



the connection

NOVEMBER 2011

KNOWING GOD'S WILL

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KNOWING GOD'S WILL

BY: MIKE STREHLOW

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IMAGINE, LONG, LONG AGO, THE FIRST EVER CHRISTIAN MISSIONS CONFERENCE, WITH PAUL, BARNABAS, LUKE, MARK, TIMOTHY, PRICILLA AND AQUILA, AND TITUS MEETING ON A HILLSIDE OVERLOOKING ANCIENT ROME.

Picture them sitting in the cool shade of olive trees beneath the midday Italian sun, picnicking on cheese and bread and quietly conversing about their ministries and the way the Holy Spirit has been advancing God's Kingdom through their testimonies of Jesus.

Now Paul stands up to speak. The others lean forward, anticipating what he has to say. "What I'd really like to know," Paul asks this assembly, "is God's will for my life." And everyone falls into shocked silence, except Timothy, who spews a mouthful of half-chewed bread clear across the orchard.

I am certain this scene never happened.

Not knowing God's will would have been preposterous for those apostles. It would have been laughable, absurd. They'd have looked at Paul, who literally wrote the book on knowing God's will, as if he was crazy or joking. If they had anything to say, it would have been, "Paul, how can you NOT know God's will for your life?"

Yet we can ask, "How can I know God's will for my

life?" in any church, small group or Bible study in America, and it would be taken up as a serious topic. If you google search the words "how to know God's will for your life" on your computer, as of September 25, 2011, you will get 62,400,000 results... for a question the early church would have found ridiculous! How can that be?

If we are saved by Christ's atoning death on the cross, raised with Him by His resurrection, and have the Holy Spirit living in us, how is it that we DON'T understand God's will for our lives? The problem isn't

PEOPLE WHO KNOW
GOD'S WILL ARE PEOPLE
WHO KNOW GOD.

that instructions on how to know God's will are not spelled out clearly in

the Bible. Romans 12:1-2 says, "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."

If that is how to know God's will, then we must conclude that the early church did these things.

Paul's appeal to the Romans was for them "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." It was understood by people of those days that to be a "living sacrifice" meant living a life dedicated to the worship of God. A continuous experience of worship, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, would be to "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22)

Next Paul told the Romans not to be conformed to this world, or age. "This age" is ruled by Satan. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness..." The Greek word for "conformed" is "suschematizesqe." As it is in the imperative, this is a command rather than a piece of advice. In other words, don't allow the world to force you into its mold.

The word "transformed" in verse two is "metamorphousqe" from which we get our word "metamorphosis." It doesn't mean to change your wardrobe or get a haircut; it means "be transformed," in the same way that a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly. Paul used the imperative for this word, too, which means it is a command as well. Paul isn't saying, "let go and let God." He is saying, "BE TRANSFORMED!"

When it came to demonstrating his teaching, Paul was his own best visual

NEWS

aid. Writing to the Philippians, he said of himself that he was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." (Philippians 3:5-7)

Prior to his conversion, Paul fit the mold perfectly; he had everything from a worldly point of view. Yet Christ transformed the Gentile-hating Rabbi Sha'ul into a Gentile-saving apostle.

The early church was made up of people who had been transformed. Have you followed this command to be transformed? People who understand God's will are people who walk with God, who are close to God, who have changed, who live not for this world but for God's kingdom. People who live to worship are the ones who know what God wants. People who know God's will are people who know God.

Do you want to know God's will? Decide what is important in your life. Decide who will be Lord in your life, Jesus or you. Paul could say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) Can we say the same thing?

If you WANT to be close to God, wondering what His will is will become as silly a question for you as it would have been for the early church. Get hungry for God. Chase Him, and by so doing let Him catch you. Jesus paid it all, we have only to walk in. Want this for yourself. 🙏

Mike Strehlow is the Academic Dean of Fountain of Life Bible College, which currently is in three prisons in the Atmore area. Mike and his wife Patty live in Pensacola, Florida.

WELCOME

We extend a big welcome to this year's Discover team! Justin Martin is from Atmore, Alabama, and attends Grace Fellowship. (His father Irvin Martin is a We Care chaplain at Fountain Correctional Facility.)

Jacob Potsander comes to us from Kalona, Iowa, and is a member of Sunnyside Mennonite Church.

Joining the We Care family from Lititz, Pennsylvania, is Sharon Bruckhart. Sharon comes with the blessing of her home church, White Oak Church of the Brethren. She is serving at Montgomery Women's Facility in Montgomery, Alabama.



