

## Discovering God's Will in my Life

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**Paul's Vision.** Paul was traveling to Damascus to arrest followers of Christ. He had a vision that transformed his life. Paul heard a voice saying: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 22:3-11). Paul learned four things:

- Jesus is alive, the risen Christ.
- Paul realized he has done real harm to Jesus' followers.
- Paul's life is not yet over.
- He should go to Damascus, and find his calling.

From Jerusalem to Damascus was quite a distance, about 100 miles. Paul had time to reflect, about what he had been doing and what he should be doing. When Jesus appeared in a vision, Paul was ready to listen.

**My father's calling.** In his sophomore year in college (1917), my father received God's calling. He decided to be a missionary. He was on a 10-day retreat with other college students, and heard talks by missionaries that had been in distant lands. At the retreat he was able to talk with some missionaries and with other students. He didn't think he had the talent to be a preacher. He liked science, and decided to be a medical missionary. This call resulted in his founding a hospital in the interior of Brazil.

There were 18 years of preparation before he came to Rio Verde in 1936. There he founded the Evangelical Hospital in Rio Verde (Hospital Evangelico de Rio Verde). Before he came, the nearest hospital was 400 miles away, over dirt roads. He wanted to cure people, but he also wanted them to know why he was there, to show them God's love. That was his calling

**Clinic.** Dr. Gordon arrived in Rio Verde on February 7, 1936. He brought with him a microscope to identify parasites and a black bag. The bag probably included a thermometer, glass syringes, a few surgical instruments, etc. After two months he was able to rent a large house facing the public square. It had plenty of room for the family, and also space for a small clinic. My parents opened the clinic on April 1, just two months after they arrived. They wondered whether it should be open in the morning or in the afternoon. The question was quickly settled. Patients arrived all day long. In the first nine months my father treated 850 individuals! He needed help in greeting people, getting a few facts, start a new file, and ask them to wait. My mother had no training as a nurse, but she learned fast. Soon two local girls were enlisted as student nurses.

**Hospital.** In the beginning there was no hospital, but a patient with a strangulated hernia needed an operation. The first operation was in our living room. After a few months, my father rented a small house to start a hospital. There was no anesthesiologist, but anesthesia was simpler in those days. My mother learned how to administer ether. A couple slept in the hospital, and could fetch Dr. Gordon if needed.

**My youth.** When we arrived in Rio Verde there were only a few Protestants, meeting in a private home. Many people called themselves Catholic, but did not attend mass. In my 8 years in Rio Verde the Protestant church grew. I remember an active church program. On Sundays, Sunday school in the morning, a service at the jail in the afternoon, and a worship service in the evening. During the weekday evenings there was choir rehearsal on Tuesday, Bible study on Wednesday, meetings at various homes Thursday or Friday, and the young adult group on Saturday.

**Church Classes.** I have attended church regularly all my life, and been asked to do many things, especially teaching Sunday school. When I was in college, I was asked to teach a class of high school girls. I had little experience, was terrified, but willing to give it a try. The previous teacher invited me to attend her last Sunday class. I did, and she gave me confidence. She inspired me. Years later I was teaching an adult Sunday school class, and was gratified to have one participant say that my class was one of the reasons he and his wife decided to join our church. This emphasized to me that teaching Sunday school was part of God's plan for my life.

Later, when my wife Doris and I moved, we joined the choir at the Silver Spring Presbyterian Church, and joined the choir. After our singing for a while, the pastor asked me to teach a Sunday school class. I thought I had the perfect excuse to refuse, since the choir rehearsed during the Sunday school period. The pastor amazed me by suggesting that I drop choir, and teach Sunday school. He thought the Sunday school was more important. It was an experience in priorities, and I followed his advice. This was another lesson in discovering God's will.

