

God's Will and its Role in Decision Making:

*Open Doors, Fleece, The Still Small Voice,
and God's Wonderful Plan for Your Life.*

© 2003, Kevin Vannorsdel
San Jose, CA 95139
kv@vannorsdel.com

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Acknowledgements	5
For Those Who Just Want the Bottom Line	6
Introduction.....	7
Why study this?.....	7
An Illustration of the Problem	7
Our Goal	8
Conventions of the Text	8
Part I: The Classical View Examined	9
Introduction.....	9
The Phrase “God’s Will” is Used in Multiple Ways.....	9
Some have described it this way:.....	9
Others have said:.....	9
Still others:.....	9
God’s Three Wills	9
God’s Sovereign / Secret Will.....	9
Definitions	9
Characteristics of God’s Sovereign Will:	9
Scriptural Support for the Concept.....	10
More Support: Calvary	10
Summary	11
The Moral Will of God	11
A Few Examples of God’s Moral Will:.....	11
God’s Individual Will	11
Phraseology:.....	11
Examples of this “Blueprint” Concept in Modern Literature:	12
A Common Quotation.....	12
Hearing God, Dallas Willard, 1999	12
Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby, 1994.....	13
The Navigators	14
Every Life is a Plan of God, J. Oswald Sanders, 1992	14
Support Typically Given for the Individual Aspect of God’s Will.....	15
Reason.....	15
Biblical Example	15
Direct Biblical Support.....	15
Personal Experience.....	15
Origin of the “Blueprint” View.....	16
Summary of the Classical View of God’s Will.....	16
Looking Ahead.....	17
One Final Note	17
Part II: The Classical View Under Fire	18
Review:	18
Let’s be Clear:	18
Reminder:	18
Are You Normal?	18
To Sum it up:	19
The Classical View Under Fire	19
Arguments from Scripture:	19
What do the Proof Text’s Used for the Blueprint View Really Say?	19
Passages Mentioning God’s Will.....	19
When God Speaks	19
“I Feel a Peace About It”.....	20
What About Open Doors?.....	20
How About “Throwing out a Fleece” (Asking for a Sign).....	22

Conclusions.....	23
Arguments from Logic and Reason:.....	23
How About It?.....	23
The Problem of Ordinary Decisions.....	23
And Speaking of Marriage.....	24
The Problem of Equal Options.....	24
The Classical View Promotes Immature Decisions.....	24
The Trouble with Signs, Impressions, and Gentle Nudges (Subjectivity).....	24
Taking the Name of the Lord in Vain.....	25
Why Read the Book When You Can Talk to the Author?.....	25
It Just Doesn't Follow.....	25
Is it Possible For Us to Misunderstand the Voice of God?.....	26
Counterpoint:.....	26
But What if I Ask God for A Message or Confirmation, Doesn't God Answer Prayer?.....	26
Summary.....	26
Lets Clarify: Specialized Guidance.....	27
Part III: A Biblical Model for Decision Making.....	28
Review:.....	28
The Wisdom Model.....	29
Governing Principle.....	29
God's Word.....	29
"Wisdom".....	29
But first, What is Wisdom?.....	30
Why Wisdom?.....	30
Evidence from the Old Testament.....	30
Evidence from the New Testament.....	31
The Book of Acts.....	33
A Note About Casting Lot's.....	33
How Do We Obtain Wisdom?.....	34
Wisdom in What Sense?.....	34
God Only Wise.....	34
Personal Desires.....	35
... and Don't Forget.....	36
But What About God's Sovereign Will?.....	37
What To Do If You've Held the Classical View Until Now.....	37
Where's the Doggie Bag?.....	37
The Wisdom View in Summary.....	37
Closing Thoughts.....	38
Summary.....	38
A Reiteration.....	38
Miscellaneous Comments.....	39
Comments For Those Who Disagree With These Conclusions.....	39
"Do It For The Children".....	39
Comments For Those Who Encounter Others Who State That God Has Personally Directed Them.....	39
Partial List of References Used in this Series.....	40
Miscellaneous Thoughts for Further Development:.....	40
Appendix A.....	41
Analysis of Passages Typically Used to Support the Blueprint View.....	41
1 Samuel 3.....	41
Psalms 32:8.....	41
Psalm 37:23-24.....	43
Psalms 138:8.....	44
Proverbs 3:5-6.....	44
Proverbs 16:1.....	45
Proverbs 16:9.....	45
Proverbs 19:21.....	45
Isaiah 30:20-21.....	46
Jeremiah 1:5.....	47

Table of Contents

Jeremiah 10:23	47
Jeremiah 29:11	47
Daniel 10	49
Mathew 6:13	49
John 10	49
John 16:7-14	49
The Book of Acts	50
Romans 12:1-2	50
Ephesians 2:10	51
Ephesians 5:10	51
Ephesians 5:15-17	51
Ephesians 6:6	51
Colossians 1:9	52
Colossians 4:12	53
James 4:13-15	54
1 John 4:1-3	54
Appendix B	56
Conclusion	64

Acknowledgements

The material presented here was heavily influenced, as can be seen in the footnotes, by the thoughtfully presented work of Greg Koukl and his organization: Stand to Reason along with Garry Freisen and J. Robin Maxson's book: "Decision Making and the Will of God". Both of these resources present a very compelling case against the model of decision making that so controlled and frustrated my life for many years. They present the material much better than I could hope to do here.

I owe the life change that I experienced studying this topic first of all to God and his Word, secondly, to those mentioned above, and thirdly, to Neil M. and Steve E. who, each in their own way, helped get me started on this journey of discovery and freedom.

Finally, to those friends and family who reviewed this material in one way or another, and who provided much input and content- thank you. May God bless you for your patience!

For Those Who Just Want the Bottom Line

These days, our discretionary time is short- and who really wants to read through all these pages anyway... Well, apparently if you are reading this- you must have some interest in the topic of God's Will. For starters, if time is short, feel free to jump ahead to the final set of conclusions on page 38. These conclusions are carefully developed within the pages of this document but depending on your background and interest level, this supporting material may be unnecessary for you personally, to read.

Introduction

Why study this?

I can think of few issues more important for practical day to day Christian living than the process of making decisions in accordance with God's will¹.

It is my conviction that few things are as misunderstood as the role of the Holy Spirit in this decision making process.

In addition, the words used when we publicly pray and speak can have a profound impact on those whose lives we have influence over.

Jl Packer wrote "Wrong ideas about God's guidance lead to wrong conclusions about the right thing to do"²

An Illustration of the Problem

The Unknown Plan³

"Do you think it might be the Lord's plan for you to take the Bible College course?" a friend asked him. Arthur had not considered this possibility before, so he obtained the literature of the college. "One serious problem confronted me as I considered the brochure," he wrote. "The course was designed chiefly for those called to missionary service. At that time I had neither the calling nor the physique necessary for overseas missionary service. Furthermore, such a training course would mean my taking a step into the unknown, for completion of the course did not assure a sphere of service after graduation. Such a prospect rather frightened me, after the security of several years of employment. "That night, browsing through some material on my desk, I came across a poem entitled, 'The Unknown Plan.' It was based on Abraham's call to an unknown land, not knowing where he was going. As I read it, the words impressed me in such a way that I knew it was God's direction to me to take the unknown path and apply to the Bible College. "Next morning, while I was filling in the application form, the doorbell rang, and I was greeted by a salesman whom I had met previously. When I told him about my plans, he answered, 'Brother, you'll make a great mistake if you take the Bible College course. Many ministers feel the training is most inadequate. I would strongly advise you to settle on another course of training.' "It was a most disconcerting experience. Had I mistaken the message of the previous evening? "Within minutes of the salesman's departure, my friend Jack, who had made the suggestion that I take the Bible College course, came in. "I told him of my experience with the salesman a few minutes earlier, and he quickly interjected: 'Don't worry! That fellow was dismissed by the college for improper behavior when he was a student! The devil has tried to use him to turn you aside from the Lord's plan.' It was a timely and reassuring word to me, and I completed the application. "Later that day I received another blow. The local doctor to whom I went for the required medical test, after examining me, startled me by saying, I'm sorry, but I can't pass you for such a course. Physically you are run down. My advice to you is to rethink your plans.' His blunt remarks left me reeling. "Finally I decided to send the application papers with a

¹ God's Will = "What God Wants"

² Jl Packer, *Hot Tub Religion*, 109. Also quoted by Koukl, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, 3

³ J. Oswald Sanders, *Every Live is a Plan of God*, 13-15

brief note appended about my tiredness, and suggesting that I take the medical test after a holiday I planned. Later, when I took the test, I was given a clean bill of health." Arthur subsequently served with distinction for many years as the Australian director of a large mission. This should be an encouragement to others who meet lions in their path as they move forward in the direction they believe to be God's will for their lives.

Our Goal

To determine how God and His Will are *normally* involved in the process of making decisions.

Conventions of the Text

- While I have come to firmly believe that the details presented here are true, accurate, and consistent, there are certain points that seem yet to have objections that I have been unable to handle sufficiently. These cases are openly laid out for your consideration and are presented with the heading: **Counterpoint**.
- Biblical text printed in this document is NIV unless otherwise noted.

Part I: The Classical View Examined

Introduction

We begin by presenting a commonly held view of God's Will and Christian decision making.

The Phrase "God's Will" is Used in Multiple Ways

One of the most important concepts to understand when studying the concept of God's Will is that the phrase, "God's Will" (and similar), is often used to describe different things. I have come to believe that many have become confused and even frustrated because they did not understand this concept. As is always the case when studying Biblical passages, we must examine the surrounding context to help us determine the author's original message.

Another way to say this is that there are different aspects to God's Will.

Some have described it this way:

Directive Will of God - What He ordains or decrees

Permissive Will of God - What He Allows

Others have said:

General Will of God - God's Will for all of mankind

Particular Will of God - God's Will for a particular group or individual

Still others:

Sovereign Will of God - God's predetermined, secret, plan for everything that happens in the universe.

Moral Will of God - The commands and prohibitions revealed in the Bible.

Individual Will of God - God's detailed plan (blueprint) for each individual (Believer).

I believe it is this last description that most accurately describes the classical view today. The remainder of Part 1 will be devoted to further developing and describing this classical view.

God's Three Wills

God's Sovereign / Secret Will

Definitions

- God's predetermined plan for everything that happens in the universe
- "What God Wants, and God Does"⁴
- "What God either Decrees or Allows"

Sovereign means "in charge", "reigning over" etc.

Characteristics of God's Sovereign Will:⁵

- A detailed plan for all events in the universe- *it is exhaustive*

⁴ Greg Koukl, Stand to Reason Radio, 8/24/03

⁵ Based on Garry Friesen, Decision Making and the Will of God, 38, 201-208

- It always comes to pass- *it is certain*
- It is hidden and cannot be known until it happens- *it is secret* (with exceptions⁶)
- Believers are not expected to “find it” as part of the Christian life
- It includes both good and evil
- It will ultimately lead to God’s glory- *it is perfect*

Scriptural Support for the Concept⁷

Daniel 4:35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD ; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

Revelation 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD .

Romans 9:19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Acts 4:27-28 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

More Support: Calvary⁸

An interesting logical proof of God’s sovereign will as we have described it here is Jesus’ death at Calvary. The most heinous of all crimes, the murder of the Son of God actually ended up providing the means by which we may all be saved. Not only did God use evil to accomplish this goal, He also showed us that it was planned to roll out in this way from the beginning. The event was actually described before it happened! (1 Peter 1:20, Isaiah 53, Passover etc). God wasn’t being forced into a “plan B” when the Jews decided to kill their own Messiah, that *was the plan*. Nothing can frustrate the Sovereign will of God. God knows all things, and therefore, was able to consider all things when he formulated his plan for all events in the universe.

With this in mind, we can also safely state that the entrance of sin into the world was also part of God’s sovereign will. I’ll say it again for fun, I think that God Sovereignly willed us to sin⁹ but that is a topic for another time.

⁶ The only exceptions are events that are foretold by a prophet (prophecy), this includes the eternal destiny of mankind.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the NIV

⁸ Friesen, 202

⁹ Kevin Vannorsdel, What is Love?

How does our “free will” fit in? It is like the gratuity that gets automatically added to your tab when dining with a large group. It sort of just gets “factored in”. Since God is omniscient (all knowing)- he has “factored in” our individual decisions to his sovereign will.¹⁰

Summary

Some things are directly attributable to God’s Sovereign will (like the creation of the universe etc) while others are more indirectly attributed (like Judas betraying Jesus, or the decisions we freely make w/ consequence).

God’s Sovereign will is exhaustive, certain, hidden, and perfect.

The Moral Will of God

This is simple. God supernaturally revealed his moral will to the writers of our scriptures. The Bible contains principles and commands that we are *all* expected to discover, understand, and follow. God’s moral will is not optional. We must all come to believe and act as instructed in the Bible. All of our decisions must conform to (a correct interpretation of) God’s Moral Will. Any decision we make outside of these guidelines is, most certainly, outside the Will of God.

A Few Examples of God’s Moral Will:

1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Many many others...

