

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, it's been my joy to officiate more than 500 weddings. Sometimes funny things happen at weddings. I've had a groom who passed out not once, but three times during the ceremony. I've had several groomsmen pass out—but never a bride or a bridesmaid. And they call females the weaker sex. I've seen brides walking down the aisle crying and laughing at the same time. And once I had a 5-year-old ring bearer who decided he didn't like his little tux so he started to disrobe in front of everyone. His mother caught him before he could remove his pants.

But I've noticed there's one thing that always happens. After the bride and groom kiss they turn around and I say, "Ladies and gentleman I introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. John Doe." Everyone breaks out in applause and even cheers the couple. Why are they so happy, but they have just witnessed the creation of a new family.

In 1979, four sisters from Philadelphia, the Sisters Sledge, recorded their only #1 hit, "We are Family." That same year, the Pittsburgh Pirates were down three games to one in the World Series, when they adopted the theme "We are Family." Willie Stargell led them back to win the next three games and win the series—the last one that Pittsburgh has won to date.

There's something about families. Our families can be the source of the greatest joy and deepest heartaches. There's more emotion attached to our families than any other unit in society. Jesus has some revolutionary things to say about family in this passage.

Mark 3:20-21. "Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"

Mark 3:31-35. "Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'"

I recently read a list of the five most overused words in our American vocabulary. I'll count them down for you.

- (5) Literally. This word is used by literally everyone for literally everything.
- (4) Awesome. I'm not sure if everything in life can be totally awesome, dude.
- (3) Whatever. It can be as harmless and "whatever you choose" or as a sarcastic "whatever."
- (2) Like. You can use it to say you like ice cream, or misuse by saying that like everything is like totally awesome, dude.
- (1) Greatest. Everyone claims to have the greatest hits, the greatest list of this or that. The word "great" should be reserved for a few legendary people, places, and things, which would make the word "greatest" redundant.

To that I just want to say literally, whatever. Because I want to talk to you about three of the greatest things in life: the greatest relationship; the greatest family; and the greatest goal—and I think this is going to be like, awesome.

I. LIFE'S GREATEST RELATIONSHIP: KNOWING JESUS

If there is one truth I have pounded out more than any other over the past 23 years as pastor here it is this: Salvation isn't about religion. It is about a relationship. It is knowing Jesus.

Religion comes from the Latin word *religare*, which means "to tie" or "to bind." Our English word "ligaments" comes from the same word. Our ligaments tie our bones and joints together. Religion is something that binds people to a set of beliefs.

In Romans 6:23 the Bible teaches that salvation is the gift of God, which is eternal life. If I gave you a test sheet and it had only one fill-in-the-blank statement on it, how would you complete this sentence: "Eternal life is _____." Some of you might insert the words "Eternal life is living forever." If you're miserable now, why would you want to live forever? The correct answer is: "Eternal life is knowing Jesus." Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

The Apostle Paul was one of the most religious guys in history, but he was lost without Jesus. In Philippians 3 he starts the chapter by quoting his religious pedigree. He wrote that He was born a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. He meticulously kept the letter of the entire Law, he so zealous he arrested and persecuted Christians who were considered a threat to Judaism. But then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus and he realized his religion was worthless. "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Philippians 3:8, 10)

Paul said that compared to knowing Jesus, everything else in life is rubbish. The KJV translates it as "dung" which isn't very pleasant, but that's a better translation. The Greek word is *skubala* that was used to describe sewage. Is that your belief? Is knowing Jesus such a life-changing passion that compared to it everything else is just stinking garbage?

Knowing Jesus isn't the same thing as knowing *facts* about Jesus. I know facts about Abraham Lincoln, but I don't know Abraham Lincoln. I know facts about Dwight D. Eisenhower, and I can say, "I like Ike." But I never had the privilege of meeting President Eisenhower. But I met Jesus when I was nine years old and he's more real to me than the carpet on this floor. He's more real to me than the wood, concrete, and steel in this building. Because one day, all this will be gone, but Jesus will still be large and in charge.

II. LIFE'S GREATEST FAMILY: THE CHURCH

This is still early in His ministry, and at this point, his family thought He was crazy. So they tried to have a family intervention. They wanted to take Jesus back home to Nazareth and avoid any public embarrassment. The word literally means, "He has lost His senses."

When they told Jesus His mother and brothers were outside, Jesus asked a question and answered it with a revolutionary statement. He asked, "Who are my mother and brothers?" Then Jesus looked around the group and said, "This is my family. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother." Jesus wasn't rejecting His earthly family. He was just stating that a spiritual connection is stronger than any biological connection. You've heard the phrase, "blood is thicker than water." It usually implies that family ties are stronger than friendship bonds. But let me revise it: "Jesus' blood is thicker than family blood." In other words, Jesus is teaching us that the most important family in the world is the Family of God, the church.

