

Seeking God's Wisdom

July 5, 2020



Day One // The Wisdom and Will of God

In Joshua 9, we see the Israelites making some decisions without consulting God that lead to some not so great outcomes. As we look more closely at our text this week, we want to examine our own decision-making process to evaluate whether we are utilizing cultural decision-making processes or truly listening to the wisdom and will of God in our choices.

As you read through our text for today for the first time, close your eyes and allow the scene to come to life in your mind. Allow yourself to create a picture in your mind of what it would have looked like. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? Let it come to life in your imagination.

Read through Joshua 9:3-16.

Take some time to visualize what the scene was like as if you were the first hearers of them. Don't worry about historical accuracy. Just allow God to bring the story to life. The people we read about in Scripture were real people who walked the earth and had feelings and thoughts much like ours.

The Israelites chose not to seek the wisdom of God in their dealings with the Gibeonites. As a result, they were deceived. They probably didn't set out to reject the wisdom of God, but rather just relied on their own ability to make a rational decision.

The question is not whether God is willing to give us his wisdom. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." We know from God's word that he will give us wisdom if we ask for it. The better questions to ask are:

1. Are we committed to seeking God's wisdom?
2. Do we know how to find God's wisdom?
3. If we do find it, will we actually implement God's wisdom or will we reject it and just continue to do whatever we wanted to do in the first place?

Think about those three questions. How would you answer them today?

In Joshua 9, we see the Gibeonites, a neighboring people to Israel, deceiving them as an enemy. Just like Israel, we have an enemy who wants to deceive us in our decision making. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us to "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Since his first appearance in the Garden of Eden, the devil has been deceptive in his efforts. Keeping our eyes open for his subtle schemes will help us choose God's wisdom and his ways.

Spend a few moments answering these questions:

- Where do you desire God's wisdom in your life? Is there a specific situation right now where you need his wisdom? Is there a specific question you long to ask him right now? Take a moment to consider this and bring the situation before God.

- Where have you seen the enemy work like the Gibeonites in your past? How has he previously distracted you from God's wisdom? Where might he be luring you away from God's wisdom right now?
- What keeps you from seeking God's wisdom?
- Where and when has God given you wisdom in the past? How was this significant for you?

Take a few moments to slow down in God's presence. Sit in the quiet and ask him for his wisdom and guidance. Bring your questions before him and wait for his response.

Day Two // Mistakes to Avoid, part 1

My guess is that any of us, if asked, would never say we wanted to intentionally choose something that would go against God's will. Most of the time, we're asking for guidance that reflects we do indeed desire God's will. But life happens, we are distracted, and we just go down the path of least resistance. It may seem easiest at the time, but in the end, we find that perhaps it wasn't.

We see in this week's passage there were four errors the Israelites made in their encounter with the Gibeonites. We want to take a closer look at their mistakes to learn from their errors, so we don't make the same ones. We also want to look at a clear way to keep from falling into the same trap.

First, they were fooled by flattery. Joshua 9:9-10 says the Gibeonites said to Israel, "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth." They spoke highly of what God had done and how impressive the victories of Israel were.

- When in your life have you struggled with doing God's will because of the affirmation of others?
- When have you tried to please others and not God?

So, how do we keep from being swayed by the affirmation of others? It sounds simple but can be hard to do. Encouragement is something we all need, but when the opinions of others moves us away from God's will, we need to take notice.

In order to not be swayed by the flattery of those around us, we must remember *who* and *whose we are*. Our identity must be firmly rooted in Christ as we cling to the truths he has spoken over us. He must be the one who fills us up.

Read through Psalm 139:13-14, Ephesians 1:3-14, Ephesians 2:10, and Isaiah 43:1-5.

- What do these Scriptures tell you about your identity in Christ?
- How would remembering the truths in these Scriptures remind you to stand firm in the wake of the flattery of others persuading you?

Take some time to pray today. Ask God to anchor your identity in Christ and help you identify where you might be swayed by the flattery of others. Confess the places where you have listened to the advice of man and not of God, and the places where you have allowed flattery to sway you. Invite God to speak to you about where this mistake is present in your life. Listen for his guidance.

Day Three // Mistakes to Avoid, part 2

Yesterday we looked at the first obstacle that caused the Israelites to fall for the Gibeonites' deception. Today we'll continue examining those mistakes so we can steer clear of them ourselves.

The first mistake the Israelites made was they were fooled by flattery. **Second, the Israelites judged by surface appearances.** Initially, the Israelites asked great questions. In Joshua 9:7 they even said, "perhaps you live near us. How can we then make a treaty with you?" They had suspicions but didn't track them down. They didn't pay attention to their initial doubts, digging deeper for the answers. When we seek God for his wisdom, he always encourages us to go beneath the surface, to press beyond face value, and get to the heart.

