

Above All Else, the Booklet

INTRODUCTION

I'm no archerist ...archeriorite
...archiebunker ...I don't know ...I DON'T
SHOOT ARROWS! That being said, I'm a
big fan of Robin Hood, plus I look good in
tights.

I used to love watching the Robin Hood shows when I was a kid. In practice, or the occasional competition, for which he would always disguise himself, Robin would pull an arrow from its quiver. He would slide the nock over the nocking point on the string, and as he began to pull back slowly he became fixated on his target. At this point he was completely unaware of anything else, other than the arrow, the target, and the space between. As he released that arrow, it would leave the bow like a rocket. Then, about 2/3 of the way there, in black and white slow motion (How did he do that?), it would course through the air toward its intended mark. Sometimes distance would demand that there be a small arch on the pathway; but it was well planned out. It was no surprise, but thrilling nonetheless, that every time Robin

would hit the very center of the target. He would then pull another arrow from its quiver. With even greater confidence after his recent success, he would do it all again. This shot would be so perfect that it hit the shaft of the first arrow, dead center, and split it in two. Truly amazing.

That is it! That is how to live a successful Christian life. Find the target. Be fixated on it. Focus on where you are, where you want to end up, and don't let anything distract you as you travel the path in between. If you are blessed to live a good, long life you may find yourself in slow motion as you get close to the target. That's okay. It worked for 'the Hood'.

People talk as if being narrow minded is a bad thing; and in a lot of ways it is. However, when it comes to our Christian walk it is necessary to put on our tights and be like Robin. We need to find the target God set for us, and keep singularly focused on that target. We cannot waiver. To achieve that our eyes cannot move from our intended goal. We must be narrow minded.

Serious Christ-followers want to hear the words: “*Well done, my good servant* when they stand before God someday, while many give that moment little or no thought. Others literally fear what God will say when they stand before Him. When we focus on the target, and live ***above all else*** in order to strike that target dead center, we will live a life that is very pleasing to God. Judgment day will be one of great reward.

THE TARGET

For the arrow to strike its target, one of two things are a must. First, the target must be *above all else*. If it is not high enough to be above your parked car, your painting of Elvis on black felt (amazing), or your cardboard cutout of Barry Manilow, then whatever it is that is between you and the target is going to become an obstruction that keeps you from hitting it.

Second, rather than placing the target high enough to shoot over top of those things, it is best to remove them all together. (But, seriously, we are talking about a Barry Manilow cardboard cutout here). Either way we are placing higher value on hitting the

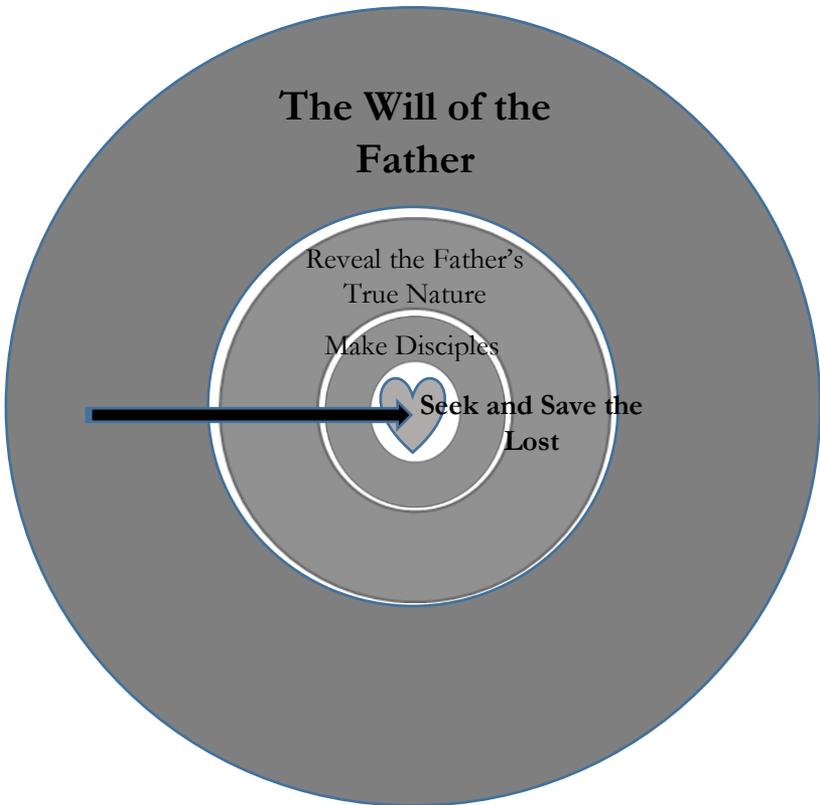
target than we are on everything else in our life. It must be that way. Doing God's will must be ***above all else***.

