

Careers: Choosing and Changing

In a recent survey this comment stood out:

In the last ten years I've had at least twenty jobs, reason being I never felt contented — I guess it's a matter of trying to find my "niche" and also what my fortes are. My problem is, I don't feel any more settled now than I did then.

There are many extremes in job tenure. Some people spend a lifetime changing jobs and wishing for stability while others stay a lifetime in a job they wish they could get out of. A few are like the person who told me, "I love my work and wouldn't change for anything."

At one time or another most of us have given rather serious consideration to changing jobs and even changing careers. We may have been pushed by boredom, had a new opportunity offered to us, been offered more money, experienced unemployment or had grand dreams, but seldom, if ever, is the decision an easy one. It is often seasoned with generous portions of worrying, praying, figuring, thinking and dreaming.

Our purpose here is to give a biblical and practical framework for handling career changes and choices. But first of all, we need to look at seven rather basic steps to finding God's will for this or any decision in life.

We're told in Ephesians 5:17, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." And, in Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you."

Here is a clear-cut direction and commitment from God that he is anxious for us to know his will. And it is on that basis that I suggest to you the seven steps for determining the will that God seeks for us to know.

The first step is a right relationship with God. This is a "must" before we can know his will. This relationship includes salvation, a commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives, confession of sin and a daily walk with him. In Psalm 66:18 the psalmist says, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." And in Psalm 1:1-3 we are told:

Ask God to show you his will, promising that you will wait until he does and you will obey when he does.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

That's the description of someone who has a right relationship with God!

A second step in finding God's will is the Bible. In Psalm 119:105 we read, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The Bible gives God's will for 90% of our life's decisions. Answers for the remaining 10% come from knowing and obeying the 90%!

Prayer needs to be another priority. According to I Peter 3:12, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer." Ask God to show you his will, promising that you will wait until he does and you will obey when he does. God will do it!

Next, assess the circumstances. God will use the circumstances of our lives as his instruments to mold and shape the direction in which we should go. The key here is not that we exclude circumstances but that we keep circumstances in their right order.

In addition to all this, it is important that we seek counsel. The Old Testament sage tells us in Proverbs 15:22, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." But remember, in Psalm 1 we are told that these must be godly counselors!

Let me add words of warning here. Beware of some very typical dangers in seeking counsel. The truth is that we tend to seek and listen to counsel that we want to hear. When we select someone to give us counsel, we may tend to select someone we feel is predisposed to say what we want them to say. We may interpret counsel in ways that suit us best or we may lead our counselors to tell us what we want to hear from them.

We should seek counsel from godly people who will be forthright and very direct and open with us. And we should seek those to whom we can later be accountable for our behavior.

With all of these steps followed, it's time to make a preliminary decision. Live with that decision for a specified period of time. At the same time continue searching the Bible, praying, interpreting circumstances and seeking counsel. Then finalize that decision with the conclusion that God has led to it. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." In other words, God will cause us to desire the right things as we move through each of the steps to discover his will for our lives.

After all that, the next step is action. Many people go through the steps and actually learn the will of God but they never act on their knowledge. They freeze into inaction. Instead, once God has revealed his will (and trust the process!), be responsible to act on God's will.

Discovering and doing the will of God is seldom easy or quick. It is actually a lifelong process. It takes time to find God's direction in our lives because God uses the process to shape us in the direction he wants us to go.

These steps for knowing and doing the will of God can apply to employment, marriage, church selection and every other decision of the Christian life. But for our purposes here we want to talk about changing and choosing jobs and careers.

There are lots of wrong reasons for changing jobs. The three most common reasons for job change are inadequate for Christians. They are:

- 1.) Money—simply to have more material possessions, power and security.
- 2.) Escape—simply to get away from problems you are having trouble handling.
- 3.) Status—simply to get a better job, title, company or prestige.

Money, escape and status may be factors in determining a job change but they should not be the primary reasons. Why? You can have more money and status and still be miserable, unhappy and unfulfilled. And the problems you are trying to escape will almost always come along with you to the new job.

What, then, are some possible right reasons? High on the list ought to be obedience to God's Word. Perhaps you can't work for your company and avoid lying, stealing, cheating, murder, adul-

tery or other clear commands of God. Maybe you must earn more money to provide for the needs of your family. Or it may be that in order to obey the commands of fellowship and ministry you need a different job.

To properly care for your family you may need to move to another place. I know a man who quit his job and moved his family to another city because of problems his children were having. He rightly considered the formative years of their lives more important than his career and employment. It was a great step of faith!

On the other hand, you may turn down a promotion, raise or transfer because it is not in the spiritual interests of your spouse or children to move at this time.

Another right reason for changing jobs may be ministry. Suppose God has laid it on your heart to be a witness for him in a certain place at a certain time? Maybe it's a ministry overseas that no one else can fill. Or, perhaps you may turn down a job offer because it would interrupt a ministry that God has called you to where you are now.