God’s Individual Will

The blueprint for our lives. God’s individual will includes things like what college I should attend, what job I should take, who I should marry, where I should live etc. We call this His Perfect Will for our lives. **Note: God’s Individual will applies to non-moral decisions.** These are decisions that have no moral issues attached. God’s Moral Will provides guidance in the area of moral decisions as we have already discussed.

Under this viewpoint, we must attempt to determine God’s perfect will so that we can then make the right decision. We call this process “finding or determining God’s will”.

Phraseology:

- I feel led...
- God told me...
- I heard God’s voice...
- God has called me to...
- God wants me to...
- I have received confirmation that God ...
- I have a peace about...
- I want to be right smack dab in the center of God’s perfect will...

¹⁰ Scott Hodson, aka Scottae- San Jose, a long time ago.

- I need to do this or that so that I can hear God’s still small voice....
- He is not silent, we are not listening...
- I am searching for God’s will on...
- I felt an inner nudge and decided...
- God spoke through my heart...
- God spoke to me through another person and...
- I must quiet my heart in order to hear God’s voice...

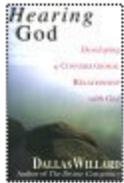
Examples of this “Blueprint” Concept in Modern Literature:

A Common Quotation¹¹

*I am not strong, I am not wise,
And many a path before me lies
Where I might go astray;
So when I have to make a choice,
Help me to listen for your voice,
And then obey.*

—Author unknown *Pulpit Resource*, 3/28/82

Hearing God, Dallas Willard, 1999



On Page 87 of “Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God”, a book endorsed by Bill Hybels (Willow Creek Church, Chicago) and published by Intervarsity Press, author Dallas Willard states:

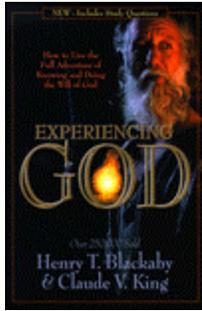
God addresses us in various ways: in dreams, visions and voices; through the Bible and extraordinary events; and so forth. Once again, this is obvious in humanity’s experience of God in general.... In terms of overall importance the written Word and Jesus, the living Word, are not even to be compared to a voice or vision used by God to speak to an individual. And from among the individual’s experiences of hearing God, the “still small voice” has a vastly greater role than anything else.

And on page 89:

But a major point of this book is that the still small voice—or the interior or inner voice, as it is also called—is the preferred and most valuable form of individualized communication for God’s purposes.

¹¹ Original author unknown, *Pulpit Resource*, 3/28/82

Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby, 1994



On Page 50, Blackaby writes of the “Seven Realities of Experiencing God”:

SEVEN REALITIES OF EXPERIENCING GOD

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.
5. God’s invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
6. You must make major adjustments in your life to join God in what He is doing.
7. You come to know God by experience as you obey Him and He accomplishes His work through you.

Page 56 expands on Reality #4:

REALITY 4:

God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

The testimony of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is that God speaks to His people. In our day, God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. He uses the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church (other believers). No one of these methods of God’s speaking is, by itself, a clear indicator of God’s directions. But when God says the same thing through each of these ways, you can have confidence to proceed.

Page 138 discussed “Hearing the voice of God”:

RECOGNIZING GOD’S WORD TO ME

What prevents me from understanding God’s truth? Who causes me to understand God’s truth? What does the Spirit use to confirm in my heart a word from God to me? To recognize God’s voice, what do I have to depend on?

THE KEY TO KNOWING GOD’S VOICE: A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

An intimate love relationship with God is the key to knowing God’s voice, to hearing when God speaks. You come to know His voice as you experience Him in a love relationship. As God speaks and you respond, you will come to the point that you recognize His voice more and more clearly. Some people try to bypass the love relationship. Some look for a miraculous sign or try to depend on a “formula” or a set of steps to discover God’s will. No substitute, however, exists for the intimate relationship with God.

Page 143 yields this warning:

I challenge you to review what you sense God has been saying to you on a regular basis. If God speaks and you hear but do not respond, a time could come when you will not hear His voice. Disobedience can lead to a “famine... of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11-12).

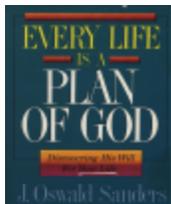
The Navigators



In a letter to my sister in-law dated 7/23/2003, Senior Vice President of The Navigators, Lauren D. Libby wrote this:

“A number of years ago a friend explained that when the Spirit of God is leading, it is usually with a gentle tug or nudge in a particular direction. When we feel beat up, twisted, pushed, or without peace, that probably is not the leading of the Spirit of God.”

Every Life is a Plan of God, J. Oswald Sanders, 1992



This book actually does a fairly good job of presenting an honest view of the relevant scriptures. It seems rare to find a book that presents multiple sides of the issue as this one does. Still Oswald tends to lean toward the classical view as evidenced here:

Page 39

I believe God has an individual will for my life and for every life, but it’s realization depends on a true surrender of *my* will and *your* will to Him for the fulfillment of His plan as and where He sees best.

Page 139

Expect the witness of the Spirit in a deepening conviction that this is the will of God for you. Circumstances may confirm your guidance.

Support Typically Given for the Individual Aspect of God's Will

Reason

It seems reasonable that God would indeed have a detailed blueprint for each of our lives. God has shown himself to be extremely detail oriented. Remember his instructions regarding the construction of the tabernacle? Mathew 10:30 says that each hair on our head is numbered. Mathew 6:26 says that God feeds the birds of the sky- and that we are more valuable than they. It seems reasonable that God has a detailed plan for each of us, and that we should therefore seek to understand it.

Biblical Example

There are many examples of people for whom God had a particular plan. Moses, John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary, The disciples, the apostle Paul- the list goes on and on.¹²

Direct Biblical Support

Genesis 24 *Isaac and Rebekah*

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD , "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Ephesians 6:6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

Colossians 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Personal Experience

The concept that God has a detailed blueprint for each of us is also confirmed by many peoples own personal experience. Many times people determine that their decision is indeed in line with God's will when they receive a supernatural peace, an unexpected blessing, or some other "sign".

Some examples of out of the ordinary experience that can communicate or confirm God's leading are:

- Receiving the same information from multiple sources¹³
- Experiencing an "Open or Closed Door"
- Confirmation by "fleeing"

¹² Freisen 41,42 provides a lengthy list w/ scriptural support

¹³ Blackaby 56

- Strange and unexpected thoughts and feelings (“My heart is speaking”)
- Actually hearing God’s audible voice
- Circumstances

Origin of the “Blueprint” View

This Blueprint view is relatively new:

Jl packer says that the classical view goes back no further than 150 years or so.¹⁴ This is based on his analysis of Hannah Whitall Smith's " Fanaticism Papers"¹⁵

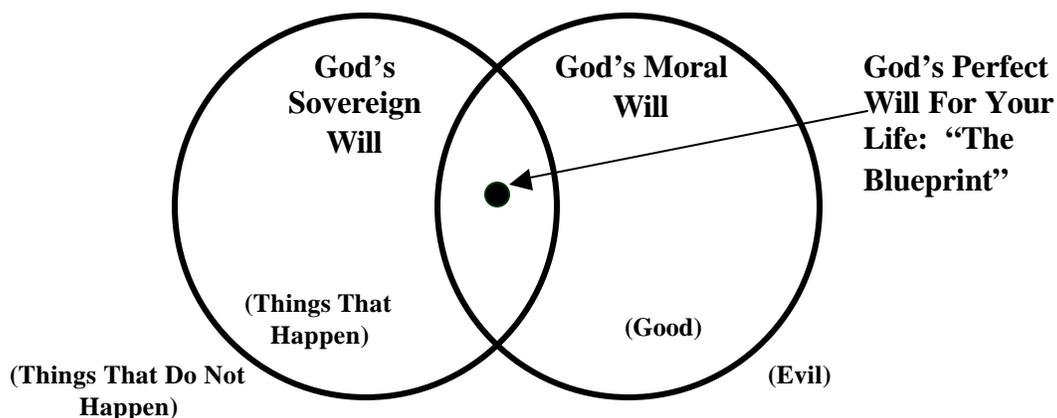
Summary of the Classical View of God’s Will

We sum it up this way:

God will’s (or wants) things for us in three different ways:

- There are things that God wants – and God does - these things ALWAYS happen and are called God’s Sovereign Will. Generally, it is not possible for us to know God’s Sovereign Will until it happens.
- There are things that God wants us **all** to do – these things may or may not happen and are called God’s Moral Will.¹⁶
- There are things that God wants us **individually** to do – this is called God’s individual will or “the blueprint”. This blueprint applies to **non-moral** decision making. We are expected to seek out and discover God’s Individual will for us. Once we learn exactly what it is that God wants, then we can correctly and safely decide what we should do.

We graphically depict the relationship of these three aspects of God’s will next:



¹⁴ Packer 110

¹⁵ Direct E-mail Conversation with Dr. Packer- Contact author (kv) for more information

¹⁶ If you feel that there is a contradiction saying that God is “in charge” and yet we still have a free will- consider this statement: “It is God’s Will that we have a Will”. A good father allows his child to make some decisions on his own- because it is the best thing to do for the child. That does not take away from the sovereignty of the father.

And regarding the subject of decision making, we summarize the principles according to this view as follows¹⁷:

- **Premise:** For each of our decisions God has a perfect plan or will, a “blueprint” for our lives. This blueprint conforms to all three aspects of God’s Will as depicted in the figure above.
- **Purpose:** The goal of the believer is to discover God’s individual will and make decisions in accordance with it.
- **Process:** The believer interprets the inner impressions and outward signs through which the Holy Spirit communicates His leading.
- **Proof:** The confirmation that one has correctly discerned the individual will of God comes from an inner sense of peace and outward (successful) results of the decision.

Looking Ahead

I believe that the concept of God’s Sovereign and Moral Will’s are both scripturally sound. The concept of God’s Individual will- and in particular- the notion that God has a Blueprint for our lives- a plan that we must consult (just like building a house etc) prior to making non-moral decisions requires some deeper study. This will be the focus of the next section.

One Final Note

We will not be studying, particularly, whether or not God has a detailed plan for our lives- only whether or not it is a “blueprint”- a plan that we need to seek out and understand as part of our non-moral decision making process.

¹⁷ Based on Freisen, 145

Part II: The Classical View Under Fire

Review:

In part 1, we discussed that the Classical View of God's Will is actually thought to be only 150 years old or so. Under this viewpoint, God's will was described to have three different aspects.

God will's (or wants) things for us in three different ways:

- There are things that God wants – and God does - these things ALWAYS happen and are called God's Sovereign Will. Generally, it is not possible for us to know God's Sovereign Will until it happens.
- There are things that God wants us **all** to do – these things may or may not happen and are called God's Moral Will.
- There are things that God wants us **individually** to do – this is called God's individual will or "the blueprint". This aspect of God's Will we are expected to figure out. Once we learn what God wants for us, then we can correctly decide what to do.

We also graphically illustrated how all three aspects relate to each other.

I briefly stated that I believe that the first two aspects of God's Will are scripturally sound but that the third aspect, His Individual Will, and in particular, the Blueprint, requires some deeper study and may in fact, not be a Biblical notion.

Lets be Clear:

The classical view describe God's Individual will as something we *need to discover* before we can make correct (or best) non-moral decisions. If you have ever said "I wonder what God wants..." then you have used the vernacular of this view. We mentioned that another way to describe it might be as a "Blueprint". As a builder consults a blueprint prior to building a house, so must we consult God's individual blueprint for us prior to building, or modifying, our lives.

It is this "Blueprint" concept and the need to discover it that I take objection to and that we will analyze together.

God may well have a blueprint for our lives but I claim that if so, it belongs to God and God alone. This would make it part of His Sovereign Will- generally kept secret from us.

Reminder:

Remember that the decisions we are considering here are non-moral in nature. For all moral decisions, God's moral will governs absolutely.

Are You Normal?

There are many cases recorded in the Bible where God spoke or directed individual people down an individual path. What we will be looking at in these cases is 1) How God "guided" and 2) does the situation describe something that might be normative for us today.

To Sum it up:

We are going to discover what the Bible teaches we can normally expect regarding God's involvement in the process of analyzing and making non-moral decisions. In the process we'll also find out how God guides when things are not normative.

The Classical View Under Fire

Arguments from Scripture:

What do the Proof Text's Used for the Blueprint View Really Say?

Please refer to Appendix A for a detailed *Analysis of Passages Typically Used to Support the Blueprint View*.

Passages Mentioning God's Will

One thing I have always wanted to do was simply tally up and analyze all the verses that mention "God's Will". Admittedly this does not include every passage discussing what God desires but nevertheless, it gives us something substantial to discuss.

Please review Appendix B: *Verses Containing "Will" in Reference to God's Will* for this analysis.

When God Speaks

Many have taught the concept that God speaks to us with a "still small voice". This leads us to conclude that the voice of God might be missed if we are not carefully listening.

The "Still small voice" is usually supported by a single passage of scripture 1 Kings 19:12 in which Elijah is confronted by a "gentle whisper" (NIV). There is one important point to not overlook here: God still used his voice (audible). Also, v11 states that the "Lord told Elijah to go stand on the mountain for the Lord is about to pass by", and finally v13 mentions God's voice again.

Job 26:14 might also be used as a support text for the concept of "God's Gentle Whisper"- again, it is a whisper... not an inward nudge.

