

LEAD! C.11 Discerning Direction

In Which We Hear to Obey, and Obey to Hear

Few questions are more fraught with promise and peril for the believer than "What is God's will for my life?" While we know the [textbook answers](#), we still long for more specific, personal guidance -- and rightly so. Properly hearing God's voice can open the door to dramatic transformation of people, relationships, and society; alas, mishearing God's voice can result in darkest tragedy.

There is no simple answer, but there is a sure promise: if we entrust our ways to the Lord by faithfully pursuing the disciplines in submission to the Spirit, the Word, and the Body, He will ultimately lead us in a way that glorifies His name...

Memory Verse: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."* -- [Proverbs 3:5-6](#) (NKJV)

Assigned Reading

1. [Richard Foster: *Celebration of Discipline*](#)
 - 12. Guidance
2. [Donald Whitney: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*](#)
 - 12. Learning
3. [Eugene Peterson: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*](#)
 - 3. Providence: "God Guards You from Every Evil"
 - 14. Obedience: "How He Promised God"
4. [Ruth Haley Barton: *Sacred Rhythms*](#)
 - 7. Discernment: Recognizing and Responding to the Presence of God

Anecdote

Read [Acts 16](#). How does Paul hear from God?

Bible

[Proverbs 3](#)

For this study, we will drop back to the Old Testament for some Solomonic advice:

[3:1](#) My son, do not forget my [law](#), But let your [heart](#) keep my [commands](#);

Though the context is of a human father advising his son, it applies equally well to our heavenly Father. The first thing we need to remember when seeking God's will is to obey what He has already told us to do -- which is a wise policy regardless:

[2](#) For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you.

It is not enough to just keep the letter of the law, though; we need to devote ourselves to the highest ideals:

³Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart, ⁴[And] so find favor and high esteem In the sight of God and man.

While everyone esteems mercy and truth in principle, it is not always comfortable to apply them in practice. Worse, from our human perspective mercy and truth often seem at odds [C.1]. To fully embrace this teaching requires going beyond our mortal understanding:

⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

A simple statement, but oh so difficult to live out consistently. Even if most of our heart trusts in the Lord, there is usually a small part that cries out God is unfair, or cruel, or unreliable [C.2]; this is usually the same part that thinks it knows better than God what is good for us!

If we are to enjoy the full benefit of God's direction over of our lives, we need to give him everything:

⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Which requires a healthy fear of God, and an even healthier distaste for our own wisdom:

⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of godly wisdom, but the end of human wisdom. This is the second important lesson; that if we want to know God's will, we need to realize that it is beyond anything our human mind can comprehend.

That can be scary to contemplate, but it is sweet to experience:

⁸It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones.

And there is no more reliable investment:

⁹Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; ¹⁰So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

As with the rest of Proverbs, this isn't a mechanistic formula guaranteeing precise results. It is however a strong indicator of how God usually works: when we honor Him above all things, He delights in blessing us.

Conversely, when we are on the wrong path that same love brings forth discipline [C.3]:

¹¹My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction;

¹²For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son [in whom] he delights.

The end result of all this to help us learn God's wisdom:

¹³Happy [is] the man [who] finds wisdom, And the man [who] gains understanding;

Because the payoff exceeds anything this world can offer [C.4]:

¹⁴For her proceeds [are] better than the profits of silver, And her gain than fine gold.

¹⁵She [is] more precious than rubies, And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.

¹⁶Length of days [is] in her right hand, In her left hand riches and honor.

¹⁷Her ways [are] ways of pleasantness, And all her paths [are] peace.

¹⁸She [is] a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy [are all] who retain her.

It is embedded in the very fabric of the universe:

¹⁹The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens; ²⁰By His knowledge the depths were broken up, And clouds drop down the dew.

Of course we know all this intellectually. The challenge is to stay focused on what is unseen:

²¹My son, let them not depart from your eyes-- Keep sound wisdom and discretion;

Because that is what is truly important:

²²So they will be life to your soul And grace to your neck.

²³Then you will walk safely in your way, And your foot will not stumble.

²⁴When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.

²⁵Do not be afraid of sudden terror, Nor of trouble from the wicked when it

comes;

For they point to the One who is behind and above all things:

[26](#)For the LORD will be your confidence, And will keep your foot from being caught.

Importantly, this doesn't mean we concern ourselves only with religious duties. In fact, the third precondition for knowing God's will is to act justly towards our fellow man:

[27](#)Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do [so].

[28](#)Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give [it]," When [you have] it with you.

[29](#)Do not devise evil against your neighbor, For he dwells by you for safety's sake.

[30](#)Do not strive with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm.

[31](#)Do not envy the oppressor, And choose none of his ways;

These commands sounds obvious, but the temptation is far more subtle in practice. All too often, we seek God's will only because we want things to turn out well for **us**. (cf. [James 4:3](#)). When our efforts appear sufficient to satisfy our desires, we are far less likely to ask God for His opinion.

To truly learn to hear God's voice, we must cultivate the discipline of asking Him at all times what is on *His* heart, and what **we** can be doing to advance **His** plans. That is the surest path to enter God's inner counsels:

[32](#)For the perverse [person is] an abomination to the LORD, But His secret [counsel](#) [is] with the upright.

[33](#)The curse of the LORD [is] on the house of the wicked, But He blesses the home of the just.

[34](#)Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble.

[35](#)The wise shall inherit glory, But shame shall be the legacy of fools.

If we want to hear God's voice, we must learn to walk with the upright, the just, the humble and the wise. The road is narrow, and the way sometimes seems dark, but light and life await us at the end.

Conversation

1. Have you ever felt forced to choose between being merciful and being truthful? How did you respond?
2. What part of your heart has the greatest difficulty trusting God?
3. When have you seen God's love in the way He discipline you?
4. Share how God led you to do something contrary to your human wisdom.

Decision

- Repentance: Where do you need to obey what God already asked of you?
- Action: Ask God how you can help fulfill His plan for someone else this week.
- Worship: Reflect on the majesty of God's wisdom in ordering the universe.

Explore More

- [Knowing God's Will](#)
- [How To: Hear God's Voice – Article – Andrew Wommack Ministries](#)
- [How do I know what God's will is for my life? – ChristianAnswers.Net](#)
- [Martina McBride – God's Will](#)

For Next Week

For next week, read [Matthew 25](#). How should we prepare for the Lord's return?

Memory Verse: *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."* -- [Matthew 25:13](#) (NKJV)

References

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[Proverbs 3](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 17 May 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Pro&c=3> >
2. **New King James Version** (NKJV) Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

