

Just Do Something (A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will) by Kevin DeYoung (Moody Publishers - 2009) (37 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

In speaking on knowing God's will, I have found the recent book "Just Do Something" very Biblical, practical, extremely helpful, and encouraging. The following are a few quotes I noted for your information and help. – Doug Nichols

1. Transitions into Adulthood

Consider this one statistic: In 1960, 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men completed all the transitions into adulthood by age thirty. These transitions include leaving home, finishing school, becoming financially independent, getting married, and having a child. By 2000, only 46 percent of women completed these transitions by age thirty, and only 31 percent of men. It's stunning for me to think that less than a third of men my age are done with school, out of the house, married with kids, and have a job that pays the bills. "Adulthood" is the new moral! (Page 13)

2. We Should Take Responsibility for our Future

We're tinkering around with everyone and everything. Instead, when it comes to our future, we should take some responsibility, make a decision, and do something. (Page 15)

3. The Biblical Way

The better way is the biblical way; Seek first the kingdom of God, and then trust that He will take care of our needs, even before we know what they are and where we're going. (Page 26)

4. Faith Doesn't Guarantee You Life and Prosperity

Faith in Jesus does not guarantee that everything will go our way. Look at Hebrews 11. the chapter sometimes called the faith hall of fame. Consider just the first three heroes mentioned in that chapter. As Bible commentator Bruce Waltke has pointed out, Able had faith and he died, Enoch had faith and he did not die; Noah had faith and everyone else died! So just having faith does not guarantee your life—or the lives of those around you—will be all candy canes and lollipops. Life isn't always fun, and we shouldn't expect it to be. (Page 29-30)

5. Some People Never Settle Down

Too many young people today have no stability, no certainty, no predictability, little decisiveness, and lots of self-doubt. It takes longer and longer for people to settle down. And some never do. I'm not advocating that everyone move back to his hometown and take whatever job is available (though that would be at least a step toward something for some people). Some of you should go overseas and others will move to new places. But I am advocating floundering less, making a difference for God sooner and—above all—not spiritualizing, year after year, our inability to make decision in the elusive quest to

discover God's will. I'm arguing that our eagerness to know God's will is probably less indicative of a heart desperately wanting to obey God and more about our heads spinning with all the choices to be made. (Page 37-38))

6. Many of us are Extremely Passive and Cowardly

Esther was more than most men I know, myself included. Many of us—men and women—are extremely passive and cowardly. We don't take risks for God because we are obsessed with safety, security, and most of all, with future. That's why most of our prayers fall into one of two categories. Either we ask that everything would be fine or we ask to know that everything will be fine. We pray for health, travel, jobs—and we should pray for these things. But a lot of prayers boil down to, "God, don't let anything unpleasant happen to anyone. Make everything in the world nice for everyone." And when we aren't praying this kind of prayer, we are praying for God to tell us that everything will be fine. (Page 40)

7. God Speaks to us through Scripture

Obsessing over the future is not how God wants us to live, because showing us the future is not God's way. His way is to speak to us in the Scripture and transform us by the renewing of our minds. His way is not a crystal ball. His way is wisdom. We should stop looking for God to reveal the future to us and remove all risks from our lives. We should start looking to God—His character and His promises—and thereby have confidence to take risks for His name's sake.

God is all knowing and all powerful. He has planned out and works out every detail of our lives—the joyous days and the difficult—all for our good (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Because we have confidence in God's will of decree, we can radically commit ourselves to His will of desire, without fretting over a hidden will of direction. (Page 41)

8. God Holds the Future

God has a wonderful plan for your life—a plan that will take you through trial and triumph as you are transformed into the image of His Son (Romans 8:28-29). Of this we can be absolutely confident. But God's normal way of operation is not to show this plan to us ahead of time—in retrospect, maybe, in advance, rarely.

Are you feeling directionally changed by this? Don't despair. God promises to be your sun and your shield and to carry you and protect with His strong right arm. So we can stop pleading with God to show us the future, and start living and obeying like we are confident that He holds the future. (Page 42)

9. God's Priorities for Us

The most important issues for God are moral purity, theological fidelity, compassion, joy our witness, faithfulness, hospitality, love, worship, and faith. These are His big concerns. The problem is that we tend to focus most of our attention on everything else. We obsess over the things God has not mentioned and may never mention, while, by

contrast, we spend little time on all the things God has already revealed to us in the Bible. (Page 44-45)

