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**THE CHRISTIAN STUDENT'S SEARCH FOR GOD'S WILL
-A COUNSELING PERSPECTIVE FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS**

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The postmodern era is characterized by an explosion of information and knowledge which has resulted in truth being defined as nonrational, relative, and declared by some to be non-existent. Many seek an answer to their spiritual emptiness in the mystical, the psychic and the supernatural. Christian youth growing up in this environment have been influenced regarding the relativity of truth that has eroded the Christian tenet of God as the unchanging source of truth. In a survey conducted by Josh McDowell (quoted by Garcia-Marenko)¹ among 3,795 Christian youth (Generation Xers) from 13 denominations, their response echoes the views of the post-modern mind regarding the relativity of truth.

Some Christian students earnestly seek God's will; however, many others profess to be Christians but lack a clear understanding as they are a product of their environment. Add to that the instability of the family unit, the breakdown of communication between generations at home and in school, and the dizzying buffet of options now available, and the high school/college adolescent often finds himself/herself bewildered and lost. In helping to steer them through this complex maze of possibilities, we can surely share the divine power of an omnipotent and omniscient God who can become very real and operative in their lives. The answer to the distress of this world is to be found in the peace that comes from nesting ourselves in the will of God and allowing Him to direct us as we navigate the important decisions related to life on earth.

How can Christian educators help students discover God's will for their lives as they make the two very important decisions of picking a college major that will lead to a career in the workplace and in their selection of a life partner? How can youth be guided to think Christianly and imbibe a worldview where the God we serve is an unchanging entity, a safe and sure anchor they can rely on?

This paper will attempt to clarify what God's will is, taking into consideration the tension that the freedom of choice creates. It will briefly explore what it means to follow God's will in spite of circumstances and despite our inherent sinful weaknesses. Finally, some practical steps for decision making will be discussed with some recommendations for school personnel who act as counselors and mentors to students.

Understanding God's Will

God's Will as Described in Scripture

From the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments had references to God's will which is very obviously to be at the very core of being Christian. From the very beginning, the earth was

created by the will of God (Rev 4:11). It does appear that the whole of creation functions within the parameters of this will set in motion by God the Father, fully involving God the Son as well as God the Holy Spirit. Christ's mission was to do the will of His Father (John 6:38) and because He came to do the will of God, we have been made holy (Heb 10:7, 9, 10).

When Jesus was on earth, He made very direct statements about God's will. In Matthew 12:50, he claims as his family those who do God's will: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." In addition, he said in Matthew 7:21: "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." He taught his disciples to accept God's will (Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven—Matthew 6:10). At the Garden of Gethsemane, when He struggled with the impending doom that was about to befall Him, he begged God to take away "this cup" and true to what he taught, followed it with the words, "may Your will be done." (Matthew 26:42)

Doing God's will is central to living the Christian life. In Psalms 103:21, it is stated plainly that as God's servants, we are expected to do his will; the psalmist's prayer in Ps 40:8 is a "desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." John, the beloved disciple assures us in John 9:31 that God will listen to the godly man who does His will. He further reiterates in 1 John 5:14: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

God has promised that He wants us to know His will (Acts 22:14); and He will reveal it to us in His good time (Eph 1:9). Furthermore, He will teach us to do His will if we will pray for it as the psalmist did in Ps 143:10. In addition, He will send the Holy Spirit to teach us all things. Paul wrote in Rom 8:27 that "he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." We have the assurance that the Holy Spirit will guide us as we pray earnestly, right into the center of God's will. Further, we are told in Eph 1:11 that we have been chosen, therefore, God has a plan for each of us and He will work out "everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Acts 22:14 echoes this very same sentiment that God has chosen us "to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth." We have the assurance that God will reveal to us "the mystery of his will according to His good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ." (Eph 1:9)

When we sincerely follow God's will, the result is peace, a much sought-after quality in today's topsy-turvy world. Heb 13:21 tells us that the God of peace will make us complete so that we may do His will. He will work among us to accomplish that which is pleasing in His sight.

