God Calls Gideon

If you’ve heard the biblical name Gideon, you probably associate him with the Bibles you find in hotels. The Gideon Society distributes 56 million Bibles yearly to hotels, hospitals, prisons and military bases.

The Gideon Society was established in 1898 by two traveling salesmen. A manager of a Wisconsin hotel asked them to share a room during a crowded lumbermen’s convention. Can you imagine a hotel manager asking you to share a room with a perfect stranger these days? The salesmen agreed to share a room and discovered each other to be Christian. They prayed and read the Bible before retiring for the night. The next morning, they talked about starting a Christian association of traveling salesmen and formed the Gideon Society. They took their name from the Gideon mentioned in the book of Judges because they saw him as willing to do whatever God asked of him.

I often wonder whether people ever read those Gideon Bibles in hotel rooms. At least one college student named Dee did. Dee used to rent hotel rooms with her friends in order to party all weekend, which introduced her to the world of alcohol and drugs. One weekend, her friends devised a contest to see who could steal the most stuff from a hotel room. Dee won the contest, having stolen a TV, towels, bedspread, even the Gideon Bible from the bed stand. She and her friends thought the prank was all quite funny.

Shortly thereafter, Dee’s life began to unravel. She became pregnant after one of those hotel parties. Her drug and alcohol problems worsened. Her boyfriend heard about her pregnancy and dumped her. One night in her dorm room, feeling all alone, she picked up the Gideon Bible she had stolen, opened it and began to read. God suddenly, in that moment, became real to her. She opened her life to Christ. Today, Dee and her 14-year-old daughter share the message of Christ’s saving love through the ministry of the Gideons.

Those salesmen might have assumed Gideon was willing to do whatever God asked of him, but it didn’t start out that way. At the outset of our story, we find Gideon threshing wheat in the winepress. This ought to tip you off to something, since ordinarily winepresses were used to crush grapes for wine, not thresh wheat. Gideon is running scared of ruthless Midianites, who have been ravaging his country. Gideon fears that even the little he has will be taken from him.
It’s not who we are when God calls that matters, but what God makes of us.


Gideon reacts to the angel’s greeting: “Sir, if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?” It’s as if the angel has said “Good morning,” and Gideon’s response is, “What’s so good about it?”

God never answers Gideon’s question. Instead, God commissions him, “Go in the might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of the Midianites” (6:14).

Our not-so-mighty warrior offers lame excuses: “My clan is weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family” (6:15). “But I will be with you,” the Lord says. “You shall strike down the Midianites, every last one of them” (6:16).

Notice how Gideon looks upon himself compared with how God sees him. Gideon sees himself as abandoned by God (6:13), as a member of the weakest clan of Israel and the youngest in his family (6:14). But God sees Gideon as a mighty warrior (6:12), strong in the Lord and the deliverer of Israel (6:14).

I initially thought the angel’s words were sarcastic: “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” Mighty warriors don’t hide out in winepresses. The angel might have used irony in the present moment, but is prophetic toward the future. Gideon will become what God makes of him. Being the weakest and the least pose no obstacles for God.

It has been said, “God does not call the equipped; he equips the called.” It’s not who we are when God calls that matters, but what God makes of us.

Gideon asks God to confirm this call by showing him a sign (6:17). After Gideon prepares a gift to offer to the Lord, God comes down in fire to consume it. Gideon, if ever you were looking for a sign from God, this is it.

Yet, Gideon wants even more assurances if he is going to fight the Midianites, so he spreads a fleece of wool on the ground. If there is dew on the fleece and not on the ground, he will know the Lord is with him. The next day, sure enough, there is dew on the fleece and not on the ground (6:36-40). Gideon then asks God to do the sign in reverse. This time let there be dew on the ground and not on the fleece. The next morning, you guessed it, there’s dew on the ground and not on the fleece.

Gideon, if ever you were looking for a sign from God, this is it.

