

I QUIT!

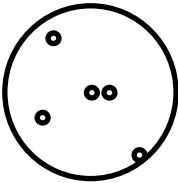
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Seeking God's will in making major decisions.

A study of the book of Acts
and how Paul changed direction 39 times.

Do you believe God's will is found in

The Circle ? or The Dot



- God's noble quitters
- Lousy reasons to quit
- When to quit
- How to know

PART 1

I JUST QUIT!

When each of my teenagers took his/her first part-time job I explained our family law.

It was absolutely forbidden to quit that job for 6 months.

There is no such word as "quitter" in my vocabulary when I am involved in the work of the Lord. If it is His pleasure that I pursue in a task to its completion, and if He gives me the time to complete it, I will not rest until the job is done.

I just quit my job being a missionary.

On the other hand, if He calls me away from a task to which He has led me and brings a substitute to finish it, I must be content with His decision. I am only a player. He is the coach. He can best see where he wants me. If I am exhausted and frustrated and discouraged and confused with what He has ordained, I can never quit until He gives His nod.

On the other hand, if I am succeeding and thriving and making progress and seeing results of the ministry to which He has appointed me, I cannot continue in that work without His approval.

To quit is an honorable decision when ordained by the Lord. Some Christians quit their formal education after high school. Some after college because they had finished the program. Others didn't quit until they had obtained a masters. The difference is not in stick-to-it-iveness. The difference is in the purpose or direction which the Lord had for them.

NOBLE QUITTERS

The word "quitter" has a generally negative ring to it in our vocabulary because it is associated with not finishing a task that one is supposed to do. He's called a "loser." But when a man quits moving in a direction that is at cross-currents with the direction the Lord would have him go, he is a winner, not a loser.

Paul quit. His best friends in Damascus sent him over the wall in a basket so he wouldn't get his head lopped off the next day. Later he quit talking to the Athenians because they wouldn't listen. He quit leading a Bible study in Thessalonica in one of the most fruitful evangelistic Bible studies in the history of the new church. He quit serving as a church planter in Corinth after a year and a half, and he quit the pastorate in Ephesus after 3 years *[his longest stint as a pastor.]*.

Years before, he had quit serving with Pastor Barnabas as the "Director of the Teaching Ministry" at Antioch Bible Church because there was a higher call on his life. He and Barnabas took off on a thousand mile evangelistic jaunt to plant churches in eight obscure villages in Turkey and Cyprus. We never hear about those churches again.

Sometimes we "quit" because the task is finished. Sometimes we "quit" because the opposition is severe *[i.e. Paul quit 5 times in Acts]*. Sometimes we "quit" because of divine intervention *[i.e. Philip and the Ethiopian]*. Sometimes we "quit" because a new door is opened. Sometimes we "quit" because of a personal desire to pursue another facet of ministry. I knew of a pastor who left the pulpit in order to enter a ministry to professional athletes. Another pastor quit preaching in order to write, and another became a marriage and family counselor.

LOUSY REASONS TO QUIT

Some of you have quit working with the Youth Group of your church. Others have quit the choir, quit teaching Sunday School classes, quit pastorates, quit jobs, quit marriage, quit school, even quit church. Some of your reasons were lousy. You rationalized, used Bible verses out of context, argued back and forth with yourself until you were exhausted, blamed others for why you had to quit and then convinced yourself that you had "peace in your soul."

You never should have quit. You were a coward and dishonored God by quitting. You got out of a bad situation, or a burdensome responsibility, or a big hassle, or a financial crunch, but you were dead wrong. You need to go back and make it right.

Others of you had to be gently forced to quit. You were more than willing to continue where God had already led you, but He kept nagging you to quit until you finally agreed with Him that it would be best for Him to find a new spot for you to serve. You didn't want to disappoint Him by quitting a job He had already placed in your hands, but it certainly looked as though He was nudging you in a different direction. It finally became clear that to remain where you were, as fine as that was, would be to resist His clear direction. So you quit and it honored Him.

WHEN TO QUIT

We should never quit:

- * because the situation is unbearable.
- * because the paycheck at another place is higher, or the hours are better, or the work is easier.
- * because the hassle-factor is stupendous where we are
- * because of a crummy boss

The only reasons to quit are:

- * because we honor the Lord by the change
- * because our spiritual ministry from the Lord at that job has come to an end "...take heed to the ministry that thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it." *[Col. 4.17]*

- * because the Lord's smile is upon our decision
- * because we have just as much contentment that He is leading us out of this situation as we had that He led us into that spot.