Approaches to Defining God's will

Under inspiration, Ellen White proposes that the first great lesson that any teacher can impart is to help the students to know and understand the will of God² which is the "law of

heaven.”³ That is the entire focus of the angels in heaven—knowing and doing God’s will—this is their “highest service.”⁴ God’s will should be central in the Christian’s thought and action. The human will is to be brought into submission and “blended”⁵ with the divine will; “molded by God’s will”⁶, yielded and surrendered.⁷ This is only possible by beholding Christ and meditating upon His perfections; only then can we be wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity. As this process of conversion takes place, we can have the mind of Christ which enables God’s will to become ours.⁸

However, this calls for a firm determination,⁹ a “steady perseverance, continually searching to know and do God’s will”¹⁰; it often requires a struggle.¹¹ As a first step, we need to withdraw our affections from the world and “place them upon heavenly things.”¹² As we behold the perfection of Christ, we will be humbled, and in this state, the angels of God will work with us as we put self aside to lead us into God’s will.¹³ Much as God would yearn for us to be the human agencies in carrying out His will, He honors and respects the individual choice. He will never coerce us into doing His will; He will only enter upon our invitation.

White suggests three ways as to how God “reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others.”¹⁴

1. In order to recognize the voice of the Lord, we need to look for His will in the Scriptures.
2. God’s voice is revealed in His providential workings as we renounce self and walk in His ways
3. God also speaks His will to us through “impressions upon the heart” made by the Holy Spirit.

A scholarly presentation of God’s will by Garry Friesen with J. Robin Maxson¹⁵ describes three dimensions of God’s will—His sovereign will, His moral will and the individual will. God’s sovereign will includes His plan for all the events of the universe; we have no control over it; we cannot miss it because it will occur just as God has willed it. Believers can only discover it after it happens. His moral will is a body of commands and principles for life, e.g. the 10 Commandments (Rom 2:18; I Thess 4:3; 5:18; 5:12-17). Its directives are general and believers are expected to find God’s moral will and obey it because it constitutes how we should live the Christian life. In the area of the individual will, Friesen and Maxson do not buy the traditional view which states that God’s will is one specific plan for an individual (compared to a dot—the center of God’s will), and the believer is expected to find it. They propose that in areas where the Bible is silent, the believer is free and responsible to choose his own course of action. In nonmoral decisions, the objective of the Christian is to make wise decisions on the basis of spiritual expediency.¹⁶ God has no personal will for our lives; He has given us the freedom to choose and sufficient intelligence that can guide us in our decisions.

Blaine Smith¹⁷ and Tim LaHaye¹⁸ both disagree with this basic thesis that God has no personal will for us. The latter expresses concern that while this idea may not mean that self-will

is advocated, it may be only a matter of time that we begin to function independently of God. We need to acknowledge him in *all* our ways to keep on track with His will.¹⁹

In 1989, La Haye²⁰ wrote a second book on God's will. In this, he hypothesized that there are three levels of God's will based on his own interpretation of the text, Eph 4:13 where three adjectives are used for describing God's will—"good, acceptable, and perfect." He approaches God's will from a qualitative standpoint. Because of our sinfulness, we may start out at the lowest rung of the ladder, able to do only what is "good" in terms of God's will. As we mature, we may advance to the acceptable level of God's will, and only total submission is possible for the highest level—God's perfect will. This is similar to getting an A or B or C in following God's will (which I suppose is an acceptable explanation in human terms); however, if we reflect on the theological assumption that it is Christ's perfection that is accorded us, then there cannot be varying levels of quality of that perfection—it is an either-or situation—we have attained it or we have not attained. Therefore, I cannot accept La Haye's hypothesis about God's will as the divine is brought too far down to the level of human terms.

Fowler sees God's will as the top priority for a Christian:

"To place God first in all that we think and do, to see everything from His perspective and to do nothing without reference to Him, to absorb His priorities as our own and to devote all we are to fulfill those priorities, to put aside everything that comes between self and God and to choose His will and way at any cost is the great and first biblical commandment. Anything that deviates from that is contrary to God's design for humanity."²¹

Does God have a personal or individual will for our lives? Of course, He does! Questions youth often pose as a follow up will be: Does this mean that God has one specific man/woman selected to be my spouse? Does this mean that God has in mind one particular major or career that He has "predestined" for me, and my job is to find it?

