

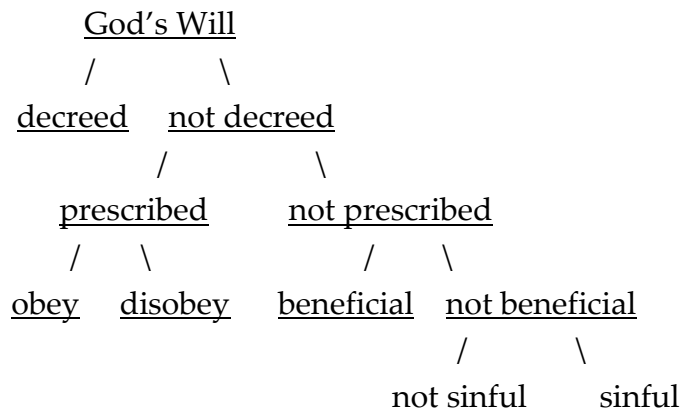
How to Find God's Will

At some point in his journey, every Christian man wants to grow. He wants to grow in maturity, knowledge, wisdom, and power—in short, to experience a transformation—so that he can be a man after God's own heart who does the will of God. Romans 12:2 puts it like this: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." The will of God is at the heart of what it means to be a kingdom-minded man.

Let me show you how to take some of the mystery out of God's will. The chart below shows that God's will is made up of things *decreed* or *not decreed*. God's decrees, like his decrees to create the earth and knit you together in your mother's womb, are the sovereign decisions of God which cannot be altered. Free will is not a factor.

What God does not decree, He either *prescribes* or *does not prescribe*. For example, God prescribes to love your neighbor and not commit adultery, but God does not prescribe which job to take or home to purchase. Both require the exercise of free will—obedience in the case of what's prescribed, and making wise choices in the case of what's not prescribed.

Choices that God does not prescribe may be *beneficial* or *not beneficial*. Paul wrote, "Everything is permissible for me'—but not everything is beneficial" (1 Corinthians 6:12). If not beneficial, choices may be *moral* or *sinful*. And sinful choices may be *intentional* or *unintentional*.



What's the point? Everyone wants to know God's will for their lives. We learn God's will by being transformed. We are transformed by renewing our minds—our worldview—through understanding Scripture. And everything I just taught you about God's will comes straight from the Bible.

The 7 Means of Guidance for Finding God's Will

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. Here are seven different means God has given us to help discern His will.

The Bible. *The Bible is our Constitution.* 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.

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.

The Holy Spirit. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit—the earthly residence of God. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

How to Start a Weekly Men's Small Group

After my wife and the Bible, God has used small groups more than anything else to change my life. I've been in two weekly couples home groups, weekly one-on-one meetings with three different men (totaling 60 years!), and for 25 years a monthly leader's group from our Friday morning Bible Study. The most intense learning, growth, sharing, encouragement, accountability, prayer, and fellowship I've experienced has taken place in small groups.

What makes a small group special is that the size is small enough that I've felt like I could really get to know the others. And, importantly, I felt like they could get to know me well enough that a) they *really* understand me and b) they *genuinely* cared about what happened in my life.

However, most men's small groups peter out. Ironically, the same small group that can bring about great change is also fragile to sustain.

How can you overcome inertia to start a group and, once started, how can you keep it going?

The Case: Why Small Groups?

Jesus used a small group to create momentum. Jesus launched his divine plan to redeem mankind by making disciples out of a small group. Impressive. The question, of course, is why would he do that? Why a small group?

Jesus knew that *most meaningful change takes place in the context of small group relationships*—men sharpening men with truth, encouraging each other for the daily battle, and sticking with each other over the long haul.

Small groups gained momentum in the 17th century, when Philip Jacob Spencer (1635-1705), the father of German Pietism, initiated a series of reforms. Central to his method was the *collegia pietatis*—“small groups” for Bible study, prayer, and intimacy intended to renew a staid and arid church.

Even secularists understand the value of small groups. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt the power of a small group of people to change the world. That's about the only way it has ever happened in the past.”

Today, despite the “gospel saturation” in America, every study I've seen shows less than 10% of men involved in any kind of ongoing discipleship. The main method of Jesus has fallen into disuse—it has lost momentum.

That is tragic, because Mission Number One of Christian service is to make (create, capture, sustain) disciples. Often we are so busy treating symptoms—marital problems, wayward children, gossip, ethical failures, apathy, backbiting, etc.—that we never treat the root disease.

