

Christian comedian Ken Davis tells the following story about waiting for a "sign from God." A Christian gets on an empty city bus, walks to the rear, and sits down. "Lord", he prays, "*if you want me to speak to someone about you, please give me a sign...*" At the next stop another passenger (a non-believer) boards the bus... goes all the way to the back... and wouldn't you know it (?)... He sits down - right next - to the Christian. ... Amazingly this new rider with a quizzical look on his face asks, "*Do you know anything about this... .. Jesus ... Person?*"

The Christian excuses himself for a moment and slowly bows his head and once again prays, "*Lord, if you really want me to talk to this stranger, I need just one more (little) sign. Please just turn the bus driver into an armadillo.*"

When it comes to trying to determine God's will... haven't some of us been praying for armadillos? Have you been waiting for a sign from God that you really hope never comes... before you get serious about following Him? ... "*Brother Dave has asked me again this year... if I would be willing to serve on the Decon Board. Send me an armadillo, Lord... if it is your will for me to say 'yes'...*" "*God, I need an armadillo if you really want me to start supporting this missionary...*" "*...What...?! ... Forgive that former friend...? That will take TWO armadillos... Lord!*"

Perhaps you've heard the phrase... "*laying your fleece before the Lord*"... That is when we give God certain conditions... that we think **we must** see happen... so that we would know He wants us to do something. ... "*God... bring my paycheck in today's mail... and I will KNOW that You want me to donate to the food pantry at the church...*" "*Make this stoplight turn*

green before I get to the intersection... and then I will know that You want me to attend tonight's Bible Study at the Johnson's..."

The phrase "*laying your fleece before the Lord*"... comes from our passage of study for today. It comes at the very end of it. We will see Gideon tell God that he need to see certain conditions... in order to know God's will. God will meet those conditions... but then Gideon... still unsure... asks God for another set of specific conditions – and God... once again submits to Gideon's testing.

Many have looked at Gideon's actions... and God's response to it... and have thought... "*Well... there you go!*" - *It's Biblical!*" ... "*If we want to determine what God's leading is... then it must be OK for us to lay our own fleece out... before the Lord...*" ... "*OK... then... Lord... I want You to bring a deer skipping across my front lawn... if You want me to... pay my electric bill... rather than buy a new computer.*"

But is that God's way for us to know His leading...? Is it appropriate for us... to lay our fleece before the Lord. ... I will reserve my answer to that... until we get to this action... in today passage. ... In the meantime... there is plenty for us to talk about... that concerns itself with... how we can know what God's leading is... in the verses leading up to it. ... We see so many factors in today's passage that will be of great help... to anyone who is trying to determine God's will on a matter in their life.

Now... here is the most dominant principle that we see in this narrative about Gideon. (LISTEN) Yours and my following God... is based on our relationship with Him... rather than a special "sign." ... Rather than looking for some sort of infallible spiritual prescription... that will always lead a

seeker to the cast-iron certainty of His will... or searching for individual undeniable signs... God wants us to develop and rely on a special closeness to Him. He wants to lead us... primarily through our on-going and deepening relationship with Him... and not some periodic rituals or applied formulas... whenever we feel stymied about His leading. ... We will see God do this in today's passage.

Here is something else you should watch for it in our Scripture study... because it is definitely here... as well:

“God is often unwilling to make His will clear to us... until we are willing to accept it.”

We must strive to have an **attitude of willingness** to do God's will... once He reveals it. (You see) I am absolutely convinced... that a believer's confusion over God's will... is not as much a matter of God not being clear enough... as it is a matter of the **believer** simply... not willing yet... to accept it. ... Today we will see how God prepares Gideon's willingness...

The Lord will guide us... rather than hide from us. It will come primarily as (1) we draw near to Him... and (2) once we have developed a willingness to obey. Today we will see these two factors and a few more... about how to discern God's leading in our lives.

That is all coming up... plus a lot more... but first... let's get the background to Gideon's story.