The Mystery of God's Will

After all is said and done, it is well to remember that God's will is a spiritual concept, and spiritual truths must be expressed in spiritual words. Human language is far too limited in explaining this lofty principle. We stand humbly to be taught by God on a daily basis. The Bible calls God's will "a mystery" (Eph 1:9), but it is a mystery that God will gradually reveal to us as we grow in relationship with Him.

As with all spiritual truths, at best, we can only see "darkly" this side of Heaven; we cannot expect 100% full illumination due to sin. This is why our quest for God's will must include the Holy Spirit "that we understand what God has freely given us . . . not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God,

for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:12-14). So long as we are willing and ready to submit to the Spirit, God will reveal to us “the mystery of his will according to His good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ” (Eph 1:9).

The Tension Between God’s Will and the Freedom of Choice

Where does the God-given element of choice come in where the personal will that God has for our lives is concerned? Friesen proposed that where there is no moral issue involved, the believer is free to decide. Here is where several authors believe that the danger lies. With the freedom of choice comes the danger of pleasing self and being self-willed. Self-denial is not a popular theme among church circles. God requires a radical examination of our self-centered lifestyles. His will goes directly against what the greater majority of society believes in—self-aggrandizement, self-pride, self-satisfaction, self-fulfillment, self-actualization.

When we seek to do God’s will, it is imperative that one be emptied of self. Max Lucado²² warns that if we are not careful about that, Satan comes in with his distortion of the truth, and our own agenda takes over that of God’s. Many Christians actually dictate what God’s will should be for their lives, lay their own plans and expect God to bless them.

Ellen White emphasizes the fact that God will only begin His work in us when we choose to surrender our all to him.²³ This focus on God’s will rather than our will is vital for the sincere Christian. Jabez left it entirely up to God to decide what and where the blessing will be. He wanted for himself nothing more and nothing less than what God wanted for Him.²⁴ Blackaby²⁵ emphasizes that God is more interested in a personal relationship in which He can lead you on a daily basis. When He is Lord of your life, then you will be willing to do and be anything He chooses. In the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*,²⁶ Fowler links this focus on God’s will and way to the first commandment of loving God with all our heart and mind and soul. When an individual is so wrapped up in the love of God, then self will be brushed aside to make room for God’s will to work.

How can we maintain this laser-sharp focus? Only by quiet meditation of God’s Word and the time spent in His presence in earnest daily prayer can the Spirit move in our lives and teach us what the will of God is. Ellen White puts it so aptly: “The Christian life is one of daily surrender, submission, and continual overcoming, gaining fresh victories every day.”²⁷

The Expression of Choice Using Reason

This total submission and denial of self does not exclude the use of our intellect, common sense and wisdom from God to decide. II Cor 9:7 states: “Let each one do just as he purposed in his heart.” God grants wisdom to those who manifest the following spiritual characteristics:

- * *Reverence*—Prov 9:10 Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
- * *Humility*—Prov 11:2 with the humble is wisdom; Prov 15:33 before honor comes humility
- * *Teachableness*—Prov 9:9 teach a wise man and he will still be wiser;
Prov 15:31, Prov 19:20 willingness to listen
- * *Diligence*—Prov 8:17 those who diligently seek me will find me
- * *Uprightness*—Prov 2:7 God stores up sound wisdom for the upright
- * *Faith*—James 1:5, 6 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt

In his study of Paul's decision making, Smith²⁸ discovered that Paul did not simply walk blindly through an open door to Troas (II Cor 2:12-13) but left for Macedonia after weighing the factors involved. The result was that Paul was happy with that decision. (II Cor 2:14). In this decision, God did not dictate; He allowed Paul to assume the full responsibility for a most challenging decision based on Paul's own personal choice.