If everyone in your family is a follower of Jesus, then your biological family is part of your family of faith – that's ideal. But many times a person will become a Christian and other members of their family aren't believers. They may be ostracized or even rejected by their families. There are many similarities between a biological family and the family of faith. Let me mention three.

A. God's Family isn't perfect

Is there anyone who could stand up and say, "Pastor I have a perfect biological family?" I didn't think so. One man described families this way: "Families are like fudge—mostly sweet, but with a few nuts." Just like our biological families aren't perfect, neither is the church. You've often heard, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." Well, when you choose Jesus, you also are choosing everyone in His family, and they are mostly sweet—but there are a few nuts, too.

When I was a kid growing up in L.A., our phone rang in the middle of the night, and my dad got in his pick-up truck and drove all the way from South Alabama to South Texas to pick up his uncle, my great-uncle, John Henry Dykes. He had gotten in some trouble with the law crossing in from Mexico. He was a mess, and his own grown children didn't want to have anything to do with him. So my dad picked him and drove him back to our house and he moved in with us. And guess whose bedroom he got?

I can remember being angry and complaining to my mother, "Why does that old man have to live in our house? He stinks. He smokes all the time. I don't like him." My mother would smile and say, "You don't have to like him, but you do have to love him because he's family." God later changed my heart and I came to love him and like him before he died.

The same is true with God's family. There may be some people in our church whose personality you don't like. That's okay, you don't have to like them, but you have to love them because they're family and we make allowances for family members. My motto about our church is that some people are easy to love and some are easier to love.

Sometimes people leave a church because there are member there they don't like. Then they go join another church where they'll find other people they don't like.

There's no such thing as a perfect church. Mavis Williams wrote a poem about this.

The Perfect Church

If you should find the perfect church
Without one fault or smear,
For goodness sake! Don't join that church;
You'd spoil the atmosphere.

If you should find the perfect church
Where all anxieties cease,
Then pass it by, lest by joining it,
You'd mar the masterpiece.

But since no perfect church exists,
Made of imperfect men,
Then let's cease looking for that church
And love the church we're in.

So let's keep working in our church,
Until the resurrection.
And then we each will join that Church
Without an imperfection!"

B. God's Family cares for one another in tough times

Families come together when there is sickness or death. They help each other out when someone has lost a job, or lost a place to live. That's what families do. God's family is the same way.

The Bible says church is like a human body. God has placed the members in the Body as it pleased Him (not us). And when one member of the body hurts, the other members hurt as well. Do you know the difference between a dead organization and a living organism? When an organization or a business has a weak section, or a weak employee, they cut out that whole division. It's called downsizing. Or they fire that weak employee.

But do you know what happens in a human body when one part is hurting? The other parts rush to the aid of the hurting member. If I happen to hit my thumb with a hammer it's going to hurt, but I'm not going to cut my thumb off. Several things happen. First, my other hand drops the hammer, and my vocal chords kick in and start wailing, "Owwwww!" Then my other hand will rush to grab the hurting hand...and then I'm probably going to stick my thumb in my mouth. That's how the parts work together to assist a hurting member.

The church isn't an organization. We're a living organism. We're the Body of Christ. We care for each other when we're going through tough times.

C. God's Family celebrates together

One of the greatest things about holidays is that families celebrate together. We just gathered with our son-in-law's family for a great 4th of July celebration. Families gather for Thanksgiving and Christmas. That's exactly what we do in the Family of God as well.

I grew up in church during a time when worship was solemn, quiet, and boring. You couldn't laugh, that was sacrilegious. There was a plaque outside our little sanctuary with a verse from Habakkuk 2:20 that said, "The Lord is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth be silent before him." We had to be quiet. We even had men I thought were "hushers," because if you started whispering, they would say, "Hush!" Church started at eleven o'clock sharp and ended at twelve o'clock dull.

But I've since learned that the verse from Habakkuk has nothing to do with worship. It's a solemn warning to the godless Babylonians to fear the power of the Almighty God who inhabits all of creation.

I'm glad to be a part of a church that realizes worship is a celebration. We aren't here to mourn a corpse; we're here to celebrate a Conqueror. Jesus is alive, and we celebrate His resurrection every time we meet. There was a pastor friend of mine who attended one of our worship services several weeks ago. He wrote and said, "It's obvious that Green Acres is a happy church." I took that as a compliment. That's what families do. And I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God!

Many of you have a biological family, but there are many single adults and widows who attend our church. We are the place where God gives you a ready-made family. The Bible says, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families." (Psalm 68:5-6) If you're looking for a family, Green Acres can be a branch of God's Family for you.

III. LIFE'S GREATEST GOAL: DOING GOD'S WILL

When Jesus defined God's family He said, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Did you notice Jesus didn't say "my Father?" That's because He only has one Father—our Heavenly Father. Jesus said the birthmark of the members of God's Family is that we strive to do God's Will.

What is your definition of success? Is it advancing in business until you reach the pinnacle of your career track? Is it becoming independently wealthy? What is success to you? Here's the Bible's definition of success: Finding and doing the Will of God.