HOW TO KNOW?

The big question for many is often how do I know that God is leading me out - to quit one thing and start another. I am convinced the Scripture teaches that for the child of God whose heart has been bent on pleasing Him for a long time. . .

IT IS PRETTY HARD TO GET OUT OF THE WILL OF THE LORD.

YELLOW FLAGS RED FLAGS

He'll let us know if we're headed in the wrong direction even when there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with either choice. He will put up a YELLOW FLAG which says, "Wait a minute! That's not the best direction. You'd better think this over." The Lord promises to guide us when our hearts are right and all our ways please Him. James reminds us that He gives wisdom in tough situations. James 1.5

Sometimes we have no way of knowing that getting into a certain situation will later demand compromise or dishonesty. It is at times like this that He will wave a RED FLAG rather than a yellow one. It may not be six feet tall with flashing lights, but if we have made a lifelong habit of being sensitive to the "still small voice" of the internal Comforter, the Holy Spirit, He will guide us in making the decision.

I believe this will usually come from His Word. Not necessarily by hunting for a single verse or proof-text, but through constant meditation on the Word year after year. The Spirit will bear witness with our spirit that "there's something rotten in Denmark." He will comfort us through the decision making process.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN BOTH DECISIONS ARE "RIGHT"

Don't worry if sometimes the decisions are tough. Paul struggled with whether or not to stay in Troas where "a door was opened for me in the Lord." Yet even though the Lord, Himself, had opened an opportunity for tremendous evangelism in Troas [11 Cor 2.12,13], Paul "had no rest" in his spirit, but left Troas to go hunt for Titus in Macedonia. He wanted to get an update on the situation in Corinth. That must have been a tough decision for Paul - to leave evangelism and go to get news about the fledgling church at Corinth.

WE FACED A TOUGH DECISION

That brings me to a difficult decision Kay and I had to wrestle with for some time. Our love for Indonesia was great. We enjoyed the people, the culture, the food, the weather, neighbors, volcanoes, rain, churches, the Muslim opposition, the vision of the seminary where I was teaching, the progress the Gospel was making, even the limited opportunities for our own ministries, and the way the Lord had stretched our faith during those six years after leaving a nice secure job at Miami Christian College.

We said it would take an act of God to move us out of that place which was dear to our hearts.

GOD ACTED!

There seemed to be no explanation for my difficulty in the language except that the Lord had numbered

○ my ability to gain fluency. I hadn't met anyone yet who knew a foreigner who worked as hard and consistently at the fairly simple Indonesian language as I had for 3 years, and yet was so limited in comprehension.

BIRTHDAY CANDLES !

It didn't seem to be a divinely given "instant stupidity." Birthday candles seemed to have a lot to do with it *[there were just too many on my cakes.]* God simply pinched the language-learning section of my brain and it just wouldn't work.

PERPLEXED BUT NOT DESPAIRING

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing" *[II Corinthians 4:8]*

Of this we were certain - He brought us to Indonesia. Of this we were not certain - Why? What door He was to open next was yet to be seen, but we were as content with His leading as we were when we telephoned Indonesia to see if there was a spot for us to serve over there.

RUNNING BLIND

I had a blind friend in high school, Artie Tuttle. That he could play the piano without sight wasn't such a big thing, but that he could run around the track was. He had a friend, Bullet, and he trusted that dog to take him anywhere. If Bullet could see, that was enough. It takes faith to run blind.

○ When I told the home office of our decision, the Asia rep said, "Your supporters will think that you gave up too soon." I'm sure some will feel that if I would just have worked harder or been more patient with myself the language would eventually come. I can't expect everyone to understand, but then again, not everyone agreed that I should have left my comfortable teaching post at Miami Christian College in the first place. Our decision to go didn't need a vote, just His approval. And there were probably others who thought that I was presumptuous taking 6 kids overseas.

But when it was time to quit, we didn't take a vote on that decision either. Yes, we sought counsel from language specialists, friends, family, the mission headquarters and supporters.

A friend of mine who served in Europe has quit twice. He was sent as a professor but switched jobs when he found that the Lord could most effectively use him as an evangelist/youth worker. His second shift was to become a trainer of evangelists. I have full confidence that each time he "quit" the previous ministry the decision was bathed with prayer and approved by God. Since he stayed in the same country during each change, perhaps "quitting" wasn't viewed with as great an apprehension as if he had changed continents both times. Eventually the Lord opened opportunities to touch orphans in half a dozen nations.

