

Discerning God's Will

#32

Today we will be looking at the dramatic difference the coming of the Holy Spirit has made in the daily disclosure of God's will.

Read Acts 1:24-26

What's going on in the story? _____

What does it mean to "cast lots", and why were they casting them to discern God's will?

In several places in the Old Testament casting lots was used to discern God's will, so this was not vain superstition. God did lead Israel through this practice. Two stone objects called the Urim and the Thummim, were rolled like dice allowing God providence over chance to make His will known.

Why don't we cast lots today? _____

The answer is found in the placement of this story: just prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts 2. After Acts 2, there is a distinct change in the narrative of Acts, as we read: the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away (8:39); the Spirit said to him (10:19); the Spirit told me (11:12); sent on their way by the Holy Spirit (13:4), etc. Luke is telling us God's powerful presence is once again with His people and His hallmark is that He is clearly leading them and making His will known. There is no longer a need for casting lots.

One of the most amazing things about being a Christian is that God does lead, and will lead you daily in His will.

Now, of course we don't hear an audible voice, so, how does God make His will known to us? _____

Can you think of a time when God clearly gave you direction and, if so, how did He do it?

There are different ways to answer this question, or rather different ways to categorize the answers, but perhaps the best way is a simple metaphor: on a daily basis, how do you know where you're going? You use your senses, right? (Smell, sight, hearing, touch, and if you lick the pavement, taste.)

Similarly, we discern God's will through using our spiritual senses. What do you think some of these senses might be? _____

One sense is clearly through **Scripture**. The Scripture makes clear God's general will on a variety of issues; we don't need to pray if it's God's will for us to rob a bank, to murder, or to harm others. We certainly don't need to seek His will for if we should sell drugs on a school campus – He has spoken to the underlying principles if not the specific execution! Additionally, God also has the ability to personalize His Word to us.

A great way to determine if something is in God's will – whether it be a plan, a new teaching, or your understanding of a passage of scripture – would be to compare what you are asking to the rest of the scripture. Is it in concert with what God's revealed will is in similar circumstances?

Our second sense we'll call **wisdom** and it can be found in two places. First, wisdom comes from mature Christians. People who have been in Christ many years have become good detectives in discerning God's will and His ways, and they can help a younger Christian decode what God may be saying. A second source of wisdom is our own. Over years of walking with Christ, we accumulate wisdom of how God speaks and leads.

Can you think of something you did as it relates to God's will (decided to date someone because the traffic light turned green), that you would now find silly? _____

The third sense is **circumstances**. God is providentially at work in and through circumstances. What are some ways you've seen God's will revealed through your circumstances over this past year? _____

What might be the danger of simply going by circumstantial clues? _____

The answer is that such clues can become very subjective. Often we use multiple senses - sight, smell - to navigate where we are going in the physical world. In the spiritual world, a good student of God's will looks for alignment among their spiritual senses. They look for clues to converge, for the wisdom of mature Christians, and the Scripture to be saying the same thing as the circumstances.

A fourth sense would be **our emotions**. It's true that emotions can be unreliable without bringing to bear other senses, but God's spirit is not truncated from our emotions and desires, and how we feel about things can be a helpful gauge in discerning God's will. If the thought of being a lawyer makes you nauseous, God is probably not calling you to the Bar.

We must be careful not to let emotions overrule the other senses, while not ruling them out entirely.

Last, we'll consider **the mind**. God can lead us through simple reasoning, and often does - If I eat two pizzas, I will gain weight. God also can bring thoughts and ideas to our minds using

just about anything. A last category of God speaking to our minds is through dreams, which also has a significant biblical precedent.

If there were one area that you could know God's will for sure, what would it be?

Why do you think God doesn't make it more clear? _____

One answer is He uses the process to draw us closer to Himself.

Having looked at the basic spiritual senses, we want to close with a very important principle.

Read Romans 12:1-2

What is connected to knowing God's will? _____

How does being a living sacrifice enable us to know God's will? _____

There is a good bit of data to process when discerning God's will. Honestly, you can twist the data to say something it doesn't say if you're not wholly desiring God's will. Only a heart totally yielded to God can process the information without trying to "fudge" the results. This is one of the things the passage is communicating. This is the idea of a living sacrifice, totally given over to following God's will in all things.

Summary

We looked at five basic spiritual senses in determining God's leading: wisdom, circumstances, emotions, the mind, and God's word. There are also two over-arching principles that help us to wisely process the clues. First is to look for the convergence of clues, and alignment of our different senses. Do not rely on one sense, or one avenue of information. Second, we must be wholly submitted to God's will, otherwise we will always "fudge" the results.

Memorize: Romans 12:1-2