Jacob Potsander and Justin Martin



Sharon Bruckhart

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Chris Neighbors and Hannah Roberson who were united in marriage on September 17 at Mennonite Christian Fellowship in Atmore, Alabama. Hannah is the bookkeeper in the We Care office, having served in that position since moving to Atmore from Pryor, Oklahoma, in August 2010. God bless you, Mr. and Mrs. Neighbors, as you begin a new life together.



Chris & Hannah Neighbors

READ-A-THON NEWS

Participants in this year's read-a-thon sent in \$21,824.75 to support prison ministry. Forty readers, ages 4-86 and scattered over 11 states, read a combined total of 76,539 pages. We are grateful to God for each reader and for each sponsor who contributed in this fundraising effort! Prizes were awarded in three age brackets for most money raised: 1st - Goldie Huber (AL), 2nd - Emma Bender (AL), 1st - Rachel Rittenhouse (PA), 2nd - Twila Bender (AL), 1st - Denver Bontrager (IA), 2nd - Allison Nisly (KS).

PROFILE

Stan Schrock

ASSIGNMENT

Missionary Chaplain, Century Correctional Facility, Century, FL

TYPICAL DAY

My day usually begins at prison around 7:15 a.m. In the chaplain's office, I start by sorting mail, answering in writing any questions the inmates are asking, or sending literature and greeting cards to those who request them. Volunteer facilitators and inmates arrive at the chapel around 8:00 a.m. I assist in setting up classes and worship services and keep general order. Most days I have time to sit and talk with some of the men who attend the services. At 10:00 the men go back to their dorms for count and chow. I am then able to relax a minute, grab a bite to eat, and relate to the three inmate chapel workers. Sometimes a phone call informs us of an inmate's relative passing away or in the hospital. After verifying that the crisis is legitimate, I call the inmate to the chapel and help him make the dreaded call to his relatives. This is probably the hardest part of what I do. Afternoons include another service, opening the chapel library for book check-outs or personal study, teaching videos, and a Bible College class. After the men go back to their dorms for shift change and afternoon chow, I have the opportunity to visit the confinement dorms, taking any books and Bibles or Bible studies that have been requested. If I have extra literature in the chapel, I'll take that along to hand out. Recently, an inmate accepted Christ during my visit there. Another needed me to help him make a call to his wife's doctor so he could make some difficult decisions concerning hospice for his wife. My day usually wraps up between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m.



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REWARDS

Leading someone to Christ, watching inmates grow in the Lord, seeing men that I counsel gain victory.

CHALLENGES

Watching an inmate who I thought was strong in the Lord suddenly change his religion to something other than Christianity. Teaching and instructing, yet observing that most do not change.

JUST FOR FUN

Spending time with my family. Working with bees, piddling in my shop and developing ideas that I have.

LOOKING FOR A

HERE'S WHAT OTHERS

MIRIAM STRITE, VA, CRUSADE VOLUNTEER

Every year at the crusade I am reminded of how much God has blessed me for granted the blessing of growing up in a godly home. Most of the young women I meet in prison have both parents in prison. Or they don't know who their parents are. As I observe these women, my heart is filled with compassion because I know that each one is a soul who will spend eternity somewhere. That moves me to reach out in love and use the power of God to help point them to Christ.



JASON SHELLY, PA, FIRE VOLUNTEER IN VA

Participating in this prison crusade has forever changed my life. For many years I told myself my calling is to drive a truck. A week spent with We Care for the Inmates, many of who are my brothers and friends, I'm realizing that IS my calling. I left the crusade with many mixed feelings, still sifting them out. I do hope if they would let me into the prison tomorrow, I would catch a flight down there tonight. This is the highlight of my life and I am looking forward to this Jesus.



JOIN US

BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO THE PRISON

- Begins with a prayer
- Four days of teaching
- Located in the prison
- Daily morning devotionals
- Nightly prison services
- Open to men and women

SHORT-TERM MISSIONS EXPERIENCE?

34TH ANNUAL MULTI-PRISON CRUSADE
JANUARY 22-26, 2012

ARE SAYING...

