

TITLE – KNOWING GOD’S WILL (GOALS & DESIRES)**SCRIPTURE READING – 1 PETER 3:10-16****OPENING PRAYER**

Our Gracious heavenly Father, I pray that you would bless this meeting as we fellowship together and examine your Word.

Please give me the words to be an encouragement and a blessing.

Please teach us how to be good witnesses and reach people for you.

We pray these things in the precious name of Jesus Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING – 1 PETER 3:8-16 or 1 PETER 3:15 (NIV)1

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

“Whoever would love life

and see good days

must keep their tongue from evil

and their lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good;

they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

and his ears are attentive to their prayer,

but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

A. INTRODUCTION – IMPORTANT TO KNOW GOD’S WILL

I would like to share with you, about how to know God’s will for your life.

I worked for many years with my father, Neil Verwey, who founded JAPAN MISSION.

After he passed away in 2013, I was faced with many responsibilities.

I thought and prayed much about what God’s will was for my life and the direction the Lord wanted the JAPAN MISSION to take.

I realized that if we were not in the center of God’s will, we could make some very serious mistakes.

I would like to share a couple of illustrations with you regarding God’s will:

1. MISSIONARY OUT OF GOD’S WILL – ILLUSTRATION

One dedicated missionary from SOUTH AFRICA approached us, saying that he would like to take meetings in the USA.

He was a blessing to us as he preached the Word.

We helped him get to the USA, and introduced him to various contacts.

When he returned to Japan, I will never forget his words.

He told us, “I never felt so out of the will of the Lord as when I was in the USA!”

This was a valuable lesson to me.

I learned that no matter how good, or even spiritual the opportunity seemed, we need to take care to discern the Lord’s will as we make decisions.

2. MISSIONARY WONDERING ABOUT HER FUTURE – ILLUSTRATION (Annie, 2014)

One of our older workers recently approached me saying,

“Would it not be better if a younger person rode all of these trains to teach English at these churches.

I told her that the Lord may even call an older person.
The important thing was not the age, but that she was assured that she was in the center of God's will.

I often tell our workers when they wonder if they should continue to serve with us:
"Do not be moved by the need."
"God will raise up a person to meet the need."
"The important thing is that we inquire and follow the Lord's guidance."

Various things can hinder us from realizing God's will for our lives.

B. OUR WORRIES CAN HINDER

As we ask God to guide us, we need to be careful not to let our worries stop us from realizing God's plan for our lives.

Worry can cause us to lose focus and have sleepless nights.
It can also lead to all kinds of physical problems and cause us to entirely miss the Lord's will for our lives.

It was Corrie Ten Boom who said:
"Worrying is carrying tomorrow's load with today's strength – carrying two days at once.
It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time.
Worrying does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow.
It empties today of its strength."

1. SLEEPLESS NIGHTS – ILLUSTRATION

I have many things I could worry about.
Our safety, travel plans, the finances, the work and personnel at Japan Mission.
Sometimes the concerns help me to be diligent in planning and avoid problems.
I may set two alarm clocks instead of one if I have to wake up early.
I may leave early so that I am not late for an appointment.

However, there are other times when worry keeps me awake at night.
It is then that I make a decision not to think on these things.

I start to pray and surrender them to the Lord.
As one man said, "If you can't sleep, don't count sheep talk to the Shepard..."
I start to count my blessings instead of sheep, as I drift off to sleep.
I then find myself waking up the next morning refreshed.

Please remember:
It is not the Lord's will that we worry about things we cannot control.

This is how the Lord helps us live a victorious life.

C. GOOD GOALS AND BAD GOALS

To live a victorious life is to live according the will of God.
As we seek to do this – we find it necessary to differentiate between good and bad goals.
I would like to mention two examples:

1. MOTHER

(i). A bad goal for a mother would be if she decides to have a harmonious home with no crying, yelling or arguing.
This is a good desire, but a bad goal.
Anyone can block this goal -- including a crying baby or an inconsiderate husband.

(ii) A better goal for her, would be to be determined to have a godly response no matter what the circumstance.

2. APPOINTMENTS

(i). The next example has to do with appointments.

A bad goal for me, would be if I decided that I had to be on-time for all my appointments, and that all was going to go smoothly.

