

Discerning God's Will



How do we discern God's will in our lives and the church? How do we know which path to take when we are confronted with dissenting voices and differing perspectives? Here are some basic principles of Presbyterian polity that may help us understand the difficult process of distinguishing God's will from our own.

1. **Equality of members.** No one person or group of persons should dominate a debate. Commitment to the Presbyterian form of governance empowers each person to express his or her opinion. Silence and non-participation should be discouraged.
2. **Bipartisan approaches are encouraged.** God is neither a liberal nor a conservative. We must resist the temptation to create God in our image.
3. **Caution in deliberation and discernment.** I have often joked that Presbytery has to move at the pace of its slowest thinkers. In discussion on a heated topic, a slower pace allows us to cool off and make decisions with calm judgment. Remember, a great idea today will still be a great idea next week.
4. **Freedom of expression.** Encouraging Presbyterians to express divergent opinions is not the same as filibustering. While openness to a variety of opinions and perspectives builds trust, filibustering fosters a spirit of suspicion.
5. **Explore all sides.** To discern God's will, a committee or court must have all pertinent information before it to be openly discussed. Creative decision making begins by examining all sides of an issue. If we hear only the ideas and perspectives with which we agree, how do we discern the prophetic voices in our midst?
6. **The Good News is related to possibility.** Rather than hurrying a vote, a committee or court might decide to seek more information and develop creative alternatives. It is natural for humans to draw lines and create boxes to contain our ideas and frame our actions, but the good news is that there is no box!
7. **Don't rush.** Good decision-making takes time, information and prayer.
8. **The role of community.** We discern God's will together as a community of God's children called to live faithful lives in church and society.

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