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DALE MAST, SC, LONG-TIME CRUSADER AND TEAM LEADER

CHRIS SUMMERS, AL, STATE CHAPLAIN
AT HOLMAN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY



I first learned about the ministry of We Care through its annual crusades. My father-in-law, who is now with the Lord, was set on fire by the Lord after attending his first crusade in 1979. When he discovered how the Lord could use him in the prison setting and fill him with an energetic love for others, he was unstoppable in telling others about Jesus and the needs in Alabama prisons. I am in prison ministry as a result of my father-in-law's passion to see men in prison saved and encouraged in Christ. It was his encouragement that led my family to Atmore. Since May of 1981, we've been here with prison ministry at the center of our mission. One might ask, how have the We Care Crusades impacted my life? In a very real "faith centered" way, the crusades have set a defined course for me and changed my life in ways I could never have imagined. (soli deo gloria)

The relationships I have built not only with inmates but also with crusade volunteers have enriched me personally and challenged me to be more Christlike in my everyday life. Society tells us that inmates do not deserve to be treated with respect, but they forget that these same men and women will someday be out in our neighborhoods and communities. Unless someone helps them see another way of life, they will be right back doing the same thing, and the results will be the same if not worse. I have found that when I pour myself into someone else, God does something in my own life. It is humbling to realize that I can be the hands of Jesus in prison.

US!

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE TO THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN ALABAMA'S PRISON SYSTEM

a Sunday of orientation and missions rally
of friendship evangelism in at least 17 different prisons
the Montgomery, Troy, Birmingham, and Atmore areas
ing workshop sessions with gifted teachers
on chapel services with special music and evangelists
ure Christian men and women age 20 and older

TO VOLUNTEER:

Call We Care Program (251-368-8818)
for application or download application
online at www.wecareprogram.org.
Completed applications REQUIRED
by December 24, 2011.



Steve Stoltzfus
**Frank Lee Work Release
Montgomery, AL**

Though I don't make a habit of attending parole hearings, in a recent case I felt I knew the person well and decided to speak on his behalf.

The instructions for testifying before the parole board included a statement that the board did not want to hear that the defendant had a religious experience but whether he had learned

how to live in society.

Jimmy was my chapel worker for nearly three years. He was a man who had studied well and had taken many opportunities to educate himself, including earning a bachelors degree in theology. Once when we were talking he said, "You know, Chaplain, I have learned a lot about the Bible, and I probably know more facts than you do. But working with you I have learned how to live what I know." His statement was very encouraging to me. I do not have a degree in theology, but I can say as Paul said in I Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers of me as I am also of Christ."

Jimmy and I have had many long talks and discussed a wide variety of topics. He has helped me see what a person deals with when he has been incarcerated for a long time. Being out of society for nearly twenty years brings many intimidating changes, including such things as using credit card fuel pumps, personal cell phones, and internet shopping. In addition there are so many decisions about daily living which were not options in prison.

Having been granted parole, Jimmy will face many challenges in the free world, but I have confidence that he will make it in society. His hope is in the Lord. Please pray for Jimmy.



Wilma Mullet
**Ohio Reformatory for Women
Marysville, OH**

Can God really give fulfillment and meaning to ordinary mundane tasks?

Yes, He certainly can. Bonnie, mother of six, saw no end to laundry. Washing wasn't so bad, but folding all those clothes? No way! They would stay in the laundry basket or in piles here and there. She folded only enough to get by. That was life at home.

Now as an inmate at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, she is a Laundry Aide in her dorm—and God has her attention. Day after day, Bonnie has no option, she HAS to fold clothes. So she started praying for each lady as she did their laundry. One day she wrote "God bless you" on each

From the Field

laundry slip that came in with the dirty clothes, for the nicer co-operative ladies as well as the conning, conniving, griping ones. They noticed. Noticed her demeanor too, as she picked up the dirty laundry and returned it cleaned AND folded.

One evening Sarah was in my office, weary from the ungodliness around her. Everyone seemed negative to her, but she mentioned a Laundry Aide (didn't say her name) who never said an unkind word or created problems. "I thanked her one day for being so kind," Sarah said, "and she turned around and gave me hug!" So they both were blessed.

The next day Bonnie, the Laundry Aide, was sitting in my office discussing her daily struggles. "Hey, did anybody in your dorm thank you lately for the good job you do?" Her face lit up, "Yeah, Sarah did! Took me so by surprise and made me feel so good I gave her a big hug!"

They proved to me that God, if we allow Him, can get glory out of anything we have to do. I need to remember that!