In 1970, when I joined our present church, I expressed an interest in teaching adults. Sometimes God's call does not match our desires. I was asked to teach a class of fifth and sixth graders. That wasn't what I had in mind! But this was what our church needed, and I learned to adapt. Years later I was glad to see one student go as a short term missionary to Egypt, two of them were missionaries to Thailand, and one boy became our Associate Pastor. In each of these three cases I was asked to teach a Sunday school class. I was reluctant, but I finally did accept, taught Sunday school, and was glad I did. That's where I should be. I had discovered God's will in my life.

**Financial Counseling.** Shortly after joining GPC I became a volunteer financial counselor. This was not sponsored by any church, but by a government agency to help low income families. It is not surprising that many counselors were active in their own church (both protestant and catholic). Counselors met weekly in the home of a low income family. Counselors were trained and directed by Marge Tollefson, who worked for the Montgomery County Extension Service. We were trained not to impose our value system on a family, but merely suggest ways of saving money. Our goal was to find out what help the family wanted, and generate a specific solution. I helped many wage-earners who worked hard under difficult circumstances. I also helped train other counselors, and found the program an excellent use of my time.

**My vocation.** My sister Hope married a Brazilian pastor, and they lived in the state of São Paulo. My brother Alan chose to become a medical missionary, and worked in Dourados (MS) and São Paulo. All three of my siblings chose to remain in Brazil. But I chose not to return to Brazil. God calls us for different tasks. Not everyone is called to the same profession. Some are called for full-time service, such as a pastor, or a missionary. Others may serve God while pursuing a secular profession. At a young age I decided to be a scientist. In prep school I decided to be a physicist. All through college and graduate school my goal was physics. I became a physicist. After my education I worked for a few years in two other fields. But they did not satisfy me.

**Satellites.** In graduate school at Harvard I had studied for a PhD and did research in elementary particles. I could have continued in this field for the rest of my life, as a friend of mine in graduate school did. This would increase our knowledge of the universe, but was not a way of helping people that needed help. I wanted to make a contribution that would directly benefit people, especially people in underdeveloped countries. Sputnik, the first satellite was launched by the Russians in 1957. In the following year, 1958, I saw an RCA ad, hiring staff to build the world's **first weather satellite**. This was my call. I jumped at the chance, and have never regretted it.

The job of my group was to predict the satellite temperature. No one had experience in this field. We had no computers in our building, and only limited access to a computer built with vacuum tubes. Most of our calculations were done with slide rules and mechanical calculators. On April 1, 1960, TIROS I was launched, and the first photographs taken from outer space were displayed on newspapers around the world. Our temperature predictions were correct, and the batteries and tape recorders worked well. Many weather satellites have followed, and now we not only have better weather forecasts, but we can all look at our TV, and see photos of the cloud cover.

Most of my professional life was building communications satellites. I was sure it would help people in underdeveloped countries. But I never imagined how. I only thought of it improving long distance telephone calls. When I lived in Rio Verde we could not telephone to the United States, and telegrams might take two days. Now we can use

emails and communicate rapidly and at much less cost. In the beginning, we never dreamed of the Internet. Now we have emails, and can communicate rapidly and at much less cost. We can find information in Google, more than we can find in books. We can locate ourselves on the earth with GPS, and find our way to remote locations. From Brazil we can take online courses with a teacher in Europe or U.S.A. The rapid communication makes it easy for consumers in U.S.A to enjoy products produced in Brazil.

**Conclusion.** Many years ago Paul discovered God's will in his life, followed it, and concluded his life with the words: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race ..." (II Tim 4:7). My father heard the call to be a medical missionary, and found the hospital that now bears his name. Many others have worked in this hospital, and made it what it is today. Many patients have benefited. I also tried to follow my call, and make a contribution to the development of artificial satellites. Many of those that benefit never think of the satellites that make it possible, but I know that my work has been worthwhile.

Paul met the risen Christ. He realized he had done real harm to Jesus' followers. But his life was not over. His life with Christ had just begun. He went to Damascus, talking to some Christians he found his calling, and in his travels and his writings he spread the gospel far and wide.