This is like treating cancer with morphine. It takes away the pain for a moment, but does nothing to cure the patient. God wants to bring men to full maturity in Christ. Making “small groups” a core value can create the momentum to get you where you want to go.

How To Form a Group

1. First, make a list of men you might like to have in your group. Figure you need to ask two men for every slot in your group. Pray over their names. Ask God to give you names you might not ordinarily think of.

2. Next, decide what kind of group you want to lead. You could wait and make a group decision, but it will likely fall apart. Leaders lead—and men like that. There are many different types of small groups (after each type I have offered a suggested size, but this is an art not a science): Bible Studies (6 to 12 men—remember, 12 is a number that’s been successfully used before!); Discussion Groups (4 to 8 men); Support Groups: specific issues like addictions (6 to 12 men); Prayer Groups (2 to 6 men); Accountability Groups (4 men); Fellowship Groups (2 to 8 men); Mentoring Groups (2 to 4 men); Mission Groups: service projects (5 or more men).

3. Decide when and where you want to meet. Friday mornings are good because most men try to be back in town by then, and it’s often a catch-up day. If all your men are from the same church, you could meet on Sunday, on a weekday evening, or one morning during the week at the church.

4. Next, invite the men to an informational meeting to discuss the small group. Pick the time, place, and stick to one hour. As you invite them...

- Do explain to men what you are trying to accomplish and why.
- Don’t ask men for a long-term commitment right away.
- Unless you feel strongly otherwise, do tell the men you will initially meet for 4, 6, or 8 weeks (pick a number), and after that you will decide as a group where to go from there.
- Do graciously let men decline your offer.

The First Meeting

The first meeting is informational...

- Have coffee and donuts or cokes and cookies. Plan to meet for at least one hour but no more than one and a half hours.
- Start on time and open with a brief prayer.”
- For 10 minutes: Mention (again) your purpose for wanting to start a small group. Give the men an opportunity to comment on your proposed Purpose Statement for the small group (write it out—Francis Bacon said, “Writing maketh an exact man”). They will appreciate being asked, and feel a stronger sense of ownership.

- Next 40 minutes: Depending on how many men you have, ask each man to take 3 to 5 minutes to share briefly where he is on his spiritual pilgrimage today, and what he hopes to “give and get” from the group.
- 5 minutes: Inspire them with your vision for the group. Encourage the men. Don’t go too far too fast. Be sensitive that most men will not jump in until they have tested the waters for a few weeks (or months).
- Last 5 minutes: Pass out materials for the kick off meeting.

How To Lead An Effective Discussion

Here are some hard learned lessons about leading an effective discussion....

- “Air time for every man every week.” Make sure men get to speak.
- You should draw out the quiet man without making him feel uncomfortable. Sense his pace. If he isn’t ready to talk, don’t try to force him. Privately ask the man who talks too much to help you draw out the other men.
- Don’t talk more than 25% of the time. If there is silence when you ask a question, don’t try to fill the space.
- Ask open-ended questions, not ones that can be answered, “Yes,” or “No.” Instead of asking, “Do you struggle with making good decisions?” ask “What kind of decisions do you find difficult, and why?”

Other Suggestions To Be Effective

- Preferably call but at least email or text your men each week to remind them about the meeting and express your genuine desire to see them. You want to make sure they feel you’re more interested in them as a person than that you’re just trying to put butts in seats. *This is a make or break point.*
- Be sure to end on time—men appreciate punctuality.
- Make it like family time, not work time (not as another duty to perform, but a place that will love and accept him). *This also is a make or break point.*
- After your group is formed host a couple’s social outing.
- Spend five hours per week on your personal ministry including group time (phone calls/texts, personal visits, counseling men, etc.). Take each man out for coffee or a meal at least once a year.
- Credo: “Long term, low pressure.” A small group is many things, including a hospital for men with broken wings. Make yours a “safe place” for men. Do not put pressure on men to conform to certain behavior. Instead, show men Christ.
- If you are a marketplace small group, encourage your men to be actively involved in a Bible believing church.

Selecting Material

- **Bible Studies:** If you have the time, aptitude, and interest you can develop your own curriculum. If not, try the Man in the Mirror Weekly Bible Study. You can get it free online at www.maninthemirror.org or on You Tube and iTunes. Watch or listen to the message, then discuss the downloadable questions. We also have unedited transcripts if you want to teach the material yourself.
- **Book Studies:** One of the most effective ways to start a small group is to study a book with discussion questions in each chapter. You can find some of my men's books suitable for groups with brief descriptions listed in Appendix __.
- **Workbooks:** You can find a plethora of small group resources at maninthemirror.org.
- **Accountability Groups:** Order wallet sized accountability cards in the "resources for leaders" section of maninthemirror.org and use the search window to find the article, "How to Have An Accountable Relationship" in both English and Spanish.