Read I Samuel 16:1-13.

- How do you see Samuel implementing God's wisdom in this passage?
- In this passage, what points to the practice of looking beyond the surface?
- What do you typically look for when you're making a decision? Is it obvious? How do you dig beyond what is seen?
- When have you found God's wisdom under the surface appearance?

When seeking wisdom, are we only asking those who will flatter us and telling us what we want to hear, or are we listening to those who will truly point us to God's truth and wisdom?

Who is in your life points you to God's truth and wisdom?

Consider your current question for God—the place you're longing for his wisdom. What does it look like to dig under the surface for his answer?

Ask him for guidance and courage to dig beneath the surface of the question you're bringing before him. Pray for wisdom and for his will to be made known.

The third mistake the Israelites made was critical. They didn't consult God. It probably didn't even occur to them because the answer seemed so obvious. They probably thought, "Do we really need to consult God on this one? Anyone can figure this one out." They probably weren't intentionally leaving God out, but they didn't intentionally bring him into the conversation either.

Joshua 9:14 says, "The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord."

Take some time to sit quietly before God and consider these questions:

- What are the obstacles keeping you from listening to God?
- If God's primary way of speaking to us is through his Word, does he have an opportunity to speak to you in this way? Are you spending time listening to him by spending time in his word? If yes, what's he been saying to you lately? If not, what's keeping you from it?
- When have you not consulted God? How did things turn out? When have you invited him in? What difference did it make?
- When has God given you clear direction? What was that experience like?

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to guide you as you bring your question before him again today. Consult him. Ask him to help you dig below the surface to see what he sees.

Day Four // Slowing Down to Wait

As we saw the last two days, the Israelites made some mistakes in their dealings with the Gibeonites. Their first mistake was to be fooled by flattery. Second, they judged by outward appearances instead of digging for truth. Third, they neglected to consult God. **Their fourth mistake was rushing their decision.**

Waiting is such a hard thing for to do. If you're anything like me, you probably are constantly looking for a more efficient way to move about the world. Maybe you change lanes on the freeway, switch lines at the grocery store, or calculate how to beat Google maps arrival time to your destination in order to hurry things along.

Hurry is an internal state of our souls that can keep us from hearing the voice of God as we try to listen for his guidance in our life questions.

But slowing down is hard work. It seems like it would be easy. While it might be simple, it's not always easy. Waiting takes time and we don't like that. We want quick fixes and fast answers.

As we saw this week with the Israelites encounter with the Gibeonites, we can't afford to move faster than God. Going our own way can lead to a life we don't really want to live. We learned yesterday that rushing to a conclusion can bring pain and unneeded hardship.

God's pace isn't ours. He's not in a hurry. He's not rushed.

Today, we want to slow down to listen to the voice of God. We don't want to be rushed. Confess to him where you are feeling urgency or where you are avoiding listening. Invite him to slow you down.

Let's begin by reading Psalm 130.

The Hebrew word for *wait* used in this passage is *qavah*. It means "to wait, look for, hope, expect; to collect, bind together."¹ Waiting is active, not passive. It means we're looking for God. We're expecting him to show us something.

Reread this passage and write a prayer to God in response.

Now take a moment to pray through this prayer entitled, "Patient Trust" by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. As you read through it, think of the question you are bringing before God. Consider where you feel rushed for an answer. Think about where you might feel a bit undone and want it tidied up.

Patient Trust

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through*

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/Lexicon/Lexicon.cfm?strongs=H6960&t=NASB>

*some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.*

Reflection Questions:

- What would it look like for you to “trust in the slow work of God”? Where have you seen God’s slow work in your life already?
- Where do you feel “in suspense and incomplete”? How might that be contributing to your decision-making process?

What would it look like to trust God completely with what is being formed in your life? What would need to change for you to do that?

Day Five // Spiritual Practice—Listening to God in Discernment

Cultural decision-making is based on logic and reason. Discernment is a decision-making process rooted in the will and wisdom of God. It requires listening to God's voice, waiting on him, seeking his desires and will.

As we've seen this week from the example of the Israelites in Joshua 9, making decisions without consulting God can turn out a bit disastrous. While God's grace and mercy can heal our messes (thank you, God!), he also invites us to change the way we make decisions by inviting him into the process.

Discernment is a multi-faceted spiritual practice with a foundation in a loving, growing relationship with God. God wants to guide us toward his best for our lives. He longs for us to grow in his wisdom and freely gives it to us when we ask. He's waiting to lead us.

