CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 28 2019

knowing God's will

Scripture Story: Judges 6–8; 10.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets (or, Beginning of the End)*, chapter 53.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This lesson is primarily about Gideon, but it has volumes to teach us about numerous topics. The dangers of compromising with the world, worshipping idols, following the calling of God, character, leadership, selling out to God, knowing the will of God—these are but a few of the directions this story can take us. For the purposes of this lesson, the emphasis will be on three things: (1) the will of God; (2) knowing your purpose; and (3) the remnant and its mission.

While some Christians cite Gideon's method of setting out a fleece (Judges 6:36-40) as the best way to discern God's will, it's important to note that this is the only occasion in Scripture when God revealed His will through a fleece. The fleece was not God's first choice in methods. After all, the LORD had already told Gideon what to do (Judges 6:11-16) and even gave him a confirming sign (Judges 6:17-22). Still, Gideon displayed less than perfect faith and demanded more evidence. So is there a better way than the fleece method to know God's will? Max Lucado answers: "Yes, God has clearly and objectively told us what He wants throughout the Bible. For example, the Ten Commandments give straightforward instructions to guide our behavior in numerous areas of life."*

Another nuance of Gideon's story centers on God's calling in life. In Ellen White's treatment of the story, it is clear that God called Gideon to do a special work for His people. Still today, God calls young people to a purpose-filled life.

Finally, just as God delivered His people from the Midianites, so too will He deliver His people at the end of time. Satan, and his agents in this world, will not have the last word. Praise God that He has, throughout the ages, preserved a remnant people.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discern the will of God. *(Know)*
- See that God has a purpose for their life. *(Feel)*
- Follow God's promptings. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

- The will of God
- Purpose (knowing yours)
- The remnant and its mission

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Divide the students into groups and refer them to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. Have them identify other areas of life where young people struggle to know God's will. Give each group two minutes to brainstorm as long a list as possible. The answers must reflect their own experience in wondering about God's will but cannot duplicate the questions listed in* What Do You Think?

Illustration

To introduce the lesson, read the following story. Introduce it by saying something like, "When it comes to

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knowing God's will, Pastor Karl Haffner tells this story":

"What are we going to do?" I moaned to my wife, Cherié. "Maybe we should move."

Late into the night we anguished. Clearly, there was no easy answer. We had to decide—continue to pastor in Washington State or move across the country to Florida. This decision was like seeing through a jug of milk.

While in the valley of decision, the pastors on our church staff threw a "you-better-not-move" party. Part of the festivities included an exercise in which I was instructed to draw an M&M from a jumbo-sized bag. "This is a fleece deal," one pastor explained. "If the candy you select is red, then it's God's will for you to stay. If it's any other color, you are to move to Florida."

"OK," I played along.

I used scissors to cut into the new bag of M&Ms—careful not to peak inside. With eyes closed I reached into the bag and pulled out an M&M. It was as red as the sox in Boston. So I tried again. Another red M&M. A fluke? I tried again. Red. And again. Red. Red. Red. Dumping the bag into a bowl I found nothing but red M&Ms with the exception of one lonely green candy at the bottom of the bag. (The green M&M was to "prove" that the process was not fixed.)

While I'm still not sure how they rigged it, I never took their shenanigans as "a sign."

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Questions to transition into the lesson:

Have you ever asked God to give you a sign like that to make His will known? Is Karl's M&M story any different than Gideon's fleece? Is that the best way to discern God's direction for your life?

Often people ask, "How do I know God's will?" Perhaps a better question is this: "How do I know God?" For God is not trying to hide His will from you. He has a purpose for your life, and He longs to make it known to you as you live daily in His presence.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read Into the Story *with your students, dig deeper into the text by exploring the following questions.*

Ellen White offers a broader context for the story of Gideon by citing Judges 1:28: "When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labor but never drove them out completely" (NIV). She explains: "It only remained for them, trusting in the assurance of divine aid, to complete the work of dispossessing the inhabitants of the land. But this they failed to do. By entering into league with the Canaanites they directly transgressed the command of God, and thus failed to fulfill the condition on which He had promised to place them in possession of Canaan" (*Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 543).

