

The Story of Gideon: Part 4 Ascertaining God's Will

The past few Sundays, we have been following the story of Gideon in Judges 6. But, before we continue with his story, let me give you a hypothetical, using purely hypothetical names. Let's use the classic hypothetical names, Dick and Jane, who in this scenario are husband and wife. And let's assume that they are confronted with a major decision: Should they pull up stakes from the place where they've been raising their children for years and move half way across the country to a new neighborhood? And the reason for moving could be a something like a new job opportunity, or to be closer to aging parents, or maybe there is some health related reason for the move. Whatever the reason, that's a big decision to make—one that could affect their individual lives, as well as that of their family in dramatic ways. And, let me add that Dick and Jane are devout Christians. They want to make sure that their decision to move or to stay put is consistent with God's will. So how do they determine this? How should they go about ascertaining the will of God?

Well, that is not a unique situation for anyone to be in. People since the beginning of humanity have faced such major decisions involving one thing or another. In fact, Gideon found himself trying to

figure out the will of God. Or, was he actually doing something else? Well, let's continue in Judges 6 to see exactly what Gideon was up to. Last Sunday, we left Gideon right after he'd pulled down those pagan idols. And now, beginning in Verse 33, this is what we find: ³³ Soon afterward the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east formed an alliance against Israel and crossed the Jordan, camping in the valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ Then the Spirit of the LORD took possession of Gideon. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms, and the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him. ³⁵ He also sent messengers throughout Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, summoning their warriors, and all of them responded. ³⁶ Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, ³⁷ prove it to me in this way. I will put a wool fleece on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised." ³⁸ And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet

with dew.”⁴⁰ So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew. Judges 6:33-40 (NLT2)

Alright, let’s review these two signs that Gideon is demanding of God? How were they supposed to work? Well, first of all this lamb’s fleece was like a shammie that we’d use to dry our cars when we wash them—except that it would have wooly fleece on one side. On the first night, Gideon sets this fleece out on the stone surface of the threshing floor. He tells God to make the fleece soaking wet with dew, but to keep the stone floor completely dry. And so, that is exactly what God did. But that’s not enough to satisfy Gideon. So on the next night, Gideon reverses things. This time the threshing floor has to come out completely wet with dew, but the fleece has to be bone dry. This is a much harder test because the stone threshing floor would normally not have any dew on it, but the shammie-like fleece would be water absorbent and would soak up the dew. And yet, the next morning the fleece was completely dry, but the stone floor was dripping wet.¹

Now if you recall this part of Gideon’s story from Sunday School when you were a kid, what Gideon did was usually referred to as “*putting out the fleece.*” Have you ever heard that phrase, “*putting out the fleece?*” Sometimes you will hear people tell you that whenever you have to make a big decision in life, you need to “*put out the fleece.*”

So, “*putting out the fleece*” is typically viewed as being a very positive thing to do because the person doing it was supposedly seeking God’s will. And admittedly, if we are genuinely trying to seek God’s will for our lives, then, yes—that is a very good thing. But, is that really what Gideon was doing here?

Back in verse 14 of this same chapter, God had told Gideon what He wanted him to do. Specifically, God made it known to him in no uncertain terms that He wanted Gideon to take on the Lord’s strength and rescue the people of Israel from the evil, Baal-worshipping Midianites.² That was God’s will for him, pure and simple. And, from what we just read, it appears that God was proceeding on his end of the bargain by filling Gideon with the Holy Spirit and empowering him to crush those invaders from Midian. Thus, God had clearly made his will known to Gideon and had empowered Gideon to achieve his God-appointed mission. So, it’s pretty clear that Gideon’s “*putting out the fleece*” activity is nothing but a charade on his part. Why?—because Gideon was not trying to ascertain God’s will; rather, he was inexplicably reverting back to his old fears and doubts. And in so doing, he was trying to manipulate God by setting up conditions that God would have to meet before Gideon would do anything further. Anyone “*putting out the fleece*” in this way is committing a serious affront to

God, coupled with a terrible act of unbelief. This approach not only showed a weak faith on Gideon's part, but it's almost as if he's drifting back to the influence of Baal. In fact, tests such as this were popular among Baal worshippers. But, God's law prohibits such pagan forms of forecasting, especially when they are designed to somehow attempt to put God to the test.³