Some Christians maintain that God demonstrates His preferences through opening and closing doors. In the above example, Paul did not choose to go to Troas despite the fact that there was an open door. At times, many doors are open; options are available, and God does allow us to exercise our individuality using our rational powers.

Paul believed that God will fill us with "the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Col 1:9 This was his sincere prayer for the Colossians. When we maintain the right attitude (an attitude that is the same as Christ's—Phil 2:5), when we "in humility consider others better than ourselves," (Phil 2:3), are unselfish and look out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4), then we can experience what is described in Phil 2:13 where God will work in us "to will and to act according to his good purpose."

Infinite Possibilities

I picture God's individual will as a huge golf umbrella under which God has programmed "many plans (Jeremiah 29:11)" for us to choose from. When God created us with that marvelous power "to think and to do" or the power of choice, He must have provided for infinite possibilities for our individual lives. Our Almighty, Omnipotent and Omniscient God can surely see the myriad of possibilities for each person on earth when we exercise that God-given gift of choosing according to our own peculiar preferences that could all be accommodated under the vast umbrella of God's will.

As youth seek to select their majors, their careers and their life partners, God allows them to decide what and who will be best suited for them. These choices, if made in the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5), with much prayer and study of His Word, will surely be blessed by God. God is not limited to just one plan or a specific "dot" for anyone; He stands ready to accommodate our

widely different preferences when He endowed us with that ability to choose. Ellen White adds this word of advice—that our only safety lies in putting our “preferences and plans on one side, saying, ‘Not my will, but Thy will, O Lord, be done.’”²⁹

In 1 Cor 7:36, 37, Paul describes this decision-making process, and comes to the conclusion there is often more than one way, and whichever way we choose, the Lord is pleased.

If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.

Tim LaHaye³⁰ quoted A. W. Tozer, who wrote the following in a tract published by the Christian Publications of Harrisburg, PA, entitled, “How the Lord Leads”:

“Except for those things that are specifically commanded or forbidden, it is God’s will that we be free to exercise our own intelligent choice. The shepherd will lead the sheep, but he does not wish to decide which tuft of grass the sheep shall nibble each moment of the day. In almost everything touching our common life on earth, God is pleased when we are pleased. He wills that we be free as birds to soar and sing our Maker’s praise without anxiety. God’s choice for us may not be one but any one of a score of possible choices. The man or woman who is wholly and joyously surrendered to Christ cannot make a wrong choice. Any choice will be the right one.”

Another word of caution from Ellen White,³¹ however:

Fear lest self shall interpose between your soul and the great Master Worker. Fear lest self-will shall mar the high purpose that through you God desires to accomplish. Fear to trust to your own strength, fear to withdraw your hand from the hand of Christ and attempt to walk life's pathway without His abiding presence. We will only be truly free when we can proclaim with the psalmist, “I will walk at liberty for I seek Thy precepts” Psalms 119:45.

Following God’s Will Through the Good and the Bad

Some people suggest that when we take a gigantic step of faith, everything comes up roses. This surely hasn’t been my experience! Having painful and difficult things happen to you doesn’t mean that you are not in God’s will. God’s will at times calls for very uncomfortable circumstances. However, as you pray your way through a tragedy, God brings good out of the

situation. When you walk closely with God and live in obedience to Him, you can trust that you are in the center of His will, no matter what the circumstances are around you.³² Omartian, p. 178

James reminds us in the Bible that trials are to be considered a “joy.” They are tests of faith, and these develop perseverance; “perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

When Jeremiah was called to drink of the cup of tribulation and sorrow, and when tempted in his misery to say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord," he recalled the providences of God in his behalf and triumphantly exclaimed, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." Lam 3:18, 22-26.

