



GRACE CHURCH

The Call of the Spirit

Judges 6:11-24

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It may be the result of pastoring a church that has plenty of young people, or it may have something to do with the culture we live in, but the questions I get more than any other as a pastor—the number one reasons people meet with me to get some guidance or encouragement—are questions related to purpose and calling.

Questions like this: “What is God’s will for my life?” “How do I make a life-altering decision that honors God?” “How do I know what he is calling me to?” “Is God calling me to go to the mission field? To seminary? To get married? To change churches? To move cities? To change careers? To change majors?”

Kids, have you ever thought about what your life will be like when you are older? What kind of work do you think you will be doing? There are too many options to choose from—in fact, I think part of the reason more and more young people are struggling with mental health more than really ever before in recent history, is because of the stress of options. After being told “you can be whoever you want to be” by everyone their entire childhood, and now in the age of the internet having access to everyone's option of “whoever we want to be”, how is anyone ever supposed to decide what they really want to be?

But it doesn’t matter if you are young or old: everyone wants clarity of purpose. There aren’t just more options for careers than ever before, there are also more options for retirement and leisure. Everyone wants their life to count. Everyone wants to know they are doing the right thing. And sometimes, we just aren’t sure. Wouldn’t it be easier if someone just *told* us our purpose? So maybe the pastor knows. Well, I don’t know where your decisions will take you. Only God sees and holds the infinitude of time. But maybe today, we can get a little help. Here are my two points for this morning:

- 1. You have a Spirit-given call and purpose. (Multiplication, Dominion, Obedience)**
- 2. The Spirit gives you everything you need to fulfill your call and purpose.**



You have a Spirit-given call and purpose.

This is our second week in a sermon series on the Holy Spirit. So I know we just read a long passage from Judges 6: bear with me here, as I want to lay some groundwork before we go there. The Holy Spirit appears in our text as we see in **verse 12** the “angel of the Lord” appeared to Gideon. That is why I chose this text—it is an example of the Holy Spirit’s appearing.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity—fully God and yet distinct from God the Father and God the Son. And last week we saw very clearly that the Spirit of God is from the beginning intimately involved with creation. He “hovers” over the waters of creation, and it is the “breath” or “spirit” of God that fills our lungs and makes us alive, makes us human.

What does it mean to be human? It means that we are spiritual. This week at our spring forum our friend Jeff Medders helped us answer the question: “Is Christianity Spiritual?” with a resounding “yes”. But before Christianity is spiritual, humanity is spiritual. We have been created by God’s spirit, therefore we have a desire for spiritual things. And if we go back to the Genesis account, that spiritual nature we have comes with a purpose, a job, a calling.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

There is the purpose given by nature of having life from God’s spirit. This is the original purpose of man: multiplication and dominion. Everyone is created, Christian or not, to fill the earth and subdue it, steward it. But that mandate also comes with a command. It’s just one:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

What is the purpose and call of man, by nature of him being spiritual? Fill and subdue the earth, and obey God. So as we continue on from Genesis and the creation account, what else do we see the Spirit doing? The Spirit is always with God’s people. He is appearing, And his job is to remind them of their purpose and of God’s commands, to call them to and empower them for their purpose. Anytime you see God speaking or appearing in the Bible, he is doing so by his Spirit.¹ Sometimes that is explicit, like a mention that God is indwelling certain men and women for specific times or purposes. Other times, like in our text with Gideon, God’s spirit shows up in what is called a “theophony” or a manifestation of God, and his presence or voice is mediated through

¹“Only with the doctrine of the Trinity do we see how Manoah and Hagar could have met God. God is the message sender and God is the message bearer, both in one appearance. The Father speaks to them through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. Old Testament theophanies are always at a deep level trinitarian theophanies.” Vern Poythress, “Theophanies”, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/theophany/>



some sort of angel or messenger or natural wonder like fire or smoke. Let me give you some examples, and show how the Spirit is always working to call back to man's original purpose.