So, today, bring your question before God. Invite him to lead you as you wait on him. Below you'll find some suggestions for listening to God in Discernment from Adele Ahlberg Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. These questions will take time to answer and probably cannot be answered in one sitting. These are meant to be walked through slowly over time, but today you can begin.

If you've made some decisions without God, rest assured there is grace for you. God's love is high and wide and long and deep and can cover wherever you find yourself. Take a moment to confess the places you have moved without God. Ask his forgiveness and then rest assured he's given it through Jesus.

Invite him to help you begin again.

As you prepare to go through this discernment practice, spend a few moments in prayer asking God to lead you to desire his will above all else. This will be a struggle for us all. David Benner tells us why. He writes,

We have believed the lie of the serpent. We have believed that freedom comes from the exercise of our autonomy. But true autonomy lies in the choice to give ourselves to others in love. It lies in the absolute surrender of our self to God and the kingdom of love. The paradoxical law of God's kingdom is that is it only when we give up what we clutch most desperately that we will receive it. Grasping destroys. Surrender restores and transforms...Most of us so excel at ensuring our own ongoing supply of life's provisions that we find the idea of having to come back for daily bread offensive. But God invites us to abandon our neurotic displays of self-sufficiency. He invites us to surrender our stolen independence and exchange it for a willingly accepted dependence.²

While we long for God's will, we struggle with building our own kingdoms instead. Even Jesus wrestled with God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Read Matthew 26:36-46.

Three times Christ prays to the Father, asking if the cup of his wrath could be taken from him. Each time he finishes with, "Not as I will, but as you will." Jesus was honest before God about his wishes but surrendered them to be obedient to the will of the Father. Keep this passage in mind as you walk

² Benner, David, *Desiring God's Will: Aligning Our Hearts with the Heart of God*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 40-42.

through the spiritual practice for discernment. Be bold enough to pray the same prayer as Jesus. “Not as I will, but as you will, God.”

Suggestions for Listening to God in Discernment

1. Come into the presence of the Holy One focusing your attention on his love and goodness. Thank God that you have a Guide who is on your side and wants to help you.
2. Consider what it means to be totally attached to God’s agenda and will. Confess any idols of your heart that block your trust.
 - Acknowledge any compulsions and addictions that get in the way of freely surrendering to God.
 - How does this choice play into your persona and false self³? check your motives.
 - Get some distance from your impulses, agendas, and compulsion to decide now.
 - Pray to recognize and relinquish anything that takes priority over God’s will. This kind of prayer is the “nevertheless” prayer Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. *Not my will but yours be done*. It is sometimes called the “prayer of relinquishment.” Ask God to move in your will so you want to choose that which promotes his glory and spreads his love. If you can’t pray this prayer, then pray for a desire to pray this prayer.
3. Lay your choice before God and examine the matter thoroughly. If it helps to journal the scope of the decision, commit your thoughts to writing.
4. Share your desires with God. What is it you want? Does your desire reflect some deeper desire? How does your desire or choice line up with love of God and others? How does the choice lead you deeper into faithfulness and goodness?
5. Use reason.
 - How does this decision enable you to live out the fruit of the Spirit?
 - Will this choice be experienced as a life-giving, loving choice for those it affects?
 - Write your pros-and-cons list: weigh the advantages and benefits, the disadvantages and dangers of each option.
 - Does the choice lead to a yes in your mind?
6. Attend to your feelings.
 - What about this choice leads to *consolation*—life-giving feelings that bring in the Spirit’s fruit of love, joy, faith and peace?
 - What excites you and gives you hope?
 - Picture yourself in this situation for a length of time. What do you sense?
 - What about this choice leads to *desolation*—life-thwarting feelings of turmoil, confusion and anxiety? Desolation leaves us feeling chaotic, cut off from God. We feel demotivated by accusation, shame and fear.
 - Does this choice lead to peaceful feelings?
7. Listen to God as you read Scripture. Pay attention to where the Word lights up and speaks to you.

³ The “false self” can be defined as an identity rooted in secondary things like accomplishments, productivity, people pleasing, fame or success. The false self is always an identity that can be lost because it is a “self” we develop. It is not our identity in Christ (Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, glossary).

8. Seek the counsel of those gifted in discernment who can listen to you and with you. Ask them:

- Am I being a good steward?
- Am I running away from or toward something rather than waiting?
- Am I open to a different path?
- Does this choice serve communion and community?

Offer your choice to God. Pray for wisdom and the freedom of the Spirit to blow through you. Wait. Ask God to bring your heart and head and spirit into agreement. Do they all confirm this course of action?⁴

⁴ Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 111-112.