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7 WAYS TO FIND GOD'S BEST

It's easier than you think

THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS

Take the next right turn

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uniformity.



PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Some years ago, after a series of mistakes left me exasperated and discouraged, I pleaded with God to turn me into a robot, programmed to always do what He knew was best. “You know that deep down I want nothing more than to do what’s right and to please You, but my wrong decisions and harebrained ideas keep getting in the way! Can’t You reprogram me to always make the right choice and do the right thing? Think how much better off Your world would be!”

“That’s really not the solution,” He replied. “Not only would that take the challenge out of life, but it would put a damper on our relationship. Because you would no longer need to come to Me for guidance, you would stop relying on Me. You would stop appreciating Me, and before long you would stop *loving* Me. No, I think we’d better leave you the way I made you—but I’ll tell you what I *will* do. Instead of programming you with all the answers all at once, I will give them to you one by one, whenever you bring a matter to Me in prayer.”

It wasn’t really a new offer at all, of course, and it wasn’t exclusively for me. He makes the same offer to you, summed up in these verses from the Bible: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The arrangement isn’t perfect, because it involves imperfect people like you and me—it depends on us remembering to stop and ask Him for guidance and then having the faith, yieldedness, humility, and whatever else it may take to follow through and *do* what He shows us—but I’m sure you’ll find, as I have, that it beats trying to figure things out yourself!

Keith Phillips
Keith Phillips
For the *Activated* family

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THE BIKE RIDE

WHEN I MET JESUS, LIFE BECAME RATHER LIKE A BIKE RIDE. It was a tandem bike; I rode in the front and steered, and Jesus was in the rear seat, helping to pedal.

I don't remember just when it happened, but Jesus suggested we change places. Life hasn't been the same since. Jesus makes the ride so exciting!

When I had control, I knew the way. It was safe and predictable, but rather boring—always the shortest distance between two points. But when Jesus got in the driver's seat, He knew delightful “long cuts” up mountain roads and down again at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hold on!

I didn't want to question His judgment, but once I couldn't help myself. “Don't You think we should slow down just a little? I'm scared.” He turned and smiled and touched my hand and said, “It's okay. Pedal.”

Sometimes I got worried and anxious and asked, “Where are You taking me?”

“It's a surprise,” He would say with a laugh. Gradually I learned to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered the adventure.

He took me to meet people with gifts that I needed—gifts of love, healing, acceptance, joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey—our journey, my Lord's and mine—and we were off again. He said, “Give the gifts away.” So I did, to other people we met. But the strangest thing happened. I found that the more of those things I gave away, the more I had for myself and to give to other people we met along the way. And still our load was light.

At first I didn't trust Jesus to be in control of my life. I thought He would wreck it. But He knows the bike's capabilities and limits, and all sorts of tricks. He knows how to take sharp corners at high speeds, make the bike “jump” to clear rocks in our way, and He can even make it fly when the road disappears beneath us.

I am learning to not worry or want to get back in control, but just to relax and enjoy the view, the cool breeze on my face, and the delightful company of my constant companion, Jesus.

I still get tired sometimes because it is a long, hard ride, but Jesus just smiles and says, “Pedal.”

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN



BY DAVID
BRANDT BERG



Seven ways to find God's best

HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS GO ABOUT MAKING DECISIONS? When we're faced with having to make a decision, what are we trying to find?—The will of God! So the real question is this: How do we find the will of God?

IF YOU'RE
LETTING
HIM DO THE
CHOOSING,
HE'S GOING TO
CHOOSE THAT
WHICH IS BEST
FOR YOU, THAT
WHICH WILL
MAKE YOU
HAPPIEST IN
THE LONG RUN.

A good Scripture on the subject is found in Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

So what is the most important requirement in finding God's will?—Having no will of your own! Surrender your will, your body, and your mind to the Lord. Everybody has free will, of course, but as Christians we're supposed to have already chosen to surrender our will to Jesus Christ. We're supposed to let Him make the decisions. Here is one of my favorite little poems on the subject:

*He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing His truth can dim!
He gives His very best to those
Who leave the choice with Him!*

If you're His child and you're letting Him do the choosing, what is He going to choose for you? He's going to choose that which is best for you, that which will make you happiest in the long run.

