

HOW DO WE HEAR GOD?

One of the most difficult times of practicing law comes when one of the people I work closely with resigns. It has happened twice in the last several months, and both resignations were for legitimate reasons.

In my practice, there is almost a military aspect to what we do. We get involved in cases as a team, and work as a team to bring those cases to fruition. There is sacrifice our families make as we have to engage in legal battles in courtrooms around the country, often for months at a time. We wind up seeing each other at almost all times of the day and night, in all kinds of moods, and there is a camaraderie that builds up. We even reference going to trial as going to war.

So, when these two gentlemen came to me and told me they were resigning, it was emotional to me. I care for them and care for their families. We have been through a lot together. Part of me wanted to insert myself into their decisions and get turn them around. Yet I didn't do so. These two gentlemen had opportunities that were better for their families, and therefore they were making the right decisions to leave.

I can think of four times I made substantial career changes that required me to dig deep intellectually and spiritually to decide what was right. I sought out the will of God in trying to come to the right decision. Something so monumental mandated my most careful consideration of what God would want.

Jesus taught us that praying for God's will is a fundamental of prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, we proclaim, "Thy will be done." But the recognized need for God's will, and the prayer for God's will, both lead to a logical question:

How do we know when we are hearing from God?

This question frequently turns in my mind with an appreciation for the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In that one chapter, we read of Peter in two important interchanges with Jesus. In the first interchange, Jesus and his disciples have come into the north country to Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asked his disciples about what people were saying of Jesus. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The disciples gave the answers that varied from John the Baptist to Jeremiah. Jesus then got more direct and asked the disciples who they thought he was. Peter's reply was square-on, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

In reply to Peter's acclamation of faith, Jesus said something interesting,

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven (Mt. 16:17).

Peter got the answer right, because Peter was rightly discerning God's message. Peter rightly heard God.

Immediately after that account, Matthew explained that Jesus began to tell his disciples about what was to come. Jesus bluntly informed them that they would go to Jerusalem, that the authorities would come against Jesus, that Jesus would suffer, be killed, and then arise from the dead on the third day. Peter then pulled Jesus aside and rebuked Jesus for saying such things adding, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Here we have another interesting proclamation from Jesus. Jesus tells Peter,

"Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Mt. 16:23).

Matthew sets these two stories right next to each other. In one, Peter hears from God and speaks. In the other, Peter hears, but not from God. Peter speaks the words of the adversary, not the Father!

These stories place front and center the question of how we hear God.

RELATION TO PREVIOUS LESSONS

This question of hearing God is important in personal decisions, who to marry, where to work, where to live, etc. But the question is also important on a larger scale. Muhammad says he heard God and that God was the source of the Quran. Joseph Smith says he heard God, and God (through his angels) was the source of the Book of Mormon and other Mormon scriptures. Many lesser known religious groups have also started with the idea that the leader has heard a unique word from God. It is a common theme.

The Christian faith believes God has spoken through prophets and apostles, giving humanity the Scriptures that are commonly divided up into the Old and New Testaments. That does not mean, however, that after those Scriptures were written, that Christianity teaches that God quit talking. To the contrary, Christian faith teaches that God still speaks to the church at large as well as to individuals. The question becomes: how?

When you were growing up did you ever have any of the childish or occultist games or toys for discerning the future or decision-making? I can remember the stores selling "Magic 8-balls" and "Ouija Boards." Some kids in my elementary school swore they were able to get results by séances. Then there were the friends who had the Chinese Fortune

Sticks. They would shake the canister and the first stick that fell out was their answer to whatever problem or question troubled them. I recently read an advertisement for these sticks:

There are times when we simply do not know what to do for the best when we can see both sides of the argument or when we feel we need advice. For the Chinese, a traditional way to find such help is to turn to the gods and goddesses for guidance using revered divination sticks. Now you too can benefit from their wisdom with CHINESE FORTUNE STICKS.¹

Of course, many did not need such childish toys. They thought they could determine the future by reading horoscopes in the paper. The wealthy (or those with no regard for wasting money) could even hire special astrologists who could give more personal readings, on the theory that the planets and stars could give directions. (Granted, the North Star can give directions, but of a different kind!) Those of us alive in the 60's remember hearing that:

When the moon is in the Seventh House
And Jupiter aligns with Mars
Then peace will guide the planets
And love will steer the stars

This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius
The Age of Aquarius
Aquarius!
Aquarius!

Harmony and understanding
Sympathy and trust abounding
No more falsehoods or derisions
Golden living dreams of visions
Mystic crystal revelation
And the mind's true liberation
Aquarius!
Aquarius!

