God's Law into a works-based, man-derived system of "do's and don'ts." They looked good on the outside, but were rotten and sick on the inside (Matt 23.25). Jesus destroyed their entire "religion" by proclaiming that "doing" what you hear from God is true religion... not simply have a head knowledge or "looking good" on the outside. "Doing" and "teaching" imply a sincere life of Godliness, not just an outward conformity without inward transformation. It has been said that:

Many people will miss heaven by less than one foot.

In other words, what we know about God never gets from our head to our heart. Head knowledge alone produces "religion." When the knowledge of God descends to the heart, it results in action and change. We become "doers," not just hearers. (James 1.22)

Our righteousness has to exceed head knowledge, surpass external compliance, and issue from a truly repentant heart that understands man has nothing to offer towards salvation (poor in spirit). Only then will we be part of the kingdom of heaven... and a great part at that!

**Many people will not enter the kingdom of heaven
despite a life of religious activity.**

Matthew 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (NKJV)

These verses should cause us to constantly evaluate our life and ask "Am I simply doing religious things of my own making, or am I doing the will of the Father in heaven?". It is scary to think that someday we may stand in front of God and have Him say "depart from Me, I don't know you." However, God does not leave us without a way to tell; He reveals how to know the difference between false works of human pride and true works that glorify God.

**Good works, "miracles," ministries, and religious activity,
will deceive many into a false sense of salvation.
Only those who do the will of the Father
in Heaven will enter the Kingdom.**

How can we know God's will?... the Bible and prayer. Learn to examine everything you are doing "for God" and evaluate whether or not you are doing it because it is God's will (which always points to and glorifies Jesus) or are you doing it for "self" reasons:

- For recognition: am I doing this to be noticed and acknowledged?
- For approval: am I doing this because I need the approval of men to feel "good" or loved?
- For admiration: am I doing this because I want people to see what a good or great person I am?
- For salvation: am I doing this trying in some way to prove that I'm good enough for God to save?

- For emotional need: are you lonely, unloved, or hurting; and doing this will soothe those feelings?

Notice that each of these reasons originates from "self." In our Scripture, we can see the pattern: "didn't we prophesy?", "didn't we cast out demons?", "didn't we do many wonders in Your name?" The focus is on what the person did, not why he did it. If these acts were truly for God's glory, then God would not be rejecting them. So they had to be motivated by selfish desires instead of the glory of Christ.

As humans, we have primary needs that are part of how God created us. We have a need to feel loved, to be secure, to be a part of something, and to feel wanted, needed, and have a purpose in life. We have the need for unconditional acceptance and approval. We have the need to have our existence validated and confirmed as important, worthwhile, and meaningful.

I used to minimize and dismiss those needs thinking it was all just a bunch of "feel-good, self-esteem nonsense" that too many weak and pampered Christians gave too much attention to. I have grown to learn that these basic human needs have very powerful influence in our life and that we can't ignore them just because the world has perverted it into something God never intended. Yes, there is a very unGodly religion of "self" in the world that is rooted in a prideful pursuit of self-love, self-adoration, self-promotion, and self "esteem." The pursuit of elevating "self" as worthy apart from God, is the original lie that Satan told Adam and Eve.

However, we are worthy in Christ; we are valuable in Christ; we are meaningful, purposeful, and wanted in Christ. Those God-given needs are fulfilled fully and perfectly in our relationship with God, through Christ (in increasing part now, and in whole when we die). Now why did I get off on that?

**Much religious activity is done to earn the
unconditional love, acceptance, and approval that
every human longs for,**

**but can only be found in our position and
relationship with Christ.**

Think about what these people had done according to our verses. They had prophesied, cast out demons, and done "many wonders." They were trying to earn God's love, earn His acceptance, and earn His approval. Obviously they were interested in God, or they would have been out probably doing other non-religious things. Why bother with religious activity if you aren't searching for something that religion offers? (i.e., salvation, purpose, hope, etc.).

I think there are two reasons people get to this point: 1) they have been taught incorrectly (i.e., parenting, church, society, etc.) and are blind to the truth, or 2) their pride will not allow them to consider their true nature ("poor in spirit") and so they believe that only by "performance" can they obtain what God offers. Either way, good works, even in Jesus' name, can be done to fulfill our own personal needs, rather than for the sole purpose of glorifying Christ and obeying the Father's will.

All of that to say this: examine and evaluate your "good works." Are you doing them because without a doubt it is God's will and glorifies Christ? Or are you doing them to fulfill some deep emotional or personal need that can only be satisfied by Christ? While our verse primarily applies to distinguishing the "saved" from the "unsaved," (and that works cannot save) there is no doubt an application for Believers that many true Christians are still doing "good works" for "self" reasons... attempting to fulfill what can only be found in a relationship with Christ (unconditional love, acceptance, value, purpose, etc.).