Some people say, "Yes, my will is surrendered to God. I have yielded my life to the Lord, I am trusting the Lord, but I still haven't been able to find His will. I'm still confused. I can't even understand the problem, much less the answer!" It's a dilemma most of us face at some time in our lives.

So how do you find the will of God? What does He require, according to the Scripture in Romans chapter 12?—Yield your mind, body, and will to God. Then you'll know! You'll soon find out, because then you're in a position for God to show you—and He will, probably through one or more of the following:



1. THE WORD

The first place we look for the will of God is in the Word of God, the Bible. This is the known, sure, absolute, revealed will of God. There's no doubt about it. This is it! If God never tells you another thing than what He has already written, if you operate according to the Bible, you'll get along great!

If you never have a revelation, if you never hear a heavenly voice, if you never receive a prophecy, if you never have the gifts of knowledge or wisdom or discernment or healing or perform miracles, if you'll just operate according to the Word of God, you'll accomplish a whole lot—and eventually you'll probably receive many of these spiritual gifts as well!

Some people don't study their Bibles as they should. They've got to have the answers spoon-fed to them. They don't know how to dig them out for themselves. Some things you've got to work for! "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).



2. THE VOICE OF THE WORD

The second way to know God's will is by the voice of His Word. God speaks not only through His Word, but He speaks through the voice of His Word. The Psalmist says, "Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His Word, heeding the voice of His Word" (Psalm 103:20).

Have you ever been reading a passage of Scripture when all of a sudden a verse or phrase or even a single word comes alive and hits you between the eyes? "That's

for me! That's the answer!" Or perhaps you've been praying about a certain situation when the Lord reminded you of a verse or passage that was exactly the answer you needed. It was so loud and clear that God couldn't have spoken any more emphatically if He'd yelled it out! That is the voice of His Word, speaking through His tried-and-proven written Word. It may have been originally given for somebody thousands of years ago, and yet, all of a sudden, it speaks to you personally.

So the first way to find God's will is through His Word, the Bible. Then there is the voice of the Word—a specific verse, phrase or passage from the Bible, which speaks to you personally.



3. DIRECT REVELATION

What do you think would be the third surest indication of the will of God?—A direct revelation: a prophecy, dream, vision, or voice.

For example, when God speaks to you in prophecy, it may come in the form of one or more Bible verses or fresh new words not found in the Bible. When I ask God for an answer to a problem, I have found that He usually gives me a Scripture—an answer that He's already given somewhere in the Bible.

Be sure that any direct revelation you receive does not contradict the Word of God. You have to measure your revelation against the Word. "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Make sure it is according to His Word!





4. GODLY COUNSEL

Fourth on the list is godly counselors. “In the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Proverbs 15:22, KJV). Godly counselors are people who not only believe the Bible, but who are practicing it the way they ought to. They are not only hearers of the Word, but doers also (James 1:22).

A godly counselor is someone who loves the Lord, and whose life shows the good fruit of living close to Him (Matthew 7:15–20). If I wanted to learn how to play the piano, I wouldn’t go to business college; I’d go to a pianist who knows how to play well. If I wanted to learn how to cook, I wouldn’t go to a computer technician, but to somebody who knows how to cook, whose meals I’ve enjoyed. So godly counselors are people that you can trust because they bear good spiritual fruit in their own lives.



5. OPEN AND CLOSED DOORS

The fifth way to determine the will of God is through circumstances and conditions.

These are generally a poor means of finding the will of God, but sometimes they are an indication. Some people call finding God’s will through circumstances “open and closed doors” (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Revelation 3:7–8).

For example, many years ago the board of my church decided that my family and I could not go to a certain country as missionaries, and they gave several reasons: The country that I wished to go to was closed to any new missionaries, there were severe food shortages there, and I had been unable

to raise our fares. I looked at all those “closed doors” and agreed that that country wasn’t the place for us to go. Then right about that time, the Lord opened the door to another place of service where there were millions of people who needed to hear the Gospel!

Open and closed doors: Which way does God seem to be leading? Where do you have open doors of service? Where have you got a possibility of a job? In which direction does it seem that God is providing the way and the means? That’s one way to find out the will of God—the circumstances and conditions, the open and closed doors.