I was recently watching the National Geographic channel and I saw this on this show that one culture thinks you can discern God's will by dissecting the liver of dead animals. There are many many forms of divination, defined as "seeking knowledge by supernatural means."

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How do we as Christians discern the will of God? How do we go about seeking God's guidance in our lives? What does Paul have to say on this subject, either directly or by example? That is our lesson today.

CAN WE GET SUPERNATURAL ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONS?

There was a famous Greek historian named Herodotus (c 484 – c. 425 BC) who wrote a history of the Greek / Persian wars. These wars stretched over centuries. Herodotus, termed by many “the Father of History,” dates the feud back even earlier than the seizing of Helen by the Trojans.

Writing about the consolidation of the Persian Empire, Herodotus recorded the various tribes of Medes that were involved. One of these tribes was the Magos tribe. Herodotus took the Persian name and simply put it into Greek letters - writing of the *Magos* tribe.² Later in his history, Herodotus showed that this tribe took a role in reading the signs from the gods for the king. Writing about an eclipse that had stumped the Persian king Xerxes, he explained the Magos were consulted. The Magos told Xerxes that, “the god was showing to the Greeks the desolation of their cities.”³

The Magos developed a reputation for harnessing supernatural powers to understand signs and meanings. Their name became synonymous in the Greek world with legitimate supernatural work as well as trickery and chicanery passed off as supernatural work. The Magos are still famous today! They gave their name in two ways that are important still today. First, we note that the Magos were in the Bible as the “Magi” who followed the star to find the Christ child.

A second way the Magos are still important today is with their name. The Greeks used it, the Romans adopted it, and we have it today in English, although we have modified the ending. Today it has become our word “Magic.”

The English word “magic” carries both overtones from the early Greek usage of Magos. It can reference trickery and illusion, such as one might see from a magician. It can also refer to sorcery, witchcraft or some occultist's access to supernatural powers. This supernatural access is a concept that Paul was familiar with, both because it was in the Old Testament, and because he saw it in his life experiences.

We begin this lesson examining magic because many people wish that God's will could be determined in a magical sense. We would love to be able to get that magic answer, so that

² “The Median tribes are these – the Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arazanti, the Budii, the Magi: so many are their tribes.” Herodotus, *The Persian Wars* I.101 (Loeb Classical Library translation by A.D. Godley).

³ *Ibid.*, Book VII.37.

anytime we wonder, “What should I do?” we get a direct answer. It is a desire to be able to follow some formula, some method, that gets us a clear and concise answer from the Divine telling us what to do, or answering whatever question we have.

God has never set himself up as the unseen mystic resource, like a fortuneteller, tarot card reader, or palm reader. The Old Testament spoke out against magic in a number of places. As Moses gave the will of God to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 18:10-14 he instructed:

There shall not be found among you...anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.

When we examine the New Testament, we do not see discernment of God’s will by some magical incantation. As a good Pharisee, Paul would never have gone to magic for someone to tell him God’s will or the direction he should go.

Paul certainly would never have sought God’s will by engaging a medium, as King Saul did in 1 Samuel 28. Saul had asked God for guidance in a coming battle against Philistines, but God had maintained silence and given no insight to Saul. Incognito, Saul then sought out a medium and had her conjure up a spirit for guidance. This did not go well for Saul!

On an early mission effort, Paul was on the island of Cyprus speaking to a Roman authority, Proconsul Sergius Paulus, when the proconsul’s adviser “Elymas the magician” opposed Paul. Paul dealt with Elymas swiftly and directly:

You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time (Acts 13:10-11).

Paul had another brush with magic in Ephesus written up in Acts 19:13-20. There were Jewish exorcists who sought to cast out demons “by the name of Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” The demon overpowered the men, answering, “Jesus, I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?”

This caused a number of believers who were still practicing and using the magical arts to confess and divulge their practices. “And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all” (Acts 19:19).

Paul never had a place for this way of living. In Galatians 5:20, Paul includes sorcery as a work of the flesh, to be avoided by the believer. There is a good indication that Paul’s

comment in 2 Timothy 3:13 that “imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” is a reference to magicians. The term Paul uses that is translated “imposter” (*goetes* - γοητες) was a derogatory term used for workers of magic.⁴

Paul also wrote the Colossian letter teaching, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). The phrase “elemental spirits of the world” was also used in other writings pre-Paul as a reference to astrology or magical incantations for supernatural intervention.⁵

Archaeology has salvaged from history a number of Greek papyri from the early centuries that reflect many of these Ephesians’ magic spells and incantations. The magic was used not simply to find God’s answers to life’s questions, but also for protection, for altering the future, for aphrodisiacs, to gain favor or influence over someone else, to heal, or even to curse or harm others.