The kingdom of heaven will be missing many people who performed great works in "Jesus' name," but were done for "self" reasons, not Christ-reasons. Doing the will of God makes us a great part of the kingdom and instead of hearing "depart from Me, I don't know you," you will hear "well done, enter in, my good and faithful servant"!

(Matt 25.21)

Contemplation: Have you ever examined why you do what you do? As a Christian, do you feel lonely, unloved, and valueless? Do you scurry about involving yourself in religious work in order to soothe those needs? Is your value based on what YOU are? On what YOU do? On who likes you, accepts you, or approves of you? Or is your value based on who CHRIST is? What CHRIST did? On whether or not Jesus loves you, accepts you, and approves of you?

Application: The basic needs of love, acceptance, worth, and purpose are powerful forces in our life. Very much of all that we do, good or bad, originates from these deep needs. For the mature Christian, those needs are met in and through Christ, so that we may be FREE to live a life for God, never having to earn His love or rely on the fragile approval of other people. But many Christians have not discovered or been taught that these needs are found only in Jesus and so they live in the endless pit of performance and approval, constantly striving through religious activity to find the worthiness they long for that can only be found in Christ. Examine your "good works" and see if they are "self" motivated, or "Christ" motivated.

Lest I stray too far from the foundational meaning of Matt 7.21-23, let me clarify that these verses speak primarily of the fact that good works, even if done in God's name, cannot save you. It is possible to be involved in intense religious activity and be deceived about salvation. Only belief in Christ and trusting in His shed blood will cause you to be known by the Father. This is the basic meaning of these verses. The rest of my comments are an "application" of the verses, not an exposition.

QUESTION:

Can we truly seek the will of God without surrendering completely to Him? If we have our own agenda, if obeying God interferes with our own selfish desires, how does this affect doing His will?

ANSWER:

I'm glad that we can still "seek the will of God" even without "completely surrendering to Him" or we would rarely ever seek God's will at all.

I guess it depends on one's definition of "completely" but if taken at face value, it would be hard to find a person, or a group of people, who could claim to consistently AND COMPLETELY surrender to God at all times, or even most of the time.

As finite, prideful, sinful, and frail humans, we have to be careful when using all-encompassing words like "completely." In fact, we are only safe using them when and where God does it for us.

I'm not sure it is even possible (again, depending on how you define it) for anyone encased in this sin-cursed flesh to truly and COMPLETELY surrender all to God. In the purest definition of "complete" that will only happen once we are free of the curse of sin.

That's the logical extreme answer. The practical answer is that TO THE DEGREE IN WHICH OUR OWN SELF-AGENDA EXISTS, IT WILL INHIBIT AND FRUSTRATE OUR EFFORT TO FIND AND DO GOD'S WILL.

And to your point, the opposite is true. To the degree that we do God's will, it is easier to deny and mortify (put to death) the sinful will of our flesh.

Galatians 5:16-18: I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and

the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (NKJV)

Romans 8:13: For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (NKJV)

So my final answer to this question would be: YES, "self" (flesh) interferes with knowing and doing God's will. So strive to surrender your will to God and the more you do that, the easier it becomes to both do the surrendering, and to know and to do God's will.

It can be a self-perpetuating cycle either positive (the more you surrender, the easier it is to know God's will) or negative (the more you follow the flesh, the harder it becomes to know God's will).

Saving Faith: Tests & Evidence

1 John 5:13: These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

2 Corinthians 13:5: Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

I was asked this weekend the question, "how can you really know you are genuinely saved?" This is not a question about "once saved always saved" (eternal security). This question, more fully would go something like this:

"Is there any way I can look at my own life and person, and know for sure whether or not I'm genuinely saved?"

The answer is categorically, YES.

Like everything else in life we want to prove, determine, objectively evaluate, or figure out, we can consider the EVIDENCE of our life, and then look at some TESTS revealed in Scripture to determine if we have genuine saving faith or not.

Sometimes we think everything about spirituality and faith is mysterious and unknowable... just a blind faith that we have to "hope" is on the right track. Of course there are things that require "faith" (trust in things "not seen") but it's never BLIND faith. It's faith based on evidence and facts.

Does this mean that genuine saving faith is an intellectual process only? Hardly.