Following God's Will Despite Ourselves

With our own sinful propensities, there is no way in which we can follow God's will on our own merits. It is only through the power that the Holy Spirit endows us with that makes doing God's will a reality in our lives. The pen of inspiration tells us:

“Talents used are talents multiplied. Success is not the result of chance or of destiny; it is the outworking of God's own providence, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and persevering effort. The Lord desires us to use every gift we have; and if we do this, we shall have greater gifts to use. He does not supernaturally endow us with the qualifications we lack; but while we use that which we have, He will work with us to increase and strengthen every faculty. By every wholehearted, earnest sacrifice for the Master's service our powers will increase. While we yield ourselves as instruments for the Holy Spirit's working, the grace of God works in us to deny old inclinations, to overcome powerful propensities, and to form new habits. As we cherish and obey the promptings of the Spirit, our hearts are enlarged to receive more and more of His power, and to do more and better work. Dormant energies are aroused, and palsied faculties receive new life.”³³

Tim LaHaye who has written extensively about the spirit-filled temperament has this observation to make.

“Through His Spirit, God has provided enormous resources that enable you to become all that He has programmed you to be . . . The two most important factors in our behavior are our inherited temperament and the motivation of the Holy Spirit. I've watched many undisciplined Sanguines, cruel Choleric, morose Melancholics, and passive Phlegmatics become filled with the Holy Spirit and experience an incredible metamorphosis”³⁴

God will, as He promised, distribute His “gifts of the Holy Spirit” according to His will (Heb 2:4). He will equip us with everything good for doing His will, and He will work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ. (Heb 13:21).

The challenge to which God calls the Christian may be too big for him/her to grasp, but God has a thousand ways of providing for us “of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet.”³⁵

Much of this goes against accepted philosophy that a choice of a major or career is dependent on an exploration of one’s strengths and inclinations alone. While these are relevant considerations in the vocational search, in God’s eyes, what is of greater importance is faith and trust in an all-powerful God who will mold and make us to be what He wills. The world’s equation for success looks like this:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{my abilities + experience + training} \\ & \quad + \text{my personality and appearance} \\ & \quad \quad + \text{my past + the expectations of others} = \text{my assigned territory} \end{aligned}$$

whereas, God’s mathematical formula for success:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{my willingness and weakness} \\ & \quad + \text{God’s will and supernatural power} = \text{my expanding territory}^{36} \end{aligned}$$

In counseling youth today, God’s formula that contains that spiritual dimension needs to be repeated often in order to flush out the secular definitions of success that the media has imprinted in their minds. It can be a struggle for youth to shun what is so attractive and mesmerizing and be committed to plain submission to the will of God. OMartian suggests some tough questions that could be used in helping the youth to assess their often faulty assumptions:

- *Do I judge myself by the world’s standard for beauty, acceptability and success?
- *Do I depend on worldly magazines and books to tell me how to live?
- *Am I willing to ignore certain convictions I have in order to find favor with other people?
- *Am I drawn toward emulating in any way the lifestyles of celebrities rather than becoming who God created *me* to be?
- *Am I willing to compromise what I know of God’s ways in order to gain something I want?

It is well to remember that “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. . . so that no one may boast before him . . . Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor 1:27, 29, 31).

The Journey of Following God's Will

The center of God's will is NOT a destination; it is a process. "God's will is a place we choose to live every day as we seek intimate relationship with the Lord, lay a solid foundation in Him and learn to walk in His way."³⁷ Attaining God's perfect will takes time, probably a life-time, and "we can never stop short of it and be fitted for heaven."³⁸

The youth need to be reminded that God is more interested in helping them find His will than they themselves are. When His will becomes a top priority, the consequence is always a closer walk and a stronger commitment to doing His will. Smith lists five results of taking seriously God's will:

- 1) personal growth
- 2) a greater sense of adventure
- 3) a deeper sense of purpose
- 4) a deeper intimacy with Christ
- 5) improved mental health³⁹

Steps to Decision Making

The steps in choosing God's will are so simple that it becomes the very reason why we don't bother to take them. As Christians, we can't be happy unless we understand God's will for our lives and are living in it. Our lives will be unfulfilled and incomplete if we are not living in God's will. Omartian has observed that we just have to look to the Lord, knowing that *He* has it all figured out and *He* will make it happen.⁴⁰

The following are steps to decision making that teachers and counselors may take the students through before they make any decision.