Some have raised, 1 Samuel 3 as an example of a passage where God's voice was not heard clearly. In response to this, I make the following two observations:

- God made sure that Samuel eventually understood the "call". God was determined to get his message through.
- The reason Samuel didn't understand God's voice may be bound up in vs. 7 where it says: "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him". I'd say that those who don't yet know the Lord (as in this case) needn't worry much about day to day non-moral decision making. This passage may more accurately exemplify God's call for an unbeliever to become saved than for a believer to learn something of God's blueprint.

The Bible contains countless examples of God speaking and leading individual people in individual ways. Moses, the Israelites, Saul/Paul, Jesus, etc. These are non-normative situations and it is safe to say that in each case, God's message was unmistakably clear.

Our point: God speaks in very clear and unmistakable ways.

Scripture does not support the general concept that we need to seek (or try hard to hear) the "voice of God".

"I Feel a Peace About It"

The classical view supports the idea that God confirms our correct decisions by providing us with a sense of peace.

This is often supported by Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...". The word "rule" is used in the sense of a judge or umpire providing confirmation of a decision. Philippians 4 also mentions "peace which transcends all understanding". The context of both passages have nothing to say about personal decision making. Instead Colossians is speaking of how we should act towards each other and Philippians is essentially saying that we should trust God's Sovereign Will.

Jesus didn't seem to have a peace about his task here on earth (Matt 26:39).

Scripture does not support the idea that God necessarily uses peace as a way to confirm our non-moral decisions.

What About Open Doors?

The classical view supports the idea that God gives us direction and confirmation by the opportunities and/or lack of opportunity we encounter. We sometimes call these Open and Closed Doors.

Under this viewpoint, it is often, practically speaking, difficult to evaluate the source and meaning of the open door. Is the door only partly open? Did God open it or is Satan trying to tempt me to travel a path that will lead to God's second best? Is a closed door actually God telling me that He does not want me to pursue a particular course of action or is He simply giving me a chance to step out in faith?

The Bible does use the “door” terminology in a few relevant places. Lets take a look:

Passage	Commentary
<p>act.niv 5:18-22 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ** 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." 21 At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles. 22 But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported,</p>	<p>This illustrates a literal Door opened by the Lord. The apostles went through this door and left the prison. This was wise since the angel of the Lord actually commanded them to do so.</p>
<p>act.niv 16:23-29 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ** 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" 29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.</p>	<p>This also illustrates a literal door being opened. Paul and Silas were praying and praising the Lord when what appears to be a miracle (debatable I guess) caused the doors to open. Paul and Silas... DID NOT go through this “open door”. Instead they chose to stay and save the jailors life.</p>
<p>1co.niv 16:6-10 6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ** 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. 10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.</p>	<p>First Paul states his dependence on God’s Sovereign Will (7) as also mentioned in James. Then he states the reason he will not visit the Corinthians right away- opportunity for productive work.</p>
<p>2co.niv 2:12-15 ** 12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, 13 I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-bye to them and went on to Macedonia. 14 But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. 15 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.</p>	<p>Now here a similar door has been opened... but Paul decides NOT to go through it. In fact, Paul had more “peace” when he chose NOT to go through the door that the LORD had opened for him.</p>
<p>col.niv 4:1-5 1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. 2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ** 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.</p>	<p>Paul, like us, was subject, “at the end of the day”, to the sovereign will of God. Here he simply prays for an opportunity- not really for “guidance”. – “God, give me an opportunity for me to share my faith at work”</p>

The only real reference I know of to a “closed door” is in Romans 1:10-13 where Paul states “...I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.” Certainly, if there is no way for us to proceed down a certain path, we can rest assured that God’s Sovereign will is in play. As Paul did, it is appropriate to pray that the situation be changed.

Another example might be Acts 16:6-7.

The Bible indicates that there is no need to assign divine directives to the open or closed doors we encounter in life. Open doors seem to simply be opportunities that the Lord presents. We may choose to act upon, or ignore, these opportunities based on other criteria. Closed doors are to be humbly accepted as part of God's sovereign will and may become an issue for prayer depending upon other factors.

How About “Throwing out a Fleece” (Asking for a Sign)

You may not think of it as “tossing out a fleece” but really, every time we ask God for a sign- or attempt to interpret something that appears to be a sign- we essentially are doing just that- “fleecing”. This term comes from a portion of the story of Gideon and the Midianites, Judges 6 and 7.

The story is quite interesting. Here is a brief summary of points relevant to us here:

Judges

6:12 The “Angel of the Lord sits down with Gideon in a field and says: “The Lord is with you mighty warrior””

6:14-17 The Lord instructs Gideon to fight the Midianites, the Lord assures Gideon that he will be successful

6:17 Gideon asks for a sign that this is indeed “The Lord” (or His messenger).

6:21 The Lord miraculously consumed a sacrifice with fire.

6:36 Gideon asks again for confirmation by requesting a wet fleece on dry ground

6:39 Gideon asks once again for confirmation, this time he requests a dry fleece on wet ground

7:10 Gideon still seems unconvinced and sneaks down to the Midianite camp to hear one final confirmation of God's assured success.

Here we see the Lord actually speaking to Gideon and asking (commanding) him to perform a task. The Lord graciously confirms Gideon's never ending doubt by performing not one, but three supernatural miracles. He follows this up by performing what I would consider one final, (supernatural?) miracle.

As can be seen by reading the above passage, Gideon's fleece was really an expression of his stubbornness or maybe his doubt and disbelief. While some might say that Gideon simply should have had more faith- I tend to side with Gideon (and Thomas) in general, enjoying the idea of being able to receive true confirmation.

The relevant question here is: If we are bent towards the idea of throwing out a fleece- How should it be done in order to be Biblical? The answer is quite simple-

- Any fleece proposed as a test of God's leading should be unquestionably supernatural
- Ask for a confirming supernatural fleece to be answered (preferably in the other direction)

A fleece that does not conform to these guidelines:

“God, if I am to marry Tabatha, let her answer on the second ring”

A fleece that does conform to these guidelines:

“God, if I am to marry Tabatha, please, levitate the lamp”

“If I am not to marry Tabatha, please levitate the chair”

If God doesn't answer either of these fleeces, you can be sure that he is not choosing to communicate to you in this manner.

An Interesting example of poor fleecing is illustrated by an episode of "The Simpsons". Homer is deep in prayer over the news that his wife, Marge, is pregnant with their third child.

Dear Lord, the gods have been good to me and I am thankful. For the first time in my life everything is absolutely perfect the way it is. So here 's the deal: You freeze everything as it is and I won 't ask for anything more. If that is okay, please give me absolutely no sign.[pause] Okay, deal. In gratitude, I present to you this offering of cookies and milk. If you want me to eat them for you, please give me no sign.[pause] Thy will be done.¹⁸

As stated by Greg Koukl¹⁹:

There are scattered examples of providential signs used in the Bible (e.g., Abraham, Genesis 24:12 ff.), but there is no indication this is a standard way of making decisions. The fact that this is not taught to us in the New Testament as a proper method of making decisions is a critical point. The only New Testament example that comes to mind is the drawing of lots to fill the apostolic vacancy left by Judas in Acts, hardly a common occurrence.

Conclusions

Those who believe that the Bible is our source for teaching regarding everything important for Christian day to day living should, at this point, begin to wonder how the Blueprint view became so popular.

Arguments from Logic and Reason:

How About It?

If God intended us to discover His individual will for our lives, don't you think we might be able to locate at least a chapter somewhere in the Bible that clearly discusses the concept? How about three verses in a row...?

Conclusions drawn and taught about God that are not scriptural make up the basis for what we call a religious cult.

The Problem of Ordinary Decisions²⁰

If we believe that God has a detailed plan for our life and that we can expect guidance from Him in every decision if we seek Him, we would best be about the business of doing this- right? Anything less would constitute disobedience. The trouble is which decisions do we need to consult God regarding and which decisions are OK for us to make on our own. Surely we shouldn't bother God regarding whether to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt.... Or should we?

Just where would we propose drawing a line?

¹⁸ As quoted by Decision Making and the Will of God, Greg Koukl, Episode 2F10, "And Maggie Makes Three" Airdate January 22, 1995

¹⁹ Decision Making and the Will of God, Greg Koukl, P8

²⁰ Decision Making and the Will of God, Gary Freisen Ch 7

We usually arrive at life's big decisions through a series of very small and seemingly insignificant decisions, decisions that we might never have imagined would bring us to that point.

If I trace things back far enough I can see that I live in California now because I chose not to diligently practice my flashcards when I was a child in elementary school in Iowa.

To be consistent, this approach to decision making has to be carried down to the minutest detail of our lives. This is an unrealistic way of approaching life.

And Speaking of Marriage²¹

Suppose God has a single best person for each one of us to marry. Then suppose you step out of God's will for a time and wind up marrying the "wrong person". Well, now you married the wrong person and so did your spouse. Of course that means that the people each of you were supposed to marry now have to marry someone else... and the people they were supposed to marry... well you get the picture. Essentially because you happened to not correctly hear and understand the voice of God (and don't you think someone, somewhere had done that at least once?) we are all unfortunately going to have to marry someone who God never intended us to marry.

The Problem of Equal Options²²

Insistence upon only one "correct" choice generates anxiety over missing reading the blueprint rather than gratitude for more than one fine opportunity.

The Classical View Promotes Immature Decisions²³

Immature decisions are often made by those following the classical blueprint view

- By permitting believers to justify otherwise unwise decisions on grounds that "God told me to do it"
- By fostering costly delays because of uncertainty/anxiety about God's Individual Will
- By encouraging people to reject personal preferences when faced with apparently equal options²⁴
- By encouraging unbiblical use of a fleece

The classical view is attractive because it allows us relief from the responsibility of supporting our decisions with careful thought, study, and analysis.

The Trouble with Signs, Impressions, and Gentle Nudges (Subjectivity)

The problem with interpreting one's impressions, gentle nudges or any other form of "spirit" (small S) leading is that one can never be sure as to the source. Remember the story we read at the beginning of this series?

Many people have come up with all sorts of systems and recommendations regarding how to discern and interpret the "gentle" voice of God's leading. Many of these were pointed out earlier.

²¹ Concept presented by Greg Koukl, Decision Making and the Will of God, Audio Tape

²² Freisen, Ch 7

²³ Freisen, Ch 7

²⁴ In fact, some teach that one should always (in general) choose the harder or most difficult option. See "God's Guidance A Slow and Certain Light", Elisabeth Elliot, P118.

Since we have already seen that the Bible has little to say about interpreting these sorts of inward impressions (in the area of non-moral decision making), one would be wise to ask exactly just what these principles and systems are based on.

The trouble with the blueprint model is that we become superstitious.

Certainty that one has found God's individual will is impossible apart from an objective source of knowledge.²⁵

Attempting to make decisions based on data that is subjective and therefore uncertain- causes confusion, frustration, and anxiety.

Taking the Name of the Lord in Vain

Part of God's moral will is that we should never incorrectly use the name of the Lord.

Some get all worked up about those who say "Oh my G*d" but never think twice about proclaiming (again, based on uncertain information) that God told them to do this or that.

The claim that "God told me something" is the claim of a prophet. Prophets were put to death if they were wrong.

Why Read the Book When You Can Talk to the Author?

If God can be directly consulted for our most important decisions- why do we really need to read the Bible at all?

The blueprint view promotes Biblical immaturity.

It Just Doesn't Follow

Some make the following argument:

God cares about every detail of our lives, and knows everything (Omniscient)

Every Life is a Plan of God:

Page 12, P1. Sanders states:

*Our heavenly Guide does not deal with us en masse, but has personal and individual transactions with each. Since each of us is unique, He employs as many methods as there are people. In describing the particularity of the Father's care for His children, Jesus used a striking figure of speech: "Even the very hairs on your head are all numbered" (Matt 10:30). This gives us assurance that no detail of heredity, no peculiarity of temperament, no handicap in environment escapes His compassionate eye. **With infinite wisdom and sympathetic understanding He plans for us in love.***

Every Life is a Plan of God:

Page 22, Sanders states:

²⁵ Freisen, P137

Would it not be strange if the One whom Jesus taught us to call “Father” did not extend detailed guidance to His children who came to Him asking for it? The implication is inherent in the very idea of fatherhood.

But this does not follow. A good father does just the opposite. He allows his grown up children to make their own decisions. God dignifies us with the responsibility of decision making.

Is it Possible For Us to Misunderstand the Voice of God?

“It seems to me that if we hold that God can be trying to speak to someone, but some human limitation gets in His way, then we have to accept as valid the same objection against the authority of Scripture and surrender our confidence that God could guarantee the outcome of the writing of the Bible.”²⁶

Counterpoint:

- Some have objected to this argument stating that “maybe God sometimes desires to not speak clearly” or “Maybe God wants us to have to work at hearing his voice”.
- Some have also used 1 Samuel as evidence that God’s voice is sometimes not heard. Please see Appendix A for more information on this passage.

But What if I Ask God for A Message or Confirmation, Doesn’t God Answer Prayer?