This is how Jesus lived His life. It is how we should live ours. We must have one primary target that guides every decision we make and every action we take. We would do well for our target to mimic that of Jesus.

This was what Jesus' target looked like. His primary goal was to **do the will of the Father**. *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. (John 4:34)*. Doing so is literally what sustained Him. The Father's will was ***above all else***.

That goal had three main components to it.

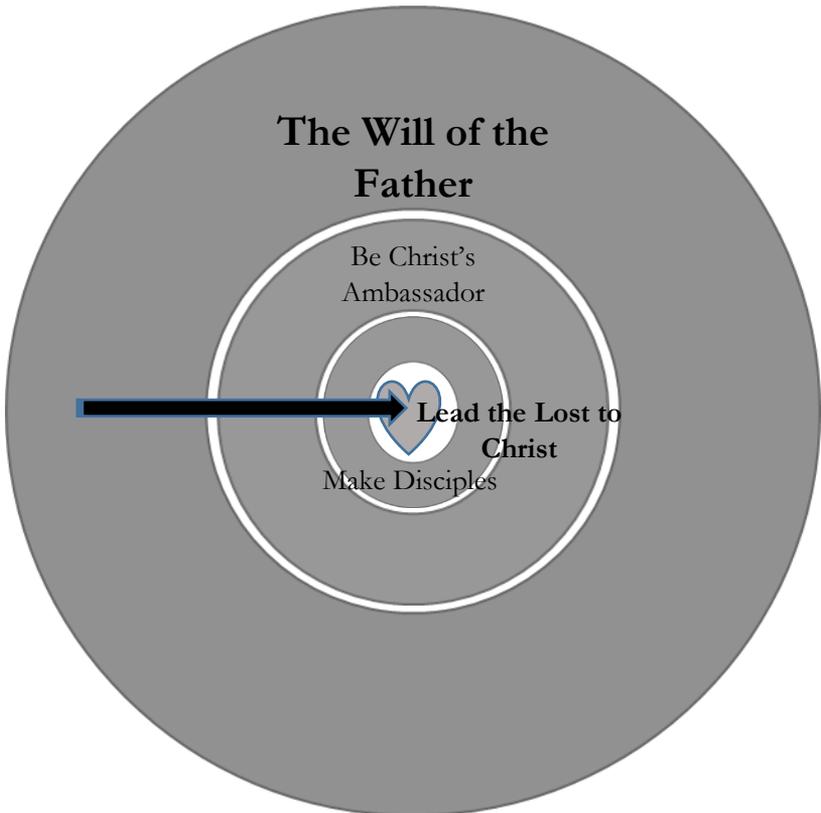
- Reveal the true nature of God
- Make Disciples
- Seek and to save the Lost



As Christ followers, our target is similar. We are to do the will of the Father *above all else*. We are to reveal the nature of God by being Christ's ambassadors. Jesus instructed us to go into all the world and

make disciples. Finally, we are to seek the lost and point them to Jesus, who is their Saviour.

“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (**Matthew 12:50**)



We see the depth of Jesus' commitment to hitting the target in the hours before His death. This is recorded as happening just before His arrest.

“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.

40 On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”

*41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet **not my will, but yours be done.**”*

43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” (Luke 22:39-44)

Here we see the struggle. Jesus felt the tension on the string as it was drawn tighter and tighter. The arrow would soon be released. He must keep focused. He must be narrow minded. He could look at nothing else. He could not be distracted by anything else. There was one last thing to do before the will of the Father was complete. It was to

hit the very center of the target. That must be His goal *above all else*.

