

## [421: Face-to-Face](#)

Have you ever wished that God would speak to you face-to-face so you could know what to do? Doesn't that sound like it would make serving and obeying God much easier? Well, that's not necessarily true that a direct encounter would be a good thing. To prove my point, let's take another look at Gideon, whose life we began to study last week.

### **CAN WE TALK?**

One day Gideon was busy trying to eke out a living when the Lord appeared and spoke to him:

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" (Judges 6:11-12).

What was Gideon's response? Was he in awe and didn't know what to say? Did he worship? Did he ask the Lord what He wanted him to do? No, he did none of those things. Instead he basically said, "Can we talk?" Gideon took the opportunity to complain and tell the Lord how bad things were in his life!

Gideon had a direct word and appearance from the Lord, but he was so preoccupied with his situation that he didn't treat it like the special event that it was. Then the Lord revealed why He had come and what He wanted Gideon to do:

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?" "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judges 6:14-15).

Again, Gideon turned God's directive into a time to complain, telling the Lord why he, Gideon, could not be the one to do what the Lord was saying.

### **IT DIDN'T MATTER**

It didn't matter to Gideon that he received a direct word from the Lord. He was so hung up on his circumstances and limitations that he could not see how God could use him. A visit from God almost turned into a bad experience for Gideon.

I am sure you have never done what Gideon did in this instance, but if you have, can you see that even a visitation from God isn't always the answer to your spiritual inactivity? Once you have a negative attitude, you can't even hear from the Lord! So this week, put yourself in Gideon's place and ask the Lord if you are acting like Gideon in any area of your life. If you are, then find out what God has been saying that you just can't hear because of your heart attitude. The good news is that Gideon went on from this encounter with the Lord to do great things and you will, too. Have a great week!

Feel free to write a comment to this entry on the [site](#) where it is posted.

## [422: Lessons in Courage](#)

Has fear ever prevented you from doing something you wanted to do? Has fear been an excuse not to do something that you needed to do? If you are human, then the answer to both those questions is a

resounding "Yes!" Yet you may be waiting for an absence of fear before you act and that will never happen. You need to learn to function in the midst of fear if you are to be a person of purpose. Let's go back to Gideon's life again this week to see how he handled his fear to become a hero of the faith.

## HIDING OUT

When we first meet Gideon, he is hiding from the Midianites, trying to eke out some food for his family in the midst of their oppression:

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" (Judges 6:11-12).

God identified Gideon as a mighty warrior, yet Gideon saw himself as a poor farmer who was working for minimum wages. The **first** lesson in how to deal with fear is: **You can't always trust the perspective you have of yourself.** The way out of that problem is to learn to trust what someone else sees in you, such as a friend, mentor or coach.

Then Gideon uttered the standard complaint when confronted with a seemingly impossible task:

"But Lord, " Gideon asked, "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 together" (Judges 6:15-16).

The **second** lesson is to remember that you are not alone. **You and God make up a majority no matter what.**

## NIGHT TIME RAID

So then God gave Gideon his first assignment to tear down his father's altars to a false god. Gideon obeyed, but notice how he did it:

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime (Judges 6:27).

Gideon did what he had to do, but he did in a way that worked for him. He went at night because he was afraid. The important thing, however, is that he obeyed. That is the **third** lesson: **He acted even though he was afraid.** He didn't wait for his fears to go away; Gideon did the best he could to obey the Lord and God helped him.

This leads me to ask you the questions: What are you afraid of? What is hindering you from moving forward to fulfill your dreams and purpose? What can you learn from Gideon that can help you this week to do something, even if it's at night or in a way that is less than noble? The important thing is that you learn how to act even though you may be afraid, for fear is not a good excuse to disobey what God has put in your heart to do. Take courage this week and see what you can do in spite of your fears.

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**KENYA VIDEOS:** I invite you to [watch](#) two short videos that I shot at the orphanage I visited in Kenya a few weeks ago. The children sang me a song and the founder said a brief word of thanks. Once you [watch](#)

them, read the post below and do what your heart moves you to do to help these children and others like them.

**THE SOPHIA FUND & THE DEBORAH FOUNDATION:** I announced last week a new initiative in time for Christmas that will allow you to help me open learning centers all over Kenya. We will start small, but will deliberately work to help the orphans in Kenya learn how to love books and learning. You can play an important part in making this happen. To read all about it, go to my [blog](#) to see my latest post or go to my Facebook page. I need books and educational toys and I need you to help me get them. I will figure out a way to get them to Kenya. You just figure out a way to get them to me.

One sister, who is confined to a wheel chair, presented me with an abacus for the children this morning in church. I was so blessed by her thoughtful and selfless generosity. Thank you, Chloe, for your gift and may the Lord move on many others to follow your example!

I also need help to continue feeding the orphans and widows there from The Sophia Fund. When you do your Christmas shopping and giving this year, please remember The Sophia Fund and The Deborah Foundation. I know you will be blessed when you do.

October 18, 2009 in [Purpose](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

### **423: Fleeced**

If you are like most people, you want to know if your ideas and actions are sanctioned by the Lord. Thus you may seek for a sign of confirmation before you act, and that whole process is called putting out a fleece before the Lord. That concept was first introduced in the story of Gideon, so let's look at that now and see if there are any lessons we can learn from what Gideon did and why he did it.

## **FLEECED**

God appeared to Gideon and appointed him the one to deliver Israel from the Midianites. This directive was not what Gideon was expecting so he asked God on three separate occasions to give him a sign that it was indeed the Lord who was guiding his steps. Here is one of those instances:

Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised- 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." And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water. 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. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew (Judges 6:36-40).

