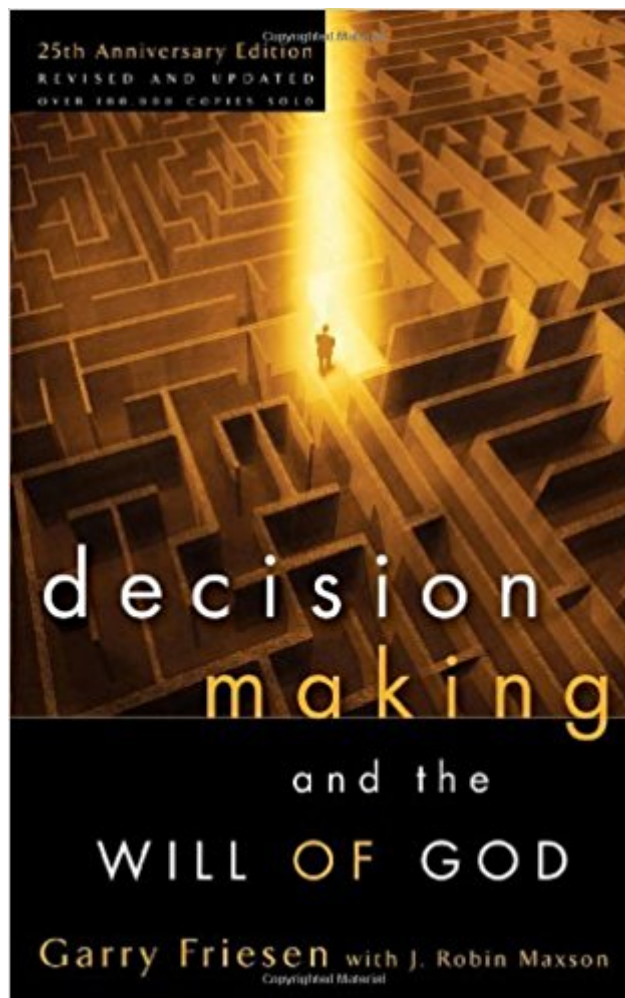




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# Decision Making And The Will Of God: A Biblical Alternative To The Traditional View



## Synopsis

Does God Have a Perfect Will for Your Life? Does God have a perfect will for each Christian? Can you be absolutely certain of God's specific will for your life? In this expanded twenty-fifth anniversary edition of his highly acclaimed work, Garry Friesen examines the prevalent view on God's will today and provides a sound biblical alternative to the traditional teaching of how God guides us. This new edition includes these helpful resources:

• Study guide for small groups  
• Responses to Frequently Asked Questions  
• Guide to painless Scripture memorization

Friesen tackles the very practical issues of choosing a mate, picking a career, and giving in this fresh and liberating approach to decision making and the will of God. Story Behind the Book

Most Christians have been taught how to find God's will, yet many are still unsure whether they've found it. God does guide His people, but the question is, "How does He guide?" After "putting out a fleece" to decide which college to attend, Garry Friesen began pondering why it was so hard to find God's will when he had so sincerely sought it. Was he the only one who did not have 100 percent clarity for every decision? Then a new possibility struck • perhaps his understanding of the nature of God's will was biblically deficient. Maybe there was a better way to understand HOW God guides.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Garry Friesen, ThM, ThD, is a member of the Bible faculty at Multnomah Bible College, where he has taught since 1976. Dr. Friesen holds a bachelor's degree from John Brown University and a master's degree and doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary. He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he enjoys hosting Bible reading marathons and collecting C. S. Lewis memorabilia. J. Robin Maxson, ThM, is senior pastor of United Evangelical Free Church in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