Friends, I'm not obligated to tell you why God had shifted directions. I'm not sure I know, yet. We had come to a cross-roads and waited for the Lord to tell us which way to go.

We were grateful to those who loved us during those days when we were running blindfolded. No matter where He sends us, the ministry door He opens will be far richer because of our time in Indonesia. It is impossible to tell how deeply we have been touched through that 7-year stint. He gave us "quitting grace."

○ When we set out for Indonesia in 1991 we prayed for:

1000 weekly prayer partners

100% support

10 families who would go to the field

○ The Lord supplied
1145 weekly prayer partners
106% support
3 families that started to go - though only one has reached the field so far

Perhaps the Lord's intent is to use our return to the States to underline the desperate need for more workers in His harvest. Maybe God has been working on you? **WILL YOU GO?**

PART 2

Decision Making & the Apostle Paul

12 Different Ways Paul [and company]
made ministry decisions
in the Book of Acts.

subtitled: ***“How do I find God’s will for major decisions in my life?”***

This Bible study will take about 2 hours.

There are 12 ways, in my study of Acts, that God used to direct the apostle Paul & the 23 guys who traveled with him *[on and off]*.

○ There were at least 39 different decision-making situations. It seems as though God has several ways of helping spirit-filled people make major decisions in life and ministry. Notice how many times in the Book of Acts God's servants **changed the direction** of their ministry.

1. audible (?) voices from the Holy Spirit
2. circumstances
 - a. the work was finished and it's time to move on.
 - b. the response of the listeners
 - * some positive responses
 - * some negative responses:
 - 1.) indifference
 - 2.) persecution
 - 3.) rejection, resistance, or death threat
3. human advice from people who persuaded the apostles to stay or to leave their city *[evidently Paul was physically restrained at least once]*
4. God spoke through other believers with specific instructions from God
5. church elders commissioned the apostle
6. One apostle, Paul, directs the movements of other men
7. visions
8. twice forbidden by the Holy Spirit
9. personal desire to minister in a certain area (used lots of times)
 - a. preference to go by land
 - b. preference to sail
 - c. proceeded in spite of being warned by the Holy Spirit
10. calendar dates determined when to leave
11. political
 - a. restrictions *[i.e. chains]*
 - b. request by local government to leave, visa denied
 - c. due process of law
12. weather

Next to each of these verses I have written in the margin of my Bible "God's Will" and one of the 12 reasons above.

Start this Bible study tomorrow morning.

- Acts 13.2 _____
- 13.12,13 _____
- 13.42 _____
- 13.46 _____
- 13.50,51 _____
- 14.5,6 _____
- 14.19,20 _____
- 15.2 _____
- 15.30 _____
- 15.36,37 _____
- 15.40 _____
- 16.3 _____
- 16.6 _____
- 16.10 _____
- 16.39 _____
- 17.10 _____
- 17.14 _____
- 17.15 _____
- 17.32 _____
- 18.1 _____
- 18.21 _____
- 18.23 _____
- 19.8,9 _____
- 19.21 _____
- 19.22 _____
- 19.30,31 _____
- 20.1 _____
- 20.3 _____
- 20.13 _____
- 20.16 _____
- 20.23 _____
- 21.4,5 _____
- 21.11,12 _____
- 21.13,14 _____
- 21.23 _____
- 21/35 _____
- 27.12 _____
- 28.19 _____
- 28.23 _____

This isn't an exhaustive study of the issue of decision making but it is most reassuring that the God of the universe is concerned about what happens in the lives of those who honor and obey Him.

Much could be said about getting advice from parents, pastors and other godly men. In Scripture even unsaved people were used of God to give Christians counsel. Today through books, seminars, stock market reports, newspapers, and friendly tips believers obtain much advice in their decision making. Even unsaved parents have also given a lot of wise counsel to their children as they grew up.

The key to "staying in the very center of God's will" is to remember that for the scrupulously obedient child of God it is very hard to get out of the will of God.

Do you believe God's will is found in

The Circle ?
or
The Dot ?

I have a wonderful, godly friend who prays about the color of his tie each day. He believes in the "DOT" concept of God's will. He holds that there is one particular tie which would most please God, today.