Alright then—we know what to say to Gideon. We know that we need to grab him and shake him and say, *“Gideon, what on earth is wrong with you! God is with you, now do something! More specifically, take up this army and get going after those Midianites and stop all this fleece-throwing non-sense!”* That's what we should say to Gideon. But what do you say to Dick and Jane? Let's not forget about them—because so often times, we are Dick and Jane. We are the ones desperately looking for a sign from God—looking for His guidance in making those difficult decisions of life. Do I take this job opportunity? Do I quit this job and look for a different one? Do I marry this person? Do I get out of this relationship? Do I have the surgery? *“God give me a sign,”* we pray. And we should do that. It is actually a sign of faith when we look to God to guide us in making life's difficult decisions. But, I think that one of the things that we might want to tell Dick and

Jane is not to be like Gideon—don't imitate him in the way he went about in tossing out that fleece.

As we have seen, God definitely told Gideon what His will was for Gideon's life. So think about it. Hasn't God also told you what His will is for your life? Hasn't the Lord expressed His will for you when He said to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God?⁴ —hasn't His Word already told you that? That's pretty good guidance in life for whatever decision you have to make. So why do you need a sign? The last thing that you want to be like is a manipulative Gideon, or like those of the generation of Jesus' day who were always demanding God to give them some kind of sign. But, Jesus told them that the only sign that they would get was the sign of Jonah.⁵ What did Jesus mean by that?—the *"sign of Jonah?"* The *"sign of Jonah"* alludes to Jonah lying in the belly of that whale for three days before God let him out of that huge fish. And what Jesus is really referring to is the most wonderful sign of all. Jesus was lying in the belly of death there in that tomb for three days before God resurrected Him from the dead. It was the sign that Jesus had conquered death. It was the sign that Satan's reign on earth would be coming to an end. It was the sign that God's offer to us of eternal life is a firm reality and an actually done deal. It is the sign of the Bread and the Wine that we will partake of in a few minutes. It is

the sign that God loves you and that His plan for your life is to ultimately give you good things and not to harm you.⁶ It is the sign that no matter how bad things may appear to be, God will work them for good if you just love and trust Him.⁷

Now, someone might still object to that and say, “Yes, but that’s not a sign as to what I am supposed to do. Why does God keep hiding His signs from me?” Does God do that? Does He sometimes refuse to give us any sign to guide us in moving forward? Yes, *sometimes* that is true. And why is that? Well, I think that Paul answers that best when he tells us that we live by faith, not by the sight of signs.⁸ Sometimes God doesn’t give us a sign because he wants our faith to develop by the experience—even if that experience may involve suffering and pain. For instance, take the case of Job. Do you think that Job would have even come out of his tent if God had given him a sign in advance of all those terrible things would be happening to him in the future?⁹ No, Job would have probably grabbed a shovel and dug a bunker, crawled in and gone into survivalist mode. And yet, Job did move forward with his life without any sign as to why these terrible things were happening to him. And, through those struggles and difficulties he not only kept the faith, but his faith was tempered by the fire of pain and made even

stronger. Job shows us the way to move forward in life—it is the way of faith in God—with or without any specific signs.

Gideon’s way of moving forward was not like that at all. Gideon demonstrates the manipulator’s way of moving forward. Oh sure, he converses with God in prayer—and that is a good thing. Prayers are extremely important, but they are harmful if they are merely prayers that foolishly try to manipulate God’s will. You only deceive yourself when you “*put out the fleece*” in an effort to “*fleece*” God. So if we avoid Gideon’s example, who can we look to for a good example of using prayer to seek God’s will when making tough decisions? Well, there are many instances in the Bible of sincere prayer that truly sought out God’s guidance. Take Jesus’ disciples for example. The disciples demonstrate the true believer’s way of moving forward. Their prayers were not prayers of manipulation, but prayers of submission and trust. After Judas killed himself, and Jesus had ascended to Heaven, the disciples needed to bring in someone to replace Judas. They prayed for God’s guidance in the selection process, and when it came down to two candidates for the position, they simply cast lots and trusted the outcome to God. The disciples weren’t trying to manipulate signs to get *their* will done. They believed God’s Word that says: **“We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall.”** Proverbs 16:33 (NLT2) **They**

were content to leave it in God's hands and then simply move forward—they were doers, not mere sitters. They were doers of God's Word because they trusted God's Word.¹⁰ God tells us to trust in Him and whatever we may do that is consistent with His Word—the outcome will take care of itself.¹¹