10. We should spend more time Walking humbly with God

Of course, this doesn't mean we shouldn't be thoughtful in choosing a career, nor that we should ignore how God wired us or the command to do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). My point is that we should spend more time trying to figure out to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (as indicated in Micah 6:8) as a doctor or lawyer and less time worrying about whether God wants us to be a doctor or lawyer. (Page 45)

11. God does not hide things from His People

Just to be clear, God does not hide things from His people. There are lots of scenarios we don't know, lots of mysteries we can't figure out. There is a well of decree that is not usually known to the people of God (Deuteronomy 29:29). But He is not trying to confuse us or hide truth. In the conventional view of God's will, however, we get the impression that He not only hides His will from us, but He then *expects* us to find it. So we obsess over God's will of direction, eventually getting frustrated with God for not showing us what He wants. We end up disappointed with ourselves or angry with God because we can't seem to figure out how to find God's will for our lives. (Page 46)

12. God is in Control of our Lives

And so we obsess about the future and we get anxious, because anxiety, after all, is simply living out of the future before it gets here. But listen to what James says:

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go unto such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this and that." (James 4:13-15).

This is one of the clearest texts on the sovereignty of God. If we make it to the grocery store this afternoon, according to James, the Lord willed it. If we live to be a hundred, the Lord willed it. If we live to be only forty-five, the Lord willed it. We don't have to say, "If the Lord wills" after every sentence, but it must be in our head and hearts. We must live our lives believing that all our plans and strategies are subject to the immutable will of God. Therefore, we should be humble in looking to the future because we don't control it; God does. And we should be hopeful in looking to the future because God controls it, not us. (Page 47-48)

13. Anxiety is a Sin

This brings us back to anxiety, our tendency to live out the future before it arrives. We must renounce our sinful desire to know the future and be in control. We are not gods.

We walk by faith, not by sight. We risk because God does not risk. We walk into the future in God-glorifying confidence, not because the future is known to us but because it is known to God. And that's all we need to know. Worry about the future is not simply a character tic. it is the sin of unbelief, an indication that our hearts are not resting in the promises of God. (Page 48).

14. Passivity is a Plague among Christians

When it comes to most of our daily decisions, and even a lot of life's "big" decisions, God expects and encourages us to make choices, confident that He's already determined how to fit our choices into His sovereign will. Passivity is a plague among Christians. It's not just that we don't do anything; it's that we feel spiritual for not doing anything. We imagine that our inactivity is patience and sensitivity to God's leading. At times it may be; but it's also quite possible we are just lazy. When we hyper-spiritualize our decisions, we can veer off into impulsive and foolish decisions. But more likely as Christians we fall into endless patterns of vacillation, indecision, and regret. No doubt; selfish ambition is a danger for Christians, but so is complacency, listless wandering and passivity that pawns itself off as spirituality. Perhaps our inactivity is not so much waiting on God as it is an expression of the fear of man, the love of the praise of men, and disbelief in God's providence. (Page 51-52)

15. Finding God's will shouldn't put us in Confusion, but in Freedom

This highlights one of the great ironies above the will-of-God talk among Christians. If there really is a perfect will of God we are meant to discover, in which we will find tremendous freedom and fulfillment, why does it seem that everyone looking for God's will in such bondage and confusion? Christ died to give us freedom from the law (Galatians 5:1), so why turn the will of God into another law leading to slavery? And, to make matters worse, this law is personalized, invisible, and indecipherable; whereas the Mosaic law (which was hard enough already), was at least objective, public, and understandable. What a burden. Expecting God, through our subjective sense of things, to point the way for *every* decision we face, no matter how trivial, is not only impractical and unrealistic, it is a recipe for disappointment and false guilt. And that's hardly what intimacy with Jesus should be all about. (Page 54)

16. Worry and Anxiety are Sins

Worry and anxiety are not merely bad habits or idiosyncrasies. They are sinful fruits that blossom from the root of unbelief. Jesus doesn't treat obsession with the future as a personal quirk, but as evidence of little faith (Matthew 6:30). Worry and anxiety reflect our hearts' distrust in goodness and sovereignty of God. Worry is a spiritual issue and must be fought with faith. We must fight to believe that God has mercy for today's troubles and, no matter what may come tomorrow, that God will have new mercies for tomorrow's troubles (Lamentations 3:22-23). God's way is not to show us what tomorrow looks like or even to tell us what decisions we should make tomorrow. That's

not His way because that's not the way of faith. God's way is to tell us that He knows tomorrow, He cares for us, and therefore, we should not worry. (Page 56-57)

17. Ordinary Guidance & Supernatural Surprises

I have been making the case that God's will is not an unexplained labyrinth whose center we are supposed to discover. God's will for our lives is much simpler than this conventional approach. The will of God for our lives is that we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. The most important decision we face is the daily decision to live for Christ and die to self.

