

Putting Out the Fleece: Right or Wrong? – Part 3

Judges 6

Introduction:

1. When it comes to determining God’s will, some people use a method called “putting out the fleece.” It involves establishing some type of circumstantial sign by which God can indicate the right decision.
2. People call this “putting out the fleece.” They base this on an Old Testament story involving one of Israel’s judges named Gideon. Israel was in bondage to the Midianites, and God desired to use Gideon to deliver them. vs. 11-16
3. Right before they were to go out to battle, Gideon got cold feet. Due to his unbelief, Gideon decided to make sure that God really meant what he said, so he “put out the fleece” - a literal wool fleece. vs. 36-40
 - Gideon placed a fleece, which was simply a piece of wool shorn from a sheep, on the outside ground.
 - The first time, Gideon wanted God to have dew on the fleece, but not on the earth around the fleece. vs. 36-38
 - The second time, Gideon wanted God to have the fleece be dry, but have dew on the ground all around the fleece. This would be even more miraculous because wool would tend to soak in the water. Vs. 39-40
4. God granted Gideon’s request, and the battle was miraculously won in Judges 7.
5. So here is the question we seek to answer. Does this Scripture passage teach, encourage, and promote the practice of “putting out a fleece?” Does God desire that members of the body of Christ today put out fleeces, so to speak?
6. Consider these facts from our passage about Gideon:

Gideon’s fleece was not a circumstantial sign, but rather a miraculous display of supernatural power.

Gideon’s fleece was not for the purpose of obtaining guidance from God, but rather to gain confirmation of guidance already given.

Gideon’s fleece was not a noble act of faith, but an expression of fear and doubt.

Gideon’s fleece is not practiced or taught anywhere in the New Testament.

The practice of putting out fleeces can be very dangerous.

- Fleeces are not always harmless, innocent attempts by believers to determine God’s will. Fleeces can, in fact, be very dangerous and cause great harm to the person attempting to use it, or to others affected by the person’s decisions. How?
1. People use fleeces as an excuse to sin.
 2. People make big decisions based upon utter chance.
 3. People fail to develop wise, biblical decision-making skills.

- God desires that you look at every situation with complete dependence upon Him, yield to His Holy Spirit, and apply the principles of godly wisdom to your decision making.
 - **Illustration:** When Clint was preparing to finish High School, he explored multiple college options, looked at the positives and negatives of each, and then made a decision based upon wisdom. While we gave him certain principles to consider, we desired that it be his decision.
- In the same way, God gives us guiding principles of wisdom in His Word to help us understand true wisdom as opposed to worldly wisdom, but then desires that we exercise our free will in making those decisions. This pleases our heavenly Father. In other words, God is not about micro-managing your life.
- God will not allow you to cop out of learning to apply His Word and godly wisdom to your decision making by giving you signs and answering fleece requests. God treats us as adults in his family, not little children.
- Let's consider Colossians 1:9-10. Paul desired that these converts be filled (fully furnished) with the knowledge of God's will. How? "...in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."
- We think of God's will in terms of the details of our daily lives, but that is not what Paul had in mind. Paul wanted these believers to understand what God is doing today in this dispensation of grace. The emphasis is not on them, but on God, and what God wants to do in and through the believer in the present dispensation.
- God had an over-arching secret purpose and will that He has revealed through Paul. God's will is no longer a mystery, but has been fully revealed and manifested. Ephesians 1:9
- How do we discover how we fit into God's objective, purpose, and plan for this present time period? Paul says that it comes through wisdom and spiritual understanding. cf. Ephesians 5:17
- How do I grow in wisdom and spiritual understanding? I grow as I study and learn God's Word. God's Word reveals God's will (2 Timothy 3:15-16). "I understand the **will** of God as the **Spirit** of God teaches me the **Word** of God."
- Do you want to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding? You must read, learn, and understand the revelation that Christ gave to you through Paul. It is the key. Read Ephesians 3:3-4
 - The word "*knowledge*" is the same word translated "*understanding*" in Colossians 1:9. Paul is saying, "When you read what I have written to you, you understand my understanding in the mystery of Christ." cf. 2 Timothy 2:7; Acts 22:14
 - All of God's Word is profitable, but Paul's prayer and passion was that believers would understand God's will for this present dispensation that had been revealed through him. cf. 1:25-26, 2:2-3