So you see from that passage that a fleece before the Lord was just that for Gideon: it was a sheep's skin that once was drenched with dew and once wasn't. Gideon chose that sign and God chose to respond. It would be nice if God would respond to every request for confirmation like He did in this instance, but He usually doesn't. Why is that?

It's because most requests are made not in faith but in unbelief and God does respond very well to those who don't trust Him in the first place. When that happens, they get the response that Jesus gave to the Jews. Let's look at that now.

## NO SIGN, SORT OF

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matthew 12:38-39).

Notice that Jesus didn't really say that there would be no sign. He just said it would be a sign of God's choosing and that sign was that Jesus would be raised from the dead after three days, just like Jonah was delivered after three days in the big fish. The problem with asking for a sign today is that a sign has already been given: Jesus is alive!

You see, if God can raise the dead, then He can do anything! He can help you start your business, publish your work, find you a job or fund your missions trip. When you say, "Oh God, I need a sign to let me know whether or not this is something you want me to do," you run the danger of asking because you don't really believe you can do what you are being asked to do.

The Lord asked Gideon to lead a battle against insurmountable odds and Gideon needed that reassurance because many lives were on the line. Most of us won't ever face that kind of challenge. Yours is much less demanding, so the knowledge that God raises the dead assures you that God can do anything, especially helping you to do what's in your heart.

Perhaps this week you need to stop procrastinating in unbelief while putting out a fleece, which will never be answered. Rather be looking for ways to do what is in your heart to do. When you do that, God will send you all the confirmation you need at every point. Have a great week!

### 424: Criticism

Do you enjoy criticism? I don't know too many who do, but it can sometimes be an important part of your development. If you can't handle criticism and misunderstanding, then you won't go very far in your purpose quest. So as we wrap up our study of Gideon this week, let's look at the criticism he received and see what you can learn.

## SUCCESS BRINGS CRITICISM

When Gideon had won a great battle over the Midianites, some of his allies confronted him after his victory:

Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to fight Midian?" And they criticized him sharply (Judges 8:1).

This reminds me of a time later when David was sharply criticized when his men's families were taken captive:

David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters (1 Samuel 30:6a).

After all David and Gideon had done, they had their critics, and you will have yours, too. With that in mind, you have three options of how to handle your inevitable critics.

## THREE STRATEGIES

First, you can become defensive, spending a lot of time and energy explaining why you did what you did. What's more, you can determine never to do much of anything again because the effort is too painful if it results in criticism. I would not recommend this first option.

Second, you can do what Gideon did:

But he answered them, "What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?" At this, their resentment against him subsided (Judges 8:2-3).

Gideon answered diplomatically and softly. He helped his critics see that their perspective was a bit skewed and that they were also an important part of what had just happened. Gideon showed great restraint and wisdom, for he knew that leaders will be criticized and he deflected it and won his critics over with a gentle, non-defensive answer.

Third, you can do what David did:

But David found strength in the Lord his God (1 Samuel 30:6b).

David did not react or respond. He took some time to regain his perspective and he did that by going to the Lord. The Lord spoke to David and he returned to lead the very men who had threatened to stone him. What's more, he led them to victory.

I once thought that fear of failure was the greatest hindrance the people of God face. I now think that fear of criticism is the number one obstacle to obedience. Since criticism is inevitable, it is vital that you develop strategies to deal with it and still remain focused and purposeful. That is what Gideon and David did and if they did it, with God's help, you can, too. Have a great week!

## [425: Deborah](#)

I few weeks ago I had a reader writer to request that I write about the Old Testament judge Deborah at some point. Well, this seems like a good point to do that, so let me honor her request and look at this obscure character in the book of Judges.

Deborah is identified as both a prophetess and a judge, someone to whom Israel came when they wanted to settle a dispute. She was married, but still had a position of authority, even though those were not common for women at that time. During her tenure, Israel was oppressed by an army commander named Sisera. God spoke to Deborah and she summoned a man named Barak and delivered a "word" from the Lord that he was to attack Sisera and deliver Israel.

When he agreed but only on the condition that Deborah accompany him, Deborah promised him victory but predicted that the victory would come at the hands of a woman, thus depriving Barak the full honor due for his courage and actions. (You can read this for yourself in [Judges 4](#).)

What can we learn from this account that would help you and me on our PurposeQuest today? Here is what I see:

1. **Deborah was a woman.** It seems that gender was not an issue for God. Should it be for you?
2. **Deborah was a leader.** Israel willingly responded to her leadership. When you are a leader, God gives you followers. You don't have to work to find them.

3. **Deborah was a woman under authority.** You seldom have to be a renegade or rebel to accomplish your purpose. You can work within the confines of the authority in your church, company or nation. You simply have to accept the "call" that is on your life.
4. **Deborah was brave.** First, she shared her word from the Lord at a time when Israel was oppressed. She agreed to go to the battle with Barak to encourage him in the work that God gave him to do through her word. Like her fellow prophets, David and Jeremiah, she was not aloof but went with the people of God. Are you involved with those you lead and follow?
5. **Deborah had faith.** Deborah shared her "word" even though it seemed that the enemies of Israel were stronger and more numerous. She was confident that, if Barak followed her command, he would have success.
6. **Deborah's faith was contagious.** Because she had faith, Barak had faith too, as reported by the writer of Hebrews: "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, **Barak**, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets" (Hebrews 11:32). Do people catch faith from you as you speak and act?

What can you learn from Deborah's example to help you in your PurposeQuest this coming week? Do you see any other points or lessons from this account that I am missing? If so, please take the time to post them on my [site](#) for others to see. Next week, we will look at Judges 5 and the song that Deborah sang after Barak and his army were victorious. Until then, may the Spirit of Deborah be with you and yours as we seek to obey the word of the Lord as it comes to our lives and work. Have a great week!