If we do those two things, then we are free to choose between jobs and schools and locations. God wants us to stop obsessing about the future and trust that He holds the future. We should put aside the passivity and the perfectionism and the quest for perfect fulfillment and get on with our lives. God does not have a specific plan for our lives that He means for us to decipher ahead of time. (Page 63)

18. God guides us in decision making

"God guides us in decision making." I did not say "God expects us to discover His plan for our lives." The difference between the two sentences is huge. We are not talking about how God reveals to us ahead of time every decision we must make in life. Yes it's proper for Christians to pray to God and seek wisdom from God when we face decisions, even nonethical decisions. That's not a bad idea. What is a bad idea is treating nonethical decisions as weightier than they really are because you think that there is One Right Answer that you must discover. (Page 64)

19. How Does God Guide?

What's also a bad idea is expecting God to tell what to do whenever we are perplexed. Hebrews 1:1-2 is a key text for understanding how God speaks to us in the new covenant" "Long ago, at many times and many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom He also created the world." (Page 64)

20. God Speaks to us by His Son, through the Bible

God continues to speak to us by His Son through His Spirit in the scriptures. When Hebrews was written, Jesus Christ was no longer speaking audibly in person. Jesus has already died, rose again, and ascended to heaven. Jesus would no longer be seen. You could not meet with Him face-to-face. But He was still speaking. So how?

Hebrews opens under the assumption that the Son's speaking takes place through the Spirit in the Scripture. The Theology of Hebrews is rooted in the Old Testament. In fact, there are several mini commentaries on Old Testament text: Psalm 2 in Hebrews 2, Psalm 110 in Hebrews 5-7, Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 8-9, Psalm 40 in Hebrews 10 and Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3-4. In these two chapters (Hebrews 3 and 4), the author is

warning against unbelief. And so the writer quotes from Psalm 95: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as [you did in rebellion]” (v 7-8).

It may be a good idea to open the Bible for yourself at this point so you can see how the author of Hebrews uses the Old Testament text. In Hebrews 3:7, the author writes, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,” and then He quotes from Psalm 95. Remarkably, the words of Scripture, written a thousand years prior, can be introduced with the words “the Holy Spirit says.” Scripture is not a dead letter. God not only *has spoken* in the Scripture, but *continues to speak* through the Scriptures. That’s the assumption behind Hebrews 3:7.

The rest of Hebrews 3, and continuing into chapter 4, is nothing but a commentary on Psalm 95. The psalm is quoted again in 3:15 and 4:3 and in 4:7, where the author says for the third time, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.” And where do we hear this voice? That’s the question that concerns us. We’ve already seen that God speaks through His Son in these last days, and that the Holy Spirit still speaks in the Scriptures, and now we receive further confirmation that God continues to speak in the Bible.

Thus Hebrews 4:12, which brings this little commentary on Psalm 95 to a close, says, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (NIV).

So the argument in Hebrews 1-4 goes like this: (1) God can speak in many ways. (2) In these last days, God has spoken by his Son. (3) God speaks to us by His Son through the Holy Spirit speaking by the living and active Word of God. Which brings us to the last statement concerning God’s guidance (Page 67-68)

21. God will not speak to apart from His Spirit

We have no promise in Scripture that God will speak to us apart from the Spirit speaking through His Word. (Page 69)

22. No Angelic Visions

You don’t get them sense that the apostle got angelic visits every other day and waited for his dreams to tell him what to do. With few exceptions, Paul planned, strategized and made his own decisions about the nonmoral matters of his life. (Page 70)

23. God generally always speaks to us through the Bible

I want to make sure with everything else I am saying in a book about seeking the will of God as revealed in the Scripture for right decision making that you don’t think I am suspicious every time someone claims to have heard from the Lord. Candidly, though, I’m just not blown away by these claims, either. If you think you’ve heard from God, I’m

not ready to lock you up in the psych word, nor am I ready to bless whatever you “heard” because you think God said it. Hearing from God directly can be important and legitimate, but I certainly wouldn’t treat a special impression from the Lord as more special than the sure word of the Lord found in the Bible (Page 74)

24. God uses discomfort and trials to make holy

Here’s the bottom line: If God opens the door for you to do something you know is good or necessary, be thankful for the opportunity. But other than that don’t assume that the relative ease or difficulty of a new situation is God’s way of telling you to do one thing or the other. Remember, God’s will for your life is your sanctification, and God tends to use discomfort and trials more than comfort and ease to make us holy. (Page 78-79)

