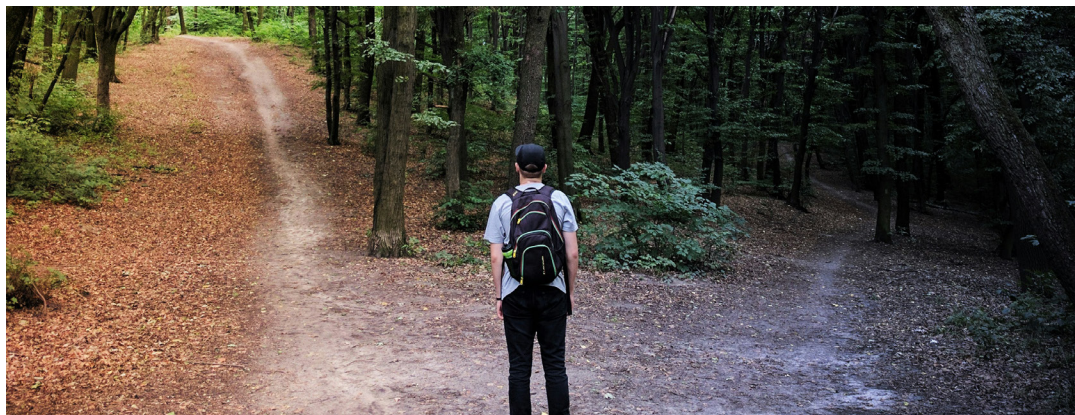


# HOW DO I DISCERN GOD'S WILL?

BY: KATIE SCHNEIDER

Katie is a CPYU Research Fellow and the Director of Youth Ministry and Administration at Highview Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Dousman, WI.



## Introduction:

When I was in high school, I can remember being asked the question over and over again: “What are you going to do with your life?” It may have been in the form of “what’s your plan for after high school?” or “do you know what career path you are going to pursue?” As a high school student trying to just navigate teenage life, these questions were daunting. How am I supposed to know what God wants me to do with my life? I can remember praying that God would give me a sign or somehow show me the answer to these questions. Before I get into some questions I think are worth considering about how we can discern God’s will for our lives, I want to recommend a book titled *Just Do Something* by Kevin DeYoung. This book was

extremely helpful for me as I tried to learn more about what God’s will is according to Scripture and how I should seek it. Much of what I’m going to lay out is from that book, but I highly recommend getting it and reading it for yourself (it’s only 122 pages)!

## What is God’s Will?

Before we can talk about how we can or should discern God’s will for our lives, we need to first define what God’s will is according to the Bible. When God’s will is discussed in the Bible, it can be talking about one of two different things. The first is God’s *will of decree*. This is what God has sovereignly planned to happen from eternity past to eternity future. It cannot be changed or thwarted—it’s how things are.

As a high school student, answering the question ‘What are you going to do with your life?’ can be daunting.





## HOW DO I DISCERN GOD'S WILL?

In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, he talks about God's will of decree when he says,

*"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."*<sup>1</sup>

The will Paul is referring to is God's plan for his children to be united to Christ and receive the spiritual blessings that accompany that—there is nothing that will alter this plan because it is part of God's will of decree. While part of God's will of decree, like his plan for our salvation, has been revealed to us, there are parts of it that God keeps hidden.

The second way the Bible speaks about God's will is his *will of desire*. This is what God has commanded and desires from his creatures. If the will of decree is how things *are*, the will of desire is how things *should be*. We see this will represented in Hebrews 13:20-21 when the author writes,

*"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."*

These verses talk about how God equips his people, through the saving work of Jesus on the

cross and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers, with everything we need to be able to do what he has commanded us to do.

The problem is that when most of us seek God's will for our lives, we aren't really looking for either one of these. We want God to tell us who we should ask to prom or what part in the school play we should try out for or what college to attend. We are looking for what's called God's *will of direction*, for him to somehow reveal to us what decision to make at every fork in the road. While it would be much easier if God would zap us if we were about to make a bad decision or drop a giant billboard in front of us to show us the right decision, that's not how God works. Listen to how Kevin DeYoung describes the will of direction:

*"So here's the real heart of the matter: Does God have a secret will of direction that He expects us to figure out before we do anything? And the answer is no. Yes, God has a specific plan for our lives. And yes, we can be assured that He works things for our good in*

*Christ Jesus...The problem is we think He's going to tell us the wonderful plan before it unfolds. We feel like we can know—and need to know—what God wants every step of the way. But such preoccupation with finding God's will, as well-intentioned as the desire may be, is more folly than freedom."*<sup>2</sup>

*While it would be much easier if God would zap us if we were about to make a bad decision or drop a giant billboard in front of us to show us the right decision, that's not how God works.*



## HOW DO I DISCERN GOD'S WILL?

---

So if God's will of direction is not something he reveals to us, why are most of us so concerned with seeking it? There are multiple reasons for that. First, if we are a Christian, we should seek to please God with the decisions we make and how we live. While this might be the reason we give for seeking God's will of direction, chances are there is a different reason if we dig deeper. As humans, we want our lives to be perfect and free of hardship, so we think if we ask God to show us the way, our life will be free of suffering. This is not a biblical way of thinking. Jesus himself taught that we should not be surprised when we face hardship or suffering in the Christian life (see John 16:33). Another reason might be that there are so many choices we feel overwhelmed. It's also possible we use seeking God's will as an excuse for laziness or the inability to make a decision. Regardless of the reason, an obsession with God's will of direction is not helpful or biblical.