The question here is what, based on Biblical precedent, can we expect from God? Some have accused that I have “put God into a box”, or placed limits on his power. The fact is that we simply cannot just teach (or believe) whatever we want. We have to teach (and believe) concepts that the Bible indicates are true.

The Bible seems only to indicate that if God does have a “word for us”, that He will communicate it in a very obvious and supernatural (not subjective) way. Therefore, I suggest, that if we want to request some form of leading or confirmation from God, for our non-moral decisions, we should treat it as discussed in the Fleece section above. We should ask God to communicate in a supernatural, objective, way.

“God, if you want me to change jobs, levitate the couch, If you do not want me to change jobs, levitate the table”²⁷

Summary

- The Bible clearly indicates the existence of God’s Sovereign and Moral Wills.
- The Bible does not support the idea that we need to seek God’s Individual Will as part of our decision making process. Common proof texts used for this are either in-correctly interpreted or are simply inconclusive.
- The Bible does not teach that God speaks to us through inner impressions or outward signs.
- The Bible does not indicate that Open or Closed Doors are divine directives from God.
- The Bible does not teach that an inner sense of peace is confirmation that a decision has been made correctly.
- The Bible does not teach that we need to learn “God speak” in order to hear the voice of God.
- The blueprint view of God’s Will does not make logical sense.

²⁶ Does God Try, Greg Koukl, www.str.org

²⁷ A conceptual quote from Koukl, Decision Making and the Will of God

Lets Clarify: Specialized Guidance

It is reckless to claim that God never gives special guidance to his children. The question is: when He does, what are it's characteristics? Koukl nicely analyzes this issue.²⁸

A summary of his analysis is:

The Biblical characteristics of special guidance are that they are rare, usually intrusive and unsought, supernatural, and clear.

Unless these characteristics are found, I argue that it is unsafe and careless to treat the “message” as anything more than just a passing thought or observation- originating from an unknown source.

²⁸ Decision Making and the Will of God, Greg Koukl, P9,10

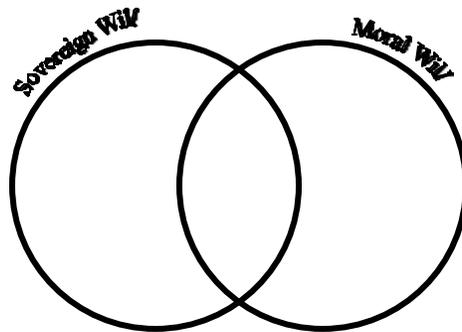
Part III: A Biblical Model for Decision Making

Review:

We have concluded that the phrase “God’s Will” has only two different meanings in the Bible.

God’s Sovereign Will	God’s Moral Will
This is What God wants and God Does	What God wants US to do
It always comes to pass	It may or may not come to pass
Includes both good and evil	Includes only good
Hidden (w/ exceptions)	Completely revealed in the Bible
Cannot be learned in advance (same exceptions)	We are expected to learn this through Bible study.

The relationship of these two aspects of God’s Will can be graphically illustrated:



Furthermore we have shown that the classical idea that God has a life blueprint that must be sought out and understood prior to our making decisions is not Biblical. This is indicated by the absence of the “dot” in the above diagram.

The result of this is the realization that phrases like “I felt led...” or “God is calling me to move to Russia” or “I need to be still and listen for God’s voice” or “I am trying to determine God’s Will for my life” are not only unbiblical, they are also seriously misleading to young Christians.

The subject of this section will be to replace the now debunked (and hopefully- defunked) blueprint model of decision making with one that is taught and demonstrated in the Bible.

The Wisdom Model

Governing Principle

Using the guidelines of God's Word and Wisdom, you have the freedom to do anything you want, with God's blessing.²⁹

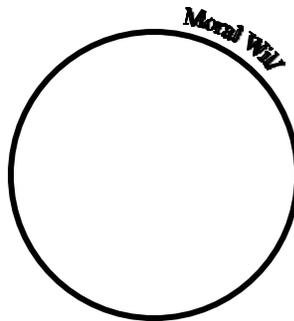
Note that we have mentioned three items, God's Word, Wisdom, and your desires.

We'll discuss each as we build a picture of the Wisdom model for decision making.

God's Word

We have already determined that the Bible is God's way of communicating his Moral Will to us, his children. We have defined God's Moral Will as the commands and prohibitions set forth to us in scripture.

We depict God's Moral will as a single circle. All possible decisions that conform to God's Moral will lie inside the circle, all decisions that do not, and are therefore considered sin, lie outside the circle.



It is never God's will for us to chose a decision that lies outside the circle of His moral will.

Counterpoint: God asked Abraham to murder his son (Genesis 22). We know looking back, that God never intended for this command to be completed- however, it does appear that God was asking Abraham to commit the sin of murder.

"Wisdom"

I place the word "wisdom" in quotes because as fallible human beings we can never make a decision that is absolutely wise. God has full knowledge and can therefore make truly wise decisions. We can only do "the best we can". More on this later.

²⁹ Koukl, 15

But first, What is Wisdom?

- Webster: knowledge of what is true or right coupled with just judgment as to action.
- JI Packer: “The power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.”³⁰
- Koukl: “The right (best -kv) use of knowledge”³¹

Why Wisdom?

Why include wisdom in our model? Because it seems that this is what was normally used to make the decisions described in the Bible.

Evidence from the Old Testament

Admittedly Old Testament example includes a number of seemingly odd methods of decision making. However, even those who subscribe to the blueprint view generally rule out many of these methods today. In addition to Gideon’s Fleece already discussed, we see multiple instances of decision making by casting lots, and the use of the Urim and Thummim (sacred lot’s).

We also see a very interesting display of God’s pleasure regarding a request for wisdom by one of his Children.

1 Kings 3

NIV: ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." ⁶ Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. ⁷ "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But *I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.* ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ *So give your servant a discerning [wise-kv] heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.* For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" ¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. *I will give you a wise and discerning heart,* so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." ¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.

--*emphasis*: mine

³⁰ As quoted by Freisen, 188: JI Packer, Knowing God, 80

³¹ Koukl, 17

And a parallel passage:

2 Chronicles 1

NIV: ⁷ That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." ⁸ Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. ⁹ Now, LORD God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. ¹⁰ *Give me wisdom and knowledge*, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?" ¹¹ God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, ¹² therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have."

I think the wording of the 1 Kings passage is very interesting. Notice how Solomon describes himself as a "little child". Solomon may have had a good reason to just ask God to tell him what to do- to remain by his side every step of the way in order to advise him of his next move. Instead, we see Solomon ask for wisdom and knowledge. We then observe God's pleasure with this request.

In addition to this, we note that the word "wisdom" is used over 150 times in the OT. 58 times in Psalms and Proverbs speaking usually to the value of wisdom. Wisdom is certainly a valuable concept in the Old Testament, one not to be ignored.

Evidence from the New Testament

Take a look at the language used in these passages:

1 Corinthians 6

NIV: ³Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶But instead, one brother goes to law against another--and this in front of unbelievers!

1 Corinthians 16

NIV: ³Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me.

1 Thessalonians 3

NIV: ¹So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. ²We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker^[1] in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,

Philippians 2

NIV: ²⁵But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

Acts 6

NIV: ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Acts 15

NIV: ¹⁹"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

NIV: ²⁸It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

NIV: ³⁷Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. ³⁹They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, ⁴⁰but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.

And how about the instructions Paul leaves regarding something as important as selecting Church leaders:

1 Timothy 3

NIV: ¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Titus 1

NIV: ⁵The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint^[1] elders in every town, as I directed you. ⁶An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer^[2] is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

The Book of Acts

The book of Acts is particularly interesting to study with regards to New Testament decision making. Acts is a history book. It chronicles the first 30 years of the post-resurrection church. Arguably, the church was in it’s purest form during this period- consisting of and being led by believers who had known Jesus first hand. We find that Christians experienced all sorts of supernatural signs and wonders during this period, we might therefore expect that this book would offer the best chance for us to find examples of Blueprint type decision making. Instead, we find surprisingly few examples of decisions made in response to supernatural guidance. What we do find are many examples of decisions based upon “what seems wise”.

Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason has compiled a list of decisions described in Acts³².

He lists the following statistics of interest:

Since the time of Pentecost (When the Holy Spirit was given to Christians)

Number of Decisions	Decision Making Method Used
14	Divine Direction by: Visions- 5, Appearance of angel- 3, The Spirit- 2 or 3, Prophecy- 1 or 2, Heard the voice of Jesus- 1, No indication-1
70	NO mention of Div ine Direction

Over 80% of all the post-Pentecost decisions described in Acts say nothing of being driven by any sort of divine directive.

But that’s not all. Of the 14 divinely directed decisions- only 3 are said to have been some form of “spirit” guidance. That is 3.6%.

Of these 3 Spirit led decisions, all of them say that the Holy Spirit “said” or “told them” something. In fact, the passages actually include (quoted in our English Bibles) exactly what the Holy Spirit “said”.

None of them mention anything about “feeling led”, “feeling a peace”, or any of the vernaculars common with the so-called classical view. In addition, no mention of the Apostles “seeking” God’s blueprint (waiting on the Lord, listening for His voice, etc) can be found. The directives seem to be un-sought.

Of the 84 post-Pentecost decisions described in the book of Acts, **0.0%** of them use terminology like “We felt led”.

A Note About Casting Lot’s

It is somewhat interesting to note that Acts 1:26, the casting of lot’s to determine a replacement for Judas, is the final mention of this practice in the Bible. It was also done just prior to Pentecost. There is no mention of the practice of casting lots after Pentecost.

Here’s another observation. In many Christian circles if you said, “God spoke to me”, it wouldn’t even raise an eyebrow. Announce you had a vision, though, and heads would turn. Admit angels

³² <http://www.str.org/free/studies/directio.htm>

were visiting and that might invite an exorcism. Yet there are abundant biblical precedents for the last two and virtually none for the first.”³³

How Do We Obtain Wisdom?³⁴

- Approach life with an attitude of humility
- Ask God for Wisdom
- Seek wise Counsel and Instruction
- Perform thoughtful Research
- Draw upon past experience (learn from past mistakes and successes)

Wisdom in What Sense³⁵?

The concept of Expediency was hinted at by the definitions given for “Wisdom” at the beginning of this section. The wisest decision is one that accomplishes the goal most expediently / efficiently.

Ephesians 5

NIV: ¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Colossians 4

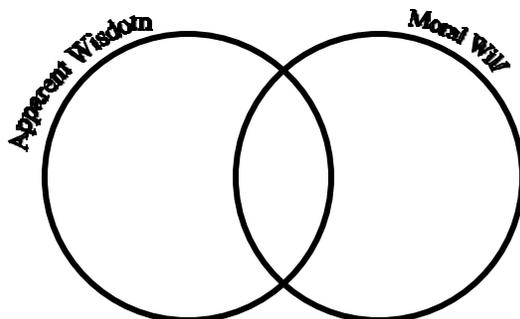
NIV: ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

God Only Wise

God is the only being that can possess ultimate and perfect wisdom. As mentioned above, we can only “do the best we can”. We noticed this same understanding by the Apostles who often used phrases like “it seemed best” and “we thought it good”.

I assert that it is not necessarily God’s Will that we make the wisest decision (in an absolute sense) but that we instead, use wisdom to make our decision.

We sum up this section by adding a second circle to our model- the circle of Apparent Wisdom. That is, the set of decisions that seem wise.



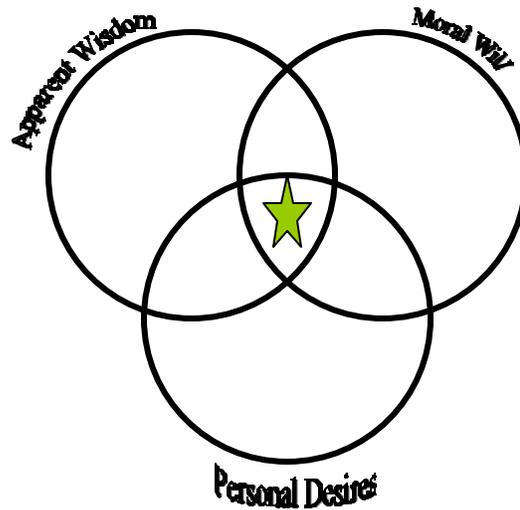
³³ Koukl, 41

³⁴ Much could be said here and indeed, Freisen, 192-198 says much about it. Here he provides a robust description w/ adequate Biblical support on what is necessary in order to attain wisdom

³⁵ Freisen covers the concept of Spiritual Expediency being the focus of our wisdom on pages 187-188

Personal Desires

We need to add one more circle for our diagram to be complete. This is the circle of Personal Desires.



There appears to be no reason to ignore our desires when making decisions so long as they conform to both “Wisdom” and God’s Moral will.

There are a number of passages that seem to support this point.

Genesis 2

NIV: ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Deuteronomy 23

NIV: ²¹ If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. ²² But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. ²³ Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth.

1 Corinthians 7

NIV: ³⁹ A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. ⁴⁰ In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is--and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

2 Corinthians 9

NIV: ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

For those interested in studying more about Desire, I recommend a book by John Eldredge entitled

“The Journey of Desire, Searching for the Life We’ve Only Dreamed Of”.³⁶ Another relevant book that comes highly recommended is entitled “Desiring God” by John Piper.