Scholars have poured over these magical papyri and texts to understand the ancient’s use of magic. One of the interesting aspects of magic in Paul’s time concerned the reasons for using magic. Magic was man-centered in the sense that man was the reason for magic.

There are no extant examples of people using magic to accomplish the will of a deity. Rather, magic was used precisely to influence the will of a deity or spirit.⁶

It is no wonder Paul had no use for magic. Paul was never interested in Paul for Paul’s sake. Paul lived for God and God’s purposes. Paul’s life was one for God’s will. When Paul wrote from his imprisonment to the Philippians, he told them his desire was to depart from this life and be with Christ. That was much better than living in this fallen world. Yet Paul knew he had more work to do for God. Paul told the Philippians that recognizing their need, he would stay doing God’s will, rather than what was best for Paul personally. (Phil. 1:21-26).

So how does Paul teach one to access God’s will? Certainly not through some magical incantation! These are not some ways to force God to answer our questions, either by reading stars, palms, crystal balls, or the entrails of animals. Similarly, we do not have a magical formula where we can force God to write on walls, answer audibly to our ears, or even give us a nudging in our hearts. There is no magic that forces God to communicate to us “in our guts” or with our instincts.

⁴ See, e.g., Philostratus, *Apollonius of Tyana* (Loeb Classical Library, vol. 16, 17).

⁵ See the Testament of Solomon 8:1-4; 18:1, 2. See also, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (U. Chi. Press 1992) Vol. 1 at 39.1-21.

⁶ Hawthorne, Gerald, et al., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP 1993) at 581.

Which brings us back to the question, if not magic (or some less occult sounding version of it), then how do we discern God's will and voice? For just as we cannot force answers from God, we can just as certainly know that God does answer prayer. God does want his will done on earth, as it is in heaven!

Part of not putting God in a box by thinking we can force him to answer includes not putting him in the box of never answering at all. God does not exist in most boxes we construct. God certainly can use a star to guide the magi to Christ (Lk 2:2), he can write on a wall to speak to King Balshazzar (Dan. 5), he can use Balaam's donkey to speak (Num 22), he can answer Saul through Samuel's spirit when the medium beckons (1 Sam. 28), and he can speak through dreams and visions (Gen. 40, 41, etc.). But just because God can do these things, does not mean it is how he teaches us to seek him out.

THE APOSTOLIC EXAMPLE

We can look at the New Testament teaching of Paul on the subject of hearing and discerning God's voice and will, and we can also see the example of Paul and the church at large on this.

Because we are not given a formula, we look at a number of features that we can glean from Scripture. These features are all considerations for our reflection, but even more for our use!

1. Prayer.

First and foremost among the ways Paul sought God's guidance and direction was through prayer. Consider that Paul prays for God's will:

- Romans 1:9-10 "without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you."
- Colossians 4:12 "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God."

Often when Paul is praying, he does not say he is praying for God's will, but it is apparent from what he is praying that he is doing so:

- Ephesians 1:16-19 "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the

immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.”

Paul certainly exhibited prayer in the way that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven (Mt. 6:10).

Paul not only prayed to God for himself and others, but he also urged others to pray for him:

- Philippians 1:18-19 “I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance”
- Colossians 4:3 “Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison”
- Philemon 1:22 “I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:11 “You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”

We do not so readily see Paul praying for God to write some message on the wall, nor do we see him asking others to pray for that. Instead we see Paul’s prayers pointedly for something (that he might come visit, might have a successful ministry, etc.) that Paul already believed was in line with God’s will. Paul never tried to put God in a formula box, where God would give him the answer to his certain question with the clarity of his Damascus road conversation. Instead Paul was confident God would answer those prayers and Paul would walk in God’s will. This was part and parcel of these other features we should consider.

2. Thinking.

This may shock some, but Paul relied on his own thinking to help determine what God wanted and willed for him. This is often the very thing we do not want to do! We want to remove our thinking from the process, instead having it dictated to us from on high. It is as if we want to be a computer or a puppet. I sit here and type into my computer these words. Each time I type a word, it appears on the screen, and ultimately (if not edited out!) before your eyes. In this way, many of us wish that God made his will so plain. We could then blindly obey and follow whatever he tells us – no problem!