We must learn to have that kind of focus, that kind of determination in fulfilling God's purpose for our life. We can find His will and purpose in the Scripture, which we will talk about, but let's not forget that each day is filled with specific tasks within the Father's will. There are individuals we must minister to. In some cases we plant seeds. In others we must water. In other cases we must help someone along in their faith journey. Our greatest joy may be the privilege of working in God's harvest field. Who, how, and when requires that we put God's will and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit *above all else* on a moment by moment basis.

CIRCLE ONE – THE WILL OF THE FATHER

Doing the Father's will is the big circle on the target. It is our general purpose as Christians. Like any target, there are smaller circles inside. They define in more detail what His will is.

Doing the Father's will is a great investment. It's extremely important that we understand this.

Jesus was concerned about His Church prioritizing the Father's will ***above all else*** for both the benefit of God's Kingdom, and our own personal benefit. That's why He told parables like this one. *“He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. **13** So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’ **14** ‘But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our*

king.’ **15** ‘He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.

16 ‘The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned ten more.’ **17** ‘“Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

18 ‘The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ **19** ‘His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

20 ‘Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth.

21 I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’ **22** ‘His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow?

23 Why then didn’t you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?’

24 ‘Then he said to those standing by, ‘Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.’

25 ‘“Sir,’ they said, ‘he already has ten!’

26 ‘He replied, ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing,

even what they have will be taken away. (Luke 19:12-26)

At the risk of over-simplifying, there are two important lessons in this parable. **One** is, that choosing to not use what God has given us to fulfil His purposes for our life is a costly choice. It is costly on a number of levels.

God has given us spiritual gifts, or ministry gifts as an investment in us. When we make financial investments, we do so with the intent of expanding our financial base through the wise use of that money. If the things we invest in don't produce dividends, we make changes to invest in something that does. In the same sense, God expects that His investment in us will pay off through the expansion of His Kingdom. That requires that we be wise in how we use our gifts, and that we use them to fulfil His purposes. When that doesn't happen it leaves Him feeling like He has made a bad investment and wanting to take what He invested in us and put it where He is more certain to get a return.

The other side of this is that we are eternally rewarded for the good things we do while on earth, if we do them. When we don't use the gifts the Heavenly Father has given us to do things of spiritual and eternal value, we are treated accordingly. Look at these verses.

- **Psalm 62:12** “...and with you, Lord, is *unfailing love*”; and, “*You reward everyone according to what they have done.*”
- **Romans 2:6** “*God will repay each person according to what they have done.*”
- **Revelation 22:12** “*Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.*”
- **2 Corinthians 5:1-10** “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*”

Everyone is born with certain strengths or talents, but upon becoming a Christian the Holy Spirit turns natural talent into spiritual gifts; making it possible for them to do the things they are naturally good at in a manner that is far beyond their natural ability. I am

speaking of these gifts: *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”*

(Romans 12:6-8). The danger is in using your gifts for some other reason other than to fulfil God’s will, or with no eternal purpose in mind, eliminating any spiritual return for the Father or eternal reward for yourself (see 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). That happens when we don’t put God’s will ***above all else***. We lose sight of the target. We do good things, but we do them with wrong motive, or we do things that don’t have eternal value. The reward is nil or poor.

Keeping God’s will ***above all else*** benefits God’s kingdom as well as ourselves. The return that God is looking for from His investment in you is spiritual and therefore eternal. We must set our sights on achieving this. When we do so, the return on God’s investment in us comes back to us; and the benefits to us then, are both spiritual and eternal.

CIRCLE TWO – CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS

In the Old Testament, God worked very consistently and meticulously to create the perfect scenario for His Son to be born, minister and eventually die as a sacrifice for our sins. That process began the moment Adam and Eve sinned. It wasn't an easy process, and to accomplish it He had to play hard ball most of the time.

When God finally came to earth in the person of Jesus, it was important that our view of Him be brought into balance. It was important that people see that His love and His compassion were at the core of all His actions. It was important that the world got to see that He longed for the relationship between Him and mankind to be restored, and would lovingly pay the highest price

possible to make that happen, all the while not diminishing His holiness.

In the gospel records, we see this constantly through the life of Christ. Often the gospel writers recorded that He was moved with compassion. His love was so often evidenced by the healings and miracles that He did. He wept when His friend, Lazarus, died. He wept over the city of Jerusalem, because they seemed so lost. They were like sheep without a Shepherd.

The fact is that He only had 3 years to accomplish making this incredible change in the way humanity viewed God.

