

How Can I Know God's Will for my Life? Judges 6:1-16, 36-40

The most popular game for children and youth in the world is called *fortnite*. A 7 year old girl addicted to Fortnite has been put into rehab for treatment recently. You know the world is changing when this, along with the World Health Organization proposes adding "gaming disorder" to its manual of disease classifications. According to the manual, "Gaming disorder is characterized by a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behavior." Symptoms include a lack of control over gaming; giving gaming preference over other life interests and daily activities; and continuation or escalation of gaming despite negative consequences.

We live in a culture that is changing more rapidly than ever before. It used to be that you could be assured of two things in life, Death and Taxes. But I think it is now 3 things, Death, Change, and Taxes. Therefore, the question, "How can I know God's will for my life in such a fast changing world?" Some people ask this question with regard to a specific decision they are facing, others as they seek their general direction and life purpose.

From the Book of Judges, we look at a man who desperately needed to know how to answer this question. His story is in Scripture as an example for us today. From Gideon we will learn what to do and what *not* to do. Both lessons are vital.

Believe in God's love

Our story is set in one of the most dangerous periods in Jewish history. It begins, as so often in Judges, with the nation's sin: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord". As a result, "for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites" (v. 1).

Who were these oppressors? Why were they so dangerous?

Midian was the fourth son of Abraham by his second wife (or concubine) Keturah (Genesis 25:2). His descendants intermingled with the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:25), living as nomads in the desert east of the Dead Sea and the Sinai Peninsula (modern-day Saudi Arabia).

In our text, the Midianites aligned with "Amalekites and other eastern people" (Judges 6:3) to attack Israel. They amassed large herds of camels, making them much quicker than the foot soldiers of Israel (v. 5b).

When the harvest was ripe, they would appear "like swarms of locusts" (v. 5a) and steal the sheep, cattle, donkeys, and crops of the Jews (v. 4). The Israelites were forced to hide from them in mountain clefts, caves, and strongholds (v. 2). They could not defeat their enemy or live like this much longer. So, they *finally* "cried out to the Lord for help" (v. 6), repenting of their sin and turning to God. The question for us then arises...

Who or what are the Midianites and Amalekites in your life?

Where are you facing challenges and struggles? They may be the result of your sins, or they may be the result of living in a fallen world....

Either way, know that God still loves you. God knows your pain and cares about your suffering. You can still call out to him for help. It's never too soon to give up on God!

[Go where God sends You]

The Lord's revealed will for the Israelites need came in a surprising way.

He sent his angel to Gideon, son of Joash the Abiezrite, while he was "threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites" (Judges 6:11). Wheat was typically threshed in an open area where the wind could carry away the chaff, while grapes were crushed into wine in an enclosed area where they would be more protected from the elements.

Gideon was a labourer, working as a field hand. He was hiding from Israel's enemies in fear. Something we would not expect from a so called "mighty warrior" of God (v. 12b).

The angel assured Gideon that "the Lord is with you" (v. 12a).

The frustrated Israelite immediately protested that God's presence should not have allowed them to fall into the hands of the Midianites (v. 13).

Rather than speculate as to the reasons for their suffering, the angel offered the practical next step of God: "***Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?***" (v. 14).

I want us to hang on to this verse because there is an entire theology of God's will in it... in...Go where God sends You!

Lesson 1: God's direction is always more practical than speculative.

We humans want to know why something happened, whereas our Lord is usually more interested in showing us what to do when it does occur...

Rather than providing a full philosophical answer for their suffering, the Lord provides a practical solution in Gideon's leadership.

Lesson two: God has prepared us for whatever he calls us to do.

Gideon was to "go in the strength you have," not waiting until he acquired greater physical prowess or military might. The Lord has already made you ready for the next step you are to take, or he would not call you to take it. If you are to share Christ with a difficult neighbor or give a greater sacrifice of your time and money, or follow God into a new career or calling, then God has already prepared you for the will he now reveals... therefore... know this - You have the strength you need for the task at hand!

Lesson three: God's will is always for what comes next.

He was to "save Israel out of Midian's hand," because that was the problem before them. We want a five-year plan, but no one in Scripture is given such advance notice. Today is the only day there is. God's will is first and foremost for this present moment and the faithfulness it requires of us. Obedience, more than knowledge, is the issue.

