

## mp3/543/a.m JUDGES 6.MP3

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     On the screen there is part of verse 15 of Joshua chapter 24 and this is what it reads, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. This is Joshua speaking to all the people.

Choose for yourself today who you'll serve. Make up your minds. And then he says at the end, as for me and my household we will serve the Lord. Why should we serve the Lord? When we come together this morning we're coming to worship God, to praise him, that's part of our service of him.

But ultimately in our lives it's not just what we do on a Sunday. We're to love him, to obey him, to follow him. But why should we serve the Lord? Well our first hymn tells us why, that he's the God who is awesome, marvelous, majestic, great, good, merciful, loving. There's no one like him, no one who deserves our faith. So let's stand and sing together. Coming up on the screen, who has held the oceans in his hands? We'll stand as the music begins to play.

Let's continue to adore our God as we pray together. Let us all pray.

We do come this morning, O Lord, to adore you, to stand in awe of you, to fall in worship at the splendor, the beauty, the majesty, the wonder of who you are. You are far beyond anything that we can imagine, far beyond anything that we can think of or dream of or create in our minds. You are so stupendous. You are so glorious. O Lord, we thank you that nothing, nothing and no one can compare to you. Not just because you are God in the sense of your mighty power, your creation, your majesty, but Lord, nothing can compare with you in any of your attributes, any of your characteristics. No one can compare with you, especially in your love. That love for us. Love for us sinful, selfish, rebellious, greedy, unpleasant people. Love, Lord, which does not treat us as our sins deserve, but love which is so full of grace, undeserved favor, unmerited love. Love, Lord, which does not say, do this and I will love you, will do that and I will love you, but love that is unconditional. Love, O Lord, which is so vast and great that we shall never come to the end of it. We shall never plumb the depths of it. Such love,

[ 2 : 5 1 ]     O Lord, which we know is more than a feeling and even more than just words, but love which is powerful action. The actions by which you came into this world, the living God, to experience our humanity.

The action that you went to the cross as we sang there, took those nails in your hands and feet. Lord, that action by which you bore the guilt, our guilt, our punishment, our shame, the death that you died in our place, all because of love. Not because we deserved it, not because we were worthy of it, but because of love. And O Lord, we come to you this morning again and we cry, O Lord, would you not pour out something more of that love into our hearts? When we compare our love for you with your love for us, it is so pathetic. It is so cold. It is so distant. It is so variable. It is so unlike your love. But Lord, we long to love you more. And from that love to serve you more, to obey you more, to follow you more, to live for you more. Thank you that you do not drive us, as it were, with a whip, but you call us with cords and pull us with cords of love. You bind us to yourself. You make us your children. You make us precious and lovely in your sight and yourself lovely to us. O Lord, help us this morning as we come to sing your praises, as we come to worship you, not just in singing, but worship you in hearing your word. For Lord, how we respond to your word is part of our attitude of worship to you. How we respond to what you say to us is an acknowledgement of our love for you and our service of you. And Lord, again, we pray, not just today, but in the days ahead in this week. Lord, we ask that that love for you may so overflow from our lives, that it may touch the lives of others in works of kindness and generosity and grace, but also in words of truth and gospel.

And so, Lord, we praise you and thank you that you are here. And we ask, O Lord, that we might know your presence and your nearness amongst us. And we ask these things all because of the love of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour. Amen.

Can we please turn together in God's word in our Bibles to Judges in chapter 6? Can I say thank you to those who looked after the services last Sunday when I wasn't too well?

And thank you for your prayers for me. But the week before that, we began looking at a brief life of Gideon. And so on page 248, page 248 in the Church Bible, Judges 6, we looked at the first part of the meeting of the Lord with Gideon and him being commissioned by the Lord to take an army and defeat the Midianites who were oppressing God's people. And we're going to read part of that just to refresh our memories. And then we're going to skip over to the part we're going to look at particularly this morning. So we're going to begin from verse 11. So that's Judges chapter 6, verse 11, and read down to verse 16. Then we're going to jump over a page to verse 33, and then read to the end of the chapter. Okay, so verse 11 to 16, and then over to verse 33.

[ 6 : 27 ]     The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abyssalite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, The Lord is with you, mighty warrior. Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied. But if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?

Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt? But now the Lord has abandoned us, given us into the hand of Midian. 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?

Pardon me, my Lord, Gideon replied. But how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I'm the least in my family. The Lord answered, I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive. Verse 33. Now all the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon. He blew a trumpet, summoning the Abizarites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. So they too went up to meet him. Gideon said to God, If you will save me, sorry, if you will save Israel by my hand, as you've promised, 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. That is exactly what happened. Gideon rose early the next day. He squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me to one more test with the fleece. But this time make the fleece dry. Let the ground be covered with dew.