I've never understood man's tendency to want to say faith is either all "heart" or all "intellect." We are created in God's image and our faith consists of all of our created being: intellect, heart, emotion, and logic. It's not all or nothing, and no part of any of these negates the other. Nor does one person's tendency to lean towards a certain aspect mean they are not using the other. For example, I personally lean naturally more towards the "intellect and logic" approach to my faith. That's just how God made me. I've been accused at times of leaning on my Bible knowledge and intellect to "save me" rather than faith and love. Ridiculous.

That is just as ridiculous as me saying that a person who naturally leans more towards the emotional experiential aspects of faith is "leaning on" their feelings for salvation rather than the facts. It is common though, that one side or the other tends to think THEIR approach to faith is the "right" approach (intellect or "heart").

Can a person mistake intellectual knowledge for saving faith? Of course. Can a person mistake "feeling" for saving faith? Of course. But it's not a foregone conclusion that either are true. The "intellectual" person cannot assume the "experiential person" is not solidly grounded; nor can the experientially-predisposed person assume the intellectual only has head knowledge but not heart knowledge.

God made us all different. We each approach our faith according to how God the Creator made us. Having said that, both the intellectual and the experiential Christian can look to clear teaching in Scripture that reveals to us both EVIDENCES and TESTS to help us know if we are on the right track, i.e. "genuinely saved."

It is these evidences and tests that I want to explore over the next several messages.

There really is no greater or more important question that we can answer - "Am I genuinely saved?" - so I hope you'll join me as we study this. This is probably the most common and probing question I get.

Can a Christian know for sure they have genuine saving faith?

The answer is YES! The same way we can prove other things: tests and evidence. Of course, we can only prove this to OURSELVES with an open and honest heart. I cannot prove it for you, and you cannot prove it for me. God does not leave us hanging with a blind hope that we might be saved. He gives us plenty of objective measurements to evaluate this in our own heart.

We are going to look at things that WILL BE TRUE for the genuine Christian, but are NOT proof of genuine saving faith because they can be true for the unsaved as well.

Isn't that a waste of time though? Not at all. All the things we will look at today SHOULD be part of your life if you are genuinely saved. But by these standards alone, you cannot have assurance of genuine faith. If you are MISSING these things, you need not go further because tomorrow's list can NOT be true for you if today's list is not. You'll see what I mean as we go along.

Things That Will Be True About a Genuine Christian But Don't PROVE You Are a Christian:

Good Works

A person can be part of and engage in all manners of apparent good works and still not be saved. We can easily see examples of all sorts of people, religious or not, that spend their life engaged in good works.

In the end, God will test each man's work with "fire" and only those works done for and by the righteousness of God that is given to the

[THIS PAGE SEEMS TO HAVE A DIFFERENT LEFT MARGIN THAN OTHERS – FOLLOWING PAGES GO BACK AND FORTH TOO] genuinely saved will survive. The rest will be burned up, shown to be worthless and dead. Just as a straw house may provide some temporary benefit, if it is put to the test, it is easily destroyed.

1 Co 3:12-13: Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. (NKJV)

Good works done by the unsaved are like that straw house. There is some temporary benefit and result, but in the end it is proven to be worthless eternally.

However, good works are absolutely part of the genuine Christian life. Some argue that emphasizing good works appeal to man's pride, or is an effort to earn salvation. That can be true of course, but for the genuine Believer, good works are the outward manifestation of a changed heart. Good works are the manifestation of appreciation for our salvation and showing of God's love to a hurting world. Oh yeah... we are commanded to do good works too, so that should end that argument (read the book of James too):

1 Ti 6:18: Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, (NKJV)

A Point of Decision

Often we point to some act, decision, or moment that appears to prove our genuine faith. I said the sinner's prayer; I was baptized; I went forward at a revival to receive Jesus into my heart.

Of course some point of decision WILL be true for all the genuinely saved but a point of decision is not proof of salvation as evidenced by the multitudes of "decisions" that are never accompanied by any long-term transformation of their life. Decisions can be made

from emotion, intellect, coercion, or impulsiveness with no accompanying spiritual motivation.

Religious interest or ministry involvement

Being interested in God or active in Christian ministry will be true of genuine Christians, but is not PROOF of genuine salvation. I don't have to explain the common experience of knowing folks who are routinely engaged in ministry or religious activity who are OBVIOUSLY not true Believers, or over the long haul prove they were not as their real life and real motivations come to light.

The Bible even tells us about wolves in sheep's clothing, tares among the wheat, and false teachers who will all appear to be engaged in the business of the Kingdom. In Matt 25:1-10, the parable of the virgins, they were all participating in the wedding party, but in the end, the bridegroom did not recognize them as being included. In Matt 13:38-43, the tares are sown amongst the wheat, and look like wheat, but in the end will be separated and burned away.