Lesson four: God's will never leads where his grace cannot sustain.

God was "sending" Gideon in his will, provision, and power. He would go before him and prepare the way; he would sustain Gideon and his people in their battles; he would use them for his glory and their good. When Gideon protested that he was the weakest member of the weakest family in the weakest clan of Israel (v. 15), God repeated his assurance, "*I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together*" (v. 16).

Our Challenge Remains Then - Trust where God leads

In Gideon's case such assurance was not enough for him. So, he placed a wool fleece on the threshing floor where he was at work (v. 37). He asked God to make the fleece wet with dew and the ground dry, and his request was answered (vv. 37–38). Then he asked that the fleece be dry while the ground was wet (the greater miracle, as fleece would absorb much more dew than the ground), and again it was so (vv. 39–40). And Gideon had his assurance and was ready to lead the armies of Israel into battle.

God's willingness to meet Gideon's conditions demonstrates his grace. God takes us where we are and leads us... where we need to go. His love manifests even in our human fallen fleshliness to make us holy & set apart.

But the fact that the LORD was willing to give Gideon such signs is not clear proof that he intends us to ask for them today.

Gideon's method of determining God's will has come down through history as "putting out the fleece." Countless believers have followed his example by constructing circumstantial tests for knowing God's direction, in other words, 'putting God to the test!' I would caution you about using the "fleece" method as the biblical way of knowing God's will, for several reasons.

First, Gideon's fleece is described in the Bible, not prescribed in Scripture. No verse of God's word asks us to seek God's will in this way. The fact that Gideon used this practice does not necessarily mandate it for us.

Second, Gideon is not the best moral character in Scripture to follow. When the people of Peniel would not help him in battle, he pulled down their tower and killed all the men of the town (Judges 8:17). Then he took gold from the people and formed an ephod (a priestly garment) as an idol for the people to worship (vv. 24–27). He had many wives, and at least one concubine as well (vv. 30–31). Nowhere does the Bible lift him up as an example for us to follow in seeking the Lord's direction for our lives.

Third, a circumstantial "fleece" must be interpreted carefully. Satan can move people to act, as with Judas's betrayal of Jesus (John 13:27). People can misuse their freedom to act in ways which contradict God's word and will, as the Hebrews did in our text. And events can be understood in different ways. Jesus' miracles caused many in the crowds to believe in him, but some to attribute his powers to Beelzebub the prince of demons (Luke 11:14–15).

To Summarise, I say it again:

God's will never leads where his grace cannot sustain.
Whatever your challenges, know that your heavenly Father loves you.
Choose to go where God sends and trust where the LORD leads.

The LORD may reveal his will through Scripture, circumstances, other people, or by speaking to you intuitively. But if you are willing to go anywhere and do anything, when you need to know his will, you will.

The question is not one of knowledge, but obedience.

God had a plan for Adam and Eve—where and how to live...

A plan for Noah—how to build his ark, right down to the exact specifications and building materials he should use. A plan for Abraham, including where he should live, how old he would be when he had his son, and even that son's name. A plan for Joseph, using his slavery and imprisonment to save the entire nation. A plan for Moses, encompassing the very words he should say to Pharaoh. A plan for Joshua, showing him where and how to take the land. A plan for David and Solomon, for their kingdom and the temple they would build for him. A plan for Daniel, even in the lion's den.

Jesus had plans for his first disciples—plans they could not have begun to understand. He had a plan for Saul of Tarsus as he left to persecute the Christians in Damascus. He had a plan for John in exile on Patmos.

Now - God has a plan for your life!

So, in what way is the Lord calling you to be a Gideon for today?

Identify your Midianites, and the reason they are persecuting you.

If sin is causing your suffering, admit it and claim your Father's forgiving grace through the precious and powerful blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

Then seek God's direction for your next step.

Surrender to his will before he reveals it, refusing to be conformed to the world's mold, being transformed daily by your communion with him. And you will know his "good, pleasing, and perfect" will (Romans 12:2).

Ignatius of Loyola founded the Jesuits, and made this prayer theirs:

*Teach us, Lord, to serve you as you deserve,
To give and not to count the cost,
To fight and not to heed the wounds,
To toil and not to seek for rest,
To labour and not to ask any reward,
Save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.*