The great missionary to Africa, David Livingstone, once wrote: "I'd rather be in the heart of Africa in the will of God than on the throne of England out of His will."

God's Will is such an important concept that it is mentioned sixty-four times in the New Testament. People talk a lot about finding God's will for their lives. But they usually mean they want to know what job He wants them to take, or what college to attend, or if and who God wants them to marry. Let me give you three quick truths about God's Will.

A. God's will never contradicts God's Word

We all know people have done strange and terrible things because in their own words, "God told me to do this." I've always been a little skeptical when someone comes up to me and says, "God told me to tell you this." My immediate reaction is, "Why didn't God just tell me Himself?"

God is still speaking, but the main way God speaks to us today is through His Word, the Bible. And as you immerse yourself daily in God's Word, He will use it to speak to you.

As you get into God's Word, you get to know God so intimately that He can guide you with His Holy Spirit. I love the verse where God says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." (Psalm 32:8 KJV)

There are wives and husbands who know each other so intimately that they can guide each other with their eyes. They can be at a social gathering and the husband wants to leave and go home and watch sports. All he has to do is look at his wife and cut his eyes toward the door. She knows. Or maybe the husband is speaking to a woman and getting too friendly. When he looks at his wife, she can communicate a powerful message to him without words. Are you always looking into God's eye by looking into His Word, so he can easily guide you?

B. God's will is always good for you

Some people are afraid to surrender to God's will because they think God will make them stop having fun. God's will for you will lead you into the most enjoyment that you could ever imagine. As a dad, I only want the very best for my daughters. I want their lives to be filled with good and not harm. Our Heavenly Father is the same way. The Bible says, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield. The Lord gives grace and glory; He does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity." (Psalm 84:11 HCSB)

Here's my definition of God's will: God's will is what you would choose for yourself if you had enough sense to choose it. You may think you've done too many bad things to get back in God's Will, but that's not true. When they launch a rocket at Cape Canaveral its flight plan is pre-programmed. However, it seldom goes the way they intend so computers constantly recalculate the trajectory to get it back on track. Maybe you've gotten off God's pre-planned direction for your life. It's not too late; He can put you back on track if you will surrender to Him.

C. You won't know God's will unless you're willing to do God's will

When you buy a car, it's a good idea to take it for a test drive. Kick the tires. Check the history. Look for any recalls. Read the reviews online. Do your homework before you buy it.

Some people want to take God's will for a test drive. They say, "God tell me what you've got planned for me, and then I'll decide whether or not I'll do it." Sorry. You can't take God's will for a test drive. You have to be willing to DO it in order to know it. But remember, it's always good for you.

We sometimes want to see the end of God's plan, and He is more interested in showing us the next step. Jimmy visited his grandparents, who lived on a farm. One night his grandmother asked him to go out to the barn and feed the cow. Jimmy said, "But grandmother, I can't see the barn. It's too dark." His grandmother stood on the porch and said, "Can you see the well?" Jimmy said, "Yes ma'am." She said, "Walk to the well." When he got to the well she said, "Can you see the apple tree?" Jimmy said, "Yes ma'am." She said, "Well then, walk to the apple tree." Then she said, "Jimmy can you see the barn now?" He said, "Yes ma'am!" She said, "Then Jimmy, go feed the cow."

That's the way God reveals His will to us. So be willing to take the next step even if you can't see the final destination.

CONCLUSION

Life's Greatest Relationship is knowing Jesus. Do you know Him? Life's great family is the church. Are you involved in a local church where you can say, "We are family?" And life's greatest goal is to do God's Will.

In the days before radio or radar, ship captains had an ingenious way of sailing into a narrow harbor at night. There would usually be a prominent lighthouse on the most seaward rock outcropping, but the captain wouldn't steer toward that, it was a warning light. Instead he would look for three smaller lights on towers inside the city. When he lined up those three lights and kept his bow pointed toward them his ship would arrive safely.

Let's say you are seeking God's Will for some important decision. There are three simple lights you can line up to find God's will for your life. I've already mentioned one, it is the Word of God. If God tells you to do something in His Word, don't argue, like Nike, just do it.

The second light is the voice of the Holy Spirit in your heart—but He will never contradict the Word. Jesus said that when the Spirit comes He would guide you into all truth. Back in the ancient times when nomad caravans crossed the desert on camels, they would often encounter thick dust storms and lose their bearing. They would carry doves for just such an occasion. They would toss a dove into the air and note the direction it flew, always toward home. Then they would have a new bearing to travel. A dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit, and He will always be directing you toward your Father's home.

The third light is the counsel of godly friends. The Bible says in Proverbs 15:22 that "There is wisdom in the multitude of counselors." (KJV) If you're seeking God's will, line up these three lights and you'll usually avoid the rocks in life."

OUTLINE

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Eternal life is: Knowing Jesus

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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