What Makes a Group Last?

Value is what makes a group last—more specifically, the perception of value. Every time a man shows up, he has decided not to do something else. Most men have many choices, so your small group has to meet the "real and felt needs test" or it won't last.

So what do men find valuable? Life can be brutal. Every day men must manage their lives against the Fall. Because life is so hard, men need to be encouraged. They need a hug from God. They need the human touch. And this, while wearing the skin of a loner. The mega-answer? Care. Caring creates, captures, and sustains value, momentum, and disciples. Men will come if they sense you really care about them. If they don't, they will eventually drift away—but rarely tell you why.

You will know you have succeeded when you hear men saying: "I really feel like my group cares about me personally;" "The leader makes sure I get a chance to air my thoughts;" and "I cannot believe how my life is changing."

The Six Worship Languages: How You Best Worship God

Author Gary Chapman gave us the profoundly helpful, and now ubiquitous, "Five Love Languages." Author Gordon MacDonald identified six "leading instincts of the soul" which lead people to prefer worshipping God along six different lines. Cobbling those together, which of the following worship languages most make you feel alive and in the presence of the holiness of God? You will likely be most inclined toward two or three of these "worship languages." For example, I identify most with the contemplative, followed closely by the student.

1. The Aesthetic Language

The aesthetic seeks to be overwhelmed by the majesty of God. This person is happiest when the worship environment includes beauty, order, tradition, and artistic integrity--whether that's in church or out in nature.

2. The Experiential Language

The experientialist wants to "feel" the presence of God and respond with a full range of emotions, including clapping, singing, prayer, weeping, laughing, and more.

3. The Activist Language

The activist sees everything through the lens of service. The world needs to be changed, and this person feels closest to God when making a contribution to the work of the kingdom--whether that's setting up chairs at church or pounding nails into shingles on a widow's roof.

4. The Contemplative Language

The contemplative cherishes the inner life, opening up to God in the quiet of his own soul, and sensing God's presence. This person is impressed by the mystery of God.

5. The Student Language

The student loves truth. The study of the Bible forms the core of this person's worship style. Happiness is found in a church which emphasizes the preaching and teaching of the Word.

6. The Relational Language

The relational person finds God most present when people are bonded together in fellowship, worship, or mutual support. This person is torn when there is conflict, lifted high when the walls come down.

Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tool

Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:9-11

STEP ONE to find your personal ministry niche is to understand your spiritual gifts. It would be foolish to become a salesman if you'd rather work with computers. In the same way we pursue vocational employment based on aptitudes and abilities, we pursue spiritual service based on the way God has wired us with the gifts of the Spirit.

While theologians and teachers sometimes differ on how to precisely classify and name them, they are often broken into *service* gifts, *speaking* gifts, and *signifying* gifts. Here are the spiritual gifts mentioned in Scripture.

1. Service Gifts

Service gifts are the ligaments and muscle tissue that hold the church of Jesus Christ together. Service gifts are often low profile, behind-the-scene gifts. They include showing mercy, service (or helps), hospitality, giving, administration, leadership, faith, and discernment.

People who serve are eager for God to receive the credit for whatever good comes. "If anyone *serves* he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11, emphasis added). Here are brief definitions of the service gifts with a few examples of how each gift may be used. These, along with speaking and signifying lists, are adapted from the work of Carl Smith, Kenneth O. Gangel, and Leslie B. Flynn:

_____ ***Mercy***: Special ability to show sympathy to the suffering saints. Meals to the sick, hospital visits, phone calls and visits to the hurting.

_____ ***Service***: Special ability to joyfully serve behind the scenes. Set up chairs, ushering, assist leaders.

_____ ***Hospitality***: Special desire to offer home, food and lodging. Host missionaries, Bible studies, singles to dinner.

_____ ***Giving***: Special desire and financial ability to give above and beyond a tithe. Generosity toward youth mission trips, deacon fund offerings, Para-church ministries, a suit for the pastor.

_____ ***Administration***: Special ability to orchestrate program details. Committee work, volunteer for church office, conference/seminar supervision.

_____ ***Leadership***: Special ability to preside or govern wisely. Boards of Christian ministries, visible roles, elders, deacons, committee chairmen, run nursery program, fundraising.

- _____ ***Faith:*** Vision for new projects that need doing and perseverance to see them through. Building programs, new ministries.
- _____ ***Discernment:*** Ability to detect error. Meet with teachers who may be teaching incorrectly, letters to the editor.