- Genesis 12 – God calls Abram (Multiplication/Dominion)
- Exodus 3 – Moses and the burning bush (Multiplication)
- Exodus 19 – God appears at Sinai (Obedience)
- Exodus 31:1 – Bezalel filled with the Spirit for craftsmanship (Dominion).
- Nehemiah 9:20 – Moses was “given the spirit to instruct” Israel (Obedience).
- Judges – Othniel, Jephthah, Gideon, Samson – all given the Spirit to deliver their people (Dominion)
- 2 Peter 1:21 – (All the prophets), “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (Obedience)

On and on we could go. The point is: the role of the Spirit in the Old Testament is to call and empower the people of God for their purpose: multiplication, dominion, and obedience. But you might say, that is the Old Testament! Does the Spirit of God work in the same way now? And my answer is yes, even more so. If the original purpose, the commission, of mankind was multiplication, dominion, and obedience—this is likewise the purpose of every Christian. When Jesus Christ rises from the grave, the Scripture says he “breathes” on the disciples—just like God breathed life into Adam in the garden (John 20:22)! This breath is a foreshadowing, a promise, of when God sends his Holy Spirit to dwell in those who trust in Christ at Pentecost, just a few weeks after Jesus ascends to the Father. But after breathing on them, Jesus gives his disciples a commission, a purpose.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Notice in Jesus' commission—which is given to all those who follow him, the Christian purpose and calling—there is multiplication (make disciples), dominion (baptizing all nations) and obedience (teaching them to observe). And although this command comes directly from Jesus, when Acts repeats it to us, it comes with the promise of the Holy Spirit whom they will receive power from. How is it also that Jesus can be “with us always”? By the Holy Spirit! So what is the role of the Holy Spirit now, after Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and after Pentecost? The Spirit is given to call us to our purpose and to empower us for our purpose. The Spirit is given so that we can multiply (make disciples), take dominion (bring Christ's kingdom) and obey.

So there you have it. Christian, you have a Spirit-Given purpose. You were created by God and saved by God, for three things: 1) so that you can spiritually multiply and fill the earth with more followers of Jesus; 2) so that you can live for Jesus' kingdom and not yours; and 3) so that you can have the joy of obeying God and teaching others to obey him. What is God's will for your life? What is the Spirit of God calling you to? Multiplication, Dominion, and Obedience.



So, in that way (thank you for your patience), you are not too unlike Gideon. God is calling Gideon, and wants to fill him with his Spirit, so that the people of God are not snuffed out but can multiply, so that God's kingdom can expand, and so that God's people can obey him and worship him alone. It doesn't really matter what Gideon did for a living. He was a farmer—but look at **verse 11**, he was a scared, poor, famer. Like Locusts, the Midanites would sweep in every harvest and take whatever they wanted from the Israelites' hard work. Gideon was trying to make some food for himself to hide so that they wouldn't take it. But Gideon gets a theophany, and the Spirit of God calls him—just as we have Christ, the great theophany, the great appearing of God, calling us by the Spirit. It doesn't matter what we do, whether we are farmers or academics or healthcare workers or moms or teachers or business owners. And it doesn't matter if we are particularly successful at it. What matters is that God calls us, shows up, and by his Spirit reminds us of our purpose.

You don't have to be “whatever you want to be”. You don't have to crumble under that pressure. Instead, you can be who God wants you to be, who he created you to be and saved you to be. You can do nearly any work, live anywhere, and fulfill your purpose from God. You can make decisions confidently, asking “does it have the potential for multiplication”, “does it build God's kingdom, not mine” and “it is done in obedience to God's commands”?

And yet, here is the rub. I can say all that, give you a nice formula for fulfilling your life's purpose, but we all know it's not that easy. It's cloudier than that. Like Gideon, we have some objections when the Spirit calls. So here is our second point.

The Spirit gives you everything you need to fulfill your call and purpose.

Gideon is what you might call an anti-hero, or at least a reluctant hero. When we find him in our story, he is one sad dude. He just wants to farm in peace, free from the tyranny of Midian. He doesn't want the spotlight—he is doing his work in a hole in the ground. This mud-pit is Gideon's origin story.