The basic principle here is that God allows us Freedom. The concept of “Free Will” is not foreign to evangelicals (it is debated however). I can see no reason to abandon this concept for decisions beyond Salvation.

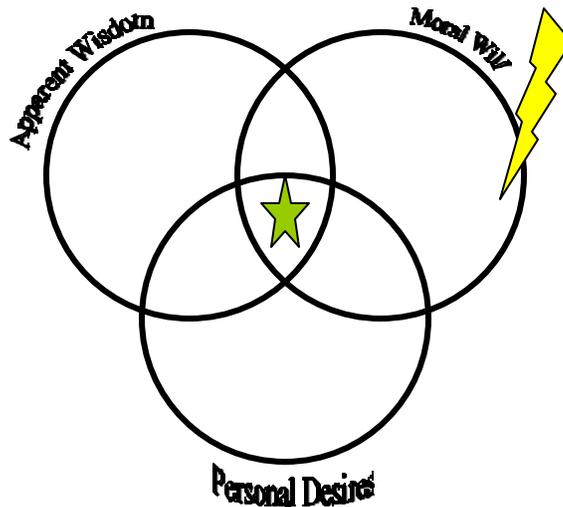
Some include “Personal Conscience” along with personal desires and label this source of decision making information as “Personal Factors”. Scriptural support that our conscience should also be used to guide our decisions includes Romans 14.³⁷ Personal Factors may indeed be a better label for this circle.

... and Don't Forget

Of course, even though we have determined that God’s supernatural individualized guidance is rare, there is no need to exclude it from this model. Please be careful to remember the characteristics one must identify before determining that one has been spoken directly to by the Lord.

Also realize that God will never ask you to do follow through with a decision that is outside the circle of His Moral Will³⁸.

We represent the unsought, unexpected, supernatural and rare occurrence of specialized guidance from the Lord as a lightning bolt.



This is the complete graphical representation of our decision making model.

³⁶ I confess that it has been some time since I read this book. It would be wise of me to read it again before I recommend it wholeheartedly as further support for our discussion on decision making. Buyer beware.

³⁷ Koukl, 18

³⁸ See the discussion above on the Circle of God’s Moral Will and God’s Word.

But What About God's Sovereign Will?

In this model of decision making, why is there no circle representing God's Sovereign Will? Simple- because God's Sovereign Will, since it cannot be known, does not play a direct role in the decision making process.

While God's Sovereign will cannot directly affect our decisions, it should affect our attitudes.

It allows us to trust God with all of our heart –at all times. When our lives take an unexpected turn for the worse, or we experience situations that we didn't foresee or cannot control- we remain steadfast, knowing that God is Sovereign over all. This attitude is what James speaks of in James 4:15.

Understanding God's Sovereignty also provides us peace. Even though we can only work with the circle of "apparent wisdom", we know that God cares about our hearts. We know that he "Opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble". We have faith that even if we don't make the absolute wisest decision (for any number of reasons), God's Will cannot be thwarted. He is in the business of taking care of us. We can rest in that.

We make our plans with an attitude of humble surrender, trusting Him with the final result.... God's sovereignty encourages an attitude of utter dependence and trust.³⁹

What To Do If You've Held the Classical View Until Now.

God's Sovereign will is also where one can look if he/she realizes (like me) that they have been making decisions (or not making decisions) using an unbiblical model. You see, God knows the course of our lives- and has factored that all into His Sovereign plan for us. We don't need to worry about now being confined to God's "Second Best" or fear consequences of living a life outside of "His Perfect Will". God understood we would be right here, right now. You are right where He Sovereignly planned you to be! Instead, we can humbly fall at the feet of our all powerful Lord, confess our dependence on Him, embrace our new found freedom to decide- and *Boldly- go where we have never gone before*⁴⁰.

Where's the Doggie Bag?

So what can we take home from all this?

The Wisdom View in Summary

The Bible demonstrates that unless God provides an objective, supernatural, clear, directive, we are free to humbly make any decision we want so long as it:

- is in accordance with God's Moral Will.
- seems wise at the time (review our definition of wisdom if necessary).

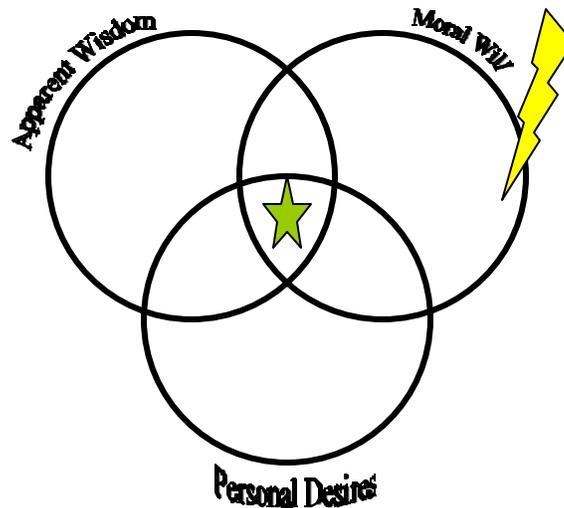
³⁹ Koukl, 21

⁴⁰ Does this really need a footnote!?

Closing Thoughts

Summary

- The Bible does not support the idea that we need to seek God’s Individual Will as part of our decision making process. Common proof texts used for this are either in-correctly interpreted or do not describe normative behavior.
 - The Bible does not teach that God speaks to us through inner impressions or outward signs.
 - The Bible does not indicate that Open or Closed Doors are divine directives from God.
 - The Bible does not teach that an inner sense of peace is confirmation that a decision has been made correctly.
 - The Bible does not teach that we need to learn “God speak” in order to hear the voice of God.
 - The blueprint view of God’s Will does not make logical sense
- Instead, the Bible teaches that God desires us to mature. He dignifies us by allowing us a measure of freedom to make decisions using the gifts of his Word and our mind according to the Wisdom model as described above and depicted here:



A Reiteration

I wish to make **very** clear, one conclusion that I do not make. I do not conclude that God does not have an individual plan and purpose for our lives. I believe that God does have a detailed plan for us. I just do not believe that the Bible supports the notion that we need to be concerned about this plan when making non-moral decisions. That is, God’s detailed plan and purpose for us is part of His *Sovereign Will*. As discussed above, God’s Sovereign will does not directly play a role in our decision making model.

Miscellaneous Comments

Comments For Those Who Disagree With These Conclusions

“Do It For The Children”

Despite doing my best to logically and Biblically convince others that the Blueprint view is incorrect and unbiblical, some will still disagree for various reasons. To those folks I humbly and respectfully have the following comments.

Even though you may disagree with the arguments for the Wisdom view and against the Blueprint view, I at least hope that you can see how easily a young Christian might be misled by the terminology that we use in day to day conversations. My counsel to those who “feel led” about something or have determined that God has “called them” to move in some direction, is to simply not share it with others using such terminology.

You may disagree with the evidence presented here but please, take note that there are, unmistakably, countless people who have lived for years trying hard to “hear God’s voice” and “seeking his direction” while receiving nothing. These poor individuals are left to ponder “what is wrong with me?”, “am I suffering for some past sin?”, “Has God given up on me?” - these people often don’t seek counsel on this issue for fear that others will think they are spiritually immature or hopelessly lost. Do you have an answer for these dear, sincere people?

Hopefully you can agree that there are MULTIPLE Biblical instances demonstrating decisions acceptable to God where apparently no components of the Blueprint model were executed. Might I suggest that you choose “neutral language” as you speak, allowing new/young Christians to determine (hopefully through a careful comparison of both sides of the issue) how God works. Instead of potentially swaying them by the use of our every day “spiritual” language.

Comments For Those Who Encounter Others Who State That God Has Personally Directed Them

JI Packer sums this up nicely⁴¹:

What should Christians do when they feel that God has directly told them to say or do something? They should face up to the following facts:

If anyone today receives a direct disclosure from God it will have no canonical significance. It will not become part of the church’s rule of faith and life, nor will the church be under any obligation to acknowledge the disclosure as revelation; nor will anyone merit blame for suspecting that the disclosure was not from God. If the alleged disclosure is a directive (as when a leader claims that God told him to found a hospital, university, mission, or crusade of some kind), any who associate themselves with his project should do so because wisdom tells them that is needed, realistic, and God-honoring, not because the leader tells them that God directly commanded him (and by implication them) to attempt it.

⁴¹ Packer, 126

People who believe they have received direct indications of what God will do, or what they should do, should refrain in all situations (worship services, board meetings, gatherings of family or friends, preparation of publications, or whatever) from asking others to agree that direct revelation has been given to them; and Christians should greet any such request with resolute silence.

Partial List of References Used in this Series

(See footnotes for a complete list)

* This list contains references both Pro and Con Wisdom view. A “*” indicates recommended reading

*Decision Making and the Will of God, Garry Freisen, Multnomah Press

*Decision Making and the Will of God, Greg Koukl, www.str.org

Discovering God’s Will, Sinclair B Ferguson, The Banner of Truth Trust

Every Life is a Plan Of God, J. Oswald Sanders, Discovery House Publishers

Experiencing God, Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, Broadman and Holman Publishers

*Hot Tub Religion, JI Packer, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc

How to Discover the Will of God, George Sweeting, World Wide Publications

*Finding the Will of God, a pagan notion?, Bruce K. Waltke, Regent College Publishing

Also- from the Classical View Scripture Analysis segment:

[1] The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament

[2] Bruce K Waltke, “Dogmatic Theology and Relative Knowledge” (March 1979)

[3] The NET Bible

[4] Constable’s Notes, www.soniclight.com

[5] Sunder Krishnan, “Listen God is Speaking” [www.rexdalealliance.org/Sermons/Text/LISTEN\(4\).htm](http://www.rexdalealliance.org/Sermons/Text/LISTEN(4).htm)

[6] The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament, Third Corrected Edition, Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort

[7] Multiple English Bible Versions

Miscellaneous Thoughts for Further Development:

Regarding “Putting God in a Box” – which view limits God more- Blueprint or Wisdom?

Potential Counterpoint re: marriage: Judges 13,14 - Sampson’s Wife

Appendix A

Analysis of Passages Typically Used to Support the Blueprint View

1 Samuel 3

The Calling of Samuel.

The situation of the calling of Samuel is interesting. I notice two things: 1) God made sure that Samuel eventually understood the "call". God was determined to get his message through. The reason Samuel didn't understand God's voice may, however, be bound up in vs. 7 where it says: "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him". I'd like to come to a more solid conclusion on this passage but for now, I'd say that those who don't yet know the Lord (as in this case) needn't worry much about everyday non-moral decision making.

The above commentary aside, I claim that if you actually hear a "voice" you should certainly immediately either obey the voice, or see a doctor.

Conclusion: The Bible is full of multiple examples of people who God had an individual will for. As seen here, God clearly communicates the calling when this is the case. This does not provide us an example of the norm today, however, should one receive crystal clear (non-subjective) direction from the Lord in the form of a vision or voice, that person would certainly do well to obey.

Psalms 32:8

KJV: I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye.

NLT: The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.

NIV: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

NAB: I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.

NKJV: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.

The above verses are sometimes used to support the classical view of an individual will of God for each of us.

Let's take a look at the Psalm in full - but first a little intro:

Psalm 32 is one of 7 Psalms typically referred to as penitential psalms - those discussing sin/forgiveness (6,32,38,51,102,130,143). It is thought that this Psalm was written after Psalm 51.

Psalm 51 was written after Nathan (the prophet) confronted David regarding his sin with Bathsheba. It records David's begging God for forgiveness.

Psalm 32 seems to record David's response to God's forgiveness of this sin.

It appears that this Psalm records a dialog between David, God, and possibly those assembled around him ("us") to worship. In an attempt to help understand 32:8, we will analyze the Psalm, section by section, attempting to determine who is speaking, and who is being spoken to.

Psalm 32 (NIV)

Passage	Speaker	Audience
¹ Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ² Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.	David	The Assembly of Believers
³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD "- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah ⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. ⁷ You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah	David	God
⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.	?God	?David
	?God	?The Assembly of Believers
	?David	?The Assembly of Believers
⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. ¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him. ¹¹ Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!	David	The Assembly of Believers

As indicated above, there are 3 possibilities for 32:8. Either God is speaking to David, God is speaking to those assembled, or David is speaking to those assembled.

Mini-Conclusion:

1) It seems to make sense (based on context) that 32:8 does not record a message from God to us- but instead, a message from David to his audience.

1a) This conclusion squares well with 51:13 (recall, written prior to receiving forgiveness for Bathsheeba incident) where David promises to "teach transgressors your ways"

But let's be skeptical. Suppose that 32:8 is actually God speaking to David or God speaking to the assembly- what then would be the meaning of the passage?

Well, all the surrounding verses, in fact, the entire Psalm is discussing sin, forgiveness, righteousness, and wickedness. There is no indication of a specific individual will for each believer. Therefore, when examining the context of 32:8, one must only conclude that whether it is David talking to the assembly, God talking to David, of God talking to the assembly- in all cases, the instruction, teaching or guiding is all relative to God's moral will—the goal, our righteousness.

In case any further doubt exists, we go a bit further and examine the usage of the word “instruct” (and variants) throughout the book of Psalms.