Anything can block this goal, including a flat tire or heavy traffic.

One time, I was in SOUTH AFRICA and it was getting dark and I was about to show a video and then the power went out!

These things can lead to anger and frustration, which could cause me to miss out entirely on God's will.

(ii). My goal should rather be to glorify God in all that comes across my path, in spite of the circumstances.

3. BLOCKED DRAINS – ILLUSTRATION

Sometimes, God changes our plans, because He wants us to share Christ with someone.

It can be frustrating when something unexpected happens.

We need to remember that nothing happens by chance.

God allows all things for a purpose, even though we may not understand.

Let me illustrate:

We had visitors and I was very busy preparing a message.

The drain in the kitchen and visitor's room suddenly became stopped up.

I tried various things, but finally had to call a plumber.

I thought to myself, "Lord, why do you allow such a thing to happen while we are so busy?"

The plumber was elderly and was someone who had helped us in the past.

After he finished unblocking the drains, he said, "I am getting old."

"I am not sure if I am going to heaven or hell, but if I am alive and you have this problem again, I will come back to help you."

I was so surprised by his parting words!

I had a deep sense that God wanted me to share Christ with him.

I spoke to him for a long time and gave him a tract and Gospel of John.

I explained to him how he could be assured of his eternal destiny.

After he left, I realized how the Lord had taken care of me in every way, in spite of my busy schedule.

He even gave me a new illustration that I could put into the message that I was preparing!!!

He learned a valuable lesson.

When our goals and desires are aligned to match God's much of our anxiety and frustration will be alleviated.

The Lord taught us this precious lesson as we served Him.

Let me illustrate:

4. ENGLISH CAMP ILLUSTRATION

We planned an English Camp in the mountains a few years ago.

All of the arrangements were made and all the food was bought.

A few days before the camp, the weather forecast stated that the most powerful typhoon of the season was about to hit our area!

Our plan was to stay in bungalows and cook outside.

There were large trees that could have blown over and cause damage.

We did not know what to do!

The Lord clearly showed us not to worry, but to pray.
He also showed us that our goal should not be to have a camp.
Our goal should rather be to glorify God no matter what the circumstance.

As we prayed, the typhoon slowed down and veered off course for a while.
The day of the camp – we had a wonderful meal under the stars around a campfire and sang songs.
We shared God's Word with many of the non-Christian students

Plans changed as the camp ground offered us indoor housing in the main building, at no extra charge.
The next morning we enjoyed our breakfast and resumed our program.
The typhoon was about a 1,000 km away, but the wind and the rain was already beating against the windows.

That afternoon we sent the students home when the camp ended.

We unloaded the trucks that evening.

That night around midnight the typhoon made a direct hit for our area.

It ended up being delayed by 24 hours from the weather forecast!

The Lord taught us once again that He would take care of us as we reach out.

Once again the Lord taught us, that when our goals and desires are aligned to match God's,
much of our anxiety and frustration will be alleviated.

D. GOD'S WILL FOR EACH CHRISTIAN

Many people desire to know what God's will is for their lives.

I would like to mention a few things that I believe is God's will for all Christians.

1. TO LIVE HOLY LIVES

Firstly, it is God's will that we live Holy lives.

1 Peter 1:15 states:

But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do

Sometimes our sin and selfishness hinders us from realizing God's will for our lives
This is often a process

HOLY SPIRIT

When we are saved we all receive the Holy Spirit.

The question is how much of us does the Holy Spirit have?

There are parts that we may not want to surrender.

Our mouths may say things that grieve the heart of God.

Our hands may do things that do not please the Lord.

It is when we start to surrender all of these things, including our minds and thoughts, that we start to understand the TRUE meaning of holiness.

Holiness means that we are 'reserved for the exclusive use' of God

One professor who visited Japan and wanted to make this point.

He took off his shoe and held it high up in the air.

He said, "This shoe is reserved for my exclusive use!" "In the same way we are reserve for the exclusive use of God!"

That made a great impression on the Japanese, because a shoe is considered to be very dirty and no one would ever think of sharing another person's shoe!

We become like a suite of clothes Jesus walks in!