There is only one small problem with this approach. God has never worked that way. We have a mind for a reason. From the beginning God made Adam and Eve, indeed he seems to have made the world, with some degree of independence (or randomness in the case of the world). Adam and Eve made true choices. They had reasoning ability, and they used their minds to tend to creation, encounter Satan, and choose to obey or disobey the Creator.

After the fall, mankind was not stripped of their minds, nor were they stripped of their ability to reason and make choices. The fall resulted in darkened minds, fallen minds, minds that no longer functioned as they were intended. But the minds were, and are still there!

Scripture does not teach that God took decision making or thinking away from the believer's mind. Instead, Scripture teaches that God is in the process of renewing the believer's mind. Renewing our minds is part and parcel of a holy life. Paul writes of the importance of living holy as he writes of the importance of learning God's will.

Paul explained to the Romans:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but ***be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God***, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

For Paul, discerning God's will was linked closely to renewal of the mind and holy living. Discernment is a natural outflow of a life that acknowledges God's authority by living consistent with his instructions. We might think of it like this: the closer we grow to God, the better we hear his voice.

Discernment is also a thinking process. Paul uses the word, "testing" to discern the will of God. We should consider briefly Paul's use of the Greek word "testing" (*dokimazo* δοκιμάζω). From his other letters, we can see that Paul employed this word in the sense of people determining the value or worth of someone or something. When Paul used the word in reference to people testing, he meant they would observe and think through a matter.⁷

A practical example of this is found in 1 Timothy 3. Paul is instructing Timothy on how to select deacons for the church. Paul does not say, "Pray about it and go with your gut." Nor does he say, "Close your eyes, flip through Scripture and the verse your finger lands on will be God's will in this matter." Paul says:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

⁷ Consider the following passage: 2 Cor. 8:22 "And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you."

This is a process that included the mind! Did the deacon candidate meet the criteria? Then test (*dokimazo*) him! Think through and see if observation and time show the deacon worthy.

Alister McGrath speaks of “discipling the mind” and it is a wonderfully Pauline term. We often speak of discipling young Christians to help them grow deeper in their faith and walk. McGrath has taken that term (and indeed much of his time and effort in life) trying to teach and challenge people to disciple their minds. To take the “renewal” process Paul writes of seriously! To strive towards minds that more readily discern God’s will, as they grow deeper in faith and understanding. This is hand in hand with Paul’s teaching on determining God’s will.

The mind is not disciplined without more of the very same features we are considering as we work through Scripture’s teachings on guidance. Consider how closely the following two features play with the thinking feature we have been discussing.

3. Study and Meditate on Scripture.

The King James Version translated 2 Timothy 2:15 as follows:

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

“Study” or, as many later translators said, “do your best” or “be diligent.” This should be the believer’s approach to Scripture. We should take the time and energy to study. It is what this class is about, but it should be more. These lessons are presented orally in class, as well as in this written form so that people have something concrete to study.

Take personal time to pull out your Bibles. Prayerfully reflect and consider the teachings of Scripture. When you do so, do not simply read the gospels, or the Psalms, or the epistles of Paul. As you would hope to have a well-balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, proteins, carbohydrates, etc., develop a broad based scriptural diet. Read and study from different parts.

This is especially important as you seek God’s will in your life. For while we do not encourage a non-thinking use of Scripture, we do know that the Scriptures bring us closer to God, help us understand his ways, and give us insight into our lives, our God and the world around us.

We must pause here and reiterate what we mean by a non-thinking use of Scripture. It is something akin to blindly selecting a passage and deciding God gave it to you, much as if you were to write Scripture verses on Chinese fortune sticks, put the sticks into their container, and shake the container until the first one falls out by divine providence answering your question.

Paul calls the Scriptures “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2). Paul never advocated going to Mt. Olympus to seek God’s will from some human oracle. Paul sent people to Scripture to study, to learn, and to grow in holiness. We have frequently reminded ourselves of Paul’s instruction to Timothy that Scripture is:

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Scripture often instructs us directly in the will of God. I do not have to wonder whether or not to steal. Scripture makes it plain. Similarly, when someone tells me that God has led them to some sinful end, I wonder if they realize how absurd it sounds. Part and parcel of using one’s mind is weighing what one hears with the revealed Scripture. This gives us insight into whether we are hearing from God, from the adversary, or simply thinking things up on our own.

Often we get instruction from Scripture about various roles others play in our lives. Whether honoring the authorities in our lives or honoring the commitments and responsibilities we have. We learn much about God’s will in specifics simply by studying and applying Scripture.