I've never asked my friend, but I don't suppose he would affirm that if he would be sinning if he didn't seek God's will in these miniscule choices, but I believe he is incorrect to assume God must be consulted on every decision we make. From what we see in Scripture, God has never given the slightest indication that we are to expect God's displeasure for personal preferences with blue—or teal—or crimson ties. The Bible is intentionally silent about that level of "God's Will."

Let the dots represent decisions we made last year or maybe sometime in the past: education, job, houses, yard or no yard, number of children, church to attend, color of car *[with or without AC]*, restaurants, yard sales, city in which to serve, ministry, etc.

Was there only one woman for me to marry who would have exactly pleased God? No. Was there only one parttime job for me going through college? No. Was there a special color car which would honor God most? No. Was there only one seminary I should attend? No.

Does God open and close doors of opportunity? Certainly. Was He pleased with my choice of Kay to be my life partner? You betcha! Did He make His "Will" clear as I faced the decision to choose a mission board? and the country in which to serve? and the ministry within that country? and the time to resign from the mission board as well? Of course.

Is it possible that I could have served with another mission organization which may have been more helpful as I struggled incredibly with the language? Certainly. (I had a half dozen Bible colleges to choose from when we were deciding where to serve overseas. The one which appealed most to me was the one which had the audacity to require each male student to plant a church before he graduated. And they planted hundreds and hundreds of churches.)

Would He have been displeased if our family had chosen to live in the nation's "Murder Triangle" next door to the college when I served as a professor in Miami? No. Did He give me latitude in those choices? Yes.

Yes, God has made a particular choice obvious in the Bible: Moses' rod, Hosea's wife, Paul's ministry, Zacchaeus' dinner, Adam's menu, ad infinitum. But rarely is a godly person chided for choices he felt would honor God.

The "tie" man believed that the exact tie was the dot way out on the right *[previous page]*. The apostle Paul functioned for years by making those kinds of decisions within the circle. When to go to Jerusalem, who to take with him, when to leave town in spite the evangelistic "door *[which]* was opened for me in the Lord," and he went on a hunt for Titus instead. II Cor 2 No indication that this was displeasing to the Lord.

Now, I have read the words written on a couple ties that would displease the Savior, and I've seen some ties knotted with such carelessness that I they might be distracting to wear in a pulpit ministry, but color choice in and of itself is not based on God-fearing.

Fifteen hundred years ago, Augustine wrote, "Love God, and live as you please."

BLUEPRINT or GAME PLAN

It is a conditional statement based on pursuing God's will at every turn, in any choice, at any age, in every circumstance. But we are not to expect that our Lord has a divine blueprint in heaven and we lose a room, or a load bearing wall with bad choices. God's will is probably more like a flexible game plan rather than architectural drawings.

Our study of the decision making process which the apostle Paul embraced seems pretty close to the way we are to follow His "will" throughout our lives. Yes, it is true that Moses and the nomads looked at the cloud every morning for 40 years to determine whether to start folding up their tents, but after they arrived in Canaan, there was no more 100-foot tall pillar of fire to escort them to the daily water fountain. Take advice. Seek help. Keep your heart attuned to the teachings of Scripture.

Oh, by the way, my "tie-praying" friend also misused the Bible when he wrote in one of his letters that he was supposed to take a trip **because** he read a verse that referred to a "wide river." He chose to believe God had given him a special revelation of the meaning of that verse. I believe he was wrong.

If there is one piece of clear advice, it may be something you have already heard.

THE WILL OF GOD IS FOUND IN THE WORD OF GOD.

Don't look for today's marching orders based on some obscure verse [*1 Chron 26.18*], but His will is found in the many hundreds of verses such as:

- ⇒ Be content
- ⇒ Be thankful
- ⇒ Give freely
- ⇒ Pray without ceasing
- ⇒ Watch! [*for His return*]
- ⇒ Meditate in it [*His Word*] day and night
- ⇒ Fish for men
- ⇒ Pray the Lord of the Harvest to send

To disobey or even neglect any of the above is sin.

Be careful that you live in such a way to bathe everything with an abundance of prayer. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication [*asking*] in the Spirit. . . ." Ephesians 6.18.

If you are obeying everything in the Bible you understand, you are in God's will.

Resources

Gary Friesen, Decision Making and the Will of God.
Thanks to Gary Friesen for the Circle & Dot illustration.

Ron Blue, How to Choose a Mission Board.
CAM International,
La Prada Dr., Garland, TX