6. BURDENS (THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT)

That leads us to number six: the witness of the Spirit—a certain intuitive conviction that gives you faith. You just know that a certain course of action is the will of God! The Lord may not tell you in an audible voice or give you a visible sign, but you know from that still, small voice in your heart (1 Kings 19:12), that inner conviction. Some people refer to this as “burdens.”

I don’t like to go by feelings, because sometimes feelings can be wrong. They can be the wrong feelings from the wrong spirit! Nevertheless, some feelings are put there by the Lord, as one indication of His will for you. The Spirit of God speaks to your heart about a decision you face, and gives you an inner conviction about what God wants you to do.

Sometimes the witness of the Spirit may be a warning not to do certain thing—that it’s not God’s will. Your heart or spirit hears a voice saying, “Stop, don’t do that! Watch out!” The Holy

Spirit doesn't even have to use words, but you get the message!

So that's the sixth way to find God's will: the witness of the Spirit.



7. FLEECES

And finally, what is the seventh way to know the will of God? Sometimes you can ask for a specific sign. This we call a fleece, a term taken from the story of Gideon in the Old Testament (Judges 6:36–40). Gideon wanted to know the Lord's will about a matter, so he spread out a fleece of wool on the ground one evening and said, "Now Lord, if tomorrow morning the fleece is wet from the dew and the ground all around it is dry, then I will know that You have been talking to me and I'm supposed to do such-and-such." But even when the Lord met that condition, Gideon still wasn't sure, so he asked the Lord to do the reverse. "Now Lord, tomorrow if the fleece is dry and the ground is wet, I'll believe that You want me to do such-and-such"—and the Lord did it! So if you resort to fleeces, check and double check.

I like to get a sign from the Lord, a confirmation that I'm on the right track, and that's one way. I'll ask for a sign, I'll "put out a fleece" by asking God to meet certain conditions.

God doesn't necessarily follow any particular order when revealing His will through these means. He may speak to you through a prophecy first, and then you may confirm that prophecy by the Word. Or He may speak to you through the voice of His Word, and then you search other Scriptures and see what the Lord generally has to say about the subject. We can't put God in a box and say He's got to speak to us in this or that way, or in this or that order. But these are ways we know He works, not only from

our own experience, but also from what He has said in His written Word.

CONCLUSION

So how do you find the will of God? Surrender your all to Him and "do not be conformed to this world"—or worldly ways of doing things—"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove"—there will be no doubt!—"what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Sometimes to find out what God's will is, we have to first find what it *isn't*. If, after trying all these ways, you still aren't sure you have found the will of God, take the first step in the direction you *think* He is leading you. A boat has to be in motion before the rudder can take effect. Take one step, then stop and ask God to confirm that you're going the right direction. Then if the answer's not clear or you're still not sure, give it some time. God may be waiting for certain circumstances to be right before He can show you any more than He has.

In the meantime, keep busy for God right where you are. You don't find God's will by just sitting around doing nothing. I once knew someone who did that. He said that he had been called by God to be a missionary, but he had since been sitting around, doing little or nothing, for many months. He said he was "waiting on the Lord" (Psalm 130:5). Well, while this man was waiting on God to do something to get him started, God was waiting on him to get busy! While you're waiting for God to reveal His will, keep busy doing the things you *know* He wants you to do: Love and praise Him for His goodness, study His Word, and be a blessing to others in your present situation.

May God help us all to not only find His will, but to do it! •




The Deal of a Lifetime

—A MESSAGE FROM JESUS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,


I have the deal of a lifetime for you! I started off in Construction and now I've also moved into Recycling and Repair. My name is Jesus and I'm the best in the business. Here's My free trial offer: I will fix whatever you most want mended! But before you answer too quickly, listen to this: I mean anything! Go a few steps beyond thinking of a broken television or your car problems. Think big!—Your health, your life, your broken heart, any impossible situation you're caught in—anything!

Of course, it's hard for you to believe My claims if you don't know for sure that I'm on the level, that I'm real and ready to back up everything I say. So I'm also making you another free trial offer: Test Me! You can put Me in a test tube and see if I work! And you are the test tube! Just ask Me to come into your life and change things for the better. If I can't do it, then you can forget about Me and this offer. But if I come through for you, if I prove to you personally that I'm real, think of what you will have gained!