God is so accommodating to Gideon’s requests! God could have told Gideon to take a hike.

I have known Christians, like Gideon, who have laid a fleece before God. Before you get any ideas, let me remind you this practice is nowhere replicated in Scripture. Jesus and the Apostle Paul never instruct us to lay a fleece before the Lord. Gideon used the
How can we compete with Cosmo Magazine and GQ?

fleece to confirm the will of God, not to determine it. Gideon knew what God wanted him to do, he was just scared to do it. So he asked God for extra confirmation.

Maybe you’ve never put a fleece before the Lord, but you’ve asked God for a sign. In a Woody Allen movie, one of his characters looks up to the heavens, demanding that God prove his existence by saying, “Is anyone up there? Could you give me a sign? Anything! How ‘bout at least a cough?”

Scott Stapp, lead singer of the band Creed before their break up in 2004, talked about his search for God as a child. He said, “I constantly found myself asking God to prove himself to me. I’d lie in bed and say, ‘God, if you’re real, just make my light go off so I won’t doubt you.’”

There was a time when I was in a quandary about which profession to pursue. I wanted to coach football as well as go into business, but I also wanted to preach. So I asked God to show me a sign. Just tell me what You want me to do.

Exactly what sign was I expecting from God? Did I expect God to write His answer in bold letters across the sky? Now, in hindsight, God answered my prayer, a little at a time.

We’ve been focusing this fall on God’s call, the first part of our church’s call, equip and send mission. Thus far, we have focused on God’s call to particular people, such as Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Gideon.

God’s call also comes to people in community. The Greek word for church, ekklesia, literally means “the called out ones.” We are a community of people who have been called out of ourselves to live for God. We’ve been called out of the world, we say, in order to become better equipped to share the message of Christ’s saving love with the world.

Jesus calls us to follow him. His call to discipleship involves our whole lives, not merely what we do on Sunday morning. It involves every dimension of living, including such things as what we do with our bodies and our money.

I’ve been thinking about the topic of sex, given that Lauren Winner spoke to our church community recently on the topic of Real Sex. That’s the title of her book we posted on the marquee at the corner of Church and Park Streets, prompting some interesting comments by neighbors and drive-bys. Lauren talked about our tendency in the church to throw up our hands and shrug our shoulders when it comes to society’s changing sexual mores. Since we can’t change secular culture, some of us concede by uncritically embracing the age we live in. How can we compete with Cosmo Magazine and GQ?

It’s time for us, brothers and sisters, to take a good, hard look at what Christian discipleship means for our bodies as well as our souls. Church people are having premarital and extra-marital sex at about the same percentage as people
No wonder our secular culture pays so little attention to our message. We’re not offering people any viable alternative.

Christians have the opportunity to speak a word of clarity and hope into the moral confusion of our time. Scripture teaches that God created our bodies and pronounced them good. Jesus, himself, came in a body, saved us with his body and was resurrected in his body. Paul writes, “You were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Jesus’ call to Christian discipleship also involves our money. We don’t reflect deeply enough about money in this church, not in the biblical sense of the word. In re-reading the Old Testament this year, I’m impressed with the frequency with which the Scripture lifts up concepts like first fruits and tithing.

We are stewards of God’s gifts. We have lost what it means to be a steward of God. When some of you hear the word “steward,” you think in terms of a male airplane attendant!

We have such an exalted sense of entitlement and ownership in our American culture today. Wherever did we get the idea that we own anything? The Bible is emphatically clear: God owns everything! Everything we have is on loan from God. Someday, like the game of Monopoly, it all goes back in the box.

College students today are acting out our culture’s collective dysfunction about money. Are you aware the average college undergraduate today carries a credit card debt approaching $3000?

Where is God calling you? Where is God calling me? Where is God calling us? This call to discipleship involves our whole lives. Jesus’ call to discipleship makes claim on our material selves, including what we do with our bodies and our money.

Where is God calling you?
Where is God calling us?