25. Gideon’s Request of God

Now I know that Gideon asked God for some special dew. But there are good reasons to think Gideon’s request is not a normative example. For starters, Gideon didn’t have a Bible. More than likely, he didn’t have a single page of God’s inspired Word of his own. More importantly, the book of Judges generally does not provide a good example of much of anything. When the theme of the book is “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25), we should think twice before copying whatever practices or attitudes we find in its chapters. Gideon’s request was probably an indication of cowardice and unbelief more than faithful, wise decision making. (Page 80)

26. You cannot be governed by only a single verse of text

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them in the first verse they should cast their eyes upon. It is no small discredit to this practice that the heathens, who knew not the Bible, used some of their favorite books in the same way . . . for if people will be governed by the occurrence of a single text of Scripture, without regarding the context, or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the great impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side. (John Newton) (Page 83)

27. Just Because the Matter Was Bathed in Prayer Doesn’t Always Make It God’s Will

On a related note, we need to be careful that we don’t absolutize our decisions just because we pray about them. Church boards or denominational committees are often guilty of putting their decisions out of reach, because “the matter was bathed in prayer.” Certainly prayer makes a big difference. I more apt to listen to others or be listened to if there has been a season of earnest prayer. But impressions of the Lord’s leading after prayer are all still impressions. We cannot infallibly judge the rightness or wrongness of our plans based on the feelings we have about them after prayer. We may feel anxious, even after prayer, about a hard task we really should not avoid. Conversely, we can also

deceive ourselves, wanting something so badly that we imagine the Lord is answering us according to our wishes. That's why I will not put God's infallible seal of approval on the plans of our church board just because we prayed about them. I will encourage the church to trust their leaders, and assure them we asked for wisdom and prayed to be submissive to the Lord, but on issues not clearly laid out in Scripture, I don't want to claim more authority for our plans than the nature of impressions allows. (Page 84-85)

28. Open doors fleeces, random Bible verses have their place

Open the doors, fleeces, random Bible verses, and impressions, if constructed in the right way, have their place in the Christian's life. But in my experience, these tools have been wielded for more harm than good. They are easily abused, manipulated, and lend themselves to superstition.

A far better approach is once again laid out by John Newton: "In general, he [God] guides and directs his people by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them to understand and to love the Scriptures. The Word of God is not to be used as a lottery; nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached from their proper place, have no determinative import; but it is to furnish us with just principles, right apprehensions to regulate our judgment and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct."

There's a word for this approach to guidance and the will of God—wisdom. It's not sexy, and it requires no secret decoding. But it is the way to "understanding righteousness and justice and equality, every good path" (Proverbs 2:9) (Page 85-86)

29. Take the God Centered Approach

Wisdom is what we need to live a godly life. God does not tell us the future, nor does He expect us to figure it out. When we don't know which way to turn and are faced with tough decisions in life, God doesn't expect us to grope in the dark for some hidden will of direction. He expects us to trust Him and to be wise. This is the theme of Proverbs; especially chapter 2. Consider verses 1-6 (NIV)

My son, if you accept my words, and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you will look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

Page 88-89)

30. God doesn't reveal the future of our lives to us

Isn't it interesting that we are never told in Scripture to ask God to reveal the future or to show us His plan for our lives? But we are told—in no uncertain terms—to call out for

insight and to cry aloud for understanding. In other words, God says, “Don’t ask to see the plans I’ve made for you. Ask Me for wisdom so you’ll know how to live according to My Book.” (Page 90)

31. Seek wisdom through Bible reading, prayer, and sound advice

So how do we get this valuable wisdom? Our text mentions three ways. The first way to get wisdom is to store up God’s commands (1). The second way is to turn your ear to wisdom (2). And the third way is to call out for insight (3). To put these ways into familial language, we could say we get wisdom by reading our Bibles (storing up God’s commands), listening to sound advice (turning our ears to wisdom), and praying to God (calling out for insight). The second and third are nearly interchangeable because when God gives us wisdom, He most often gives it through other people. But for the sake of organization we’ll look at them as distinct.