People today have all kinds of distorted views of who God is and what He is like. Some view Him in an Old Testament kind of way. They see Him as a harsh rule-maker. Others see Him as being so gracious that He overlooks all sin, without there being any remorse or repentance whatsoever. Sin is without consequence. Others either don't believe that He exists; or if He does He certainly isn't interested in the lives of us as individuals.

Jesus beautifully represented God on earth. It was circle two of His target. Part of doing the will of the Father was to present a correct image of God's character to man. He

was determined to fulfil this task ***above all else.***

This caused Him to have countless conflicts with the religious teachers and leaders of the day who wanted to paint God in a totally different way. They pictured Him as nothing more than a rule-maker seeking out rule-breakers to punish them.

Jesus then left us with the task of duplicating that example to those we have opportunity to influence; and to give them a reason to want to be reconciled to God.

*“...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20** We are therefore **Christ’s ambassadors**, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”*
(2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

God’s desire to have the relationship with His most loved creation restored is the message we must share. For people to be even remotely interested in being reconciled with God, they must see His love, compassion, mercy, grace, goodness, and holiness in us. It is an accurate representation of God’s character that will catch the attention of the world. We cannot be the

reconciler, but we can reveal the unconditional love and character of the one who is. The third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit lives in us, helping us to achieve this remarkable privilege and great task.

We are Christ's ambassadors. We are the official representatives of God on earth. We are citizens of heaven living on earth to show those around us the true character of God the Father and God the Son. *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ"* **(Philippians 3:20).**

There is no question that this is the second circle of our target, as it was Christ's. In general terms, it sounds like a piece of cake. We just live good Christian lives and share our faith to whoever comes our way.

To truly be like Christ, and to truly be effective in this task, we must seek daily to know who, to know how, to know when to minister to individuals. We must know when to plant, when to water, and when to harvest with every individual we have opportunity to minister to. This requires constant sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Every single day, representing Christ well must be our goal when the front door of our house closes behind us. We must seek to do so *above all else*. This is the Father's will for us.

CIRCLE THREE – MAKE DISCIPLES

As we get one stop closer to the center of the target, the third circle is biblically clear.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:19-20)

This was the last commandment of our Commander in Chief. We can't ignore it. It can't be forgotten or neglected. These are our standing orders.

To be able to accomplish the task, we must better understand what the word 'disciple' means. Sometimes, in our minds at least, we reduce its definition to the twelve men from Galilee in the New Testament.

Even in the New Testament, there were DISCIPLES (the twelve), and there were disciples, who were faithful followers of Jesus. We can make disciples. Meriam Webster defines disciple in this way: “a convinced adherent of a school or individual.”

Our job is to help people be totally convinced that following Jesus is the best life possible. It is to teach them that making the Father’s will their priority is both a necessary and blessed way to live.

The reason why this is so important is because, as the number of true disciples increase, the number of people that prioritize the will of the Father increases. The benefit to the kingdom of God is exponential. We must establish making disciples our lifestyle ***above all else***. Making disciples is a great investment in the kingdom of God.

Our focus should be on those who are younger in the faith, those who are not well grounded in Scripture, and those who have got stuck in an immature faith-walk with God. They need convincing that the more committed life is the better life.

Obviously, the big question is how to do that. How do we make disciples? The easy answer is to be one. Disciples beget disciples. If we have already struck circle two on the target, and are a good ambassador of Christ's character, then we have set a worthy example before others.

Although that is a big part of disciple making, there is more to it than that. We must invest the gifts, experience and wisdom that God has given to us in the lives of other individuals who desire to grow stronger in their walk with God. Here are a few specific ideas of how you could help convince people that a life given completely to God is a worthy commitment.

- You could teach a discipleship class for people who sincerely desire to grow in their walk with God.
- Being part of a mentorship program can be very effective.
- Mentorship that is not part of a program, but rooted in a real and sincere friendship is very impactful . This doesn't influence as many lives,

but is probably the most effective method of truly seeing a life changed.

I am sure that there are many more ideas of how we can invest in the lives of others. Once again, being sensitive to the Holy Spirit is key. The point that I want to make clear though, is that to make a true disciple you must commit to being a true disciple ***above all else***. Your teaching in a group, or with an individual, will never carry weight unless your life lives up to your words. If you can't hit circle two, you will never be able to hit circle three.

