**Seeking God’s will for our lives: How can we discern it? (JD09)**

After I prayed about undertaking another MA program in Asian American Studies, I came to a conclusion that this was God’s will for my life. C:\Users\cryun2\Documents\Imagenes 1\Sports Related\Boxer 3.tif I thought this training, along with seminary education, would help me to understand the mindset of the people whom I was going to minister in the future. However, it seemed like everyone was discouraging me (saying, “What for?” or “Is your faith OK?”) and on top of that I didn’t get accepted by the program. My first thought was that I must’ve misread God’s will but after praying about this matter, Proverbs 24: 16b came to my mind: “For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again.” I sensed that I hadn’t misread God’s will but that this was an obstacle that I needed to overcome and persevere. After resubmitting a required paper for admission, which I worked hard on, I got accepted. Looking back, this MA degree was pivo-tal in getting accepted to a Ph.D. program; more importantly, it was during this period that the Lord opened my eyes to see the need for contextualizing His eternal truth in an ever-changing world. To many of us who want to follow Christ, we desire to know God’s will concerning jobs, schools, relationships, etc. What I shared here in discerning God’s will, perhaps many experience guidance in this way (i.e., a certain thought or verse). Let’s explore other ways of seeing God’s will.

***Get up!***

**Q:** Share a similar situation in which you ascertained what you were praying for on your 2nd try.

**A. Revisiting Gideon:** Read 6:11-24, 33-40.

1. Whenever we can identify ourselves with people appearing in the Bible, the level of our interest goes up. I think Gideon is someone whom we can easily identify with since he does what we would normally do when facing similar circumstances.

**Q:** What does Gideon do that reminds us of ourselves in these verses: 6:13, 15, 17, 36 & 39?

**R:** In 13, he wonders about God’s faithfulness. (*If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?)*

In 15, he doubts his ability to do what God said. (*How can I save Israel. I’m the least in my family.*) In 17, he needs an assurance that God is really speaking to him. *(Give me a sign that it’s really you.)*

In 36-39, Gideon tests God twice before accepting the call to lead Israel into a great battle.

2. The focus of the study is Gideon’s way of figuring out God’s will in his life. The narrative presents a reluctant man who wishes that God had chosen someone else for the big task. He

doesn’t really want to do this unless he is absolutely sure that it is the LORD’s will.

**Q1:** In 36-38, describe the request he made to the LORD. In essence, what’s he asking God to do?

**R:** A miracle! The dew should be on both the fleece & ground but God obliged his request by making the ground dry! Since that doesn’t happen every day, it ought to be enough! Nope!

**Q2:** In 39, describe the 2nd request Gideon made to the LORD. Is it different from the first one?

**R:** No, there is no difference since he is asking for another miracle— this time for a dry fleece!

**Q3:** But each time God obliged by doing what Gideon asked Him to do. What does that imply?

**R:** It implies that asking God to demonstrate His will through circumstantial changes may be one of the ways to figure it out, as in, “Lord, if this is your will, then let this be like this . . . “

**B. Making sense of this: Is it OK to do what Gideon did when seeking God’s will?**

1. The NT doesn’t really talk about the so-called Gideon’s fleece method in figuring out God’s will, thus we may not have any specific guidelines in how to properly implement this.

**Q**: Do you detect any peril in using this method to seek the Lord’s will? If so, what are they?

**R:** Those who don’t really want to obey God can ask Him to do something so outrageous that it

has no chance of happening. So when it doesn’t happen, they can justify their unwillingness by

saying to God**,** “I was going to obey but you failed to confirm it!” Another peril: we might

keep asking for more signs. Gideon asked for two but how many more are you willing to ask?

2. Today’s study is about how to avoid mishearing God because if you think Gideon’s method is

over the top, then consider two other ways found in the NT.

**Q1:** Read Acts 16:6-10. What means did God use to change Paul’s mind about going to Bithynia?

**R:** A dream! A Macedonian man appearing in Paul’s dream informed the apostle that God’s will

was for him to do missions work in Europe instead of in northeastern Turkey.

**Q2:** Are you ready for the next one? The 11 apostles used the following method in order to choose the 12th apostle to replace Judas who betrayed Jesus. Read Acts 1:23-26. What was it?

**R:** They cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias. But do notice that they had prayed first!

3. Can we rely on these methods to know God’s will for us? We shouldn’t completely say NO but we do need a firmer base & some guidelines before expecting God’s direction in these ways.

**Q:** Share an experience of having discovered God’s will through one of these methods.

**The writer’s example:** I was at Southland’s New Year’s Eve service in 2006 where Pastor Keith talked about the need to fast for the New Year. So I made a mental commitment to fast but once I returned home to Mexico I gave no further thought on the matter. But one night in January, a renowned California pastor Chuck Smith appeared in my dream, telling me, “You have to fast.” Scared, I asked, “For how many days?” I was quite relieved when he said, “2.” So happily I did the fast, wondering what I would have done had he said, “20?”

