

Heavenly Father! To Whose Eye*Josiah Conder (1789–1855)*

Heavenly Father! to whose eye
 Future things unfolded lie;
 Through the desert when I stray
 Let Thy counsels guide my way.

Leave me not, for flesh is frail,
 Where fierce trials would assail;
 Leave me not in darkened hour,
 To withstand the tempter's power.

Lord! uphold me day by day;
 Shed a light upon my way;
 Guide me through perplexing snares;
 Care for me in all my cares.

Should Thy wisdom, Lord, decree
 Trials long and sharp for me,
 Pain, or sorrow, care or shame,—
 Father! glorify Thy name.

Let me neither faint nor fear,
 Feeling still that Thou art near;
 In the course my Saviour trod,
 Tending home to Thee, my God.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Knowing God's Will: Part Seven***Kevin T. Bauder*

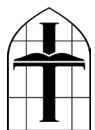
In previous essays I have outlined several considerations that all believers should weigh when seeking to discern God's leading in their lives. Obviously, they should avoid wrong ways of knowing God's will, such as inner voices, dreams, "fleeces," and misuse of Scripture. Instead, they should begin by obeying God's will as revealed in Scripture. This obedience is the sign of their commitment to genuinely wanting to know and do God's will. They should prioritize faithfulness to duties. They should bathe decisions in prayer. They should inform themselves as fully as possible. They should seek the counsel of people who know them and who know God.

Now I would like to suggest two more considerations that will help believers to discover God's direction. The first is perhaps obvious, but it bears stating. It is to pay attention to circumstances.

Before I go on, I ought to tell you that some Christians would disagree with me. Their motivations are good: they believe that walking by faith is opposed to walking by sight, and they wish to walk by faith. They also believe that taking account of circumstances is walking by sight. Ergo, to heed circumstances is to fail in walking by faith and (these brothers and sisters remind us) whatever is not of faith is sin.

I agree with them!—but only to a point. When biblical commands or promises appear to contradict circumstances, then we owe loyalty to whatever God says. Abraham believed God, even when circumstances appeared to make the fulfillment of God's promises impossible. If we find that our circumstances are such that taking God at His word will cost us everything, then we ought to obey God anyway.

If we have to ask how God is leading, however, then usually no clear biblical precept or promise is at stake. After all, we don't have to ask once we know that God has spoken. We ask when He has not. When we do not have God's clearly spoken will, we are arrogant to act as if our choices rest upon divine revelation. We have no right to assert our own will, then to insist upon following it in spite of circumstances that render it unattainable.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

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To cite an extreme example, I may believe that God is leading me to offer my services as an accompanist in a church that lacks one. The problem is that I cannot play a piano or organ. For me to accompany a congregation would require not merely personal willingness but an outright divine miracle of the sort that God nowhere promises. My circumstances ought to tell me that God is not leading me to make such a decision.

Paying attention to circumstances is simply a matter of common sense. Paul was using common sense and paying attention to circumstances when he told the centurion not to sail from Fair Havens until spring (Acts 27:9-10). When things went wrong, Paul even reminded the centurion that he should have listened (Acts 27:21). Circumstances should indeed be taken into account when seeking God's leading. Simply paying attention to circumstances can prevent some very bad decisions.

We should pay attention to circumstances, and we should also take account of another factor that is regularly discounted. When trying to discern the Lord's direction, we should consider the direction of our own inclinations. We should ask, "What would I really like to do?"

Too often, Christians assume that God's will is an ugly, repugnant thing that they would prefer to avoid if they could. Of course, it may be some of the time. Left to themselves, Jeremiah would not have chosen the well and Daniel would not have entered the lion's den. In those cases, however, obedience to God's revealed will was clearly at stake. When God directs us into unpleasant circumstances, He usually does it in ways that are unavoidable.

God's will is not usually like that. Jesus promised rest for our souls and told us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:30). David taught that when we delight in the Lord, He gives us the desires of our heart (Ps. 37:4). In other words, He leads us to want the things that He wants to give us. Doing God's will is a joy, something that we can look forward to with cheerful anticipation.

How often do we hear the phrase, "I surrendered to the Lord's will," as if the only way that God could get us to knuckle under was to batter us until we lowered our colors in defeat? While such things can happen, they are not the norm. God prepares us for what He wants us to do. If we are seeking Him and delighting in Him, He inclines us toward those things that He sees as our greatest good. We should usually find ourselves wanting the very thing that God wants for us.

When I was first married I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life (a fact that must have concerned my father-in-law). I was working as a laborer in an auto parts warehouse, but clearly that was not a career. I thought about studying law. Somebody tried to convince me to sell insurance. Somebody else tried to get me to go to chiropractic school. None of that seemed right.

I had considered vocational ministry, but I simply found it too intimidating. I wasn't opposed to ministry, but pastoral work included tasks for which I thought I was poorly suited. Over a process of months, however, the Lord placed me in positions that forced me to do the very things I was most apprehensive about in ministry. I learned two lessons. First, the Lord is quite able to do His own work through someone who is simply willing to be used. Second, I actually enjoyed performing those dreaded tasks, then getting to see the results. I found that I wanted to do more of the same things.

My bride was also watching those events unfold, and she was seeing the same things. When I finally said aloud, "I think the Lord might be calling me into ministry," she responded, "I know!" In that moment, something clicked into place. I knew what God's direction was for my life, and I was eager to embrace it. I never had to surrender anything. God gave me the desires of my heart.

Please don't misunderstand: I am not suggesting that sadness and hardship are never God's will. What I am saying is that, while seeking God's will, *one* of the things that we should consider is our own inclinations and desires. These may well be among the components that God uses to lead us while we follow Him.



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.