STEP ONE—*Submit and be willing to obey.* Unless we are willing, God will never intervene nor impose Himself on us. This was the risk He had to take when He created us as free moral agents, free to choose to accept or reject Him. In Genesis 6:22, we are told that Noah was given new life because he did *all* that God asked Him to do. When we are trying to know the will of God for your life, obedience to God's ways and God's directives are a must. We will never be in the center of God's will for our life if we are continually living in disobedience.⁴¹

As part of surrender, we need to let go of our human inclinations, our cherished hopes and dreams so that we can experience and be much more than we ever hoped or imagined. God wants us to soar like the eagles; He is eager for us to rise above our limitations; He desires to bring us to heights that we have never dared to climb—only if we are willing to take this first step in faith.

Ellen White says that when we yield our will to Christ, we ally ourselves “with the power that is above all principalities and powers.”⁴² The problem with most Christians is they don’t want to believe that God is interested in every aspect of their lives; that He seeks to grant abundant life to us even while on this earth.

STEP TWO—*Earnestly seek guidance through a daily personalized study of God’s Word, seeking for His will.* The psalmist declares: Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors” (Ps 119:24). Having the “mind of Christ” will change the way we look at options before decision making. Thinking Christianly is the aim of the believer. When we are steeped in the Word of God, we can be sure that our thinking processes will be so consecrated and sanctified that staying in the center of God’s will become increasingly more and more of an automatic reflex.

STEP THREE—*Coupled with diligent study of God’s Word, take hold of prayer, a powerful weapon against the evil around.* (Matt 7:7; Phil 4:6; Col. 1:9-10; I Thess 5:17). Prayer was a privilege created by God for *our* own sake. “It is through prayer that God allows us to take responsibility for his work in the most mature and wholesome sense, and through it we’re allowed the privilege of spiritual growth which can come no other way.”⁴³

When we are facing a major decision in life, it is critical to spend more time in prayer for the strength to do God’s will.

“Amid the perils of these last days, the only safety of the youth lies in ever-increasing watchfulness and prayer. The youth who finds his joy in reading the Word of God, and in the hour of prayer, will be constantly refreshed by drafts from the fountain of life. He will attain a height of moral excellence and a breadth of thought of which others cannot conceive. Communion with God encourages good thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth, and lofty purposes of action.”⁴⁴

In the case of the choice of a life partner, Ellen White advises that young people should double their prayer time,⁴⁵ so serious and far-reaching are the consequences of this one decision.

STEP FOUR—*Gather information; do research.* This is an important step in our choice of a major or career. This decision should be made on the basis of an informed choice, rather than to blindly follow where peers lead. Standardized instruments such as the Self-Directed Search (based on a theory developed by John Hollands) have been developed to help young people in high school or college think through their career options. (See Appendix A for more information on Hollands’ theory.) Another similar instrument is the *Career Key*, which is free and available on the website, (www.careerkey.org/english). A self-scoring instrument, it can assist young people in their search for a suitable college major leading to a career. Versions in Spanish and Chinese are available. (See Appendix B for a description of these two instruments.)

Reading along the lines of career interests, talking to professionals working in the area of their interest, or even taking a summer job that will allow them to work in that particular or related areas will all contribute to helping young people make an informed decision. Another aspect to consider is the training cost incurred in preparation for the career.

Similarly, in the case of deciding on a life partner, understanding oneself is as important as (if not more important than) choosing a career. Group dating, reading, observation, taking marriage and family classes, understanding gender differences and personality types will all contribute towards making a better informed decision. This consequential choice which has implications not only for this life but also the life to come is often made with little or no thought. Post-modern youth often go with their feelings and emotions rather than logical and careful analysis when it comes to this. Ellen White calls this “one of Satan’s special devices”⁴⁶ and it is unfortunate that he succeeds almost every other time, judging from the large number of broken marriages.

Psychological instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the Temperament Inventory and the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Inventory may be used in understanding personality. Training and certification are required in the use of these instruments.

STEP FIVE—Think things through, using a process of rational discernment in discovering God’s will. As discussed in the section “Choice Using Reason,” the Lord designed us with an intellect that we should use responsibly in the decision-making process.