(Page 90, 91)

32. How the Christian Life works

Romans 12:1-2 is the classic text about this kind of spiritual transformation.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

There are three commands here: (1) Present your bodies as living sacrifices. (2) Do not conform to the world. (3) Be transformed by the renewal of your mind. If we do these three, then we will be able to discern what God’s will is. This is how the Christian life works. There are no shortcuts. We don’t get secret messages that tell us whether to drop the entomology minor. God wants us to offer ourselves to Him, turn from the way of the world, and be transformed. Then we will have something better than special revelations and words about the future—we’ll have wisdom. (Page 92-93)

33. We become what we Behold

God wants us to sit at His feet and read His Word so that we can live a life in the image of His Son. God doesn’t tell us the future for this simple, yet profound reason: “We become what we behold. God wants us to behold Him in His glory so that we can be transformed into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). If God figured everything out for us, we wouldn’t need to focus on Him and learn to delight in His glory. God says, “I’m not giving you a crystal ball. I’m giving you My Word. Meditate on it; see Me in it; and become like Me.” (Page 94)

34. Walk the Way of Wisdom: Counsel

Those who are wise read and memorize Scripture. They love to hear it read, preached, and sung. But the wise also know you need to read the Bible in community. You need to listen to what other Bible reading Christians say. If we want to make wise decisions, we must seek advice and counsel from others. This is especially true when dealing with nonethical choices or decisions that aren't always laid out in Scripture. It's not that we always listen to the majority in everything, or that the decisions we make will always please everyone, or that every friend in your circle must be consulted before making a decision. But when God's Word doesn't speak directly, or when the matter facing us isn't even considered in Scripture, it is wise to listen to other Christians.

Consider these words from Proverbs:

Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance (1:5)

The way of a fool is wise in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice (12:15)

Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisors they succeed (15:22)

Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future (19:20) (Page 94-45)

35. Walk the Way of Wisdom: Prayer

The way of wisdom means three things: searching the Scriptures, seeking wise counsel, and praying to God. But what do we pray for if we aren't asking God to tell us exactly what to do? Well, first of all we pray for illumination. We ask God to open our minds so we can understand the Scripture and apply them to our lives. Don't forget about this prayer. God can show you amazingly relevant things in His Word if you ask Him to. Second, pray for wisdom. We have not because we ask not. God *wants* us to make good decisions that will help us be more like Christ and bring Him glory. Third, pray for things you already know are God's will. Pray for good motives in your decision making. Pray for an attitude of trust and faith and obedience. Pray for humility and teachability. Pray for His gospel to spread. You know that He wants those things in the world and for your life. Pray for them. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, as Jesus asked us to (Matthew 6:33).

And then after you've prayed and studied and sought advice, make a decision and don't hyper-spiritualize it. Do what seems best. Sometimes you won't have time to pray and read and seek counsel for a month. That's why the way of wisdom is more that getting a decisive word about one or two big decisions in life. The way of wisdom is the way of life. And when it's a way of life, you are freer then to realize. If you are drinking deeply of godliness in the Word and from others and in your prayer life, then you'll probably make God honoring decisions. In fact, if you are a person of prayer, full of regular good counsel from others, and steeped in the truth of the Word, you should begin to make many important decisions instinctively, and some of them even quickly. For most Christians, agonizing over decisions is the only sure thing we know to do, the only thing that feels

safe and truly spiritual. But sometimes, often-times actually, it's okay to just decide. (Page 96-97)

36. The best way of Life

Study the Scripture, listen to others, and pray continually—that's the best course of action, not just at the moment of crisis, but as a way of life. And as you engage in these practices, don't forget to make a decision—always with wisdom, always with freedom, and sometimes even with speed. (Page 98)

37. A Life Lived not in Vain

The will of God isn't a special direction here or a bit of secret knowledge there. God doesn't put us in a maze, turn out the lights, and tell us, "Get out and good luck." In one sense, we trust in the will of God as His sovereign plan for our future. In another sense, we obey the will of God as His good word for our lives. In no sense should we be scrambling around trying to turn to the right page in our personal choose-your-own-adventure novel.

God's will for your life and my life is simpler, harder, and easier than that. Simpler because there are no secrets we must discover. Harder, because denying ourselves, living for others, and obeying God is more difficult than taking a new job and moving to Fargo. Easier, because Augustine said, God commands what He wills and grants what He commands.

In other words, God give His children the will to walk in His way—not by reveling a series of next steps cloaked in shadows, but by giving us a heart to delight in His law.

So the end of the matter is this: Live for God. Obey the Scriptures. Think of others before yourself. Be holy. Love Jesus. And as you do these things, do whatever else you like, with whomever you like, wherever you like, and you'll be walking in the will of God. (Page 121-122)

Just Do Something (A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will) by Kevin DeYoung (Moody Publishers - 2009)