Judges 6:1-6

We have in verses 1-6 the most detailed description so far... of Israel's distress... from which God would raise up a judge to rescue them. ... And **dire** distress it was! ... Seven years of it...!

Imagine yourself in their situation: You are hungry, poor, and tired. ... Because every year... you diligently worked your land... planting seed... watering... weeding... cultivating. Then... as soon as harvest time came... as sure as income tax... Midian's buzzards come. They pillage everything you worked for... and allow their livestock to trample and destroy the rest. ... You're tired of rushing your family... livestock (what is left of it)... and grain (if salvaged) ...to the hills where you live a caveman existence till the foreign locusts get bored and move on to impoverish others. ... You worked by the sweat of your brow all spring... raising your new sheep... oxen and donkeys... thinking maybe this year you might make it. ... But it wasn't to be. ... Some lookout on a hill would shout, "*Oh, oh! Here they come. Back to the caves!*" ... So there you are again... along with the other People of God - living in caves in the ground.

Judges 6:7-11

Now... Yahweh does the strangest thing! ... In fact... it appears ludicrous. Israel cries for relief... 'and Yahweh sent a prophet... a prophet(!)... not a deliverer... to the sons of Israel'... That would be like Tyler having engine problems... stuck on the side of 97 in the middle of the night in January... so he calls someone mechanical... like Rick to come and help... but... I show up instead. (I am helpless when it comes to car repairs!) ... "OK... Tyler... *Let's read James chapter one... shall we...?*" Not that Tyler doesn't

like James or any other Scripture... but I think he would much rather have someone like Rick to come.

But... getting back to our story... Israel needs deliverance and Yahweh sends a prophet. ... Israel asks for an act of God's power... and He sends them a proclaimer of His word who rehearses Yahweh's grace... repeats Yahweh's demand... and levels Yahweh's accusation.

Yahweh sent a prophet... because Israel needed more than immediate relief. ... They needed to understand why they are oppressed. They had to see that 'Yahweh gave them into the hand of Midian'... because they had 'not listened to His voice.'

Surely God's way with his people has not changed. ... Is there a log-jam of unresolved issues that you know God wants you to take care of...? ... Before God began the process of revealing His will to Gideon... we see that there was an important matter to take care of first. ... This may be true for you. ... Remember... God's greater interest is to lead us by an ever deepening relationship with Him. To hear God speak to us... we need to listen openly... and that means... being willing to hear God correct us

Indeed... the first step in seeking guidance in your life from God... is to ask Him to search your heart for any area of life... belief... or motive... that is not given over entirely to Him.

There is something strange... that I would like to call to your attention about the prophet's preaching... and it is this: He didn't finish his sermon. Look with me again at his proclamation... and you'll see what I mean.

Judges 6:8c-9

The next thing we know... the Angel of Yahweh comes and sits under the oak at Ophrah. ... That is wholly unexpected. ... After hearing the prophet accuse in Yahweh's behalf, '*But you have not obeyed my voice,*' we expect him to say what any other prophet would be expected to say... which would normally be an announcement of judgment. ... The complete sermon of a prophet is... "*Here is what you did (or did not do)... and this will be your consequence...*" If you read any of the major or minor prophets you will see that they all do this.

BUT the problem with this prophecy in Judges 6... is that after verse 10... we are all tensed for the proper 'therefore' ... but it does **not** come. ... The judgment that should be announced is omitted. ... Instead the Angel of Yahweh goes to coax a man... hiding in fear... to deliver Israel.

When God 'ought' to **destroy**... He **delivers** - yet again! ... When He has every right to shatter... He nevertheless prepares to save. ... This is our God! He is rich in mercy! He is 'slow to anger' indeed!

Now... Gideon is **NOT** introduced to us... as a hero... or outstanding man.

Judges 6:11

Gideon was threshing wheat inside the winepress. ... Now the winepress... in that day... was always put at the foot of the hill... because they brought the grapes down from the vineyard. ... Naturally... they would carry the heavy grapes downhill... they carried them to the lowest place.