And then God shows up, with an identity. It's not “scared farmer”, but **verse 12**, “mighty man of valor”. The scene is almost comical, the opposite of dramatic. He obviously doesn't intend to be



found. And when he is found, what he finds is a stranger with a strange word. Notice the stranger is identified as the “messenger of the LORD”, but Gideon calls him “lord”, a sign of respect but not deity. He doesn’t think him divine or holy. And so Gideon naturally has some objections: three of them to be exact. First, in **verse 13**, the objection of suffering. Second, in **verse 15**, the objection of competency, and third, in **verse 17**, the objection of certainty. Let’s view them in order.

The Spirit’s Presence Despite Our Suffering

The word Gideon has a problem with in **verse 12** is not first that he is a mighty man of valor—but rather that God would be said to be “with him”. Gideon’s objection may be a familiar one to us, in **verse 13**. How could God be present when all these bad things are happening? Where is God in my suffering, my pain? I’ve heard God is good, but I don’t see him now.

In the book *Night* by Elie Weisel. He recounts life in a concentration camp at the height of the horrors of WWII. Elie is recounting a time when a young boy was hung in the camp for insurrection, but did not die immediately. He hears someone look at this scene and ask “Where is God? Where is He?” They wait a bit longer, witnessing the suffering of this boy.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking: “Where is God now?” And I heard a voice within me answer him: Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows. . . .”

In Elie’s mind, no loving God could allow or provide any help in this kind of immense affliction. To him, God is dead. He is no longer real, or at least no longer active. Mankind has killed him with their pursuit to enact ruthless suffering. In the face of excruciating circumstances, it is increasingly difficult to imagine that God is *with us*.

It’s important to remember too that while the suffering of Israel was an injustice against their humanity, it was also a result of their rebellion. In **verse 1** we read that it was because of their evil and idolatry that God disciplined them into the hands of Midian. Gideon thinks that God has abandoned them, that he is distant—but in fact, God has intentionality to their suffering. The Spirit of God is always near and close in our suffering—even if that suffering is in part due to our own rebellion against him.

Notice that God doesn’t provide an answer to Gideon’s objection. He doesn’t have to explain the workings of his providence, his severe mercy. Often I find myself explaining all my actions to my toddler, in an attempt to justify myself. But God doesn’t owe us explanations—his promises are enough. And he promises: I am with you.

The Holy Spirit is called many things in Scripture, and he shows up in many different ways. But one constant about the Spirit of God is this: he is the manifestation of the *presence* of God. When Jesus lived perfectly, died in our place, and rose from the grave, he did so by the power of the Spirit. He was baptized to begin his ministry as a sign that he works by the Spirit’s power. And so when Jesus, defeater of death, breathes and gives us the Holy Spirit—he is giving us himself. He is giving us



intimacy, connection, presence with the triune God. There is nowhere you can go to escape God's spirit. If you are in Christ, there is no circumstance that can rob you of God's presence. That promise: "I am with you" is enough. I know it may not feel like it—but God is the only one tender enough in Jesus to understand your pain, and powerful enough to do something about it. His Spirit indwells you if you are in Christ, he holds you, sees you, weeps with you in your circumstance, *and* he saves you, protects you, heals you, empowers you. Which leads us to the next answer to our objections.

The Spirit's Power Despite Our Incompetency

Were Gideon to trust that God has some plan despite his circumstances telling him the opposite, he still has an objection: why him? **Verse 15**, he is the least—perhaps youngest, least capable, least honored—in his fathers' house. His father's house is the weakest in his tribe, and Manasseh is an average tribe at best. In other words, Gideon is the guy in the family who knows one expects anything from, in a family that has a history of failure.

We all relate. If you have not yet been humbled by others, you will eventually be humbled by life. No one goes through life believing they are the best—there is always someone better. Especially when it comes to spiritual things: how many of you would say you have the prayer life you have always dreamed of, you just knock it out of the park every day? I relate to Gideon—I remember just four years ago when God called me to the pastorate here, at this church, I was 25 years old. I remember all these thoughts, thoughts I sometimes feel even now: "Excuse me, God? Don't you mean someone else for this job?"