Galatians 2:20a: *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..."*

Our lives are a gift from God.

What we do with it is a gift back to God.
Every day as a Christian is a day we have a choice to love Him back
Let us give Him exclusive use in all we do

2. TO BE READY TO WITNESS

Secondly, it is God's will that we be ready to witness to others.

1 Peter 3:15 states: ". . . *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*"

It is God's will that we be prepared to give an answer if people ask, "Why are you smiling and so at peace when that typhoon is about to be upon you?"

Some ask us, "How can you be so happy and be married for 36 years??!!!"

My answer is: "It is but by the grace of God. Would you like to hear more?"

This often causes people to be curious and then I have the opportunity to share how I have been a recipient of so much love, mercy and grace.

And we bestow this on each other.

This is the glue that holds our marriage together.

I say these things in order to make the point: that we need to be prepared to give an answer that points people to Jesus when asked...

a. FORTUNE TELLING NEED – ILLUSTRATION

Sometimes we are challenged to think outside the box as we 'give a reason for the hope that lives within us'.

One lady was desperate and had no peace about the future.

She was about to go overseas and make some important business decisions.

She phoned and asked if JAPAN MISSION could provide her with a reliable fortune teller.

He thought for a minute and answered. "Yes, please come. I can tell you about the future."

When the lady came, our worker explains about the hope that we have in the Gospel and everlasting life.

He then told her about the book Revelation, and how Christians know about the future

She listened ever so intently.

When she came back the next day and the JAPAN MISSION worker asked if she was ready to accept the Lord.

She said, "I already did! I went home and did all that you told me to do and my heart feels so much lighter."

Today she attends church regularly and continues on with the Lord.

This worker's willingness to be flexible when asked about a fortune teller helped her find the Lord!

Sometimes we are tempted to look with scorn on people who consult with fortune-tellers or the horoscope.

We should rather reach out to these people with love and understanding.

The Bible has much to say to people who have no peace or hope for the future.

We need to be prepared to be flexible when sharing Christ with others.

3. TO DO GOOD DEEDS

Thirdly, it is God's will for us to influence people for Christ through our good deeds.

In Matt 5:16 we read:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

ATTITUDE, INFORMATION, NEED (AID)

We have found that doing good deeds can play a critical role in reaching the lost for Christ.

A wise missionary once said: “There are three things we should be sensitive to when sharing the Gospel.”

Attitude, Information and Need

These 3 things are related to reaching people through doing good deeds

I believe that these things will also help you reach people in your community for Christ.

A. ATTITUDE

The first is attitude.

It is difficult to share the Gospel with someone who has a bad attitude.

It is much easier when we first establish some kind of rapport and win their respect.

We have found that doing good works has played an important role in determining people’s attitudes.

That is why we often teach English, Cooking or Music

We have also collected food and clothing for the homeless and offered Disaster Relief to those in need.

These things have helped us establish a connection with people and win their respect.

I repeat Matt 5:16:

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt 5:16, KJV).

Scripture says that the unsaved will take notice of our good works.

Will they then praise us?? NO!!!

The Bible says that they will glorify our Father in heaven!

We need to remember that our good works can have a powerful influence on people.

Let me illustrate:

a. (i). EARTHQUAKE, TSUNAMI & NUCLEAR DISASTER –

One of the greatest challenges we recently faced was the M9.0 earthquake and tsunami. Hundreds of kilometers of coastline in northeast Japan was devastated on March 11, 2011.

19,000 people were killed and 500,000 were left homeless.

The tsunami also damaged a nuclear facility.

7 years later 3 towns are still uninhabitable because of the high radiation.

About 100,000 people remain evacuated. and cannot return home.

In the beginning, when our supporters prayed and sent donations, the Japan Mission was challenged to help people in such a way that also made a spiritual impact.

But that was not the time to give out tracts and share the Gospel.

That was a time when people needed food, blankets, shelter, a hug and mud cleaned out of their homes.

The Lord showed us that the best strategy was to help people through the local churches.

Our workers partnered with the churches in such a way –that residents perceived that the help came from the church in their community.

Many people were thankful and attended church for the first time!