James Smoker
Donaldson Corr. Facility
Birmingham, AL

With such a wide range of opportunities to minister to the spiritual needs of inmates, I need to guard against trying to do too many things, losing focus and spreading out too thin.

In the process of doing too many things, I find myself not allowing the Holy Spirit to direct.

One area of ministry that seems so simple, but yet is so powerful, is praying with individuals. Why don't I use this weapon more often? Do I need to refocus? Am I not listening for the Holy Spirit's prompting?

Recently I was talking with a tough young man who is hard towards God. He expressed that he hadn't heard from his three-year-old son in a long time. I could tell it was causing him stress and frustration waiting day after day for something in the mail. At the end of our conversation, I asked if I could pray with him about this situation. "Sure," he said, willing for anything that might work.

The next day I entered his dorm area to do some visitation. He promptly came over and asked me to look at something. In his hand he held a letter and a picture of his son that he had received in the mail the same day we had prayed about it. God had answered his prayer and was working in his life. There is nothing I could have done to make this happen. This experience made an impact on him, and hopefully he is one step closer to receiving Jesus in his life. When I move out of the way, God can receive all the glory.



A Relationship That Changed My Life

by: Steve Martin, Development Director

My prison ministry experience began with a Gospel Express Crusade back in the spring of 2000. Having recently experienced a personal revival, I was looking for ways to minister to people, and I now believe that those three days in Delaware were providential. Like many first timers, I was scared half to death as we walked through the gates and into a dorm-type setting. It was somewhat overwhelming, and I didn't know where to start or what to say.

During those three days, God led me to Sam. When I first saw Sam, he was visibly upset. He had just received a letter from his wife and was being reminded of his inability to fulfill his responsibilities as a husband around the house. Things were in disarray, and his wife was feeling the pressure of working, raising their two daughters and trying to keep things up around the house. With the chaplain's approval and encouragement, my wife and I began to minister to Sam and his family. Over the next few years I visited Sam in prison a few times, my wife and I visited his family, and we even got our small group involved in fixing things up around their home. Thus began a series of experiences in prison ministry that has led to where I am today.

Relating to Sam and his family was a dramatic life-changing experience for me. It began the whole process of changing how I looked at the poor, the inmates and their families, and the disenfranchised of our society. As I developed a relationship with Sam and his family, I began to understand the struggles and challenges that they faced. This started a whole new journey of God beginning to remove condemnation and judgmentalism from my heart and replacing it with love and compassion. In Matthew 25 Jesus refers to these folks as "the least of these," and His life and teaching reflect His deep love and affection for them. It is my desire to continue to grow and become more and more like Jesus in relating to the marginalized folks in our communities.

My life-change began with a relationship. As Development Director of We Care Program, it is my goal to help and assist others in also developing life-changing relationships with the "least of these." There are many stories of how involvement in a crusade, the softball outreach, prayer support, giving or other opportunities at We Care has softened hearts and changed lives. For all of you who are on this journey, thanks for allowing us to be a part of it. If you haven't begun this journey and feel God drawing you to start, we would love to partner with you. I look forward to meeting and learning to know many of you in the days and months to come.

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Sowing and Growing

A MESSAGE FROM DAVID R. LANDIS, PRESIDENT

I'm guessing that some of you are wondering why for the first time in many years we do not have a prison-related picture on our front cover. Well, I'll admit that we wanted to get your attention! And the image of a path ties in with a question so many of us have asked in our journey with God: "What is God's will for my life?" I have certainly wrestled with this question myself, have helped others process their own personal callings, and have even approached the subject with men who will spend most of their lives in prison.

I think Mike Strehlow has done a wonderful job in the lead article of helping us to clarify our thinking in relation to knowing God's will, and I encourage you to evaluate your own walk based on what God's Word has to say about this. I realize that we are all at a different place in our journey with God, but there is no question that we should all be moving away from some things

and growing towards others as we are led by the Holy Spirit. "Every movement from one place to another along the path that God desires us to walk is the result of growth. And that growth is most often the product of seed sown into our lives. Without people spreading seed, the growth of the Body of Christ stagnates. Stagnation means we cease to move along the pathways that mark our walk with Jesus." (*The Sower*, Scott Rodin & Gary Hoag, pg. 4) I want to personally thank those of you who have sown seeds of friendship, support, and prayer into those of us serving with We Care Program. It is my prayer that we will also be able to sow seeds for growth in your life as well.

"Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness." (2 Corinthians 9:10) 🌱

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