ASK ME TO PROVE I'M
REAL, ... THAT I WILL
DO ALL THE THINGS
I SAY I CAN DO, AND
THEN STAND BACK
AND WATCH ME COME
THROUGH FOR YOU!

And what do I want from you in return? The only thing I want from you is your love. I want for you to choose Me to solve your problems before you choose any other solution, and I'll get you to feel like that by actually fixing each problem you bring to Me. This is not a promise for the future, although I have lots of those as well. This is for



right now, and for each and every time you put Me to the test. I mean it! Does it sound too good to be true? I said it's the deal of a lifetime! You'll never get a better offer than this—and you haven't even heard all of it yet!

What did you do to deserve all this?—Nothing! When you're in love with someone, they don't have to do anything to get your favor; you want to do things for them. And that's why I want to do this for you, because I love you! I also have a lot of other unbeatable deals for you, and you can find many of them in the Bible. But I'm no fool; I know you won't even bother to read it if you don't first know that I'm real and that those promises are not just a bunch of sweet words.

So do this one thing: Ask Me to prove I'm real, that I am who I say I am, that I will do all the things I say I can do, and then stand back and watch Me come through for you! I promise you I will do it for anyone who honestly asks Me. And I promise you this, you will be glad you did!

On to the next step: After you put Me to the test, if you are satisfied

with the results, then I would ask one small favor of you: Pass this offer on to someone else, or to as many as you will. Word-of-mouth advertising from a satisfied customer is the best kind, and that's what I like. Now that's asking no more than anyone would when they've given you a good deal on something or provided good reliable service. And like other good businesses, each time you refer someone to Me by giving them this offer, I'll mark it up to your credit and I'll repay you for it. How's that for a deal? You can't lose!

I've been around a long time and, believe it or not, this dynamite offer is the same one I've always offered. I'm just stepping up My advertising a little to keep up with the changing times. Time is short and times are changing. Do yourself a favor and try it. You'll be glad you did. And so will whoever else you tell about this offer, if they'll try it too. Don't forget, this offer is only the introduction. There's a lot more—and I mean a lot more! And it's all for you and your good! First try this, and then I'll show you some more.

So, ask Me to come into your life and fix whatever is broken. I'll move in with a complete program of repair, restoration, and even some new improvements if you want them. I have a whole new range of possibilities for you to choose from. Is that a good deal? It's the best! Try it! Do it now and let's get started! Just tell Me right now, "Jesus, it's a deal! I'll take Your offer. Come in and let me see what You can do. If I'm satisfied with the results, I'll refer others to You!"

With love, your heavenly repairman,

Jesus

This and other messages are available in tract form. Write one of the Activated addresses listed on page 2, or visit the Family's Web site: family@thefamily.org. •

THE ROAD TO



JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES, “If you know these things”—the keys to right living that He had taught them—“happy are you if you do them” (John 13:17 KJV). That simple point has a world of truth in it!

Some time ago I was reading an article in a magazine. This is an excerpt from it:

Everyone is after the same thing in life, and that is happiness. Just to have a good time seems to be the purpose of life to some people. Unfortunately, most of them blunder until their short lives are nearly over before they find out what a good time really is.

At first, when children, we think that a good time means lots of fun and not much work, to do as you like and get something for nothing. But many folks discover after a while that that is a very silly notion and leads to mischief, spankings, and stomachaches.

Eventually, after having plenty of troubles, folks learn that success and

happiness do not come from grabbing everything we want—that happiness does not mean idleness and chocolate creams! But it takes some folks a long time to learn to go about it in the right way and to find true happiness.

Of course, Christians who are serious about their Christianity don’t make a selfish quest for personal happiness, but they find it just the same. I hope I can convince you of this. Happiness is to many a holy grail. They think that if they miss finding happiness, they will have missed the supreme purpose in life. But that *isn’t* the supreme purpose in life! There is a poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox called “I’ve Lost the Road to Happiness,” which goes like this:

I’ve lost the road to happiness,
Does anyone know it, pray?
I was dwelling there
When the morn was fair,
But somehow I wandered away.
I saw rare treasure
And scenes of pleasure
And ran to pursue them when lo,
I had lost the road to happiness
And knew not whither to go.