This book by Garry Friesen (with J. Robin Maxson) was originally published by Multnomah Press back in 1980 as part of their A Critical Concern Book series. I purchased *Decision Making and the Will of God (A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View)* shortly before flying to India on a summer mission trip in 1981. I had been taught what Friesen calls the traditional view and was unaware that there was an alternative. Little did I know that this book with the strange looking cover (different from the one pictured here) would turn my view of this subject around a 180 degrees. I originally read Friesen's book in 1981, again in 1984 and a third time this past summer. The cover of the book I read was quite different from the more recent republished edition (2004) available on Amazon (see original in photo below). Most books I see on this popular subject are often little more than pamphlets and others are maybe 125 pages at best. Friesen's 430-page volume (not counting indices) resulted from his own struggles with "finding God's will" and eventually spawned from his seminary doctoral dissertation, "God's Will As It Relates To Decision Making" (ThD) at Dallas Theological Seminary (1978). Having said this, Friesen's book is not so theologically minded that it is over the head of most readers; not at all. Though he does show the reader how to maneuver in, around and through key Bible texts pertaining to the doctrine of God's will in quite some detail, none of this book is beyond the grasp of anyone who is willing to patiently and systematically engage and investigate what the Bible reveals. However, if you're in hurry to discover a 7-step method to discovering God's will for your life, then this is not the book for you. This book is definitely no page-turner. Friesen divides his survey (his word, not mine) into four parts: (1) "You Have heard It Said (The Traditional View Presented)", (2) "The Case of the Missing `Dot' (The Traditional View Critiqued)", (3) "The Way of Wisdom (The Wisdom View Explained)", and (4) "Deciding the Big Ones (The Wisdom View Applied)." In his Introduction, Friesen reveals his anxiety over why the question that had occupied most of his waking thoughts for years was seemingly so elusive; the one that would eventually become the most important decision of his young Christian life . . . , "Where should I go to college?" In his search, Friesen eventually came to three possibilities concerning discovering God's will: 1. Perhaps God was unable to reveal His will. 2. Perhaps there was sinfulness or insincerity on

Friesen's part.3. Perhaps Friesen's understanding of the nature of God's will was biblically deficient. Friesen eventually came to the understanding that it was his own biblically deficient understanding of the nature of God's will that propelled him to start all over again and approach this subject afresh. Since his conclusions differ significantly from what Friesen calls "The Traditional View" he decided to call his viewpoint "An Alternative View." At first I thought Friesen was making the same cardinal error of too many other authors by first constructing the proverbial "straw man." How disappointing is that? But curiously Friesen confessed in his Introduction that he ". . . intended to give an accurate overview of the teaching most often presented . . . of the traditional view." He admits that he would present a fictional seminar that would cover in some detail the important points of that viewpoint. He would use this content to later compare, contrast and evaluate the two views. (Hmmm). I won't go into the information Friesen presents, but by the time I finished reading about the fictional seminar I was amazed at just how similar it was to what I had been taught . . . and believed. Friesen developed what he believes are four essential questions as guides in his early conclusions about God's will: 1. Definition: What does "God's will" mean? 2. Proof: Does God have a plan for my life? 3. Process: How can I discover God's will? 4. Certainty: How can I know God's will for sure in a specific situation? Though I won't go into detail about these questions, I do think it important to mention Friesen's definitions from question #1 above; his three categories of God's will: (1) His Sovereign will, (2) His Moral will, and (3) His individual will. He refers to these in great detail throughout the rest of the book so understanding these are very important. One of the devices Friesen used effectively was after he covered a section, he inserted a well-designed chart that briefly summarized the material covered. Considering the large volume of information Friesen was going to cover, these charts (Figures) clearly captured the essence of his survey and were handy tools for review. On the other hand, I found his circular graphs less helpful. What separated this book from all of the other books I have read on this subject was Friesen's willingness and ability to formulate good questions that spoke to the heart of the issue of God's will. One of the really tough ones was "Does God Have Three Wills?" His answer to that question, again, separated his viewpoint from the traditional teaching on this subject. But asking questions is one thing; proving your thesis is another. This is where I thought Friesen excelled. His decision to exegete all of the key texts on God's will and painstakingly hold them up to the light of biblical scrutiny was labor intensive, both for himself and the reader. But the positive outcome was well worth the time. After developing his model (The Way of Wisdom), Friesen spends Section 3 explaining and demonstrating how it worked. In the second half of the book, and this is where he appears to have lost quite a number of readers, Friesen labors at applying his model to the most common "Big Ones", those decisions everyone