Passage	Commentary
Psalm 16 ⁷ I will praise the LORD , who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.	NA, God is not the one doing the “instructing”.
Psalm 25 ⁸ Good and upright is the LORD ; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. ¹² Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD ? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.	NA, God instructing sinners. This verse is interesting- but a look at surrounding verses, again, causes one to conclude that instructions in <u>righteousness</u> are most likely what is being considered. See v14.
Psalm 50 ¹⁷ You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you.	NA, This verse states that the “wicked” hate God’s instruction. See v 16.
Psalm 105 ²² to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.	NA, Referring to Joseph (ala, the “Coat of Many Colors”).
Psalm 32 ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.	Previously examined.

Mini-Conclusion:

In the book of Psalms, “Instruct” is never, obviously (clearly) used, to indicate an individual guidance or direction from the Lord to his seeker.

Conclusion: Psalms 32:8 is not a valid proof text to support the concept of God having a blueprint for our lives that must be discovered by means of his “guidance”.

Psalm 37:23-24

NIV: ²³If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; ²⁴though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.

[3] translates this passage notably different:

NET: ²³The Lord grants success to the one whose behavior he finds commendable. ²⁴Even if he trips, he will not fall headlong, for the Lord holds his hand.

They provide the following translator notes: *Hebrew Literally:* “from the Lord the steps of a man are established, and in his way he delights.” The second line qualifies the first. The man whose behavior is commendable in God’s sight is the one whose ways are established by God. Another option is that the second line refers to the godly man delighting in God’s “way,” namely the lifestyle which he prescribes for men. In this case one might translate, “The Lord grants success to the one who desires to obey his commands.”

The NIV Interlinear, [1], reports a “word for word” rendering as: “by Yahweh steps of man they are made firm and way of him he delights in.”

Constable, [4], comments on this passage: The Lord delights in how a good person lives, and He blesses his or her activities. Even though he may stumble as he goes through life, he will not experience a fatal fall from which he cannot rise.

In my opinion, there seems to be more than one (at least two) possible translations and thus interpretation's of verse 23. The "steps firm" wording is similar to "make path straight" used in other passages (Prov 3:5-6) where it indicates a successful life. It would take some time for me to become very very confident in any particular interpretation of this passage but it seems, based on the commentary above and surrounding context (wicked/righteousness), that an adequate paraphrase might be:

"The Lord gives success, blesses, and protects those who obey his commands (live a righteous life)."

Conclusion: There seems to be nothing here indicating that we must seek out "God's pre-determined Blueprint" for us prior to making non-moral decisions.

Psalms 138:8

NIV: The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever- do not abandon the works of your hands.

Conclusion: God certainly has a purpose for us as part of his Sovereign will. This verse seems to support the concept as God is shown to be the one responsible for fulfilling it. As previously discussed, God's Sovereign Will is generally hidden and need not be (in general, cannot be) discovered as part our decision making process.

Proverbs 3:5-6

This verse is sometimes used to support the Classical View of God's Individual Will-

KJV (and NLT) read something like this: Trust in the Lord with all of your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

The phrase "He will direct your paths" seems to indicate that the Lord will guide you down a particular, individualized course.

NIV and NASB translate the phrase "He will make your paths straight". According to [1], this Hebrew phrase is best directly (word for word) translated to English as: "and He He will make straight paths of you"

"He Will Make Straight" Hebrew transliteration "yasar" GK 3837 appears 27 times in the Old Testament and is translated (NIV) as follows:

make straight	right
please	pleased
best	channeled
consider right	fix directly
go straight	good
hammered evenly	keeps straight
level	liked
makes straight	pleased with
upright	went straight

Markedly absent is any distinct translation indicating "direction" as in "providing guidance". (I did not study, however, each of the above instances in context).

On the other hand, notably, the NIV contains a text note indicating that there is an alternate translation for the passage: "will direct your paths". Frustratingly, I was not able to find an explanation for this NIV note. This goes against any clear logic that I can see, as well as statements made by Dr. Bruce Waltke as he discussed the reaction of an NIV translator when he was forced to realize that this passage had nothing to say about "direction from God" [2] .

Strong's (KJV) Concordance lists this same Hebrew word as Strong's 3474 "yashar". Translated in this verse (as mentioned above) to "direct" in KJV. Translated in other verses also as: fit, seem good, please, be right, bring straight, be upright. KJV translates this word to a form of "direct" 4 times throughout the old testament.

Indeed, the above may cast a certain amount of doubt on the accuracy of the traditional KJV translation of this passage but it does fall short of completely ruling out the traditional interpretation. We must dig deeper.

As is well known, it is usually far better to attempt to understand a passage by obtaining a grasp of the overall message the author is conveying, rather than focusing on an individual phrase (context, context, context).

Let's take a look at Proverbs 3:5-6 within the context of the verses surrounding it:

NIV Text	General Summary (KV)
<p>¹ My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, ² for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.</p>	<p>Make the things of the Lord your top priority and your life will be successful.</p>
<p>³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.</p>	<p>Make the things of the Lord your top priority and your life will be successful.</p>
<p>⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.</p>	<p>Make the things of the Lord your top priority and _____</p>
<p>⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. ⁸ This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.</p>	<p>Make the things of the Lord your top priority and your life will be successful.</p>
<p>⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.</p>	<p>Make the things of the Lord your top priority and your life will be successful.</p>

This section seems to contain a single message- "Make the things of the Lord your top priority, and you will have a successful life". To me, this is the single best argument against the traditional KJV translation "he shall direct your paths".

Conclusion: While admittedly, the above arguments are not exhaustive, these arguments, when taken in conjunction with a certain amount of "faith" in the scholars translating modern works like NIV and NAB (NASB), force me to come to no other conclusion than the following:

Using Proverbs 3:5-6 as a proof text for God providing Special Revelation to each of us regarding the course of our individual lives- is risky at best.

Proverbs 16:1

Proverbs 16:9

Proverbs 19:21

NIV: 16:1 To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue.

NIV: 16:9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

NIV: 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

[4] states the following regarding 16:1 and 16:9: *The meaning of this proverb is similar to that of 16:9. Even though man has freedom to plan, in the end he only fulfills the will of God by what he says. Man plans his words, but what really comes out takes place because God Sovereignly controls. "Man proposes, God disposes," is a common equivalent.*

Conclusion: These verses discuss the fact that man is free to plan, but God's plan is the only one that is carried out with certainty. This aspect of certainty is a characteristic of God's Sovereign Will and is not related to the concept of God's individual will as we have defined it. If anything, these passages work to disprove the concept of God's individual will for us since they essentially state that all of man's plans are, in the end, uncertain.

Isaiah 30:20-21

NIV: ²⁰Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. ²¹Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it".

The question at hand here is who are the teachers (Teacher-NASB) that are hidden, and what is the voice that is being "heard".

Even modern translations seem to differ greatly on this verse:

NASB: ²⁰Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, He, your Teacher will no longer hide Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. ²¹And your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

Note that the NIV indicates plural "teachers" while the NASB clearly (note capitalization etc) promotes the idea that there is one teacher, the Lord.

The majority of commentaries that I have come across do seem to assume that the "teacher" is God and the voice therefore, a voice from the Lord. However, there does seem to be significant indications that an alternate translation (as in NIV and KJV) is acceptable.

NetBible [3] comments about their translation (which closely mirrors NIV) as follows (Note 48):

48tn *Heb* "but your teachers will no longer be hidden, your eyes will be seeing your teachers." The translation assumes that the form *lyrwmm* is a plural participle, referring to spiritual leaders such as prophets and priests. Another possibility is that the form is actually singular (see GKC §93.ss) or a plural of respect, referring to God as the master teacher. See *HALOT* 560-61. For discussion of the views, see Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 560.

[5] further references other commentators (pp 114, notes 6 and 7) that deserve review.

The net of their analysis [5] is that the verse refers to "teachers" or prophets. They propose that the prophets in Judah had been in hiding since the time of wicked King Ahaz. Isaiah 30:8-11 possibly can be interpreted as a mention of this fact.

Isaiah is stating what Judah will experience if they cry out to him (instead of Egypt 30:1-2) for help. The prophets will once again be able to preach and guide the people without fear. They will no longer be in hiding and their voices will be heard guiding the people of Judah.

[6] also provides commentary worthy of review.

Whether the voice is that of the Lord, or of his prophets, all translations seem to indicate that the voice is actually a "voice" ("heard", "behind you") as opposed to some form of internal communication from a Spirit.

Conclusion: Further analysis of the above mentioned references is required, however, I believe that sufficient doubt has been cast on the traditional idea that the passage indicates that these followers of the Lord were individually guided by the inward leading of the Holy Spirit. Even if the passage did clearly indicate this - it is a stretch to infer that this same passage describes what is normative for us today.

Jeremiah 1:5

NIV: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart

But don't stop there- the verse goes on to say: "I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

Conclusion: This verse is clearly talking about the prophet Jeremiah specifically. It lends no support to the concept of God's Individual Will and decision making.

Jeremiah 10:23

NIV: I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.

Conclusion: This verse seems to be indicating that God owns (controls) a man's life and not man. This is consistent with the notion of God's Sovereign Will, not an individual will that must be discovered in order to make correct decisions.

Jeremiah 29:11

NIV: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD , "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

This must be one of the most popular verses of encouragement today. One can find it on plaques, pictures, bookmarks, and trinket after trinket in any Christian bookstore. This verse is often used (and has been used by me) to provide encouragement to someone when times are tough. The "fact" that God "has a plan to prosper me, and not to harm me", is encouraging.

The issue here is not whether God wants to harm us or not, for in fact, he most certainly does not. The question is: does this verse imply that God has a detailed and individual plan that each of us must discover?

What follows is the NIV text of Jeremiah 29 with amplifications provided by me.

Jeremiah 29

A Letter to the Exiles

¹ **This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.** ² (This was after King Jehoiachin ^[1] and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.) ³ He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

⁴ **This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:** ⁵ "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for you sons and give you daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." ⁸ Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹ They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the LORD .

¹⁰ **This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.** ¹¹ *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD , "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD , "and will bring you back from captivity. ^[2] I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD , "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

¹⁵ You may say, "The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon," ¹⁶ but this is what the LORD says about the king who sits on David's throne and all the people who remain in this city, your countrymen who did not go with you

into exile- ¹⁷ yes, this is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I will make them like poor figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. ¹⁸ I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth and an object of cursing and horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them. ¹⁹ For they have not listened to my words," declares the LORD , "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the LORD .

²⁰ Therefore, hear the word of the LORD , all you exiles whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon. ²¹ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name: "I will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will put them to death before your very eyes. ²² Because of them, all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon will use this curse: 'The LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.' ²³ For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and in my name have spoken lies, which I did not tell them to do. I know it and am a witness to it," declares the LORD .

Message to Shemaiah

²⁴ Tell Shemaiah the Nehelamite, ²⁵ "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the other priests. You said to Zephaniah, ²⁶ 'The LORD has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the LORD ; you should put any madman who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons. ²⁷ So why have you not reprimanded Jeremiah from Anathoth, who poses as a prophet among you?' ²⁸ He has sent this message to us in Babylon: 'It will be a long time. Therefore build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.' "²⁹ Zephaniah the priest, however, read the letter to Jeremiah the prophet. ³⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ³¹ "Send this message to all the exiles: 'This is what the LORD says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, even though I did not send him, and has led you to believe a lie, ³² this is what the LORD says: I will surely punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one left among this people, nor will he see the good things I will do for my people, declares the LORD , because he has preached rebellion against me.' "

NIV Text Notes:

1. **29:2** Hebrew *Jeconiah* , a variant of *Jehoiachin*
2. **29:14** Or *will restore your fortunes*

Now, consider this:

Overall Context:

- 1) Who is this passage written to?

¹ This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

Immediate Context:

¹⁰ This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ ~~For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD , "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.~~ ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD , "and will bring you back from captivity. ¹⁵ I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD , "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Striking out v11 allows us to focus on the immediately surrounding verses. It is quite obvious that v11 is directed still to the exiles- as opposed to anyone else (us). If it were directed to us, we might also be expected to be "brought back from captivity" or "have our fortunes restored". This interpretation seems ludicrous.

You/Your:

Finally, the word “You” or “Your” appears 42 times in this chapter. Four times in our subject verse 11. For the one who still doubts that this passage does not refer to us, it might prove insightful to read the entire chapter one more time, noting each instance of the word “you” or “your”. Ask yourself who the word is referring too. In all cases, it is my conviction that it will become clear that the author is referring to those in exile- not the general body of believers.

Conclusion: While this verse is very famous, the entire passage seems to be quite infamous. When v11 is studied, even only in it’s immediate context, it becomes quite clear that it is not written to the general body of believers (us) and therefore cannot support the idea of God having a specific, individual plan for each of our lives- especially not one that we need to discover prior to making decisions.

Daniel 10

This is an interesting passage describing Daniel seeing a vision, while those around him did not. Could this be some form of “inward nudge or leading”?

Conclusion: It seems to me that no one else saw the angel because they fled in terror (10:7). In any case, this revelation to Daniel comes in the form of a "vision"- whether he actually saw the angel w/ his Rods/Cones - or the vision materialized in the chemistry of his brain, it was still a vision that he "saw". I would categorize this as an objective supernatural manifestation, far from what we typically mean when we talk about "feeling led". If I (or anyone I knew) had a vision as clear as what Daniel describes here, I would be comfortable interpreting that as a direct revelation from God.