So, considering all of these things, if you were advising Dick and Jane about ascertaining the will of God, what would you tell them? Well, there are three things that you might want to stress. First, tell them to always engage in sincere prayer. Sometimes in response to sincere prayers, the Holy Spirit just pours over us, and we can feel God's will in the peace and comfort that we experience in just setting forth on a certain course. And then, we know that direction is where God wants us to go. This isn't just some whimsical feeling that flits about as part of our emotions. Rather, it is an inner peace that can only come from God. The Bible speaks of his when it says: And let the peace—the soul harmony which comes from Christ—rule or act as an umpire continually in your hearts, deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state to which, as members of Christ's one body, you were also called to live. And be thankful and be appreciative always giving praise to God. Colossians 3:15 (Adapted from AMP) **If you have made some decision and are moving forward with it, but find that**

you lack the peace of Christ in whatever you may be pursuing, then that may well be a sign that your chosen path is not in accordance with God's will. Then, it's time to retrace your steps and realign your actions with the will of God until a more peaceable plan of action emerges.

Secondly, you might also want to remind Dick and Jane that if God's will isn't answered in prayer, then don't just stop there. Go to your Bible—open it and read it, not just a verse or two, but entire passages. Study it. Think about it. Meditate on it. So often, God will reveal to you what course of action you should take through the promises made in His Word. I can't tell you the number of times that I was trying to make a decision—searching for guidance, and the will of God revealed itself right there in Scripture. It is there that God tells you what is pleasing to Him, and in so doing provides a compass that shows you the way to go. Don't leave that Bible on the shelf. The answers that you seek in pursuing God's Will are right there in black and white—and quite often in red letters, as well.

And finally, be attentive to the signs that only God can give—for He continues to signal His will to those who are spiritually receptive. Pastor Greg Laurie puts it this way: *"Not only does God speak to us through His Word . . . but God also speaks to us through circumstances. Although I'm not one to base major life decisions on circumstances*

alone, clearly there have been times when I sensed that something was the will of God and then things would fall into place circumstantially. At other times, circumstances have made it obvious that God was saying no . . . Of course, as part of this process, God speaks to us through people. For example, there have been times when I've been listening to someone preaching or have been talking with a friend, and suddenly what he is saying addresses the situation I'm going through, even though he is completely unaware of my circumstances. It makes me realize that it is God Himself speaking to me through those individuals.”¹²

Yeah! That is so very true. Keep your spiritual eyes and ears open, God speaks to those He loves so often in just this very way. Sometimes God's voice is loud and dramatic as when He spoke to Moses from the burning bush. But other times, as with Elijah, it's a small still voice¹³—just a whisper on the breeze. With all the sights and sounds of the world that bombard us today, we need to take the time to be quiet. We need to take the time to be still. Maybe God is giving signs all around you, but you are just too busy crying out that you don't hear or see a thing that He's trying to tell you. Maybe God is telling you what He told the Psalmist: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

That's the message that God has for Dick and Jane . . . and for you and me, as well.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
July 7, 2019
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¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Available (Judges)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 118-119.

² Judges 6:14 (NLT2) Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

³ Deuteronomy 6:16 (NLT2) You must not test the LORD your God as you did when you complained at Massah. See: John H. Walton, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the Old Testament – Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, (USA: Zondervan, 2009), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 156.

⁴ Micah 6:8 (NIV) To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

⁵ Matthew 12:39-40 (NIV) ³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

⁶ Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

⁷ Romans 8:28 (NIV) And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV) We live by faith, not by sight.

⁹ Job 1:9-12 (NIV) ⁹ "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. ¹⁰ "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." ¹² The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

¹⁰ James 1:22 (KJV) But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

¹¹ Jeremiah 7:23 (NLT2) This is what I told them: "Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Do everything as I say, and all will be well!"

¹² Greg Laurie, *Every Day with Jesus, Forty Years of Favorite Devotionals*, (Charisma: USA), 2013, 2018, p. 92.

¹³ 1 Kings 19:12 (KJV) And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.