CIRCLE FOUR – SEEK AND SAVE

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

Everything Jesus did was ultimately for this purpose, to seek and to save the lost. His entire life pointed Him toward the cross of Calvary. The Father’s will for Him was to ultimately suffer and bear the sins of all who will accept Him as Saviour, and to die as the perfect sacrifice for those who do so. This was the center of His target. This was the ultimate definition of the Father’s will for Him. Everything that He did was leading to this moment. Every healing, every lesson, every miracle would have meant nothing if He didn’t hit the center of the target.

It is here that, as churches and as Christians, we so often go wrong. I believe that it is in our heart to see people come to know Christ in a personal way. But there are

multiple distractions that take our attention from making that the center of everything we do; even though it is the center of our target.

Jesus did a lot of things. He cast out demons, He healed the sick, He raised the dead, He performed great miracles, and He taught both small and large groups of people. Of course He healed the sick because He loved the person and wanted them well. The same was true when He cast out demons or raised the dead. Rest assured, however, that His ultimate desire was that they would realize that He truly was the Son of God, that His teaching was truth, and that they accept the free gift of salvation eventually offered through the sacrifice of His own life.

There are many ways to use the gifts that God gives us as Christians. We encourage those dealing with difficult circumstances, we serve at church dinners, we teach Sunday School, we help those that are in need, we give generously, and we use our leadership skills by taking on responsibilities within the church structure. That's all good stuff. But if our motive ends with encouraging the downhearted, having a great

Sunday School class, helping people out financially or in other practical ways, or being part of the church leadership team; we have missed the mark. We have not hit the center of the target. Everything we do must ultimately be for the purpose of seeking out the lost so that they will be saved. We encourage others so that they have a testimony of God's goodness to share with others. We help at church dinners, hoping that unbelievers will come and be ministered to. We help people in need so they can see the kindness of Christ in us and be drawn into a relationship with God. We use our leadership skills to help our church grow into one that effectively ministers the Gospel message in our community. We use the gifts God has invested in us to seek and to save the lost ***above all else***.

St. Francis of Assisi said: "*Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.*" Often this quote is used as an excuse to not verbally share our faith. Please be careful with that way of thinking. Our character can get attention, but cannot give explanation. Truth be known, the Gospel requires clarification and often invitation. Living a good life

without the gospel message will draw people to ourselves. Our words must redirect them to Jesus.

The center of the target, the ultimate goal, the thing that matters *above all else* is that people realize that Jesus is truly the Son of God, that He is the Way to the Father, that His teaching is absolute Truth, and that eternal Life comes by placing our faith in Him. To fulfill the Father's will, the thing that must drive our every act is that others accept the free gift of salvation offered through Jesus sacrifice. This is at the center of God's will always, and therefore must be at the center of all that we do as Christians and as a church.

CONCLUSION

When we look at the target from the center out, we see the wisdom of the Father's will. ***Above all else***, we live and minister for the purpose of leading others into a faith relationship with Christ. We then disciple them into mature Christians so that together we can represent the character of God in this strange world we live in. We do that so that even more will come to know Christ and be discipled, so that they also represent the character of God well in our strange world, so that others will come to know Christ as their Saviour. And, so on. It is a perfect investment plan.

Jesus made a staggering statement, recorded by the Apostle Matthew, that should cause us to sit back in our chairs and truly assess the reason for everything we do. He said this: *'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only the one who does the will of my Father***

who is in heaven. 22 *Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?'* **23** *Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'* (**Matthew 7:21-23**).

Those are some pretty powerful ministries listed there: Speaking out in the name of Jesus, casting out demons and performing miracles. Jesus, however, makes it very clear that unless our lives are invested in accomplishing the Father's will, our ministries have no spiritual and eternal value.

Robin Hood's example is the right way to live a successful Christian life. Find the target. Be fixated on it. Focus on where you are, where you want to end up, and what you have to do to get from point 'A' to point 'B' successfully. Don't let anything distract you as you travel the path in between. Be singularly focused. Be narrow-minded in a good sense. Reaching the center of God's will is of primary importance ***above all else***.

What is the Father's will? It is to seek and to save the lost, make disciples, and be ambassadors of Christ.