Mathew 6:13

NIV: "...and Lead us not into temptation"

Conclusion: This seems to be a request for strength or protection against temptation. This is a moral issue and has nothing to do with being “led” in non-moral areas.

John 10

These are the famous “My Sheep Hear My Voice” passages.

NIV: John 10:3-4 ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

NIV: John 10:16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

NIV: John 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

The question here is what exactly is “the voice”? First, lets see what it is not:

John 10:6

NIV: Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

John says that Jesus was using a "Figure of Speech". This means that the word "voice" could not possibly mean "voice". It must be a metaphor for something else. Maybe a "feeling" or a "inward urge"? Well maybe, but to what end? Reading the entire section leads us easily to see that Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit’s work, and our response to the call of Salvation. See John 10:27-28.

Conclusion: [9] analyzes this passage nicely on page 32. Koukl sums up his analysis like this: *Hearing Jesus’ voice is not getting a special assignment, it’s getting saved. It’s the result of the Father drawing the non-believer into Jesus’ arms.*

John 16:7-14

NIV: ⁷But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

¹²I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will

guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

Conclusion: There are legitimate ministries of the Holy Spirit and he is, indeed, active in our lives. These verses identify some of them: Judgment, Conviction of Sin, Training in Righteousness and Truth etc. I see nothing here regarding guidance in non-moral areas.

The Book of Acts

Please see the discussion of the book of Acts on page 33.

Romans 12:1-2

NIV: ¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is --his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Why fore is that therefore... there for?

An abbreviated outline of Romans from [4] is shown below:

- I. Introduction 1:1-17
- II. The need for God's righteousness 1:18—3:20
- III. The imputation of God's righteousness 3:21—5:21
- IV. The impartation of God's righteousness chs. 6—8
- V. The vindication of God's righteousness chs. 9—11
If God is for His elect and will never remove His love from them, why has He set aside his chosen people, the Jews? It certainly looks as though something separated them from His love. Paul deals with this here.
- VI. The practice of God's righteousness 12:1—15:13
- VII. Conclusion 15:14—16:27

You can see that chapter 12 actually forms a distinct break in Paul's writing. 1-11 provides a description of Christian doctrine- many aspects of God's righteousness (and his plan) are discussed in great detail. As chapter 12 begins, the "Therefore" transitions us from a dis cussion about God, how he acts, and what He has done for us, to what We should do for Him.

The verses and chapters following 12:1-2 say nothing about which vocation we should pursue, how to find a mate, or anything else that would be considered part of "God's individual will for us". Instead we see this:

- 12:3-8 How to handle spiritual gifts
 - 12:9 How to Love
 - 12:10 Be devoted to each other
 - 12:11 Serve the Lord
 - 12:12 Hope, pray, remain faithful
 - 12:13 Help others in need. Be hospitable
 - 12:14 How to deal with those who hurt you
 - 12:16 Live in harmony with everyone, Don't be proud.
 - 12:17-21 Don't repay evil with evil, live in peace
- And so on.

[4] details the outline of chapters 12-15 as follows:

- A. Dedication to God 12:1-2
- B. Conduct within the church 12:3-21
 - 1. The diversity of gifts 12:3-8
 - 2. The necessity of love 12:9-21
- C. Conduct within the state ch. 13
 - 1. Conduct towards the government 13:1-7
 - 2. Conduct toward unbelievers 13:8-10
 - 3. Conduct in view of our hope 13:11-14

D. Conduct within Christian liberty 14:1—15:13

1. The folly of judging one another 14:1-12
2. The evil of offending one another 14:13-23
3. The importance of pleasing one another 15:1-6
4. the importance of accepting one another 15:7-13

As you can see, from the aforementioned “Therefore” to essentially the end of the chapter, the focus is on practicing righteousness.

Conclusion: Based simply on the overall intent and outline of Romans, it seems irresponsible to conclude that “Will of God” as mentioned in 12:1-2 has anything to do with an individualized will for each believer. Rather, it seems clear that God’s will for us is to, in response to what he has done for us, practice and display His righteousness to others. [5] provides multiple other arguments to bolster this conclusion. They seem unnecessary.

Ephesians 2:10

NIV: For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This verse seems to be the closest thing to support for the blueprint view that I have found. It appears that God has planned certain “good works” for us to do throughout our life.

The following objections can be made however:

1) It is not clear if these “good works” are different for each of us or if God just generally has a body of “good work” for his believers to do (like obeying his Moral Will).

2) There seems to be absent any indication that we need to search and discover which good works we are to individually accomplish. Possibly God handles this as part of his Sovereign will (and as we obey his Moral will).

Conclusion: It appears that this verse can be understood to lend support for both the classical view and the alternate view. It however, stops short of being able to be used as a proof text for either view. Even if the verse was intended to let us know that God has an individual body of “good work” for each of us to accomplish, it strikes me that it does not follow to state that we must then expect God to communicate this to us as we seek Him when making decisions. I tend to think that indeed God does have a body of good work for us individually to perform, but that we perform it as part of His Sovereign will while obeying His moral will in each circumstance we encounter. To me, this conclusion requires taking fewer liberties with the interpretation of the passage.

Ephesians 5:10

Ephesians 5:15-17

NIV: Ephesians 5:10 ... and find out what pleases the Lord.

NIV: Ephesians 5:15-17: ¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine...

Conclusion: Even a casual reader of the entire chapter of Ephesians 5 will realize that Paul’s purpose in writing is to instruct us of the importance of God’s Moral will- that we imitate God, live as children of light, be filled with the Spirit, and avoid all sorts of unrighteousness (specifically mentioned). “What pleases the Lord” and the “Lord’s Will” must, by analysis of the immediate context, only be referring to God’s desire for, and pleasure over, our righteousness.

Ephesians 6:6

NIV: Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.

A brief summary of the first 7 verses of Ephesians 6 would look like this:

- 6:1-3 Children obey your parents
- 6:4 Parents, treat your children well, train them in the ways of the Lord
- 6:5 Slaves, obey your masters

- 6:5 Obey your earthly master just as you would if your earthly master were Christ
 6:6 Obey your master from the heart- as if it were Christ giving you orders.
 6:7 Serve as if you were serving the Lord instead of man
 6:9 Masters, treat your slaves well – remember, the ultimate Master is Christ.

Note the words and phrases underlined above. The NIV translates these verses with a sense that there is a comparison being made: Serve your earthly master as if he were actually a someone that you fully loved and trusted, Jesus Christ.

Some translations/paraphrases don't seem to maintain this subtlety. *The Message* and the *Contemporary English Version* translate v6 to something like “you must do what God wants you to do”.

It is likely that this level of analysis is unnecessary for the context of the entire section (v1-9) is clearly regarding obedience to our Masters, and righteous treatment of those we “Master”. If God were to communicate a command to his children, like a master does to his slave, we would surely be obliged to obey it as stated here. Of course, he has done this in the form of the Bible. Some may argue that he still does communicate commands to us individually today, but this verse cannot be used to support that point- only that if he does, we must obey.

Conclusion: This passage addresses the need to obey God's moral will. Whatever is commanded by God- we must obey. This verse cannot, in good conscience, be used as any sort of proof text for the concept that we must seek to discover God's Individual Will for us in our day to day, non-moral decisions.

Colossians 1:9

NIV: ⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Since vs. 9 begins with “For this reason” we at least better decide what is being referred to. Verses 1-9 contain the letters salutation followed by a paragraph indicating that Paul (the Author) has not visited these believers in person but has “heard of their faith” (v4) and their desire to follow Christ.

And now the verses following 1:9-

¹⁰And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

By reviewing vs 10 and 11 it becomes almost intuitively obvious that verse 9 is referring to God's moral will- that is, God's desire for us to be righteous/holy.

[4] discusses the Greek word translated in vs 9 as knowledge and states the following:

“Specifically they asked that God would give them full and exact knowledge of all His desires for them. The Greek word translated “knowledge” is epignosis. This word can mean either full knowledge or more precise knowledge. Probably Paul prayed for greater knowledge in both respects. This word always describes moral and religious knowledge in the New Testament. Especially it refers to full and comprehensive knowledge of God's will that rests on the knowledge of God and of Christ.”

Further interesting insight can be gained by examining other passages where Paul mentions living a life “Worthy of the Lord” and/or acting in ways that “Please Him”. Ephesians 4:1, 5:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 4:1-3, 2 Corinthians 5:9-20, Romans 14:17-18 are examples of this. The context of these passages is God's desire for us to be righteous and obey Him.

Conclusion: This passage is discussing God's moral will- His desire for us to be righteous and Holy. This passage cannot be taken as evidence that God has a specific, individual will that each of us must discover in order to be in the “Center of God's Will”.

Colossians 4:12

NIV: Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Initial Note: Epaphras is now with Paul, but was once a minister to the Colossians (1:7). Paul may have never met the Colossians personally (2:1).

I struggled with this verse for some time- wondering what exactly “in all the will of God” might mean. Once again, it was only after stepping back and attempting to see the picture from a higher “altitude” that I finally believe I have some clarity on this verse.

A couple interesting observations can be made- first, lets take a look at a “word for word” translation of this verse from a New Testament Interlinear:

Colossians 4:12 [7]

Greets you Epaphras, the one of you, a slave of Christ Jesus, always striving for you in the prayers, that you might stand mature and having been fully assured in all will of God.

I have underlined the word “might” for emphasis. You can see that NIV translated this as “may”.

Now take a look at these passages from the same book.

Colossians 1:21-23:

NIV: ²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of ^{f^U} your evil behavior. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- ²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Colossians 2:18

NIV: ¹⁸Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

You see, what Paul and Epaphras were concerned about was the possibility of the Colossians falling prey to the false teaching and losing out on the salvation offered through the truth of Christ.

I pointed out the word “might” in 4:12 above, once again, Epaphras here is worried that his friends “might” miss out on something... the “Will of God”! He is not concerned that his friends will “hear God’s Voice” regarding everyday choices and decisions, he is concerned, that his friends just might wind up in Hell if they don’t choose to reject false teaching and believe the truth.

The point I am trying to make is that when you read Colossians (and it took me a few times) you eventually will get a sense of the passion and urgency that Paul felt—not that his readers would be directed step by step through each phase of their lives, but that they would be (and would remain) SAVED!

In an attempt to point out Paul’s message, let’s take a look at the commands Paul gives to the Colossians. Below is an enumeration of every single command or recommendation found in Colossians. I’ve also included things that Paul “wishes” or “prays” for them.

- 1:9 That they be filled with the knowledge of God’s will w/ wisdom and understanding
- 1:10 That they might live a righteous, fruit bearing life pleasing and worthy of the Lord
- 1:10 That they might grow in the knowledge of God
- 1:11 That they would be strong and patient and thankful
- 2:2 That they may be encouraged, united.
- 2:2 That they may understand the purpose of Christ
- 2:4 That they would not be deceived by false teaching
- 2:6 Continue living with Jesus as your Lord

2:6 Be Thankful
 2:8 Don't let deceptive philosophy take the place of the truth of Christ
 2:16 Don't let anyone tell you that your liberty in Christ is wrong
 2:18 Don't fall prey to false teaching and LOSE out on heaven
 2:20 Don't fall into the trap of false legalism
 3:1 Set your hearts on things above
 3:2 Set your mind on things above- *not* on earthly things
 3:5-9 Be righteous
 3:12-14 Be righteous,
 3:15 Let the peace of Christ dwell in you, be thankful
 3:16 Teach the truth of Christ
 3:17 Do everything in the name of the Lord
 3:18 Wives submit to husbands
 3:19 Husbands love your wives and treat them well
 3:20 Children obey parents
 3:21 Be good to your children
 3:22 Slaves should obey their masters
 3:23 Work hard
 4:1 Treat slaves well
 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer
 4:4 Pray for Paul
 4:5 Witness carefully to others
 4:12 That they might stand firm in the will of God
 4:15-18 Miscellaneous closing statements

Conclusion: The above should help show how concerned Paul was with the Colossians not being deceived by false teaching and with them continually behaving righteously. He was concerned about their Salvation- clearly not their individual, day to day decision making process. This verse can hardly be considered support for the classical view of God's individual will for us.

James 4:13-15

NIV: ¹³Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

The theme of this entire chapter seems to be "Submit to God". The Immediate context of this verse is regarding a proud or boastful spirit. James is stating that it is wise to be humble in what you proclaim you plan to do- for we know not what the Lord has in store for us tomorrow. Since the "will" discussed is hidden from view and apparently completely out of human control, James must be referring to the Sovereign will of God in this passage.

Conclusion: This passage is speaking of God's Sovereign Will.