In contrast... the threshing floor was always put up on the top of the hill... the highest hill that was available... in order to catch the wind which would drive the chaff away. ... But here we find Gideon... down at the bottom of the hill... threshing.

Can you see the frustration of this man? He doesn't go to the hilltop... because he is afraid of the Midianites. ... He does not want them to see that he is threshing wheat. ... Now let your imaginations take over again... for just a minute... and you might sense his frustration. ... There is no air getting to him down there... certainly no wind. ... He pitches some grain up into the air... but in the absence of any wind... both the kernels and chaff... drop straight down... getting into his face... his hair... The itchy stuff falls down around his neck and gets inside his clothes... making him very uncomfortable. ... But there he is... trying his best to thresh... in a place like that. He might have considered going to the top anyway... but suddenly his cowardly thoughts would return... "*No... it's too great of a risk...!*" ... Gideon was having a very frustrating experience... when suddenly... surprisingly... the angel of the Lord appeared to him. ... And it seems pretty funny to me how the angel of the Lord (Who I believe was the pre-incarnate Christ) ... addresses Gideon.

Judges 6:12

Gideon is hiding like a coward in a winepress... and look what the Lord calls him - "*Mighty man of valor.*" ... Isn't that funny...?

There are a few observations that would like to make from this... about the way God often reveals Himself to us. ... When I was doing my research for the dissertation... I read a book by Chuck Swindoll about how God leads.

In it he wrote: "God's preferred method is by surprise. So expect surprises. I repeat, surprises are the rule, not the exception."

The next thing that we should notice... is that whenever we are dealing with God... as we come to Him... He is not picturing us in our present circumstance... but as the person He is fashioning us to become. ... He didn't see Gideon as an insignificant "nobody"... fearful and hiding in a winepress... even though that was what Gideon was doing at the time. Instead He saw... and He addressed Gideon... as the person he would become.

Are you asking God for His wisdom in an area of your life...? Be comforted by this. As he meets with you in prayer... and in Bible study... He sees you... and He treats you... as the person you will become... even though your present circumstance might seem contradictory.

Judges 6:13-16

Can't you see Gideon lift up his head and say, "You must have the wrong wine press! I'm Gideon. I'm no valiant warrior; I'm not courageous. My activities ought to show you that. Are you sure you're in the right place?" "By the way, where is the Lord? Hasn't He abandoned us?"

Gideon doubted God's care and argued with the angel of the Lord about the legitimacy of the angel's declaration. *"The Lord has forsaken us."* ... This accuses God of unfaithfulness. Gideon's understanding about God... was that He does not care.

But Gideon is wrong. It is Israel who was unfaithful... not God. ... It is Israel who did not care about Jehovah... not Jehovah Who did not care about Israel. ...

God began to work inside Gideon... to bring these wrong assumptions to the surface. This had to be done... because God's primary way of leading us is by our being rightly related to Him... in an ever deepening fellowship. Look how God put Gideon's focus on their fellowship.

God tells Gideon... Go in this might... Gideon... that I am sending you.

Judges 6:16

God leads through a proper relationship with Him. It isn't a formula... or special sign. So... Gideon and the Lord start dealing with Gideon's obstacles to that proper relationship. Gideon has some wrong assumptions about God's care... and about his own self... and worthiness. But the bottom line is this: I am sending you... and I am going with you.

Gideon protested his call because he was unworthy and unable. **First**, he lacked riches. "*My family is poor*". This was true, but money does not determine Divine callings. **Second**, he lacked rank. "*I am the least in my father's house*". This also was true, but earthly rank does not decide Divine callings.

Here is where Gideon, like many Christians, makes his mistake. Gideon focused on what he was... not Who God is! ... He focused on what he could do and not what God could do.

On the other hand... we seem to have a different problem today... Many who seek the Lord's will in their life... are too strong for God to use. ... Many are just too capable.

1 Corinthians 1:26-27

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

God used all of the judges... in this book we are studying... but not because they were capable or outstanding. ... Does that encourage you... like it does me...?... Do you know why God does not use many people? ... They are too strong. ... Many have too much talent for God to use us. ... They are doing their own will and going their own way. ... There are multitudes of people... talented people... people with ability... whom God is not using. ... 1 Cor 1:26-27 lets us know why. ... They are too strong for God to use.