Oftentimes, God calls us not just in spite of our incompetency, but because of it. In his call to make disciples, to subdue creation for his kingdom, and to obey him, he intentionally leads us to impossible scenarios to keep us dependent on him. When was the last time you looked at your life and thought: "someone else could do everything I am doing better than me?" That might be God teaching you to depend on him, it may be the Spirit calling you to do what you could never do without him. Jesus doesn't lower standards either. Imposter syndrome is not God's intention for our life, but it is a natural result of being called to God's high standards and constantly feeling the weight of our incompetence. Like Paul in Romans 7, "For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

God's answer to our incompetence lies in a question in **verse 14**: "Do I not send you?" See, when we are focused on our incompetence we are actually living in a state of concealed pride. We mistakenly think that the power to fulfill our purpose comes from inside us. Friend, you are not that amazing. You are not a world-changer, or a world-beater. Get some perspective, read Ecclesiastes. The world turns, we all die, and nothing we do lasts very long.

But what God does lasts forever. When he calls you, he will also equip you. You are not lacking in the power to obey God and fulfill your purpose: because of Jesus, God has indwelled you with his very spirit. You can kill sin, you can tear down strongholds, you can take every thought captive, you



can proclaim boldly the gospel, you can endure suffering and persecution, you can and are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. If you are in Christ, you have the Spirit, and you are not an imposter. The Lord is with you, mighty one of valor.

The Spirit's Patience Despite Our Uncertainty

Despite all this, Gideon has one more objection. It's the objection of certainty. See, even if we trust God is with us in our circumstances, and he will empower us by his Spirit, we all have those times where we wonder: is any of this real? Friends, we believe in a God we cannot see, in a man who got up from the dead. That takes real faith. And sometimes, we doubt. Like Gideon in **verse 17-18**, we want a sign.

So Gideon goes and prepares this meal—the meal he makes is like some sort of sacrifice, note the unleavened bread and young, unblemished goat. He wants to know if this message is divine, if it really is God. He wants to see what the messenger will do with this sacrifice. And what happens is fascinating: like the sacrifices of the temple, it is burned with flames, a sign that God is pleased, but like Elijah's sacrifice on Mt Carmel, the flames come miraculously. The messenger of God's Spirit disappears, and Gideon **verse 22**, suddenly gets it. He has been visited by the Spirit of God—and his response is fear and trembling, for who can see the Lord and live? But somehow, we are not told how, in verse 23, although the angel is gone, God speaks again, and tells Gideon to be at peace. So Gideon listens, and the altar he builds, in a time of war and uncertainty, is called “the Lord is Peace.” Although his doubts were not perfected, something changed in Gideon that day. His meal was consumed, but he feasted on faith. He became a spiritual man, ready to be filled with the Spirit. **Verse 34** can literally be translated, “the Spirit clothed himself with Gideon”.

What spurred Gideon's change, from uncertain to spirit filled? I think we find the answer in **verse 18**. The Lord says “I will stay until you return”. It takes more than a few minutes to butcher a goat, cook it, and bake some bread. The Scriptures warn us not to test God. But God says “I'll wait. And you know what Gideon, I'll give you a sign.”

Friends, doubt is not a virtue. But the Spirit of God is patient with sinners, sufferers, and doubters. He is patient as his purpose for you is fulfilled in a lifetime. How do you know what God is calling you to, exactly, by his Spirit? You don't. But you can trust God with your fears and doubts and insecurities. He isn't intimidated by them. And not only, he has given you a sign. You don't need his writing in the clouds or his audible voice. Jesus Christ, full of the Spirit, was offered up like a sacrifice, burnt up even, as pleasing to God, so that we could be truly spiritual, full of the Spirit, and with spiritual eyes be able to say: “the Lord is Peace”. He is the sign you need for certainty. No matter your uncertainty, you can be at peace. God has called you to a purpose, and by his Spirit, he will be with you, he will equip you for exactly what you need, and he will be patient and kind while you stumble through it.

