

**Almighty God, In Humble Prayer**

*James Montgomery (1771–1854)*

Almighty God, in humble prayer,  
To Thee our souls we lift,  
Do Thou our waiting minds prepare  
For Thy most needful gift.

We ask not golden streams of wealth,  
Along our path to flow,  
We ask not undecaying health,  
Nor length of years below.

We ask not honours which an hour  
May bring or take away;  
We ask not pleasure, pomp, or power,  
Lest we should go astray.

We ask for wisdom:—Lord, impart  
The knowledge how to live;  
A wise and understanding heart  
To all before Thee give.

For we, like children, born in sin  
Know not till Thou hast taught,  
How to go out, or how come in,  
By word, or deed, or thought.

The young remember Thee in youth,  
Before the evil days;  
The old be guided by Thy truth  
In Wisdom’s pleasant ways.

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ**

*In the Nick of Time*

**Knowing God’s Will: Part Five**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

A few months ago I received a phone call from a colleague, a former student who went on to serve in pastoral ministry for a decade. He told me that he was trying to decide whether to remain with his current pastorate or whether to go back to school. He thought that he might like to teach in a Bible college or seminary someday. He asked for my counsel as he weighed his choices.

His request reflects a number of important considerations in seeking God’s will. First, he was choosing deliberately, refusing to allow momentary emotions to determine his direction. Second, he was seeking counsel—a matter I’ll have more to say about in a future essay. Third, and perhaps most importantly, he was looking for information. He wanted to know what he could expect if he were to pursue an academic doctorate, and he wanted to know about teaching opportunities once he had the degree.

I’m afraid that I wasn’t overly encouraging. I explained that few people can anticipate the kind of labor and sacrifice that goes into earning a Ph.D. or Th.D. Fewer still understand that the pressures must be borne by both the students and their families. Yet this price must be paid: an earned doctorate is the union card for teaching in higher education. I said all of this because I wanted my friend to know what demands and pressures he would face if he left his pastorate for further education.

That wasn’t the end of the bad news. Doctors of Philosophy now saturate the academy. Even large universities are shifting toward using adjunct rather than full-time teachers. Within mainstream fundamentalism this situation is exacerbated by the fact that nearly half our schools have closed over the past decade or two, and most of those that remain are only half the size they once were. Every man who leaves the pastorate for doctoral study needs to think seriously about what he will do for a living once he has earned the degree. He could go back into the pastorate, of course, but no one needs a Ph.D. to pastor effectively.

What is the right decision for my colleague? I really don’t know. In any event, he did not want to know what *my* will might be, but what *God’s*

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leading was. For discerning God's leading, he was doing the right thing by gaining as much information as he could.

The Bible is full of both examples and principles that merge God's will with adequate informed judgment. God's will was for Joshua to conquer the land, but Joshua still sent investigators to gather information from Jericho (Josh. 2). Those who hope to pass wise judgments are obligated to gain information from multiple witnesses (Deut. 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1). Acting without knowledge is not good (Prov. 19:2). A person who makes a pronouncement without listening to the facts is a fool (Prov. 18:13).

Ignorance is not a virtue in discovering God's direction. To be sure, circumstances sometimes force us to make decisions about which we are poorly informed. Furthermore, we often wish that we had more information than we do. We can never become omniscient, and something that we don't know might be the one thing that would have changed our minds. That is no excuse, however, for not learning all we can.

Informing one's self and seeking God's will are not mutually exclusive categories. God does not usually lead in a vacuum. He uses several factors to create in us an impression of what His direction might be. The more attention we pay to these factors, the more likely we are to understand what God wishes us to do. One of the most important factors is information. By learning all we can about our decision, we are giving God something to work with as He leads.

Consider a man who is offered a promotion that will require him to move his family to a distant city. He ought to know exactly what his responsibilities will entail and who he will be working with. He ought to learn all he can about the city, both its opportunities and its problems. He ought to search in advance for churches in that city, and, if possible, he ought to visit some of them and talk to their pastors.

He should also inform himself about the subjective responses of the people who will be affected by his decision. How will his new co-workers perceive him? How does his wife feel about the move? How do his children feel about it? On the other hand, how will his employers respond if he declines? While these matters are outside his control, he still needs to take them into account. How people feel is part of the information that should go into his decision.

Every kind of decision requires different information. No single rule can specify exactly what kind of information is necessary in every circumstance. The only rule is to gain as much relevant information as possible before the choice has to be made. Informing one's self is necessary if one is to exercise due diligence when making decisions.

I have heard Christian leaders dismiss the exercise of due diligence by denouncing it as "human wisdom." They are half right. It *is* wisdom—but it is not merely human. It is the care that God expects His people to exercise before committing themselves to a course of action. Even Jesus thought that a man who was going to build a tower should know how much it would cost before he began (Lk. 14:28). Too many Christian leaders have wrecked ministries—and people's lives—because they did not bother to inform themselves before announcing some course of action and proclaiming it to be "God's will."

Ignorance is not faith. Ignorance does not foster faith. Ignorance is not a substitute for faith. Ignorance is never a virtue. Instead, information is a tool that the faithful employ whenever possible while seeking God's direction. David trusted God to deliver him from Saul; he also trusted the information that Jonathan brought him (1 Sam. 20).

God places us in positions in which we have to make choices. In those choices He certainly knows what direction is best for us, but He also uses those decisions as opportunities to grow us in maturity and wisdom. Maturity and wisdom revolve around the capacity for sound judgment. For that reason, seeking God's leading entails the exercise of sound judgment. The simple truth is that informed judgments are usually sounder than uninformed ones.

Do you want God's will? If you are already yielded to Him, obeying Him, and fulfilling your duties to the best of your ability, then the next thing you need to do is to inform yourself. The information you gain may be exactly the instrument that God uses to disclose His direction for your life.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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