

3. Next, submit your “purpose statement” to a series of questions. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ What are you trying to accomplish, and why?
- ◆ What is your objective, or desired end result?
- ◆ What are your expectations and why?
- ◆ How does this decision fit in with your calling?
- ◆ Are you considering this from a sense of calling or duty?
- ◆ What would Jesus do if He were you?
- ◆ What is the “next” right step to take?

4. *If your answer still hasn't become obvious, list each option on a separate sheet of paper.* On the left side list the advantages of that option; on the right side list the disadvantages. As Louis Agassiz said, “A pencil is one of the best of eyes.” Usually, one option will prove itself clearly desirable, or undesirable, at this point.

5. *At all times, employ the seven steps of guidance to discern God's will covered above.*

6. *If the answer still hasn't come, wait.* You can never predict what God is doing in your life. God is not a man that He would ever work for your harm. God is committed to working for your good. Commit to let God set the agenda. Never push God. If the answer isn't obvious, trust Him to make it clear in His timing. You can rush ahead if you must, but you do so at your own peril. Better to wait upon the Lord. Give Him the time He wants to work some things into and out of your character. And remember this: God is not the author of confusion. Satan, however, is. If you are still confused, wait. Peace is the umpire.

Let me encourage you to keep this article in a handy place. Review it when you seem to get stuck on a major decision.

Business leader, author, and speaker, Patrick Morley helps men think more deeply about their lives, to be reconciled with Christ, and to be equipped for a larger impact on the world. © 2002. Patrick M. Morley. All rights reserved.

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How to Make Major Decisions

Patrick Morley

Adapted from *Devotions for Couples* (Zondervan Publishers)

During the course of a year most of us only make two or three truly major decisions. These might include whether or not to change jobs, which job to take, whether or not to move to another city or across town, how many children to have, which church to attend, what kind of personal ministry to undertake, what kind of car to buy (and do I really need a new one?), how to adjust lifestyle to a reduced income, and so on. Yet, these comprise some of the most important and difficult decisions we ever make.

Most of the major decisions we make in life are not dictated by Scripture. So what do we do?

A PERSPECTIVE

Here are some considerations to help make better decisions:

1. Know that many major decisions do turn out wrong. A man became restless after twenty one years with the same company. He could not isolate the source of his feelings, but decided he needed a change. Since that time he has bounced around from job to job, never keeping the same position more than three years.

A couple decided to move to a “better” neighborhood. There was nothing wrong with their present neighborhood. In fact, they loved their neighbors, the location was convenient, crime was low, the mortgage payment was a pittance, and they couldn't really find anything wrong with their existing home. Their new house required much more upkeep than they had figured. The higher payments created a great deal of tension between them. Soon they began pointing fingers at each other, blaming one another for deciding to leave the old neighborhood.

If you are not content with yourself where you are, you will not be content where you are going. It is an error to think that changing our circumstances alone will make us happy or content. Often we cling to some selfish ambition that is at odds with leading a surrendered life.

2. Count the cost of making the wrong decision. Perhaps the greatest lesson I've learned about making major decisions is the cost of making the wrong decision. When decisions turn out right, “I” am brilliant. When they turn out wrong, “you” really blew it! Think about this next statement: The greatest time waster in our lives is the time we spend undoing that which ought not to have been done in the first place. Do you agree?

Usually we can recover if we make a bad choice. Sometimes, however, we can't. Never make a decision that bets the entire ranch on being right.

3. *Most decisions are obvious given enough information and time.* When do we make poor decisions? When we don't have our facts straight and when we are hasty. Keep collecting data. Write it down so you don't forget it. The mind by itself may blow one small fact all out of proportion. Writing it down puts things in perspective. Talk to wise counselors; get other people's perspective. Talk to experts who have skill better to operate from fact than feeling.

Ours is an impatient world, a hasty world, an impulsive world. If my computer takes three seconds to sort 20,000,000 bytes of data instead of one second I get frustrated. Let's get real! It takes time to make a wise, major decision. The mind may know quickly what to do, but it takes time for our emotions to catch up. We have vested positions which only time can change. We must wait for that "gut feeling," which is our subconscious mind informing our conscious mind of the results of its thorough and complete analysis.

The greatest time waster in our lives is the time we spend undoing that which ought not to have been done in the first place.

THE MEANS OF GUIDANCE

The major decisions we make will come most easily if we abide in Christ daily, begin each dawn in humble surrender to God, seek to please Him in all our ways, and live our lives out of the overflow of our personal relationship with Jesus. To assist us God has given means of guidance. Let's briefly explore each of seven different means God has given us to help discern His will.

1. *The Bible.* The single most important question to ask is, "Has God already spoken on this matter?" The Bible is chock full of commands (which are duty) and principles (which are wise). We don't have to wonder if not reporting \$1,800 of incidental income to the IRS is God's will. We know it is. As the Bible says, "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). Obedience is the trademark of a biblical Christian. Talk over the Scriptures together.

2. *Prayer.* Jesus said, "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:24). Over and over and over again we are invited to present our requests to God. Prayer is the currency of our personal relationship with Christ. Spend it liberally. Pray over major (why not all?) decisions.

3. *The Holy Spirit.* God lives in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. He is our counselor, convicter, comforter, converter, and encourager. Consciously depend upon Him and He will both guide you and intercede for you. "The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:27). The Holy Spirit is the one Who "clothes" us with power from on high. The

Holy Spirit will never lead in contradiction to His written Word.

4. *Conscience.* In seeking God's will we must live by the pledge of a good conscience toward God and other people. "Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 John 3:21). Keep in mind that while a guilty conscience provides clear evidence you are not in God's will, a clear conscience may not guarantee you have correctly discerned God's will. Conscience is more effective as a red light than a green light. To go against conscience is neither wise nor safe.

5. *Circumstances.* Some people are born short, some tall. Some black, some white. Some in America, some in Argentina. Some to poor parents, some to rich. God's will is often revealed clearly by the circumstances in which we live. "He determines the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17: 26). If you want to purchase a house which will require a \$100,000 mortgage and you can only qualify for \$75,000, then circumstances have told you God's will.

6. *Counsel.* "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22). Often we need nothing more than a good listener to help us crystallize our thoughts into coherent words. Other times, we need the advice of a trusted friend. Seek out each other's counsel.

7. *Fasting.* Fasting is a lost spiritual discipline in this age. Fasting slows down the physical functions so that the mind can be more in tune with Christ. Fasting demonstrates a seriousness about your concern to the Lord.

Employ these constituted means for finding the will of God. Do them only occasionally and it will amount to nothing more than priming a rusty pump. Do them regularly and the will of God will gush forth like deep well springs.

God is not the author of confusion. Satan, however, is. If you are still confused – wait. Peace is the umpire.

A PROCESS

Here is a useful, practical process for finding the will of God. Keep in mind this is not a process for getting our own way. We must be cautious that we truly want what God wants. Otherwise we will twist things to our own way. Each step builds on itself, and you may find the answer becomes obvious at any point along the way. If it doesn't make itself clear, keep moving through the steps until it does.

1. *Write down the decision exactly.* Nothing clarifies our thinking more quickly than paper and pencil. It's said that half the solution is knowing the problem. Precisely what is the decision? What are the choices?

2. *Next, write out a "purpose statement" which precisely explains why you are considering this decision.* It is helpful not only to know *what* you are trying to decide, but *why*. "Why" are you trying to decide "what" you are trying to decide? What is the context? Do you *have* to move? Is it a need or a want? Are you unhappy?