Now I take the liberty to paraphrase the next verse:

Have you lost the road to happiness?
Oh, I can lead you back.
Take the road marked “obedience,”
To the right, up God’s own track!

So where can you find *real* happiness? It’s found in obeying God! Strange to say, the mother of happiness is just plain old-fashioned obedience.

Joy is always the aftermath of obedience! God’s Word says that if you know these things—Jesus’ teach-

ings—happy are you if you do them. It's true! A personal will yielded to God brings rest of spirit, a heart right with God brings joy, and a mind stayed on God brings peace.

Perfect obedience would be perfect happiness if we had perfect confidence in the One we are obeying. Isn't that a wonderful thought? And so true! It's reasonable too, for if the heart is right with God and you're walking in obedience to His Word, then He can fulfill in you all of His wonderful promises. Who could help but find happiness then?

Many people think they are unhappy because of conditions and circumstances around them, but that isn't it—something is wrong in the heart. When the heart is right, all is right, but when the heart is wrong, all is wrong. They are at war with themselves because they are out of harmony with God.

Jesus did not teach that the quest for happiness should be abandoned, but that you must go about it the right way. Jesus believed in and taught happiness, but He made it very plain that there are right and wrong ways of pursuing it.

Jesus understood our human longing for happiness, and that our pursuing it the wrong way was one of the world's greatest problems. He also knew the source of true happiness and had the power to give it to us. He said, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

The Bible promises that one of the fruits of the Spirit will be joy (Galatians 5:22–23), and Jesus Himself told His disciples, "I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22). There are so many Scriptures along this line to prove that joy comes to a real Christian that I don't have space to mention them all here.

TRUE
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But this kind of joy is entirely different from the merriment the world calls happiness. This confident message of happiness runs triumphantly throughout the Word of God, so don't think that when you become a Christian it's some long-faced affair, all fenced in and hard and dark!

Christ set forth the fundamentals of happiness, and told us that we should have joy, to "ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." People are on the wrong path if they strive for happiness as a goal in itself, because that is to chase a shadow. There's no substance in that at all!

True happiness is not something from the *outside* that you can pour into the heart, but rather it springs up from *within* the heart. True happiness is God-given and is a result of yielding to the will of God—what God knows is best—and putting your life at God's disposal.

Is this a new thought to you? Does it seem unreal that you can find happiness by making Jesus Christ the master of your life? Thousands and thousands of people today will tell you they found true happiness and fulfillment in obedience to the Lord. He can do it for you! He *wants* to do it for you!

Are you dissatisfied, distraught, frustrated? Why not give God a chance at your heart? Before you again start up some wrong trail to find just another dead end of dissatisfaction or frustration, why not turn to God?

Read God's Word, and there you will find the plan of happiness that God has for you. You'll find God's way! Remember that Jesus, when He was here on earth, constantly taught that there was no happiness or no blessing equal to the blessing of finding and following God's plan and loving ways. Is it strange that God can fully satisfy your soul? Oh, He can! •

IT HAPPENED TO ME

BY C. PETER VAN GORDER

The Golden Staircase

MAKING DECISIONS IS RARELY EASY TO DO. One of the most important times to get it right is when you are deciding on a new job offer. In my career as a full-time volunteer, I often have the luxury of choosing which country I wish to work in. Jesus said, “The harvest is plenteous but the laborers are few.” That means that the need is so great that you could go just about anywhere and dig in and make a difference. But of course, some job opportunities in some countries may be more suitable for your talents than others.

About two years ago, my wife and I were at a crossroads. I had just turned 50, and there is some indefinable thing that happens to our psyche each time our age rolls over to a new decade.

The realization begins to dawn that we’re not getting any younger and we don’t have as many strong years left. My wife and I were looking for new challenges—but where? We needed to decide which country to go to next, and we needed to get it right.

We had several offers, but two stood out above the others. One was to work at the *Activated* magazine’s California office; the other was to join a team working in the Middle East. We added up all of the advantages and disadvantages in neat columns, but they came out equal. We read God’s Word and spent time daily trying to hear from Him what His will was and how we fit into that plan, but it all seemed a bit foggy. There were just too many variables to know exactly where each path would take us. What we needed was one of those good old upright, downright, Heaven-right revelations. We wanted some words of assurance from the Lord, something we could stand firm on later if fears and doubts assailed us, something that we could look back on and know that we had made the right decision regardless of the circumstances we might find ourselves in.