2. Speaking Gifts

Speaking gifts include knowledge, wisdom, preaching, teaching, evangelism, apostleship, shepherding, and encouragement. “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God” (1 Peter 4:11, emphasis added). Here are definitions and examples of the spiritual gifts of speaking:

- _____ ***Knowledge:*** Spiritual ability to search and acquire Scriptural truth. Academic pursuits, writing, teaching.
- _____ ***Wisdom:*** Special insight into applications of knowledge. Counseling, teaching, discussion group leader, accountability groups, friendship.
- _____ ***Preaching:*** Special ability to rightly proclaim and expound God’s truth. Preachers, lay preachers.
- _____ ***Teaching:*** Special ability to explain Scripture in an edifying way. Sunday school teachers, Bible studies, Home groups, children, youth programs.
- _____ ***Evangelism:*** Special ability to clearly present the gospel to non-believers. Sunday night church visitation program, share faith with contacts on job, sponsor outreach events.
- _____ ***Apostleship:*** Special ability to begin new works. Missionaries, church planters, Christian service organizations.
- _____ ***Shepherding:*** Unique ability to care for a flock of believers over the long haul. Pastors, elders, nursery program.
- _____ ***Encouragement:*** Special skill to inspire, encourage, and comfort. Being a friend, counseling, writing letters.

People who have been given speaking gifts are able to help equip others to have a personal ministry of service. “It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12, emphasis added).

3. Signifying Gifts

The signifying gifts are miracles, healing, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

_____ ***Tongues:*** Spiritual ability to speak in a language foreign to speaker.

_____ ***Interpretation of Tongues:*** Spiritual ability to interpret the message of one speaking in tongues.

_____ ***Miracles:*** Spiritual ability to actuate the supernatural intervention of God against the laws of nature.

_____ ***Healing:*** Spiritual agency of God in curing illness and disease and restoring to health supernaturally.

Steps to determine your spiritual gifts

Learning your own spiritual gifts will 1) help you understand how and where you fit into the body of Christ, 2) help you set priorities for service, and 3) give you direction for developing a personal ministry.

Spiritual gifts are a blessing. Therefore, the exercise of your gifts will necessarily bring enjoyment, fulfillment, and produce fruit. If your service doesn't, you probably are not serving in the right area.

If you have never studied or don't understand your own spiritual gifts follow these suggested steps:

1. **Study and Reflection.** Study the four passages of Scripture which deal with spiritual gifts: Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; and 1 Peter 4:9-11. You may want to study the context by examining the verses before and after these specific references.

Your gifts will usually be related to the following, so reflect on and answer these questions:

1. What are your natural abilities? _____

2. What are your motivated interests? _____

3. What is your previous successful ministry involvement (if applicable) _____

4. Where have you received positive feedback from other Christians? _____

5. What is the burden, or calling, you sense? _____

2. **Narrowing.** Now that you have studied the Scripture passages and answered these questions, it's time to narrow the list to the specific spiritual gifts which you "think" you possess or "possibly" may possess. How do you do that?

First, make a photocopy of the list of gifts above (I'll explain why below). Now mark each gift in the blank space provided using on the following legend:

Y = Yes, I think I possess this spiritual gift.

M = Maybe. I may possess this spiritual gift.

N = No. I do not possess this spiritual gift.

D = Don't know. I don't know if I possess this spiritual gift.

3. **Ranking.** Now that you have sifted through the list of gifts you should have one or more "Y" and "M" notations in the blanks. Write each of those spiritual gifts in the following spaces:

Now, rank these in order of priority based on what you know at this time. Put a "1" next to the gift with which you most identify, a "2" by your second choice, and so on. This is provisional – you are still exploring.

4. **Feedback.** An excellent way to help determine your spiritual gifts is to ask your Christian friends for help. Ask a few friends to rank you using the same legend you used in Step 2 above, Narrowing. Make enough additional photocopies of the spiritual gifts above for each friend. Compare the results to your own assessment. Should you add any spiritual gifts to your exploratory list?

5. **Exploration.** Now it is time to explore the possibilities. Take special training in your potential areas of giftedness. Experiment with different ministries. Which ones help you feel fulfilled? In which ones do you feel you are making a contribution? Which ones are drudgery? In what areas are you being affirmed by other people?

Discovering your spiritual gifts will inevitably open up a whole new realm of joy in the Lord. To know Him is to serve Him, and the happiest people in the world are those who know their spiritual gifts and are using them for the glory of God.