Often people puzzle over God's will. Could it be, however, that we make this subject far more complicated than it needs to be? Gideon never would have needed to put out a fleece had God's people not "directly transgressed the command of God." Discuss this principle: When it comes to knowing God's will, don't let what you don't know keep you from doing what you do know.

In what ways might compromising what we know to be God's command weaken our ability to know God's will in areas where His will may not be so clear? For example, you may not know what college God wants you to attend, but you can be certain that if you attend college God does want you to live with integrity and not cheat to get a good grade. For most of us, the challenge is not in knowing the small part of God's will that is unknown; rather, the challenge is to live up to what is clearly revealed in the Bible.

Other questions to discuss:

- What is the connection between knowing God's will and following one's calling? Does following God's will guarantee a purpose-driven life? Explain your answer.
- In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39, NIV). What does Jesus' example teach us when seeking God's will?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. How does the story of Gideon illustrate the principle of this passage?

Sharing Context and Background

For this lesson it might be helpful to offer students:

1. A historical perspective

Judges 6:1, 2 says: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds" (NIV).

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In your own words, share this brief history of the Midianites:

The Bible tells us that Midian was a son of Abraham and his concubine Keturah (have a volunteer read Genesis 25:1-6). His descendants, the Midianites, settled in the territory east of the Jordan River and also in the area east of the Dead Sea (later occupied by Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites), and southward through the desert wilderness of the Arabah (have students find the territory on a map of ancient Israel). Midian was also where Moses spent 40 years between the time that he fled Egypt and his return to deliver the Jewish slaves. During that time, Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian. The Bible implies that God's appearance in the burning bush at Horeb occurred in Midian (have a volunteer read Exodus 3:1). In later years the Midianites were often oppressive and hostile to the Israelites, at least partly as God's punishment for their idolatry. At the time of Gideon, the Midianites were raiding Israel with the use of swift camels. Thus, the deliverance from the Midianites was a great miracle celebrated by God's people. Today, the former territory of Midian is found through small portions of western Saudi Arabia, southern Jordan, southern Israel and the Sinai (have students find this area on a modern map).

2. **A personal perspective**

   Share your own story of God calling you. Describe doors that God opened and closed. Did you use any kind of fleece or sign from God? How did you know it was God's will? This can be a story of a major decision (e.g., getting married, choosing a major, joining the church, etc.) or it can be a more mundane experience of sensing God's call (e.g., helping a homeless man, volunteering to teach the lesson, initiating a conversation that seemed to be a divine encounter, etc.).

3. **A spiritual perspective**

   The chapter in *Patriarchs and Prophets* ends with these sobering words: "Satan works through the ungodly, under cover of a pretended friendship, to allure God's people into sin, that he may separate them from Him; and when their defense is removed, then he will lead his agents to turn against them and seek to accomplish their destruction" (p. 559). Who are "the Midianites" of today? What influences in our culture allure God's people into sin? What can we learn from this chapter of compromise in the history of the Israelites?

III. CLOSING

Activity

For a closing activity, have students affirm God's calling in one another's lives. For instance, they may start with a girl of whom it may be said, "Courtney, we think you have an uncanny ability to tell friends the

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* Patriarchs and Prophets. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

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hard truth in a loving way. You can kick someone in the seat, and the person feels hugged. Perhaps God is calling you to be a counselor or a principal at school." Have the students offer suggestions for everyone in the class.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Participatory Teaching

In the ancient world, transmitting values occurred through oral communication. Through stories, symbols, and images communities found coherence and meaning. Because of the rise of print media in the fifteenth century, values transmission shifted to reading the Word of God. Now, with the advent of electronic media, the means of communication has changed again. The current communication revolution has moved from the didactic nature of the print media to a more experiential form of communication based on a participatory experience. Thus it is important when preparing to teach this lesson to first brainstorm ways to use a participatory approach.

