

Bible Studies for Life for August

16: Do you require signs?

August 4, 2009

Have many times have you heard someone say, "If only I had a sign from God, then I would know." Many believers struggle to know the will of God for their lives. Many believers even struggle to carry out his will after they know what it is.

One time a B.C. comic strip character was praying, asking God, "Show me a sign." The last frame of the strip showed one of those signs with changeable letters that are seen out in front of many businesses. The frame was drawn in such a way that you knew the sign had just dropped down from heaven. The lettering on the sign spelled out, "A Sign From God."

Is it dangerous to ask God for a miraculous sign concerning his will for our lives? This week's lesson explores the dangers of asking God for signs. The lesson also provides a better way of discerning God's will.

Fleeces then and now (Judges 6:14-16, 36-40)

The Lord was looking for a deliverer for his people. When the angel of the Lord approached Gideon, he was hiding out like all the other Israelites (v. 11). The angel told Gideon, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior" (v. 12).

God had chosen Gideon to go and deliver Israel from the Midianites. "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?'" (v. 14).

Gideon was skeptical and full of doubts, "But Lord how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (v. 15). Gideon has just had a one-on-one encounter with the Almighty God and

he is trying to excuse himself out of the assignment. God assured Gideon he had nothing to worry about because “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together” (v. 16).

Later, the Midianites made one of their yearly invasions. They settled in the Jezreel Valley. Whoever controlled this rich and fertile valley controlled the food supply and the people around it. It was time for Gideon to step up to the plate and obey God.

Guess what he did? Instead of trusting the Lord he demanded two signs from God. Gideon said to God, “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” (v. 37). Of course the next morning, Gideon found this had occurred.

Is it correct to ask God for a miraculous sign to prove he can do what he says? Notice what Gideon says in verse 39 to God, “Do not be angry with me.” Gideon seems to know he is in the wrong in demanding signs from the Lord. But he goes ahead and asks for another sign, “Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time to make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew.”

Demanding extra signs was an indication of unbelief. He did not believe God could use him to deliver Israel. Gideon should have been taking action because he knew God was capable of doing what he said he could do. Don't we know that too? Instead of spending time making excuses, our time should be spent doing what God wants.

Today, the greatest direction we receive from God is found in his word, the Bible. We should not depend on tests we present before God but depend on knowing his wisdom and guidance through Bible study and prayer.

Warnings about signs (Matthew 16:1-4)

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven” (v. 1). Even though the Pharisees and Sadducees were religious leaders of two different groups and did not see eye to eye on many issues, they both wanted to discredit Jesus.

It appeared the Pharisees and Sadducees wanted Jesus to perform a miraculous sign in order to prove his messiahship. Their motive in asking actually was to test him and possibly diminish his influence with the people. These religious leaders believed only God could place a sign in the sky. They were sure Jesus did not have this kind of power.

Jesus reminds them they had no difficulty interpreting the weather by the color of the sky (vv. 2-3). Jesus refused to give the Pharisees and Sadducees a sign on demand. He told them “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given except the sign of Jonah” (v. 4)

The Pharisees and Sadducees had seen or heard about Jesus healing people, raising people from the dead, and feeding thousands. They had refused to accept the signs they already had seen and heard.

By saying “sign of Jonah” Jesus was predicting his death and resurrection. That would be the only sign they would receive. Jesus knew the religious leaders had no intention of believing in him.

We should not miss the lesson the Pharisees and Sadducees missed. We should not demand or expect God to prove himself to us on our own terms. We should open our spiritual eyes, allowing us to see what God is already doing around us so we can join him in his work.

Keys to discerning God’s will (Romans 12:1-2)

Is it possible for the believer to have a relationship with the Lord that is so close that we have no doubts when he speaks? We obey without excuses. It is possible to have such closeness to God.

The Apostle Paul provides instruction in how to discern God's will for our lives. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (v. 1).

God requires that believers become living sacrifices, laying aside our own desires. Devoting our time, energy and resources to God for his use to further his kingdom. The key to discerning God's will, "Do not conform any longer 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" (v. 2).

Being obedient to the word found in the Bible allows believers to become more like Christ and less like the world. As we draw closer to Christ, we are better able to discern God's will.

Spiritual disciplines, like prayer and reading the Bible daily, are a must if we want to have the keen eyesight to see what God's plan and purpose is for the life of a believer on earth.