

What is God's Will?

Stephen Lim
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

As Rick turned the ignition key, the engine of his minivan revved to life. Backing out of his driveway he headed for the church, where the evening Board meeting was scheduled to begin in 20 minutes. As he drove, he pondered the issue that had been raised at last week's specially called Board meeting of the New Life Church of San Francisco. After much prayer, thought, and discussion with other Board members, he still could not decide how he should vote.

Pastor Bill had received a call from Reverend Yung, whom he knew through ministerial fellowships of their denomination. Rev. Yung was the pastor of a ten-year-old, growing Korean congregation. "We need to find another facility in which to worship on Sunday evenings," he shared. "We've been meeting at a large church building, but the church there has decided that they need their sanctuary at that time. They gave us two months to find another location. For the past month we have been exploring every option."

"I know how hard it is to rent space in this city," Bill sympathized. "Any possibilities so far?"

"The only place available to us is a small church building, which can seat about 125, if people squeeze together," Rev. Yung responded. "With an average attendance of 300, not only would our growth be stifled there, but we could lose many of our present members."

"We would like to buy property as soon as possible, but you know how expensive real estate is in the Bay Area," he continued. "Within two years we hope to raise enough funds for a substantial down payment and to find suitable property. Meanwhile, we need a place to meet. Can your church help us?"

"I'm sensitive to your situation, and hope that we can help," Bill replied. "Long term use of the facilities, however, must be approved by our Board. I will bring this up with them as soon as I can schedule a meeting."

That was how Rick's pastor came to share with the Board reasons to open their building to this group. "The Korean church has

exhausted its options, and the only other church open to them is inadequate. They feel bitter that no other church of our denomination cares to help. Scripturally," Bill concluded, "we are called to help our brothers and sisters in need." He then opened the meeting for discussion.

Lily wondered about overtaxing the facilities. "I am all for helping others, but when do we reach the point of saturation? The preschool and afterschool care center use our building eleven hours a day, five days a week. A Messianic Jewish congregation meets here on Saturdays. And a Chinese church uses the building on Sunday afternoons along with some evenings. We use it Sunday morning and many nights. With the present groups, we experience conflicts about scheduling, missing items, and cleanliness. Then there is the problem of security. Sometimes doors and windows are left unlocked. In addition, with all these people wandering around, I don't know who actually belongs here, and who just wandered off the streets. Another large group would compound the problems we already have."

Ted disagreed. "I remember that in past years, before we purchased and remodeled our present building, we lacked space. At various times Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Adventist churches - plus a neighborhood center - willingly rented space to us. Can we turn down another congregation in need, especially a sister church? After all, even churches unaffiliated with us have rented to us."

Joe commented, "The building will receive more wear and tear. Also, there is no storage space available for another congregation's equipment and supplies."

"If we are talking about practical issues," Doris responded, "the extra rent would be helpful in our goal of a building a \$2 million multi-purpose facility adjacent to the church."

Jocelyn voiced her reservation. "Just because a need is urgent does not mean that it is God's will for us to meet it, nor that we are obligated to provide the solution. If this isn't God's will, don't we have the faith that he will provide for their need in another way?"

After extended discussion, no consensus could be reached. Pastor Bill suggested that the Board take a week to think and pray about the issue, before voting on it. The Board agreed and adjourned with prayer for God's direction.

The next day, Rick received a call from his friend and fellow Board member, Peter, who was an architect. "Since yesterday's meeting, I have done some thinking. I am afraid that another congregation could hinder our plans for the gym and educational complex. The Planning Commission always solicits neighborhood input before approving major construction projects. We have little off-street parking, so the proposed congregation would take 100 to 150 street spaces during the prime dinner hour. The many restaurants in our neighborhood will be very unhappy when they lose customers due to the absence of parking. And the residents around our church will not be happy to see hundreds of people pouring into the streets at 10:00 PM. If we anger a few neighbors, and they oppose our building plans, our dream of greater outreach and ministry will be jeopardized. I am planning to vote 'No.'"

The following day Matthew called. "I know that there will be inconveniences and hassles. Some neighbors could even complain. Despite the risks I have got to ask myself, 'What is the Christian thing to do?' I am leaning toward 'Yes.'" During the week Rick dialogued with several other Board members over the phone.

As he pulled into the parking lot of the church, Rick mentally summarized their options. From the discussion at the previous meeting and his phone conversations, he realized that four Board members approved renting their facility to the Korean congregation, while four opposed. He would cast the deciding vote.

What is God's Will? Teaching Notes

Teaching Objectives

1. Identify the immediate factors relevant to making significant decisions in a church: biblical-spiritual principles, circumstances, pragmatic issues, and emotional considerations.
2. Understand the broader contextual factors that may affect these decisions: history of the church, community relationships, denominational loyalty, and long range plans.
3. Evaluate the priority and relative weight of the factors involved in choosing a course of action.

Time needed: 60 to 80 minutes

Introducing the Case (15 minutes)

(Request someone to serve as recorder to post responses)

1. Ask participants what they know about the New Life Church.
2. Ask participants what issues the church faces.
3. Ask participants to state what they know about each of the characters: Rick, Pastor Bill, Rev. Yun6 Lily, Ted, Joe, Doris, Jocelyn, Peter, and Matthew.

Issues Explored (35-45 minutes, depending on the time available)

1. Divide the class into small groups of no more than six persons each. (A minimum of two groups is needed.) Approximately half of the groups will develop all the reasons for allowing the Korean congregation to use the facilities of New Life Church. The remaining groups will develop all the reasons against it. As much as possible, participants may choose which group they wish to join. The results from each group should be written on newsprint sheets or otherwise posted. (15 minutes)
2. Using the posted results, the groups will report their conclusions. If there are more than one "pro" or "con" groups, subsequent groups can simply add reasons not previously stated. (7 minutes)
3. Participants discuss/debate the alternatives as a class. (12-22 minutes)
4. Using previously prepared blank sheets of paper, participants indicate by secret ballot how they would have voted (Yes or No) if they were Rick. (1 minute)

What Was Learned (10-20 minutes, depending on the time available)

1. Based on this case, ask participants as a class to state what immediate factors and broader contextual factors can be involved in making significant decisions in a church. These may overlap. (5 minutes)
2. Ask several participants to share briefly what he or she learned about decision-making (5 minutes). If time permits, ask each participant who wishes to share (additional 10 minutes).