

NBC Devotional
June 22, 2022
“Obedience: Not Just Close Enough”

I would like to take us back to the Old Testament into the book of Judges 6:36-40 and chapter 7. We all know Gideon as a mighty warrior for the Lord. His triumphant battle against Midian is legendary, but let's have a little refresher on the finer details.

With the Lord on his side, Gideon and 300 soldiers defeated the army at Midian. If we go back to the beginning of chapter 7, we see that Gideon had started with 32,000 men ready to go into battle against the Midianites when the Lord spoke to Gideon and said, “You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, ‘My own strength has saved me.’”³ Now announce to the army, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So, twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.” (Judges 7:2-3)

You would think having 10,000 men would be sufficient to fight the battle, hopefully, but the Lord spoke to Gideon again and said, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go; but if I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink.” ⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

⁷ 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.” (Judges 7:4-7)

So, Gideon's army went from 32,000 men to just 300. I don't know about you, but those are small numbers when compared with 135,000 fighting men that were in Midian. It wasn't the size of the army though that helped him win, it was Gideon's total obedience to the Lord that helped him win the battle that day against Midian.

Now, if we go back a little further in the Scripture, we can get some of the back story, so we can understand the process by which the Lord began working in Gideon's life and proving Himself in spite of Gideon's need for clarification.

In Judges 6, we read “³⁶ Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— ³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.” ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.” (Judges 6:36-40)

Gideon asks the Lord to make the fleece wet, and then just to be sure it was really the Lord, he changed it up a bit asking for the fleece to stay dry. Gideon wanted to be extra sure the Lord was speaking to Him.

You see. God had plans for Gideon. He only needed Gideon's total obedience. It is interesting here that Gideon trusted what God was telling him, but he needed confirmation or assurance that he was really understanding what God was telling him to do.

Friends, it is ok to ask God to verify what He has told us – to validate that God is really speaking to us, and it is not our own desires that we are seeking to fulfill.

When I was a teenager, I felt God's call on my life to be a pastor. I was always involved in the Church and volunteered in many of the ministries, so I thought I was doing enough with the call.

Shortly after high school, I went my own way for a while until I recommitted my life to the Lord and was sanctified at the Chicago Holiness Crusade. I still knew I was called into the ministry and wasn't sure how to even get started doing that, so I focused on serving in my local church and even on the District Council for the Youth. I loved being a lay leader and felt that it was enough to be doing that. I didn't need to give God more of me.

Several of my friends asked why I wasn't a youth pastor, and I would laugh and tell them that I was very happy with being a lay leader. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was staying within the boundaries of what I was willing to give over to God – what I could handle under my own strength. I figured it was close enough to the call God had placed on my life – so I was being obedient, right?

In March of 2019, I began talking with my Pastor and the Church Board about finally accepting the call of God on my life that had begun so many years ago. They granted me a local license to begin my studies and training to be ordained as a deacon in the Church. I knew that being ordained as a deacon would make me a pastor, but wouldn't make me preach since deacons aren't called to that. Honestly, I didn't feel equipped enough to preach.

I didn't fully realize it at the time, but I was still putting limits on what I was willing to give over to God. I was going to be a pastor, wasn't that close enough to being obedient?

In February 2021, I interviewed for my District license, At the interview, I told them I was called to serve, not to preach and was preparing to be a deacon. I also told them that I would be preaching the next day for our youth service.

They then both asked me if after preaching at the service, I felt God speak to me about changing over to the Elder track, if I would be willing. I laughed and replied that God would have to be very clear about that and that being a deacon was enough.

The next day came, I preached, and I later shared my recorded message with a few friends. Immediately, got a text message that said, "I sure hope you are on the Elder Track, because God has definitely called you to preach."

That night, I was like, "God, if you are really calling me to the elder track, I need at least two more people to say something to me without me bringing it up and one of those has to be my Pastor– since I know he will give it to me straight.

This was my "laying a fleece before the Lord" moment.

The very next day, another friend mentioned the very same thing to me, and I was starting to get nervous, but knew that it was Monday night, so the probability of someone else reaching out was unlikely.

That week on Wednesday, which is my office day, we didn't have staff meeting, so I figured I was in the clear. I dropped some papers off with my Pastor and he said, "Let's talk about your sermon." I immediately got nervous!

He looked at me and said, "I have never told anyone this, but you need to be on the Elder track." Now, he said some other things, which I honestly can't remember word-for-word, because I was too stunned.

I sat down and said, "you are not going to believe this, but..." then I began to tell him the story I just told you.

That day, God confirmed to me the call He has on my life yet again AND He used others in my life to finally get me to stop putting limits on how I would allow Him to use me for His purpose. He didn't want me to be just close enough to being obedient to His will for my life. He wanted me to be fully obedient and be willing to serve in any way He calls, trusting His strength in my weaknesses.

You see, like Gideon, I needed confirmation of what He was calling me to, as well as being completely obedient to His call on my life.

God doesn't want us to put limits on how He can use us.

If we are sanctified by the blood of His son, He wants us to say “yes” to whatever task He calls us to. We need to be ready to answer when He calls – not just enough to get by, but giving Him our whole heart and our whole life, so that we can fulfill that call that He has prepared for us.

I *knew* this, I had *taught* this, but in this moment, *God reminded me* that I can trust Him to give me strength to do what He has called me to when I am weak and terrified or feel inadequate.

In the same way, just as I learned this lesson, there may be some of you that need to hear the same thing.

- Are you following God’s will for your life?
- Are you being completely obedient to what He has told you?
- Are you putting limits on how God can use you – relying on your own strengths?

I can tell you that God wants to use you, and He needs you to stop putting limits on HOW He can use you.

If we truly desire to make a difference for Christ in this world that we live in, then we need to be ready to say “Yes” when God tells us to “Go.”

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