God wants weak vessels... and that is the only kind He will use. When God gets ready to do anything... He chooses the weakest thing He can get... in order to make it clear that He is doing it. ... We'll see this same principle in next week's passage... when Gideon takes his troops to the river.

Judges 6:17-22

As Gideon tries to figure out if God is speaking to him... he does what...? He prepares a tremendous sacrifice... and makes an offering. ... This amount of food that Gideon prepares... especially in a time of famine... was at great personal cost. These provisions would have fed a family for a week.

What do we do... when we are trying to determine God's will...? ... We do the exact opposite. ... *“God – FIRST verify... eliminate every reason I have to doubt that this is You... and then I'll probably respond in a sacrificial manner...”*

You know what I think we learn from this...? ... Those who would confirm the truth of God... must be devoted to the Lord. ... (LISTEN)... Stingy... selfish people... will have trouble discerning the mind of God. ... If you are waiting to hear from God on a matter in your life... then while you wait... evaluate your selfishness. ... (...And by the way...) Does one of the options you are trying to decide if it is God's will... appeal to your sense of selfishness...?

The sudden appearance of the fire and disappearance of the visitor convinced Gideon that indeed he had seen God and spoken to Him, and this frightened him even more. Since the Jews believed it was fatal for sinful man to look upon God, Gideon was sure he would die. ... Ironic... isn't it...? ... Gideon asked to see a sign... and after seeing it... he was sure that the God who gave him the sign would now kill him!

Judges 6:23-24

The presence of God's peace is a BIG DEAL in the process of discerning God's will.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

I have used this verse a lot in my life... when I am trying to discern God's will... and I have counseled others with it. ... *“Let it RULE in your heart...”*

The word rule... in the Greek language... suggests the role of an umpire. Let the peace of Christ determine what is a “ball” and what is a “strike.” When His peace resides on one of the options... then you know how the decision should go. ... But once again... we will not sense His peace... without our being in right relationship with Him. ... He will lead us through our relationship.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

He will do it... by giving you His peace toward the way of His leading.

Judges 6:25-32

Our time is getting very short... so let me simply observe from this... that God will often test our resolve... our willingness to obey Him... in the process of learning what His will is. ... Those tests are not easy. But the development of a willingness to obey... is the most crucial element of our process to determine God’s leading. Gideon showed he had been developed. ... And then notice how God assured Gideon that He really was along side Gideon. God showed His providing nature by raise Gideon’s father up... unexpectedly (because Gideon did some stuff that we’d expect would have angered the father.) This had to be a “God-thing.” Joash said... “If Baal is a god... then let him take vengeance for himself!”

Mark this – the presence of opposition... opposition EVEN from among your own people... (in Gideon’s case... it was people from his own village)... the presence of opposition... does not mean you are outside the will of God!

Finally now – the fleece!

Judges 6:36-40

I will argue that when the full range of Biblical evidence is understood... we see that Scripture points us AWAY from laying our fleeces before the Lord... as a healthy approach to determining God's will.

We never see an example in the New Testament of this... and yet there are plenty of examples where God's servant was trying to determine God's will. There is not even a HINT in the rest of Scripture that we are to look for and depend on "signs" to determine God's leading. Look for signs to determine the "end of the age" – YES ! But that is not the same as looking for signs to know His will on a particular matter.

Jesus never taught us to use signs in the manner Gideon did. What did Jesus say on the matter...?

John 14:26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Are you looking to God to give you an answer on a particular matter of your life...? ... Do you yearn for Him to tell you... THIS WAY... and not THAT...?

Look for Him to answer – through your relationship with Him. That is what God was doing with Gideon. But as New Testament Believers... His Holy Spirit resides in our life... and can effectively teach us... and point us to the peace of Christ. Draw near to Him.

The Apostle Paul was writing about determining the will of God when he wrote:

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.