In the case of a career, young people might be wise to consider the following questions: Do I have the intelligence and abilities to do this job? If I don’t, can I get the necessary knowledge and skills? Do I know how people with this occupation live on and off the job? Do I think this is a good way to live my life? Can I see myself happy doing this for many years? Do my coworkers, friends and relatives think I can succeed at this job?

Smith⁴⁷ suggests seeking an intuitive impression of the Holy Spirit’s leading.” He believes that the inner feelings--those hunches--are important after logical reasoning has taken place, but they are not the infallible voice of God although it may be part of God’s guidance. This has to be taken into perspective with validating and checking if those hunches are valid. Deep soul searching and earnest prayer that will dispel self-centeredness is essential.

*STEP SIX—Seek counsel from a variety of godly and respected people, those who know you well, Christians, those who are trained in giving advice in the area where you are seeking answers.*⁴⁸ Howard⁴⁹ compares counselors to “coaches” who are placed by God along the sidelines for us to use while on earth. These coaches may be a respected person: a mom, dad, pastor, youth minister, teacher, sponsor or just a close friend whom you respect. However, he warns youth to be careful in picking their counselors well--counselors who are qualified to help.

He also stresses the importance of going to the sidelines for help while the game is still on. When the game is over, it will be too late.

STEP SEVEN— *After accomplishing the above six steps, take a pause to look at it all from a broad perspective in reflection.* Consider seriously the element of the divine—providence working through events that come together in an uncanny sort of way (from the human standpoint). Christians don't believe in luck or chance or coincidence—only the providence of a caring heavenly Father.

Repeat any of the seven steps if necessary; then make the decision.

Recommendations to School Administrators, Counselors and Teachers

1. School administrators, counselors and teachers serve as catalysts and guides who have struggled and are struggling with similar questions. From experience, we may have access to pertinent materials or have insight as to a student's strengths or weaknesses. Our input in this area may be potentially helpful as students are often unaware of where their strengths lie. Nonetheless, we should be careful that we do not indoctrinate but be willing to share with students a process that they can learn and refine in future decision making.
2. We should not load guilt on to young people who do not see as we do but instead pray for them and patiently help them to think things through, but eventually allow the students themselves to make the decisions rather than decide for them. Choosing a major or career is not an end-all in itself; most young people explore, experiment and change majors or careers often in life. We should remember our finiteness and fallibility and refrain from pontificating "answers" when we cannot see the end from the beginning as God does.
3. Even when, in the counselor's opinion, the decision was a wrong one, it is vital to recognize that mistakes are learning opportunities. Wrong decisions may lead to inescapable consequences which can be teaching moments that the Holy Spirit can use for the students. When students fail in their choices, instead of condemning, a supportive attitude speaks much louder on behalf of Christianity. After all, our aim is to help our students move towards maturity, and dictating decisions to them or encouragement of an over-dependence on an authority figure will stifle such growth.
4. Nothing can be more relevant to young people in high school or college than for a teacher or a counselor to show an interest in their future and success in life. Leading them through that decision-making process is a most effective entering wedge to discussion of the spiritual dimension when students (Christian or otherwise) seek answers to their queries about career or life partner. This is part of a journey of application of faith to reality, a true integration of faith, learning and practice.

5. Caution should be exercised in the use of psychometric devices. Many of these “tests” are based on self-perception which may be inaccurate. Unless trained and certified, it may be wiser for teachers to refer students to counselors who have the expertise in this area rather than try to attempt an inaccurate interpretation of the results and lead the students awry. Furthermore, they lack the spiritual dimension which counselors need to supplement to ensure a holistic view.

Conclusion

It is tragic but true that even mature Christians (let alone adolescents) don’t tap into the limitless storehouse of God’s power in doing His will. They hardly know this power exists or understand the centrality of God’s will in the Christian life. They think it is only reserved for and required of prophets, apostles, or pastors but not for them. On the contrary, every Christian who sincerely seeks to do God’s will receives a product guarantee—an out-of-this-world experience of the unhindered forces of heaven accomplishing His perfect will.⁵⁰

Wilkinson⁵¹ describes it so aptly in his book, *The Prayer of Jabez*:

“Think of it this way: Instead of standing near the river’s edge, asking for a cup of water to get you through each day, you’ll do something unthinkable—you will take the little prayer with the giant prize and *jump into the river!* At that moment, you will begin to let the loving currents of God’s grace and power carry you along. God’s great plan for you will surround you and sweep you forward into the profoundly important and satisfying life He has waiting.”