The Bible makes is abundantly clear, and indeed warns us, that there will always be "fake Christians" who give appearance of genuine faith, and most probably even believe they really are saved (as opposed to malicious pretending).

Morality or Goodness

Morality and goodness are certainly true of genuine Christians, but the unsaved are capable of understanding right and wrong, and engaging in civil good. People who seem to lead hedonistic or even evil lives can at times show an understanding and response to what is "good". Even death row murderers abhor pedophiles and rapists. Just about every person is capable to some degree of being "good" and grasping morality.

Let rich young ruler was a shining example of goodness. A stalwart citizen, a religious man, good in every way... but still lost:

Mt 19:16-26: Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (NKJV)

I would guess this unsaved man was actually "gooder" than most of us. But he was unsaved because his heart was not transformed and he valued something more highly than God.

If we have genuine saving faith, then goodness and high morals WILL be true of us but they are not PROOF of genuine saving faith.

Knowledge of the Facts

Having a working knowledge of Christian facts, the Gospel message or Biblical education is true for the genuinely saved, but can be true of the unsaved too. Religious organizations, colleges, and churches can be filled with people who KNOW the right things but have not been transformed by them. The Bible tells us clearly of multitudes of people who should and do know about God intellectually and still reject Him:

Ro 1:20-21: For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (NKJV)

We all know people who "know" about Jesus, who "know" the Gospel, who "know" the Truth, but still reject or ignore it. You must have the right knowledge to have genuine saving faith, but that knowledge alone is no proof of genuine saving faith.

Contrition or Conviction About Sin

A person can be sorry about their sin, recognize it, and even try to do something about it without being genuinely saved. It is a fleshly act done in human power and will ultimately fail (just as all our decisions, convictions, and efforts done separate from God's power ultimately fail).

Often we see people aware of their sin who try some human act of restitution, sacrifice, or penance in an attempt to satisfy their genuine guilt and shame. While it seems selfless on the surface, it is in reality totally self-centered because it is an attempt to merit grace by our own acts/choices of contrition. It is ultimately prideful because it declares "I can pay for sin my own way, not God's."

Paul spoke the truth to Felix and he obviously was convicted about it but told Paul to get lost:

Ac 24:25: Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." (NKJV)

Personal Feeling of Assurance

A genuine Christian can experience true assurance of salvation (that's what this lesson is about) but even the unsaved can wrongly be "sure" they are saved because they are basing it on the wrong test, the wrong evidence, or on the wrong reasons.

In Matt 23, the religious leaders were SURE of their standing with God for all the wrong reasons: self-righteousness, birth, knowledge, privilege, etc. We can be SURE of our salvation based on many erroneous "proofs":

- I prayed a prayer
- I was baptized
- I'm part of the right group, church, or organization
- Because of my family background
- I've always been told I was saved
- I really sincerely FEEL I am saved
- Someone else says I am saved
- Anecdotal evidence (my life is going well, so God must be pleased)

All these are things that WILL be true of genuine saving faith, but are not PROOF of genuine saving faith. The unsaved can exhibit these things as well. Tomorrow we will look at the evidence of genuine saving faith.

Things That Will Be True About a Genuine Christian and Are Evidence You Are Truly Saved:

Let's look at those things which ARE evidence of genuine salvation. If this list is true in someone's life, then the last list will be true as well.

Taking up your cross:

Mt 10:38: And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (NKJV)

Taking up your cross is the idea of giving up your life for God. It means that everything else in life become subservient and inferior to the will of God. Only the genuinely saved are capable of this type of life.

Living sacrifice:

Ro 12:1: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (NKJV)

Dead sacrifices are no longer acceptable to God. As new creatures in Christ, our spirits are recreated, but our sin-cursed body remains. It is to be offered up to God as “living sacrifice” wholly committed to whatever use God may have for it. Only a “new creation” is capable of such a sacrifice.

Love for God:

Ro 8:6-7: For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (NKJV)

The unsaved cannot have a truly spiritual mind. The unsaved mind is at war with God. Only a genuinely saved person can have likemindedness and love for God.

Lk 10:27: So he answered and said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” (NKJV)

Again, this is only possible for the saved. The unsaved cannot possibly love God with all their heart, mind, and soul for that is incompatible with being unsaved. Only God grants the power for this love, and He only grants it to His children.

Continual repentance:

2 Co 7:10: For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (NKJV)

Only the truly saved are capable of genuine repentance which is different from being contrite or sorry about sin (and its consequences). The genuinely saved REPENT and turn from sin because as new creations we are no longer SLAVES to sin.