One verse that has always been helpful in times like this is Matthew 7:7—an easy reference to remember. “Ask and it will be given you.”—Simple yet true. The passage goes on to say that if we ask for bread, our heavenly Father won’t give us a stone. We ask, He answers. Sometimes His answer is yes, sometimes it’s no, and sometimes it’s wait.

For weeks we didn’t know which way to go, so we kept asking. We were like the importunate woman in a parable Jesus told who kept pestering the judge until he finally got fed up and gave her what she wanted (Luke 18:1–8).

The answer we needed came in the form of a beautiful clear picture—what

FEEDING READING

HOW TO FIND THE WILL OF GOD

one might call a vision. I once heard someone define visions as dreams you have when you are awake. Others call them pictures from Heaven, received while in prayer.

The picture was of a glowing golden staircase that ascended to the right. In our case this was significant because we were living in Texas at the time and the Middle East was to the right of us as we looked at a map of the world, and California was to the left. That was the clear indication from the Lord that we had been praying for—our starting point—and we acted on it. As we did, God confirmed His will through another vision, financial supply, and other answers to prayer.

It has been nearly two years now since we have been here in the Middle East, and we have never been happier! The need here is great, the people are extremely friendly and receptive, and new doors of opportunity for service are opening daily.

After living this life of faith for some 30 years now, I can truly say that He has never failed in one of all His good promises (1 Kings 8:56). “God is not a man, that He should lie. ... Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). Jesus is our Good Shepherd and will always show the way. All we have to do is listen to His voice and follow.

God has a plan for my life. His words in Jeremiah 29:11–13 remind me of this: “I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” •

C. PETER VAN GORDER IS A FULL-TIME FAMILY VOLUNTEER IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

The prerequisite— submit your will to the Lord.

Luke 22:42
John 5:30
John 6:38
John 7:17
Romans 12:1–2

The first place to look for God’s will is in His Word.

Psalms 119:105,130
2 Timothy 3:16

God sometimes reveals His will through prophecy and revelations.

1 Kings 19:12
Ezekiel 3:10–11
Acts 10:19–20

God sometimes reveals His will through dreams.

Job 33:15–17
Genesis 15:12–16
Genesis 20:2–7
Genesis 31:22–24
Matthew 1:20–21

Seek godly counsel.

Proverbs 11:14
Proverbs 15:22
2 Corinthians 13:1

Consider obvious circumstances.

2 Samuel 5:22–25
1 Kings 17:1–9
Mark 14:12–16

Ask for confirming signs.

Genesis 24:14
1 Samuel 14:8–10

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Thank You Jesus for always being ready and willing to come to my aid. It’s a special token of Your never-ending love that You care enough to help me in the decisions I face, even the seemingly small ones. Whenever problems arise throughout the day, I know You are there to help me solve them. You are truly concerned about every little detail, and You always know best. With each passing day, I want You to be more a part of my life and thoughts and decisions, because You’re so good to me!

NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THE COMING “MARK OF THE BEAST”

CAN YOU IMAGINE A WORLD in which any store, restaurant, or other business you enter is able to identify you, make note of what you're wearing, and even detect how much money you have in your wallet? Science fiction?—Not for long! Believe it or not, one day soon radio frequency identification (RFID) technology could be identifying, screening, and tracking us all.

RFID “tags” use radio frequencies to transmit a code that uniquely identifies the tag. The silicon chips that hold RFID tags—some no bigger than a grain of salt—are small enough that they could be placed in clothing, razor blades, library books, and even currency.

RFID readers within 15 or 20 feet of some tags can pick up their signals. Global databases will let businesses keep track of every location where an RFID signal has been read.

How might the tags identify you? If, for example, you buy a sweater using a credit card, your name could be forever linked with that particular item of clothing.

That's what worries privacy advocates—the ease with which companies can read the tags and keep logs, identifying and profiling consumers

long after the tagged products those consumers bought leave the store. Privacy advocates and civil libertarians also say the technology designed for tracking clothing items at a very short range can easily be adapted to tracking and spying on people, just as software “cookies” now track computer users' movements online.