4. Counsel.

Not only in Scripture do we find aid in determining God’s will, but also in the good counsel of other godly people. Consider again the Timothy passage. Paul did not simply send Timothy to the Scriptures. Paul sent counsel: “Read these, they will help! They are useful in a number of ways!” In fact, all of Paul’s letters, while we might consider them “teaching” or “instruction” they could also be fairly called “counsel.”

Consider in this vein the Jerusalem conference Luke wrote of in Acts chapter 15. The issue confronting the church was whether or not Gentile believers had to become Jews as part of their conversion to Christianity. This was a watershed issue for the church.

The church gathered the apostles and elders together for a counsel time, a discussion time, a time of “much debate.” This included prayer and a discussion of what God had been doing in their midst and on the mission field. It included a study and well-reasoned consideration of Scripture, and then it ultimately resulted in a letter of instruction to the Gentile converts. In this letter, the Jerusalem church wrote:

It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:

The church, Paul included, saw in their prayer, in their thinking, in their study, and in their counsel (“much debate”) God’s Spirit at work, leading them into God’s will!

5. Keep Your Eyes and Ears Open.

In Luke's narrative, the very next chapter after the Jerusalem conference contains an interesting event. Paul was in Troas:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10).

Several items draw our attention to this story. First, God used a vision to speak to Paul! This emphasizes our earlier suggestion that we not put God in a box. That means we do not put him in a box of *having to work in some way*, but it also means not putting him in a box of *not working in some way*!

A second interesting aspect to Luke's write up is the phrase, "concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Luke uses a word (*sumbibazo* συμβιβάζω) that suggests a conclusion that was deduced after weighing or bringing together a number of thoughts or ideas. In other words, Paul still used counsel, his brain, and likely bathed their decision in prayer, before moving on it as God's message.

CONCLUSION

I am sorry that I cannot impart a magic formula to you for determining God's will. I am unable to tell you exactly what to do to make certain you are taking the right job, living in the right home, or even wearing the right pair of shoes. I can assure you, however, that if you are a Christian, God is at work in you. He is working in you to bring his will into your life and into the world. He is at work renewing your mind just as he is healing your hurts. God does not leave you adrift. He has set Scripture before you and placed his Spirit within you. You have wonderful ways of growing before him, learning his ways and finding his paths – but it never has been, nor will it ever be, magic!

These applications were very much directed toward individual discernment of God's will, but they apply much the same when looking at whether someone else has received a valid word of God for you and me. Whether Muhammad, Joseph Smith, or your next-door neighbor, when someone tells you they have a message from God for you, it is right that we should weigh it against Scripture. If it is contrary to Scripture, we know it is not from God. This means we will need to be well-studied and prayerful. We should also take godly counsel and get the thoughts of others steeped in Scripture and a holy walk with God.

These go to the core of why I am neither a Muslim or a Mormon. I find the revelations of those faiths contrary to Scripture.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind”* (Rom. 12:2).

It may not always be what we want, but it is the way it is. God made us to be decision makers. He gave us minds and he expects us to use them! Part of being fallen, however, includes minds that are darkened. Jeremiah proclaimed that, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer. 19:9). For this reason, we need to disciple our minds, and work to align our thoughts with God. Toward this end, we study his word, we seek counsel and we prayerfully consider and test matters before us.

2. *“It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”* (Acts 15:28).

As we consider God giving directions for our lives, I would urge us not to look at the MapQuest model. MapQuest is wonderful for driving directions. It will tell you exactly how many miles to go and exactly when to turn. A better model for much of the direction God gives is that of a compass. It points the way to go in the sense of giving us a true north. From that we can derive east, west, and south. We can find legitimate and good paths for where we should go. It does not provide the almost mindless instruction of MapQuest, but its directions are true. I do not believe that God has only one pair of socks in mind for most of us to wear on any particular day. Instead, there are many areas where God truly gives us a choice, with the assurance he will bless us. Our choices are to align with his will, certainly, but his will often leaves us with multiple choices. This is the idea of Proverbs 3: 5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” As we acknowledge and seek God, as we look to him for wisdom and his will, he will bless our choices and make our ways straight.

3. *“By testing you may discern what is the will of God”* (Rom. 12:2).

Paul’s call to renew our minds, his call to seek direction in Scripture, his call to prayerfully consider God and his will are all calls that set before us spiritual dependence upon God for direction. Paul’s urging for thinking, for testing, for counsel, engage our minds in the process. Practically speaking, then, we have good insight for how we weigh pro’s and con’s of decisions, how we process a decision tree to see where our choices lead us, and how we weigh out those factors to determine what seems to comply most readily with the instructions God has for us!