- Without that understanding, no matter how sincere we may be, we cannot *"walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."* vs. 10
 - As we read God's Word and understand Paul's mystery, we begin to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and then we can take that knowledge and apply it to the details of our lives with wisdom.
 - We don't need God to micro-manage every detail of our lives. We are able to pray, study His Word, and apply godly wisdom to our decisions. This is what we see Paul doing. **Examples:** 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, Titus 3:12
4. People credit a fleece for a simply prudent, good decision, and it encourages them to continue to live their Christian lives this way.
- There are times when a fleece can lead to a good decision in spite of itself.
 - **Example:** A person wants to sell his car and determines that \$5,000 would be a good asking price. So he prays, "God, if a person offers me \$5,000 or more for my car, I will take that as a positive sign that you want me to sell it." If somebody offers him \$5,000 and he sells it, the result would be a good decision. It wasn't because the fleece "worked." It was because the man applied sound wisdom to his decision.
 - Here is the problem with this scenario: Now the man thinks he sold it because of the fleece. It was God "giving him a sign" to sell it to the man offering the \$5,000.
 - Let's say this same man really needs to sell his home five years later. He lays out another fleece to God. This time the fleece is \$100,000 for his house. If somebody offers him at least that, then he'll know God wants him to sell it. Somebody offers him \$99,500. He really needs to sell it or risk more severe losses. Wisdom says, "Sell it!" But because of the fleece the man refuses. No more offers come and the man ends up in a tragic situation, and maybe even loses his home.
 - If this same man is simply operating his Christian life on the basis of applied wisdom from God's Word, he may ask and desire \$100,000, but he is at complete liberty to take the \$99,500 because he is under no illusion that he is getting a sign from God. He can accept the offer as "close enough" and unload the house.
 - Do you see the danger of living this way? Your faith should not rest in circumstantial signs, but your faith is designed to rest in an intelligent understanding and application of God's Word to your life. You are to live your life on the basis of sound, godly, biblical wisdom, not signs and fleeces.
5. When fleeces backfire, people blame God.
- When we try to read God's leadership into circumstances and signs, we can often make decisions that don't work out (many times because the basis for our decision-making was all wrong).
 - If the person is convinced that God was communicating to him through circumstances, signs, and fleeces, then who do you think the person blames when things don't work out? He blames God and says things like, "I don't know why God is doing this to me. I don't know why God had me do that. I don't understand what God is doing."

- Many people have become disillusioned with God because they feel that God did them dirty or led them down a dead-end street.
 - Here is the bottom line: **Your** decisions are **your** decisions. God gives you His Word to provide wisdom and guiding principles, but God gives you the freedom and liberty in Christ to make choices every day.
 - Not every decision we make in life is going to turn to gold. Sometimes we fail to make the right decision, and sometimes it can bring pain and suffering. What do we do? Do we blame God and question God?
 - No, we accept responsibility for the decisions we have made, we determine to learn and grow from them, and we become more mature in our walk and in our decision-making in the future.
 - I have never blamed God for a decision I have made.
 - **Illustration:** When I accepted the pastorate at CrossRoads, it was my decision. Had it not worked out, it would have never occurred to me to blame God.
 - Through the years I have made some good decisions and a few bad ones. When I have made the bad ones, I have tried to learn from them, grow, and not repeat them again.
6. It can cause us to be indecisive and miss opportunity.
- Some people are always waiting to “hear from God,” and they are waiting on a particular fleece or sign to show them what to do. While they wait, the opportunity passes by.
 - We do not see Paul being indecisive and sitting around waiting for a sign on what to do. Even when God didn’t allow Paul to go into Asia or Bithynia, he kept moving. Acts 16:6-8
 - Even during the silent years of Paul’s ministry - when Paul was sent home to Tarsus in that “waiting” period of Acts 10 - many believe that Paul evangelized and planted Gentile churches in Syria and Cilicia. Paul wasn’t just sitting at home waiting on a knock at his door. Galatians 1:21; cf. Acts 15:23, 41
 - We see Paul on his missionary journeys following a logical path that demonstrated common sense and godly wisdom. Sometimes common sense said, “Get out of town!” Sometimes wisdom said, “Stay here for an extended period.”
 - Why do you think Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus to begin their first missionary journey? Was it because we see them receiving a circumstantial sign? They went to Cyprus because that is where Barnabas was originally from. They would have knowledge of the culture and the area, and have contacts.
 - Some believers are so incredibly indecisive about everything, and it goes back to this very point. They are expecting God to reveal His perfect will through some circumstantial sign. They live frustrated lives and they also frustrate people around them.
 - We are to serve the Lord fervently! Romans 12:11