### **If God won't reveal his will of direction, what can I know from God's will?**

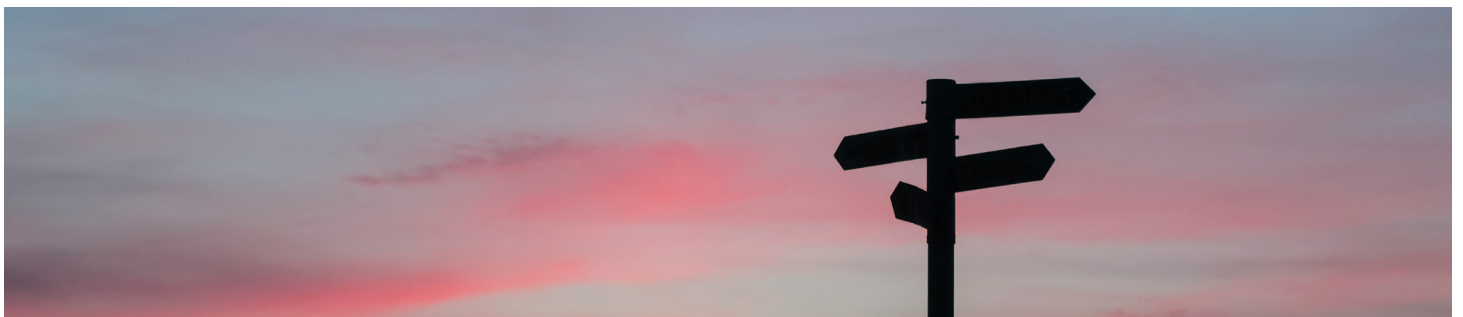
While God is not a Magic 8-ball that we can just shake every time we have a decision to make, there is a lot we can know about God's will. First, because we know God has a will of decree, we can be confident that God has already sovereignly ordained every detail of your life including if you'll go to college, if you'll get married, what job you'll have, etc. There is nothing you can do to thwart God's plan. The prophet Isaiah writes,

*"...remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'..."<sup>3</sup>*

Second, God has promised to provide us with everything we need to uphold his plan. You can take comfort in knowing that even though God may not drop a sign from heaven that says, "Go to school to be a lawyer," or "make sure you tell so and so the good news of the gospel," he will equip you to do whatever he has planned for you to do. Thirdly, God does not desire for us to know every single thing that is going to happen before it does. Deuteronomy 29:29 says,

*"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."*

This reminds us that there are certain things God keeps hidden from us (his will of decree), but reveals to us what we feel we need to know (his will of desire).







# HOW DO I DISCERN GOD'S WILL?

## Now what?

So what do I do? If God isn't going to tell me his will of direction, how am I supposed to know if what I'm doing or the decisions I'm making are what God wants me to be doing? Kevin DeYoung answers the question this way:

*"Seek first the kingdom of God, and then trust that He will take care of our needs, even before we know what they are and where's we are going...we can stop pleading with God to show us the future, and start living and obeying like we are confident he holds the future."*<sup>4</sup>

But what does this look like practically? It can be boiled down to a few simple steps:

1. Seek wisdom from the Scriptures. God tells us how we can develop godliness and live in a way that honors him. Proverbs 2:6 tells us, *"For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding."*
2. Seek wisdom from others. Not every situation you will encounter in life has a specific chapter and verse to reference. It is essential that you seek counsel from other Christians who have more experience than you. Proverbs 19:20 tells us, *"Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future."*
3. Seek wisdom through prayer. Pray for wisdom and discernment. Pray for the things that you know are part of God's will for your life like obedience to his commands, humility, and patience.



4. Make a decision. If you've done these things and the decision you're going to make seems wise, do it. Take the job. Go to college. Get married. God does not want you to sit around and do nothing while you wait for a lightning bolt to direct you what to do. Just do something!

## KATIE SCHNEIDER

[1] Ephesians 1:11

[2] DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something* p. 24

[3] Isaiah 46:9-10

[4] DeYoung, Kevin. *Just Do Something* p. 26, 42



Phone: (717) 361-8429  
E-Mail: [CPYU@CPYU.ORG](mailto:CPYU@CPYU.ORG)  
Web: [WWW.CPYU.ORG](http://WWW.CPYU.ORG)  
Mail: PO BOX 414,  
ELIZABETHTOWN  
PA 17022, USA

For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at [www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org).

*CPYU grants permission for this article to be copied in its entirety, provided the copies are distributed free of charge and the copies indicate the source as the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.*