A fourth right reason for changing jobs may be because it will jeopardize your spiritual life. You're a new Christian and are growing significantly through the preaching, teaching, discipleship and fellowship of your church. Relocation could remove further opportunity for growth, so you say "no". Or, you've moved somewhere and discovered that you don't yet have the spiritual strength and experience to be out on your own — so you decide to transfer back to where your spiritual needs can be met. Maybe your present job puts you into situations where you are tempted to immorality or other sinful misconduct. God may call you to get a new job until you have grown spiritually and can handle that situation.

Normal transition may be another reason for a job change. You've completed a project, finished your degree or reached retirement age. All of these are good and normal reasons to seek a change in employment direction. The point is that the change grows out of God's ongoing blessing and direction in life.

Another right reason is job loss. You've been retired, laid off or fired. These are very difficult and frightening times for many people, but take this as an opportunity from God for growth and direction from him.

A seventh right reason may be lack of fulfill-

ment or a mismatch. It's altogether possible that a bad choice was made in the past that needs to be corrected in the present. Maybe you have a job that is beyond your capabilities. Or perhaps you have a job that doesn't utilize the gifts God has given you. You are clearly out-of-place where you are.

All of these may be valid reasons for a job change; however, they must be seen primarily as instruments that God uses to make his will known in our lives. Our primary purpose is still to know and do the will of God! Remember, the Bible says relatively little about what we do but it says a great deal about how we do it! Be sure that you place far more emphasis on character and performance than on actual occupation.

But there are some principles for choosing a job whether it's a first job or a career change. High on the list is to know yourself. Take time to know your gifts, your desires and your limitations. Many significant problems arise because people don't know themselves very well. We sometimes think we are great artists, insightful managers or capable secretaries when we are not at all the way we think we are.

Pray that God will show you your true self. Listen carefully to other's assessments of your abilities and skills. Be content with who you are. Don't try to be someone else. Don't seek to compete with or measure up to other people. Be God's person. Life will be a lot fuller and happier and more productive!

Be realistic. In choosing a job, seek one that best fits who and what you are. Get the data about the job and compare it to your abilities. Christian service is a grand example of a lot of unrealistic thinking. Up to Ω of all missionaries never return for a second term of service. Many people think that it is easier to be employed by a Christian organization when really it is harder. More is expected. Hours are long. Many of the same problems exist.

Some people think that a missionary gives all his or her time to Bible study. Reality is that most missionaries have less time for Bible study than the rest of us do. Reality is that many missionaries are so consumed by the strange culture, new language, oppressive climate and routine chores that they dry up spiritually.

Realism is necessary at every point of career and job selection. If you're 50 years old, you probably can't ever become an astronaut or a professional athlete or a medical doctor. You are too old! If you have a family that's dependent on you and there are few financial resources, you probably can't go back to school for ten years. If you've been fired from several jobs and have repeatedly gotten poor reviews, the problem is probably with you and not with the bosses and companies. Realism is not easy, but it is healthy. It's part of a Christian commitment to honesty. We must be honest with ourselves as well as with others.

Another principle in choosing a job is to be faithful now. If you're considering a job change, be sure to be faithful and diligent in your present job until you switch to a new one. Use your present job to learn and grow and be used by God in preparation for what's next. In fact, what happens in your future job may be dependent upon your faithfulness in your present job. Do you remember the parable of the talents in Matthew 25? God doesn't give more until we are good stewards of what he has already given to us.

Perhaps you say, "I don't have a job. How can I be faithful if I'm unemployed?" This is actually one of the best opportunities for faithfulness. Determine that you will be faithful to God through your unemployment. Trust him in difficulty as well as prosperity.

Consider your unemployment to be your job. Set goals. Put in eight hour days looking for work. Prepare for the job God will lead you to.

Faithfulness to God in your unemployment may be the key to getting the right kind of job in permanent employment.

Next, share with others. Ask friends to commit to pray with you for your job needs and changes. Seek the counsel of Christian friends and follow that counsel. Let your family and church participate in the decision that you make. And, if it comes to the matter of full-time Christian work, don't go out on your own. Seek the counsel and endorsement of your church.

A fifth principle is to dedicate your job to God. Before our children were born, Charleen and I dedicated them to the Lord. In a similar fashion, before

Use your present job to learn and grow and be used by God in preparation for what's next.

you select your career or college or sign a contract dedicate that venture to God. Specifically, give your job, income, time and life to the glory of Jesus Christ.

The bottom line is that we are all full-time workers for the Lord. He's our boss. We answer to him. We live and work for his glory.

Years ago a baby was born who was destined to die, but God intervened and saved his life. His name was Moses. Moses grew up with all the advantages of the court of Pharaoh, the emperor of Egypt. He was an aristocrat. He had a good job and a good position.

But his career switched when he was 40 years old. He left all the comfort of the court of Pharaoh and moved out into the desert to become a shepherd. He spent 40 years at this second career, a career that some would consider a far less noble job than the position he first held.

When he was 80 years old he had a career change again. This time, instead of being an aristocrat in the court of Pharaoh or a shepherd in the

desert, he became the leader of the nation of Israel, the lawgiver of Sinai, the spokesman for God himself to his people.

The God of Moses is our God, too. He directs and changes and molds and uses us giving us his direction and his will . . . all for our good and for his glory.

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
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