With little public fanfare, this new RFID technology is rolling out on a massive scale. Alien Technology, an RFID tag maker, projects that within three years the company will sell 10 billion RFID tags a year, and that the cost of a single tag will drop below US\$0.05—cheap enough that they may start to appear in most products. Wal-Mart, the world largest retailer, has mandated the use of the RFID tagging by its suppliers on all their products by 2005, and many other large retail outfits are expected to follow Wal-Mart's lead.

Another technology to keep an eye on is the new Electronic Product Code (EPC). Hailed as the next-generation product code system, EPC could someday replace with a microchip the bar code (Universal Product Code, or UPC) found on most merchandise today.

Whereas bar codes only identify *groups* of products, the EPC is designed

to provide a unique serial number for every *item* in the system. For example, at present all cans of Coke produced at a certain bottling plant or within a certain country have the same bar code. Under EPC, each and every bottle or can of Coke would have its own unique identifier. Impossible, you say? The EPC is built around a 96-bit format that is large enough to generate a unique code for every grain of rice on the planet.

Retailers and manufacturers think a

a store, pick up the items you want, stroll through the reader on your way out of the store, and the cost of the items would automatically be charged to your credit account. Not only that, but all the information regarding your purchases would be beamed to the manufacturers, who would be ever so happy to send you special offers on future purchases, or even to stock you up on their products at prearranged times, billing you automatically.

one-of-a-kind product code could help reduce theft and counterfeit goods, and simplify the inventory process.

The way it's been designed, an EPC can be linked to databases that can store far more information about a particular product than is possible with the current bar code system. In addition to the basic information provided by UPC—item, price, and manufacturer—the EPC could link to information about the buyer and location of the item based on a complex system of microchip tags and microchip readers that communicate via radio frequency (RFID).

And RFID tags aren't just for goods found in supermarkets and malls. Applied Digital Solutions (ADS) of Palm Beach, Florida, is hoping that Americans can be persuaded to implant RFID chips under their skin to identify themselves when going to a cash machine or in place of using a credit card. The surgical procedure, which is performed with local anesthetic, embeds a 12-by-2 mm RFID tag in the flesh of a human arm. ADS even ran a special promotion urging Americans to "get chipped." The first 100,000 people to sign up were offered a \$50 discount.

And why shouldn't you get chipped? That way you could simply walk into

The system would also put an end to shoplifting and other forms of theft and fraud, as there would be no cash or credit cards to steal and every item would be linked to its rightful owner. There would be far fewer criminals and drug dealers (again, no cash), and society would be much better off.—Or would it? It seems benign—even beneficial—but what about its potential to track your every physical and financial move?

The new technology is preparing the public, and it won't be long till the mother of all silicon chips is ready for its debut—the mark of the Beast, as predicted in the Bible. "He [the False Prophet, top minister in the Antichrist's government] causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on [or 'in'] their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the Beast [the Antichrist], or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the Beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666" (Revelation 13:16–18).

When the mark of the Beast comes, don't be duped into taking it! •

PRIVACY
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PEOPLE.

Be wise -let Me decide!

It's natural to have your own ideas, opinions, and preferences. That's the way you were created, and it's part of what makes you the unique individual you are. It's natural, but it doesn't always lead to the wisest and best choices unless you also involve Me in the decision-making process.

I love you and want you to be happy, fulfilled, and have everything you need, but for Me to help you all I can, you need to learn to let Me do the choosing. There's no decision too big or too small for Me to help you with. It may surprise you how practical and down to earth I can be! As you bring your plans or wishes to Me in prayer, I will give you My thoughts, counsel, and instruction.

It's not that I want to control you or dictate your every move, but from My vantage point I can see things much more clearly than you can, and I always know what will work out best and make you and everyone else involved happiest in the end. So when you pray about what to do in a certain situation, ask Me to override your own ideas and personal desires if I know that something else would prove better.

Then, of course, you need to be willing to accept My counsel and do things the way I show you. That's often easier said than done, but as you watch Me work on your behalf, you'll be happy you let Me have the final say. I always give the very best to those who leave the choice to Me!