asks about: Marriage, ministry, missions, vocation, education, etc., etc. He wraps up this long book with a brief, 4-page summary of what he calls his Principles of Decision Making. I enjoyed my most recent read of this book, probably even more than the first two. I particularly appreciated Friesen's citing research material and the additional information contained in his footnotes; though I would have preferred that he post his footnotes at the bottom of the applicable page rather than at the end of the chapter. I know this form of footnoting is old school, but it still benefits the reader over the publisher, especially in a somewhat technical book like this one. And like any other book that shakes our traditional viewpoint on biblical matters, Friesen has received a grand amount of criticism. Most of the criticism has centered on the claim that Friesen has removed God from the Christian's decision making. Whether this is true or not is up to each reader who must patiently and diligently follow Friesen through his study. This book is not a sprint to the finish line; instead it's a marathon, and one worth running. In closing, Friesen has a few words for those who after reading his book are still unsure whether to agree or disagree with his alternative to the traditional view of decision making: "For the one who is not sure whether he agrees or disagrees, his response is most crucial. First, he should make it a goal to search the Scripture concerning guidance so that he may become fully convinced before the Lord. Second, he should not begin following this new presentation of guidance until he 'is' fully convinced. He should continue to follow his previous conviction so that his actions will be of faith and not of doubt (Romans 14:23). If he is not sure, but goes ahead and attempts to follow the way of wisdom, doubts and self-condemnation are likely to follow (Romans 14:22-23). He should follow the traditional view until he is convinced of another view."

This book addresses a very popular approach to Christian decision-making; it was truly refreshing and empowering. It's college reading level, but it would really be good for high school students to read and understand. It would make an excellent group-study book; there is also a study guide in the back which could be helpful. The material is logical and thought-provoking. To start with, this is a persuasive book. One of the most important things for me, when reading any persuasive material, is the writer's understanding of the counter-argument. If you don't understand both sides, what the other guys think, you shouldn't be trying to persuade people otherwise. In the first part of the book, Garry Friesen, sets up a fictional story to illustrate "the traditional view" and gives an outline of that view; it's accurate and clear. Another thing I look for is whether or not the writer belittles or rails against the opposing view. Again, this book is free of that; it's logical and even-handed. For subject material, the topic is decision-making as the title says. The writer's view is a practical approach to decision making that empowers the individual to make their own decisions wisely according to

Biblical principles. This book will either help you to understand why you, as a Christian, approach decision making in the way that you do, or it will clearly explain a different approach to you. Either way, I highly recommend this book.

One of the things this book deals with is how specifically God guides us when we make decisions. It is very helpful by showing us that there are many times that God lets us choose and doesn't tell us exactly what to do. Looking for God's specific guidance when doesn't choose to give it can drive a person crazy and this book help correct that but, unfortunately, he does not account enough for the times He DOES give specific individual guidance which is a big failure of this book

As someone who thought that God insisted on planning every little detail in my life and feeling false guilt whenever I felt I had missed it, this book was a relief. Don't get me wrong, I believe that God does give specific guidance when its needed, but being reminded of how much freedom we actually do have especially when we seek wisdom, is quite refreshing. I do know some people that want God to make every decision for them and I don't knock them at all, I did at one point but I could never be fully sure if it was God or if it was my own feelings. It would quickly become a case of paralysis by analysis. I agree with the authors, keep to what's written and trust God to give wisdom in areas that aren't expressly mentioned in the Bible.

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