Help students experience the story of Gideon. For example, you may read the story as volunteers act it out. Another idea: Tell students to assume the role of the different characters (the angel, Gideon, Joash, etc.) in the story. After studying the story have each student share their experience from the first-person perspective of the Bible character they were assigned.

RABBI 101

Summary

(1) The story of Gideon offers an ideal context in which to talk about knowing and following God's will. Just as God called Gideon and had a purpose for his life, so God has called every young person today. (2) Don't be afraid to challenge the young people with this lesson. They want to be pressed to do great things for God. They should be reminded that God has called them to soar like eagles, not grovel like pigs. (3) Moreover, this lesson illustrates the disastrous results of getting too enamored with the world. Just as God called the Jews of old to be uncompromising in their stand against the heathen nations, God is looking for a remnant of people today who will dare to stand against Satan's stronghold in this world. (4) And through Bible study, prayer, the Holy Spirit's leading, and the guidance of godly people, they can understand more clearly God's will and purpose for their lives. They need someone to call sin by its right name and give clear warning to the consequences of compromise. Just as the angel reminded Gideon, do not fear; God is with you!

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* *What Does the Bible Say About—: The Ultimate A to Z Resource Fully Illustrated.* Nelson's A to Z series. Thomas Nelson: Nashville, Tenn., 2001.

Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets (or Beginning of the End)*, chapter 53.

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CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 28 2019

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Judges 6–8; 10.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets, (or Beginning of the End),* chapter 53.

knowing God's will

Photo by Alden Ho

key text

"No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites . . . set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side. They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) in spite of all the good things he had done for them."

(Judges 8:33-35, NIV)

flashlight

"Like Israel, Christians too often yield to the influence of the world and conform to its principles and customs, in order to secure the friendship of the ungodly; but in the end it will be found that these professed friends are the most dangerous of foes. The Bible plainly teaches that there can be no harmony between the people of God and the world" (*Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 559).

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what do you think?

Rank the following in order ("1" being the most difficult and "10" being the least difficult) when it comes to knowing God's will with regard to:

___ Whom to marry?
___ What career to pursue?
___ What to do this weekend?
___ Where to work this summer?
___ Whom to ask out for a date?
___ How to choose friends?
___ What book to read for pleasure?
___ What to say on Facebook?
___ Whether or not to trust in Jesus?
___ Whether or not to get involved in a local church?

Questions to consider:

- What's the most difficult decision I have ever made?
- What made it so difficult?

did you know?

In the ancient world, names were very significant. Often the person's name captured the uniqueness of that individual. This was the case with Gideon, whose name means "he that bruises" or "great warrior." Gideon's name speaks to his mighty conquest of the Midianites. There are other examples in Scripture where we find great significance in a name. For instance, "Peter" means "the rock." The name "Jesus" is the Greek equivalent of Joshua, which means "Jehovah shall save his people." Knowing about the significance of names enlightens our understanding of Colossians 3:17 where we're called to do everything in the "name of the LORD Jesus." In other words, since the name conveys the deepest essence of the person, we're called to do everything in the same spirit or character of Christ.

INTO THE STORY

"The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds."

"The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.' "

"The LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?'

" 'Pardon me, my lord,' Gideon replied, 'but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.'

"The LORD answered, 'I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.'

"Gideon replied, 'If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.' "

"The LORD said to Gideon, 'With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home.' "

"When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, 'Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.' "

(Judges 6:1, 2, 11, 12, 14-17; 7:7, 22-24, NIV)

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OUT OF THE STORY

What details of the story of Gideon might you remember that are not included in the selected verses above?

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_____

What words or phrases capture the various emotions of this story most?

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_____

In your opinion, what is the most important lesson of the story of Gideon?

