

Discerning the Will of God for Your Life

James 4:13-15 warns against those who live their life making their plans without reference to God's will. It calls such planning arrogant (v. 16), and ignorant (v. 14). "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" (Jam. 4:15). In James' counsel is an assumption—there is a way to know God's will in your life. I believe God has, in the stories and teachings of the Bible, offered us several avenues to discerning His will. The list provided here is offered in hopes "that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12).

1. **Look in your own heart.** What do you desire? Ps. 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." Double meaning...He gives you what you want...He gives you your very desires. One way to know what God wants is to know what you want. One caution, sometimes our hearts deceive us (Jer. 17:9; 1 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 6:3; Jam. 1:22; Rev. 3:17). What follows protects us from this...read on.
2. **Consult with others.** Prov. 24:6 - in a multitude of counselors there is safety. Matt. 18:19 where two or three agree on earth concerning anything it will be done by My Father in heaven. Talk to people you trust, godly people, about the evidences you are gathering. Get their input. Solicit their prayers.
3. **Ask for a sign.** Get God directly involved. In Jud. 6:36-40 Gideon asked God for signs. And God gave them. God wants you to know His will, and He will help you discern it.
4. **Ask, seek, knock** until you receive (Matt. 7:7). The verb tense here suggests "keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking"...in other words we are being commanded to pester heaven. Matt. 7:8 - everyone who asks in this manner receives an answer.
5. **Obey.** God's commandments are His revealed will. Asking God permission to do what He has already forbidden is not faith, but presumption. Start with the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God" (John 7:17). Disobedience blocks God's communication with us, Isa. 59:1, 2.
6. **Cite God's promises.** One way to know God's will is to acquaint yourself with His promises. There are some 7500 promises, and they are all "yes" in Jesus! 2 Cor. 1:20.
7. **Be yielding.** Don't lean on your own understanding. Acknowledge God in everything. He will direct (Prov. 3:3-5). When we are yielded, God will lead. The Spirit's leading implies we are to follow (John 16:13). Titus 1:7 warns against being self-willed. That's the opposite of being yielded to do God's will. Jesus surrendered His will to God (Matt. 26:39).
8. **All in with God.** Prov. 3:5, 6 further says, trust in the Lord with *all* your heart...and He will direct your steps. God's will is revealed to those who go beyond just a casual, half-hearted interest. Double-mindedness is never rewarded (Jam. 1:5-8). It's all in or nothing with God. See also Jer. 29:13.
9. **Put God first.** Make God's kingdom and righteousness your priority. Matt. 6:33 - seek God first...and *all* these things will be added.
10. **Partner with God**...in everything. Prov. 16:9 - Man plans his ways, and the Lord guides his steps. Depending on God to reveal His will does not remove our need to plan.
11. **God's Providence.** God opens and closes doors of opportunity for us (Matt. 7:7, 8; Rev. 3:7, 8). His leading in the past helps you gauge His leading in the future. In God's kingdom, nothing is wasted. Everything (the good, the bad, and the ugly) in our past prepares us for our future. This takes time. The more you reflect on your past life the more you can discern His future leading. In *Testimonies to Ministers* p. 31 Ellen White wrote, "We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."
12. **Don't shy away from the Impossible.** Phil. 4:13; Matt. 19:26; John 15:5. When given the option between easy or impossible, choose the impossible. Henry Blackaby claims the Lord never calls us to do anything we can accomplish without Him. 1 Thes. 5:24 says, "He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it." Our sufficiency is from God (2 Cor. 3:5, 6).

13. **Jesus will be with you.** The story of Jonah teaches we need to choose to go where God wants us to go. But the Great Commission commands we go to the ends of the earth, and when we do, Jesus will go with us. Matt. 28:19-20.
14. **Use your talents.** Giftedness determines ministry. 1 Pet. 4:10. Through the Holy Spirit's endowments God is preparing us for the tasks He has in store for us. Our gifts are unique to us, and shape our unique contribution to the world. Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; and 1 Pet. 4:9-11 reveal some of those gifts.
15. **Conviction.** According to John 16:8 the Holy Spirit convicts of righteousness, or right doing. In other words, the Holy Spirit places a burden on our hearts from which there is no peace until we accept and do His will. This is an internal subjective reality which needs further external corroboration.
16. **Listen to God's words.** The Bible, the writings of Ellen White, devotionals, etc. guide and prompt us. Ps. 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path". The Spirit's uses the Bible to discern our motives (Heb. 4:12) and enlighten our journey ahead.
17. **Silence the other voices.** Elijah was once sent to a mountain cave where wind and quake and fire blasted the mountainside, but God wasn't in the wind or quake or flame. His voice came through in still small tones (1 Kings 19:11, 12). To hear the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit we are going to have to quiet our loud lives. DA 363 reads, "When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. ...This is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God." Jesus was often found praying in solitude before He faced the crowds (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12). We hear God's call to "be still and know that I am God" in Ps. 46:10.
18. **Wait upon God.** Isa. 40:31 encourages, "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Sometimes answers don't come in the timing we prefer, so we wait on God's timing. Discernment is an art, not a science. It can take time to figure things out. This is where fasting may come in...to allow clarity of mind to prevail (Matt. 6:17, 18).
19. **Open your life to all God's methods of communication.** By the mouth of two or three witnesses so it is established (Mat. 18:16). In the context of knowing God's will, the idea here is don't depend on just one method. God is speaking to us through a variety of means (dreams, bible passages, convictions, providences, advice of godly people...all kinds of ways). Let's open ourselves to all God is trying to say. If we limit ourselves to just one method, we might either miss what God is trying to say through other means, or be deceived by our own self-interested heart, dictating to God His will for us...which obviously defeats the purpose of this study on discerning the will of God for our life.
20. **Ask for discernment.** When we lack wisdom we can ask God (Jam. 1:4). Then we need to trust the Holy Spirit to give the discernment we need (1 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:9; Heb. 5:14).

As God shapes our life to be something other than what the world hopes for us, and we yield ourselves to that transformational process we will then prove that God's will is perfect and pleasing (Rom. 12:1, 2). Spiritual things are still spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). As we become spiritually-minded people (Romans 8:6) we will more clearly discern what God's will is for our life, and for the situations we face all around us. It is in this way we show ourselves to be true members of God's family, for "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the children of God" (Rom. 8:14).