

Putting Out a Fleece

Every Christian has asked at one time or another, “How can I know God’s will for my life?” Even seasoned saints struggle at times in knowing God’s will. Occasionally, people will suggest putting out a fleece to determine the will of the Lord. Is this something we should do? Where does this practice originate, and is it one that we should follow? Should we ever put out a fleece to discover God’s will for our life?

The practice of putting out a fleece originated with Gideon in Judges 6.36-40. In response to Midianite oppression, God called Gideon to deliver the Israelites. Yet, Gideon felt inadequate and so he asked for a sign to be assured that God was leading him to do this. On two separate occasions he laid out a fleece of wool overnight. The first time he asked that the fleece would be wet and the ground around it dry. The second time he asked that the fleece would be dry and the ground around it wet. God granted him the sign, and Gideon went on to defeat the Midianites.

So should we ever put out a fleece to know God’s will as Gideon did? Personally, I would not recommend that Christians put out a fleece to discover God’s will. When Gideon put out his fleece, it was at an early stage in divine revelation. Gideon did not possess the Scriptures like we do today. With this deficiency, God revealed his will to him in the way he asked. Yet, with what we have today in terms of complete biblical revelation, I’m not sure it’s prudent to put out a fleece to know God’s will. Wouldn’t it be wiser to simply search the Scriptures, pray, and seek godly counsel?

Something to remember about Gideon’s fleece is that it involved a life or death situation. Gideon was not simply putting out a fleece to see if he should take this job or that job or whether he should marry this woman or that woman. This was a life or death issue. God was calling him to take on the Midianites in battle, which could very well cost him and many Israelites their lives. Thus, he needed clear confirmation and assurance before proceeding further. God does not give out his miracles lightly or casually. If we need one, he’ll give it. Otherwise, to demand a miracle reveals unbelief. Jesus condemned those who demanded a sign (see Matt 12.38-39). For some, putting out a fleece may simply be a smokescreen for unbelief.

By the way, some who say they are putting out a fleece are not really doing what Gideon did. When Gideon put out his fleece, it required an absolute miracle for God to confirm his will. Gideon's fleece was not asking the Lord for a friend to call on the phone no later than 6:00 PM or that he would see a deer while walking through a field. No, he was asking for a miracle—that a fleece of wool after setting out all night would have water in it while the ground was dry and then that it would be dry while the ground was wet. If you're going to put out a fleece, it should not be a sign that you can manipulate. It should be a miracle. And that's the danger of so-called signs: we can manipulate them to mean what we want or we can ignore them when they don't agree with what we want.

The bottom line is: the practice of putting out a fleece is never set forth in Scripture as a principle to be followed. What Gideon did is simply recorded in the book of Judges, showing how God worked in his life in response to doubt and fear. The Bible does not condemn this practice but neither does it recommend it. There is no verse in the Bible that tells us to seek God's will by putting out a fleece. This is not to say that God will not respond to a fleece; in Gideon's case he did. God gave him the assurance he asked for. However, Scripture sets forth a more dependable course in knowing God's will for one's life. This includes the following: searching the Scriptures (see Ps 119.105), praying about it (see James 1.5), and seeking godly counsel (see Proverbs 19.20). I cannot say that a person should *never* put out a fleece in order to know God's will. Yet, I certainly wouldn't recommend it. What I would recommend is: search the Scriptures, pray, and seek godly counsel. This is a much safer route in knowing God's will.

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