_____

_____

If you were to capture this story in a five-word title, what would it be?

_____

_____

What does this story teach us about knowing the will of God?

_____

_____

_____

What does this story teach us about knowing one's purpose in life?

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What does this story teach us about the mission of God's remnant people?

_____

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_____

punch lines

"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it' " **(Isaiah 30:21, NIV).**

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" **(Proverbs 3:5, 6, NIV).**

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" **(Romans 12:1, 2, NIV).**

"The righteousness of the blameless makes their paths straight, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness" **(Proverbs 11:5, NIV).**

"Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you" **(1 John 3:13, NIV).**

further insight

"The great need of the soul is to know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent."—Ellen G. White, *Colporteur Ministry,* p. 103.

"The Lord reveals His will to those who are earnest and anxious to be guided."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* vol. 3, p. 467.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read 1 Corinthians 14:15.

Finding God's will is a hot topic among teenagers. After all, many young people are facing important decisions and genuinely want to know and follow God's will. But is Gideon's method of testing God with a fleece the best way to discover God's will? Google the phrase "how to know God's will" and see if you can discover some helpful guidance for understanding God's will in your life.

Sunday

Read Judges 6–8.

Read excerpts from the story of Gideon in the *Into the Story* section of this week's lesson and work through the study questions listed in *Out of the Story.* Next, read the entire story in Judges 6–8 and list all the positive character qualities that you see in Gideon.

Monday

Read Judges 8:33-35.

Review the *Key Text* for this lesson. How might you explain the fickleness of the Israelites in their relationship to God? What role does the spiritual leader play in safeguarding God's people from backsliding? What are the idols that we are tempted to worship today? Have you ever failed to "remember the LORD" even when God has rescued you "from the hands of all [your] enemies"?

Also reflect on the phrase "They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) in spite of all the good things he had done for them." Do you ever fail to show gratitude toward people who have done good things for you? How can you be more intentional about expressing thankfulness to the people who have had a spiritual impact in your life?

Tuesday

Read Romans 12:2.

The quote in the *Flashlight* section applies the mistakes that the Israelites made to our lives today. Pray about how the world influences you. Ask a mature Christian about strategies to keep from conforming to the principles and customs of the world. Identify ways in which the world sneaks into us (e.g., billboards, television, friends, etc.). Do you have any "ungodly" friends that are influencing you away from Christ? Memorize the statement, "The Bible plainly teaches that there can be no harmony between the people of God and the world" (*Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 559).

Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week. Contained in these verses you will find profound principles for enjoying life with God. Read the texts over and over until you have them deeply entrenched in your mind. Now use this biblical foundation to create a game plan for leveraging your life for God. Identify three principles that you can use to guide you in understanding God's will for your life.

Now, apply them to your life and see what happens!

Thursday

Read Proverbs 10:9.

The story of Gideon illustrates that God would prefer a few sold-out soldiers than a mighty army of spiritual pansies. Which group do you think you would be in? What does selling out to God look like in your life?

Gideon reminds us that doing great things for God does not require extraordinary abilities; rather, God seeks people with availability. If you make yourself fully available for God to use as He wills, watch out! God may use ordinary you as a modern day Gideon and accomplish extraordinary things.

Friday

Read Jeremiah 29:11.

Reflect on this commentary by Ellen White: "The leader whom God chose to overthrow the Midianites occupied no prominent position in Israel. He was not a ruler, a priest, or a Levite. He thought himself the least in his father's house. But God saw in him a man of courage and integrity. He was distrustful of himself and willing to follow the guidance of the LORD. God does not always choose for His work men of the greatest talents, but He selects those whom He can best use" (*Patriarchs and Prophets,* p. 553).

If you were completely "willing to follow the guidance of the LORD," where do you suppose He might take you? What is God's grandest dream for your life? What is keeping you from fulfilling that dream?

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this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or Beginning of the End), chapter 53.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

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