
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

May 10, 2015

Knowing God's Will

"Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is – what is good and pleasing and mature."

Romans 12:2 (Common English Bible)

Recently, my friend Tom Tewell shared with me a basic and helpful approach to seeking God's will – an approach he had learned years earlier from Lloyd J. Ogilvie. The place to begin is a careful reading of the Bible and prayer. Seeking God's will in a particular circumstance, or more generally for one's life, must always begin with some grasp of who God is. What can we know of God and how God has worked through human history from God's word in the Holy Scriptures? God's desire for today will not contradict God's character as disclosed in the Bible. If God is opposed to adultery in the Bible, for instance, God remains opposed to adultery. Simply, we will never discern that God may be calling us to violate our marriage vows.

The second movement to discerning God's will is by consulting with a few trusted people who have demonstrated, in some way, that they listen carefully for God's direction. These will be people who have been widely noticed by others as "paying attention to God" as they live each day. Share with them what you think God may be calling you to do. Then invite them to place what you think you hear alongside what they know of God and God's activity. Is there consistency? Does what you believe God is saying match up with the God your friends have come to know from years of following Christ? Some Christian leaders refer to this practice as "discernment in community." Bring what you hear to a faithful community so they can say if it makes sense to them from what they know of God.

Finally, pay attention to the opportunities that present themselves – and those that don't. What some may simply call "circumstances" may be powerful indicators of what God is up to in your life. If you believe God is calling you to missionary work overseas and no doors seem to be opening for that to happen, it is well to rethink if God's will has been properly discerned. On the other hand, if you sense God is calling you to partner with Habitat for Humanity for building homes for the poor, and you have particular skills for building homes, and have discretionary time available in your routine rhythm of life and then hear of a specific need from that organization that you can meet, and feel a burden for those who can't afford a home – well, you see where I am going.

Many ask why finding God's will has to be such a struggle. My own take on that is that God planned it that way. It is in the struggle that we go deeper and deeper in a relationship with God. Think of it this way. A meaningful relationship with a spouse is built with paying close attention to their likes and dislikes over a long period of time. We listen carefully when they speak. We watch what makes them happy and what discourages them. We take notice of their idiosyncrasies. This takes effort, naturally. But it is the effort – over time – that results in a deep and satisfying relationship with another. God wants no less from us.

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