

How to make decisions

by Charles C. Ryrie

Does God's will seem cloudy to you?

How can you know God's will? There's no easy answer to that question. But the Bible's account of how God led the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan will help you understand God's will.

After the Israelites left Egypt, God used a supernatural cloud to lead them through the desert. He guided them day and night with this cloud. When it moved ahead, the Israelites were to break camp and follow the cloud. When it stood still, the Israelites were not to move.

The cloud was a constant sign of God's presence. When any Israelite wanted to know where he should be, he looked toward the cloud. When God's presence moved, he moved. When God's presence stayed, he stayed. God Himself was the guide (Numbers 9:15-23).

In His presence

Today, God directs Christians the same way He guided the Israelites. He shows us what to do when we are in His presence—when we are in fellowship with Him.

This means that knowing the will of God is not based on the many other things which people use—the "fleece," for example. "Putting out a fleece" is asking God to make something happen to prove He is leading in a certain way. For example: "Lord, if it's Your will that I study before class, wake me up at 6 A.M. And don't let me be sleepy!"

One of the main problems with the fleece method is that it limits God's leading to only two directions: What you want, and what you don't want. But what if God has in mind some other possibilities which you have not considered? The fleece won't reveal

them.

A fleece is often a poor substitute for real fellowship with God that enables you to receive guidance from Him directly. You have the mind of Christ, and it is through your prayer life, godly desires, and biblical meditation that the Lord will lead you. God may also confirm your decisions through circumstances, but don't think that because there's an open door, it's God's will. Satan can open and shut doors of opportunity too.

Perfectly clear

The second thing to notice about "the cloud" passage is: The leading of the Lord is clear not just to you, but to others as well. For the Israelites, God's leading was evident to all in the camp, not just to Moses, the leader. Everyone could see when it was time to move and when it was time to stay.

Likewise, if you have the leading of God, some other people will recognize it. If nobody else thinks you are right, then be careful. You should reexamine what you thought was God's will. Don't wander off into the desert alone. Don't think you have an inside track to God—some sort of direct pipeline to the Almighty—especially when no one else sees it as you do.

Other Christians who are in fellowship with Christ can help discern the facts in your case. It is especially important for young people to remember that older people have wisdom and should be consulted.

Meeting the condition

There is a third thing about "the cloud" passage: God's leading is conditional. The first condition is that you have to want to have His will for your life. Even Christians sometimes

fail to make that basic choice. They haven't decided whose will they will follow in their lives. They are still dabbling and compromising, never having said, "Lord, I take Your will for my life." This basic decision must come first.

The second condition is that there must be fellowship with the Lord. You have to keep your eyes on the cloud.

Finally, there must be obedience to what has already been revealed to you. Don't expect God to reveal further steps to you unless you have taken the first step. If you refuse the first, don't be surprised if you never learn the second.

Sometimes we get the idea that we need the leading of the Lord only for an extra special matter like a summer job or where to go to school. But really we need to know His will all the time, and it will be plain in the stops as well as the steps.

Both the steps and the stops of the people of Israel were ordered from the Lord. Just because the Israelites were asked to remain in a certain place for a while did not mean that they were out of God's will. It is just as important for you to fulfill His will where your cloud is resting now as when it moves to a different school or a full-time job.

Watch Him carefully. Move when He moves. God is guiding you, just as He guided the Israelites, if only you'll look above you, toward the heavenly clouds. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:6). □

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