In this world full of anxiety and restlessness, Christ holds out the invitation for peace and joy--possible only to those who choose to be fully committed to God’s will. After all, “God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.”⁵²

ENDNOTES

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NB: All Scripture references are from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). (1984). Zondervan Bible Publishers.

APPENDIX A

A SUMMARY OF HOLLAND'S THEORY

1. Most people fall into one of six “personality” types: *realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional*.
2. People of the same personality tend to “flock together.” For example, artistic people are attracted to making friends and working with artistic people.
3. People of the same personality type working together in a job create a work environment that fits their type. For example, when artistic persons are together on a job, they create a work environment that rewards creative thinking and behavior—an artistic environment.
4. There are six basic types of work environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional.
5. People who choose to work in an environment similar to their personality type are more likely to be successful and satisfied.
6. How you act and feel at work depends to a large extent on your workplace environment. If you are working with people who have a personality type like yours, you will be able to do many of the things they can do, and you will feel most comfortable with them.

Type	Description	Suggested Occupations	Closest	Farthest
R	Mechanical & practical	Farmer, technician, mechanic, forester, fireman, policeman, electrician, locksmith	C & I	S
I	scientific, intellectual and problem solve	scientist, geologist, archaeologist, doctor mathematician, researcher, dentist, actuary, statistician, med technologist, chemist	R & A	E
A	creative in the drama, arts, writing	editor, journalist, writer, actor, producer, playwright, artist, interior decorator, ballerina, graphic designer, comedian	I & S	C
S	love working with & helping people	social worker, teacher, PR officer, marketing executive, coordinator, nurse, counselor, teacher, supervisor, recreational therapist	A & E	R
E	good at politics, leading & selling	businessman, CEO, travel agent, fund raiser, school principal, camp director, politician, superintendent, manager, contractor	S & C	I
C	routine, and orderly	clerk, accountant, secretary, bank teller, typist, timekeeper, mail carrier, timekeeper	R & E	A

APPENDIX B

THE SELF-DIRECTED SEARCH (SDS)

Self-Directed Search® (SDS®) Form R: 4th Ed.

John L. Holland, PhD

The SDS is a simulated career counseling experience. Based on Dr John L. Holland's RIASEC theory that both people and work environments can be classified according to 6 basic types; Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC), the SDS enables individuals to choose careers and fields of study that best match their self-reported skills and interests. Extensive research has shown that people whose job and work environments most closely match their personal style and interests tend to consider themselves satisfied and successful with the occupational choices they have made.

The SDS Form R is an easy-to-use, comprehensive career exploration tool that allows people to gain insight into the world of work and, with their new self-understanding, discover an occupational "match." Individuals answer questions about their aspirations, activities, competencies, occupations, and other self-estimates and discover occupations that best fit their interests and skills. The SDS yields a 3-letter Summary Code that designates the 3 personality types and individual most closely resembles and normative data derived from a nationally representative sample of 2,602 students and working adults.

(Psychological Assessment Resources, Catalog of Professional Testing Resources, Vol 25, No. 1, Jan 2002) p. 190

THE CAREER KEY

The Career Key, designed by Lawrence K. Jones from North Carolina State University, is the only free career interest inventory available on the internet at www.careerkey.org/English. It is also available in Spanish and Chinese. Based on Hollands' theory, and validated against the Self-Directed Search, the short test can be completed in a matter of minutes, and the results will be generated. The theory is explained and a list of occupations suggested in line with interests and skills. Tips are also given to parents in guiding their children towards the choice of a college major and career. It is very user-friendly and should be seen as a decision-making aid and not a prescription of what careers fit a person. At best, it helps to narrow down the possible options.