1 Jn 1:8-10: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (NKJV)

The genuinely saved do not lie about being sinful. We KNOW we are not sinless because the Truth in us illuminates our sin clearly. We see it, repent of it, and receive forgiveness, all of which is impossible for the unsaved.

The unsaved typically have a high opinion of their goodness and have a hard time seeing their sin, whereas the genuinely saved are grieved because their sin is all too apparent.

A transformed life:

Ro 12:2: And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJV)

The truly saved life will experience genuine transformation because God is constantly renewing their mind. God does not indwell the unsaved so they have no way to genuinely transform their life

Humility:

Jas 4:6: But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (NKJV)

The unsaved are by necessity full of pride. They cannot help it or change it. Therefore they can never have deep, sustaining humility. Genuinely humility is a sign of true salvation.

Spiritual fruit:

Lk 8:15: But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (NKJV)

The unregenerated is incapable of producing good fruit. Presence of measurable and obvious Christian fruit in a life is real evidence of genuine saving faith.

Ga 5:22: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (NKJV)

The consistent presence of the fruit of the Spirit is an obvious evidence of genuine salvation because it is impossible for the slave to sin to display any of these characteristics in more than a token form.

Devotion to God’s glory:

1 Co 10:31: Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (NKJV)

The genuinely saved see ALL their life as an opportunity to glorify God, an attitude that the unsaved are incapable of faking but for a short time, if at all.

Selflessness towards other:

1 John 4:7: Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (NKJV)

Only the genuinely saved can consistently love others and put themselves second. The unsaved cannot help but put their own interests first over the long run. It's difficult effort for the saved, and impossible for the unsaved.

Ro 12:10: Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; (NKJV)

Again, honor and preference are possible only when empowered by God to do so. If these attributes are present in your life, then they are solid evidence of genuine saving faith.

Effective Prayer:

Jas 5:16: Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (NKJV)

If you can see the effects of prayer, and prayers being answered in your life, then this is evidence of genuine saving faith. Prayer is effective for the "righteous" man and righteousness only comes after the supernatural rebirth of the spirit.

Obedient Living:

Mt 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (NKJV)

It's not the people who SAY the right thing who are truly saved, but the people who DO the right thing; obedience as evidence of salvation is a common thread through all of Scripture.

Assurance of Salvation Tests in 1st John

The book of 1st John specifically gives conditions and "tests" that we **may know** if we are truly saved. The are "proofs" of genuine salvation. Here are some of them:

- 1 John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
 - Obedience is proof.
- 1 John 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
 - Obedience is proof.
- 1 John 2:5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.
 - Obedience is evidence.
- 1 John 2:11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.
 - You cannot hate a brother and be in the light; love for brethren is evidence.
- 1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.
 - Love for the brethren is proof.
- 1 John 3:15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.
 - If you hate a brother, that is evidence of being lost
- 1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
 - If we are willing to lay down our lives for our brethren, that is evidence of genuine saving faith.
- 1 Jn 3:18-19 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. (NKJV)

- When we put love into real action and not just talk about it, that is evidence of genuine salvation.
- 1 John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.
 - Obedience is evidence of saving faith.
- 1 John 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,
 - Confession is evidence of genuine salvation.
- 1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
 - Knowing God and loving God is evidence of genuine faith.
- 1 John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.
 - If the work of the Holy Spirit is evident in our life, this is proof of our salvation.

There are many more verses in 1 John that are “tests” for us to administer to ourselves to see if our faith is genuine.

Conduct of Genuine Saving Faith

Just a few things; you could list many more, and even many more verses for each of these... but the point is that when we have genuine saving faith, it affects our lives, not just how we live, but what we do with the TRUTH that brought us to salvation.

- Tell people (don’t be ashamed) - Ro 1:16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (NKJV)
- Live the truth - Phil 1:27: Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in

one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, (NKJV)

- Fellowship together the truth - Phil 1:5: for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, (NKJV)
- Protect the truth - Ga 1:6-8: I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (NKJV)
- Suffer for truth - 1 Pe 4:12-13: Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (NKJV)
- Defend the truth - Jud 3: Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. (NKJV)

Questions to consider:

1. How do you tend to approach "faith"... through facts, intellect, and logic? Or through emotions, heart, and feeling? Do you ever find yourself thinking the "other" approach is not as legitimate?
2. Do you believe that these tests and evidences can REALLY, genuinely give us a true feeling of assurance? Or do we just have to "hope" we are saved and never really, seriously know for sure?
3. How does this assurance, or lack of it, affect our Christian walk on an everyday basis? (discuss the dangers and effects of false assurance; discuss the positive effects and benefits to your daily life if you have genuine assurance.)

Personal Notes:

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Knowing The Will of God