(ii). RESIDENTS AND SUPPLIES – EXAMPLE

In one town, residents were told that supplies would be handed out every morning except on Sunday, because of the worship services.
Some of the residents came on Sunday anyway.
They said, "We did not come for supplies."
"We came to attend the service."
This sudden openness caused many to come to know the Lord.

(iii). KESENUMA – EXAMPLE

One church in Kesenuma had no converts the year before the disaster.
18 months later, 15 people were saved!
We learned some valuable lessons → and now our workers stand ready → to jump into action
On April 16, 2016 there was a M7 in Kumamoto.
44,000 people were evacuated.
JAPAN MISSION workers jumped into action and many responded to the Gospel.
We saw how the Lord used our good works to change the attitudes of the residents towards the church
This is how many have found the Lord.
As we do good works, we find that the Holy Spirit uses these things to transform people's hearts.

-- AID ----- Start -----

B. INFORMATION

The second thing we need to be sensitive to when sharing the Gospel is information.
Tracts, Bibles, message CDs and the internet are all powerful sources of information.

a. NEIL'S HEALTH & INAGAMI FAMILY – ILLUSTRATION (2012)

My father, Neil Verwey, was diagnosed with cancer in Nov 2010.
He slowed down his activities quite a bit, but still continued to write and preach and write.
Neil desired above all was to glorify the Lord until the end.
As he became older 2 Corinthians 12:9 a (NKJV) became more precious to him:
"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Shortly before Neil passed away, he preached on how the Lord had given him peace about this infirmity.
He gave a copy of this message CD to a couple who owned a gasoline station where we regularly filled up our cars.
Their attitude was right because we often drove by there to put in gas and befriend them.

The wife approached Neil one day and confided in him.
She said, "My husband has cancer and is scheduled for surgery."
"We are terrified!"
"We don't have the kind of peace that you mentioned on that CD."
"What do we need to do in order to find the peace that you have?"

Shortly after, they came to JAPAN MISSION and both accepted the Lord as Savior!
The Holy Spirit used the the message CDs and tracts we gave that couple in a powerful way!
They were valuable sources of information.
As we do good works and people's attitudes change, we have the opportunity to share information, and we see how the Holy Spirit uses these things to change hearts!

C. NEED

The third thing we need to be sensitive to when sharing the Gospel is need.

Sometimes the Lord brings seeking people across our path with grave problems and desperate needs.

That is when we need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
It is sometimes hard to know how to relate to such people.
It is often a matter of just being with them and giving them a hug.
Sometimes, the Lord will prompt us to share some words of advice.

a. ONECHAN & KANASHIBARI – ILLUSTRATION

My wife's close non-Christian friend asked her for advice.
She was having terrible nightmares.
While sleeping, she felt as though she was awake and being smothered.
Now she was afraid to go to sleep and getting depressed.

My wife told her, "Why don't you pray in Jesus name and ask it to stop.
A few days later she came back and told her, "It worked!"
"I asked it to stop in Jesus name and it stopped immediately!"

She later prayed to accept the Lord as Savior!
It was wonderful to see how the Lord revealed Himself to her through this desperate need and answered prayer.
There is true power in the name of Jesus!!!

As we do good deeds, we see people's attitudes change.
We are then able to share some information with them.
We then we see how the Lord allows a need to come into their lives.
Sometimes it is an illness or a problem in the family.
We pray with these people and the Lord reveals Himself to them through this need and answered prayer.
Many people's hearts have been transformed by the Holy Spirit in this way.

CONCLUSION

This is how Attitude, Information and Need play an important role in the missionary work we do in Japan.
These things can also help you reach your community for Christ.
We should always be aware of these things as we share the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I would like to encourage you:
Let's serve Him faithfully by seeking after goals which are according to His will.
May we always be prepared to "give a reason for the hope that lives within us."
Let us take every opportunity to share God's love with others.

LET'S PRAY

Dear heavenly Father,
Thank you for the salvation we have through our wonderful Savior, Jesus Christ.
Please help us not to worry, but to surrender all to you in an attitude of prayer.
Help us to incorporate goals into our lives that glorify you.
We are honored to know that you desire to use us to reach people.
We realize that if we try to reach people in our own strength we are wasting time.
Help us to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
We pray these things in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.