1 John 4:1-3

NIV: ¹Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Conclusion: This passage does provide us with a means of verifying whether or not a "Spirit" is from God. Maybe every time someone "feels led" they should ask the "feeling" whether or not it acknowledges that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh". ☺

References

- [1] The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament
- [2] Bruce K Waltke, "Dogmatic Theology and Relative Knowledge" (March 1979), quoted in [5]
- [3] The NET Bible
- [4] Constable's Notes, www.soniclight.com
- [5] Gary Friesen, "Decision Making and the Will of God"
- [6] Sunder Krishnan, "Listen God is Speaking" [www.rexdalealliance.org/Sermons/Text/LISTEN\(4\).htm](http://www.rexdalealliance.org/Sermons/Text/LISTEN(4).htm)
- [7] The New Greek English Interlinear New Testament, Third Corrected Edition, Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort
- [8] Multiple English Bible Versions
- [9] Greg Koukl, "Decision Making and the Will of God"

Cat	Verse	Comments
-----	-------	----------

Appendix B

Constructed here is a table of each verse that mentions the word “Will” in what appears to be a relation to the concept of “God’s Will”. The first column contains a code indicating whether I think the verse is referring to God’s Sovereign Will, God’s Moral Will, or Gods Individual Will (the blueprint). The second column contains the verse and it’s surrounding context (+/- 2 verses) and is the only “inspired” text in the document. The last column records relevant comments regarding the classification.

This information was compiled by manually examining all instances of “Will” listed in “The NIV Exhaustive Concordance” that seem to be tied in with the idea of God’s Will or desire based on the small context phrase printed next to each reference. The verses in context then were generated by using custom code and an NIV text database.

Cat	Verse	Comments
M	exo.niv 18:13-17 13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" ** 15 Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws." 17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good.	Moses acting as a judge
M B	lev.niv 24:10-14 10 Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. 11 The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) ** 12 They put him in custody until the will of the LORD should be made clear to them. 13 Then the LORD said to Moses: 14 "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him.	M since this is referring to punishment. B since God communicated (v13) to Moses about what to do. If God “says” something to individually to us, we must certainly obey - there is no question.
S	deu.niv 10:8-12 8 At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today. 9 That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as the LORD your God told them.) ** 10 Now I had stayed on the mountain forty days and nights, as I did the first time, and the LORD listened to me at this time also. It was not his will to destroy you. 11 "Go," the LORD said to me, "and lead the people on their way, so that they may enter and possess the land that I swore to their fathers to give them." 12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,	
?	deu.niv 33:19-23 19 They will summon peoples to the mountain and there offer sacrifices of righteousness; they will feast on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand." 20 About Gad he said: "Blessed is he who enlarges Gad's domain! Gad lives there like a lion, tearing at arm or head. ** 21 He chose the best land for himself; the leader's portion was kept for him. When the heads of the people assembled, he carried out the Lord's righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel. " 22 About Dan he said: "Dan is a lion's cub, springing out of Bashan." 23 About Naphtali he said: "Naphtali is abounding with the favor of the LORD and is full of his blessing; he will inherit outward to the lake."	I am not sure what this means but it seems difficult to use it as some sort of definitive proof text for B.
S	isa.niv 2:23-27 23 So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. 24 No, my sons; it is not a good report that I hear spreading among the Lord's people. ** 25 If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the Lord's will to put them to death. 26 And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men. 27 Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Did I not clearly reveal myself to your father's house when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh?"	

Cat	Verse	Comments
S	<p>2sa.niv 7:19-23 19 And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD? 20 "What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign LORD. ** 21 For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant. 22 "How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. 23 And who is like your people Israel--the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt?"</p>	Speaking to God (you=God)
S	<p>1ch.niv 13:1-4 1 David conferred with each of his officers, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. ** 2 He then said to the whole assembly of Israel, "If it seems good to you and if it is the will of the LORD our God, let us send word far and wide to the rest of our brothers throughout the territories of Israel, and also to the priests and Levites who are with them in their towns and pasturelands, to come and join us. 3 Let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul." 4 The whole assembly agreed to do this, because it seemed right to all the people.</p>	I say S because they say "if it seems good" and if it is God's Will (if God allows it). If it was B-one would not care if it "seemed good"- in the case of B, obedience is the only option.
S	<p>1ch.niv 17:17-21 17 And as if this were not enough in your sight, O God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men, O LORD God. 18 "What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, ** 19 O LORD. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises. 20 "There is no one like you, O LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. 21 And who is like your people Israel--the one nation on earth whose God went out to redeem a people for himself, and to make a name for yourself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt?"</p>	
S	<p>ezr.niv 7:16-20 16 together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the free will offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. 17 With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem. ** 18 You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. 19 Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. 20 And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.</p>	See 1 Chronicles 13:2
M	<p>ezr.niv 10:9-13 9 Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. ** 11 Now make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives." 12 The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say. 13 But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two, because we have sinned greatly in this thing.</p>	
M B?	<p>psa.niv 40:6-10 6 Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced ; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. 7 Then I said, "Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. ** 8 I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." 9 I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, as you know, O LORD. 10 I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.</p>	M since law is mentioned in the immediate context. NETBible comments on this. Either David meant that he knew the Law, and desired now to do it (M) <u>or</u> David seemed willing to do more than just follow the Law since it was already "in his heart". This second interpretation seems like a stretch and thus gets (B?)
M	<p>psa.niv 103:19-22 19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. 20 Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. ** 21 Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. 22 Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the LORD, O my soul.</p>	M fits best since near and far context involve righteousness.

Cat	Verse	Comments
M B?	<p>psa.niv 143:8-12 8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. 9 Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in you. ** 10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. 11 For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. 12 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.</p>	<p>M since the Psalm mentions unrighteousness and requests mercy. Ps 26 mentions "level ground" also and seems to indicate righteousness as opposed to B. B also may fit the context since David is asking for "guidance".</p>
S	<p>isa.niv 53:8-12 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. ** 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied ; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.</p>	
S	<p>eze.niv 12:23-27 23 Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to put an end to this proverb, and they will no longer quote it in Israel.' Say to them, 'The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled. 24 For there will be no more false visions or flattering divinations among the people of Israel. ** 25 But I the LORD will speak what I will, and it shall be fulfilled without delay. For in your days, you rebellious house, I will fulfill whatever I say, declares the Sovereign LORD.' 26 The word of the LORD came to me: 27 "Son of man, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future.'</p>	
M	<p>mat.niv 6:8-12 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ** 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</p>	<p>Not S since we are to pray that it will be done. We Not B because we will still have free will in heaven- No?</p>
M	<p>mat.niv 7:19-23 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ** 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'</p>	
S	<p>mat.niv 10:27-31 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ** 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.</p>	
M	<p>mat.niv 12:48-50 48 He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ** 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."</p>	<p>Not S because we have a choice. Not B because it seems to be a condition necessary for being in the Lord's family.</p>
S*	<p>mat.niv 26:37-41 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." ** 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."</p>	<p>This is God's <u>individual Sovereign</u> plan for Jesus- Some may argue this is God's <u>individual will</u> for Jesus. If it is regarding B- then Jesus surely knew it clearly- not a "gentle nudge". <u>Jesus was a prophet and cannot provide a normative example to us (in this regard) anyway</u></p>
S*	<p>mat.niv 26:40-44 40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." ** 42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.</p>	<p>See Matt 26:39</p>

Cat	Verse	Comments
M	mar.niv 3:33-35 33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ** 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. "	See Matt 12:50
S*	mar.niv 14:34-38 34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ** 36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." 37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."	See Matt 26:39
M	luk.niv 12:45-49 45 But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. ** 47 "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. 49 "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!	
S*	luk.niv 22:40-44 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ** 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.	See Matt 26:39
M	joh.niv 4:32-36 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." 33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" ** 34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.	M since Jesus apparently knew God's will- If we know His Will- it becomes part of M. <u>Also- the context here is the means to Salvation.</u>
S*	joh.niv 6:36-40 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ** 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."	S because it was certain to happen B because Jesus knew the plan and intended to carry it out.
B*	joh.niv 6:37-41 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ** 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." 41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."	Jesus is a special case since he has full communion with the Father. We do not enjoy this and therefore these verses do not demonstrate what is normative for us today.
B*	joh.niv 6:38-42 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ** 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." 41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"	
M	joh.niv 7:15-19 15 The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" 16 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. ** 17 If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. 18 He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. 19 Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"	Salvation is in view here. See also John 6:38

Cat	Verse	Comments
M	<p>joh.niv 9:29-33 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ** 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."</p>	Sinners and righteous are contrasted here - not sinners and one who seeks and follows B.
S	<p>act.niv 4:26-30 26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' 27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ** 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretchout your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."</p>	Certainly Pilate and Herod were not seeking guidance (B) from the Lord.
S B?	<p>act.niv 18:19-23 19 They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ** 21 But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. 22 When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. 23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the d isciples.</p>	Similar to James 4:15 which is speaking of not being boastful and presumptuous. May also be taken to mean that Paul would consult God later for B. The exact meaning is unclear. In light of James, I lean towards S.
M	<p>act.niv 20:25-29 25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ** 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.</p>	Salvation is in view here.
S	<p>act.niv 21:12-16 12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ** 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." 15 After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.</p>	
S B*	<p>act.niv 22:12-16 12 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. ** 14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'</p>	S because God chose Paul to be saved. B because God did have an (B) plan that Paul needed to understand ahead of time. Paul was another "special case" similar to Jesus- this is not an example of a normative situation for us.
S	<p>rom.niv 1:8-12 8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. 9 God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ** 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. 11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong -- 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.</p>	Note the use of "at last"- Paul seemed to be desiring a closed door to be opened.
M	<p>rom.niv 2:16-20 16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. 17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; ** 18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth--</p>	
S	<p>rom.niv 9:17-21 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. ** 19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?</p>	S because this will cannot be resisted

Cat	Verse	Comments
M	<p>rom.niv 12:1-4 1 There fore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. ** 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is --his good, pleasing and perfect will. 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,</p>	
S	<p>rom.niv 15:30-33 30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. 31 Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, ** 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. 33 The God of peace be with you all. Amen.</p>	
S B?	<p>1co.niv 1:1-3 ** 1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.</p>	<p>This phrase is used in many of Paul's opening statements. Some take it to mean that it was by God's Will that he was an apostle- some that it was God's B that he write the letter. Non-Conclusive.</p>
S	<p>gal.niv 1:2-6 2 and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ** 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--</p>	<p>This is referring to Jesus and God's S plan to provide a way of salvation.</p>
S B?	<p>eph.niv 1:1-3 ** 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.</p>	<p>See 1 Corinthians 1:1-3</p>
S	<p>eph.niv 1:3-7 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ** 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace</p>	
M	<p>eph.niv 1:7-11 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ** 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,</p>	<p>Not S since it can be known. Salvation is in view here.</p>
S	<p>eph.niv 1:9-13 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ** 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,</p>	
M	<p>eph.niv 5:15-19 15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ** 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,</p>	

Cat	Verse	Comments
M	<p>eph.niv 6:4-8 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. 5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ** 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.</p>	Referring to acting righteously. No B is in sight here. This text applies to everyone equally.
S B?	<p>col.niv 1:1-3 ** 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,</p>	See 1 Corinthians 1:1-3
M	<p>col.niv 1:7-11 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. ** 9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully</p>	This is dealt with in detail elsewhere - very clearly referring to Salvation. Paul and Epaphras were quite fearful that the Colossians might just "lose their salvation".
M	<p>col.niv 4:10-14 10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ** 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.</p>	See Colossians 1:9
M	<p>1th.niv 4:1-5 1 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ** 3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;</p>	
M	<p>1th.niv 5:16-20 16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; ** 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt.</p>	
S B?	<p>2ti.niv 1:1-3 ** 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, 2 To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.</p>	See 1 Corinthians 1:1-3
NA	<p>2ti.niv 2:24-26 24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ** 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.</p>	Referring to the will of the devil.
S	<p>heb.niv 2:2-6 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ** 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. 5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"</p>	
M S	<p>heb.niv 10:5-9 5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ** 7 Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second.</p>	Referring to Jesus. See John 4:34

Cat	Verse	Comments
B*	<p>heb.niv 10:7-11 7 Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ** 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.</p>	
M	<p>heb.niv 10:34-38 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. 35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ** 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him."</p>	
S	<p>heb.niv 13:19-23 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon. 20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, ** 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 22 Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter. 23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.</p>	S since everything here is up to God
S	<p>jam.niv 4:13-17 13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ** 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.</p>	
M	<p>1pe.niv 2:13-17 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ** 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. 16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.</p>	
S	<p>1pe.niv 3:15-19 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ** 17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison</p>	Rephrase this as: "When it is God's will for us to suffer, it is better to suffer for doing good- than to suffer for doing evil." In other words, it is better to suffer under God's pleasure than under his displeasure (due to our sin).
M	<p>1pe.niv 4:1-4 1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. ** 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.</p>	
M	<p>1pe.niv 4:17-19 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ** 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.</p>	
M	<p>1jo.niv 2:15-19 15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. ** 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. 18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.</p>	M because talking about Salvation. Following or not following B is not a condition for salvation under the classical view.

Cat	Verse	Comments
M	<p>1jo.niv 5:12-16 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ** 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him. 16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.</p>	<p>M because this is clearly referring to salvation when context is examined.</p>
M	<p>rev.niv 2:24-28 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): 25 Only hold on to what you have until I come. ** 26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – 27 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give him the morning star.</p>	
S	<p>rev.niv 4:9-11 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ** 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."</p>	

Conclusion

The word “Will” is never clearly used to indicate the idea that God maintains a blueprint for our lives that we are expected to seek and discover.