**C. Reviewing Gideon’s method**

1. So what does putting out the fleece to figure out God’s will look like in real life? Try this one:

**The writer’s example:** The year 1999 was when I was sensing that the Lord was leading my

wife and me toward missions. So one Sunday morning before going to church, I prayed, “Lord,

if you want me to be a missionary, show me a sign, today.” In the service, the pastor of the

church who had spoken for more than an hour on Christology all of sudden asked the conger- gants to raise their hand if they are Christians; many complied including me. Then he declared that those whose hands are raised are all missionaries! Little sleepy before hearing this, I was now wide awake, thinking this was definitely a sign that I had asked for that very morning.

**Q1:** In what way was this similar to what Gideon did?

**R:** I was hoping to discern God’s specific will through a confirming sign in my circumstances.

**Q2**: Does this method guarantee the discovery of God’s will? **R:** No, of course not.

2. In order for this to work (the Lord willing), it must be accompanied by 2 things:

* One is prior compliance to God’s general will regarding how we ought to live in all areas

of life, which is very easy to discover with a full assurance that it is from God.

* The other one is an attitude of humility, reminding us that just because I’m obeying God’s

specific will (i.e., the big picture) for my life doesn’t mean that He automatically approves every step I take in trying to fulfill it. We still need to abide by God’s general will in the decisions we make and how we treat people (e.g., looking not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others— Phil. 2:3-4).

**D. Theology of God’s general and specific will**: God’s will is twofold, general and specific.

1. His general will embraces His plan and purpose for the whole creation, which would include us. There is no mystery about this because it is plainly shown in the Scripture for all to see.

**Q:** For instance, to a married boss who is praying whether it may be God’s will for him to have an adulterous affair with his secretary, what would God say to him?

**R:** Something like: “I already gave you an answer. Read 1 Thess. 4:3 and obey.” It says, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.”

2. In addition, God has His specific will which differs with each individual Christian. Ephesians

2:10 states, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” This means that God has a tailor-made plan for the life of every believer. The details, of course, are not spelled out in the Scriptures.

**Q1:** In reading 2 Cor. 6:14-15 (*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers*), what can we learn about

God’s general will with respect to whom should Christians marry?

**R:** It seems obvious here that a believer shouldn’t be married to an unbeliever.

**Q2**: Other than that, what does (or, doesn’t) this verse say about whom the believer should marry?

**R:** Of course, this verse does not say where this person can be found, who this person is, and in case there are two or more potential suitors (all Christians), which is the right one! These

are specific details that we need to obtain from the Lord, but how?

3. Read Rom. 12:1-2 (*In view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy & pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you’ll be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing & perfect will*.)

**Q:** It suggests that to ascertain the specific will of God, the mind of the believer must be renewed day by day by an act of continual consecration. So what does the renewing of the mind have to do with successfully discerning God’s specific will for our lives?

**R:** If one’s mind is saturated with values from Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and the Wall Street, then this individual is likely to want those things associated with these worldly values.

* Given such a state of mind, the person would be predisposed to not want what God has for him (not fun or profitable enough); thus, he may not pray at all to seek His will.
* Even if that person prays about his choices (however perfunctory it may be), he is likely to rationalize his desire as if it is God’s will, usually by way of twisting some scriptures such as Ps. 37:4 (*Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.)*
* But when the mind has been renewed & continues to be renewed by God’s principles, values & worldview delineated in the Scriptures, then whenever God’s specific will is broached during one’s seeking, that person will see that it is “good, acceptable and perfect.”

4. It is not easy to ascertain God’s specific will, for it takes time & discipline. It is also impossible to know this will unless we’re willing to bring our lives in conformity with His general will.

**Q:** Why do you suppose this is the case? Why does non-conformity to God’s general will affect our ability to discern God’s specific will for our lives?

**R: “**Only when we do His general will, which we know, will He give us light regarding His specific will, which we don’t know. It is at this point that many Christians go wrong. They pay little attention to what God has revealed regarding His general will, but spend much time and thought trying to ascertain His specific will” (Herbert Kane 1982:43).

5. Suggestion: Before asking God to help us to discern his will (i.e., before making a decision) through any of the four ways presented in the study (i.e., inward impressions while praying,

putting out a fleece, through dreams, casting lots), we ought to consider the following:

* Am I in His word? In other words, does my present life display a consistent intake of God’s principles, worldview & values? If no, then we ought to delay making an important decision until we develop a pattern of reading, studying, and meditating on His word.
* Am I currently complying with God’s general will? If not, then in discovering God’s specific will, there will be confusion and also delusion. Instead, start obeying His general will by

getting rid of those things that are harmful to your spiritual life while you stop doing certain activities that you know are displeasing to the Lord.

6. Share about any decision that you need to make at the present moment. What can you do to ensure that you hear correctly from the Lord on this matter?