That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry, or the ground was covered with dew. If you'd like to turn back to Judges and chapter 6, and particularly those verses that we read in the second part, verses 33 to 40. Verses 33 to 40. Now, so far at the children's talk and at the beginning of the service, we've been thinking about choices, making choices. I wonder how you make choices. On what basis do you make those choices, those decisions? How do you work through which way you will take what you will do in any given situation? Perhaps you'll write down pros on one side and cons on the other. Perhaps you'll have other ways of working things through, maybe on a financial basis, or so on. Life is indeed full of choices. As I said with the children, those very simple choices. What shall we put on in the morning? Those choices, what yogurt shall we buy when we stand before the great refrigerator in Sainsbury's or whatever? But it's not those choices I'm really concerned about so much this morning. Those choices are very much personal and very much to do with our taste and so on and who we're seeking to shop for and whatever. I'm thinking about the bigger decisions, the bigger choices, the ones that really have an effect upon our future. Those choices that have effect upon our walk with God, especially those choices that determine where we will be in a year's time, what will happen, and so on. Now, it's that sort of big choice that was facing Gideon here in chapter 6 of Judges. That's why talking about choices. He had a big choice. Would he lead the

[ 10 : 32 ] Israelite army against the Midianites who had for many years oppressed them and raided them and stolen from them and made their life an absolute misery, or wouldn't he? Would he go through with leading them or not? Now, the reason we read from verses 11 before was to show that God had given him a command to do just that. Verse 14, the Lord turned to him, Gideon, and said, go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you? God was sending him, commissioning him, charging him to go. But when we get to verse 36, we realize that doubt has entered Gideon's mind. Gideon said, to God, if you will save. If. God had said, go, and he said, if you want me to go. And so we come to possibly the most well-known episode in the life of Gideon, which is this experience of laying down of a fleece before the Lord. Many Christians, if not all of us at some time, have followed Gideon's example in this matter. Not necessarily with a sheep's fleece, I mean, but at some point or other, we've sort of looked for a sign from God to guide us in our decision-making. It wasn't usually a miraculous sign. We haven't asked for God to make the sun go backwards or this sort of miracle, which is what this was, but sort of a small sign just to help us along our way in our choices and decisions.

And perhaps you've done something similar to these things. Perhaps when you were young, you thought, shall I marry this person, Lord? And then we've added a sort of on the end, if you want me to marry them, get them to send me a text today. Or do you want me to become a missionary, Lord? I don't know how Ben and Liz worked this one out, but perhaps they may have said, well, Lord, send me a missionary newsletter in my email box this week. Or perhaps you said, which university do you want me to go to, God? Please, can you give me a sign by making sure it's got an indoor swimming pool? I don't know, but in some way or other, I think all of us have done something of that nature. We've looked for a sign from God or asked for a sign from God. We've done something similar. But the question really is, should we do that? Should we seek God's guidance in the way that Gideon does here? Is Gideon's example one that we should follow? Should we lay a fleece before God? Well, I want to say right at the start that I believe Gideon's example is one that we should not follow. We should not follow Gideon's example. I'm going to look a bit later on as to how we should seek the will of God, how we should seek and expect him to guide and lead us. But when it comes to the example of Gideon here,

I think we've got again to remind ourselves that we must handle God's word in the Bible very carefully. We mustn't just take what we read as being an example for us always for the good. Because once you get to read the Bible, you see lots of things there that aren't good examples for us to follow, such as Judas going out and hanging himself or anything like that. So we're to handle God's carefully, God's word carefully. Remember when we deal with and read about the lives of God's people in both the Old and the New Testament, we're reading about ordinary people like us. Perhaps exceptional circumstances, God doing exceptional things, but ordinary people, people at their faults, their sins, their failings, as well as their faith. So when we read about the lives of God's people, we need to be discerning. Discerning as to whether this is a good example to follow or a bad example to avoid. And in the Old Testament, we have both. In Hebrews in chapter 11, the writer there speaks about faith. He says, faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

This is what the ancients, the people of the Old Testament, were commended for. So acts of faith are to be commended. They are recommended by us. That's why we have so much of God's word is about narrative, story, God interacting in people's lives. But also we have warnings not to copy.

When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 about the sin of the people in Israel in older times, he said this, now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings to us.

[ 15 : 27 ] So again, we handle the word of God correctly, carefully. So I'm saying to you that this example given to us of Gideon is an example to avoid, not to follow. But you may say to me, well, why?

Why is it wrong to seek God's will in the way that Gideon did looking for a sign? After all, when we look at what happened, God answered his prayer. God gave him what he wanted as a sign.

Surely if that would have been wrong, God wouldn't have answered his prayer. Especially twice. But I want to put it to you this way, why I believe that Gideon was wrong.

First of all, we see that his request for a sign is born out of fear and not faith. He acts because he's afraid. He's afraid. He's afraid of what will happen. God had already told Gideon what to do. He told him to go.

It even promised him a victory. Verse 16, I will be with you. You will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive. God had promised him a victory. God had told him what to do already. He didn't need to ask for a sign. He didn't need to ask God to confirm what he'd already said. He was doubting the word of God, doubting the power of God. And we must remember, as we looked the other week, Gideon was a man, and this is where he's helpful to us because we see a life which is owned by fear, controlled by fear. Right at the very start when we meet him, he's in that wine press. Remember that sort of very large half a barrel type of thing, hiding away from the Midianites because he's scared of them. God speaks to him later on and says to him in verse 23, do not be afraid.

[ 17 : 17 ] And later on, when Gideon first obeys the Lord, we're told he did what God commanded him at night because he was afraid. He's a man who is ruled by fear. In fact, it carries on, which we'll look at next week when God speaks to him in verse 10 of chapter 7, if you are afraid to attack.

So what Gideon is doing is born of fear and not faith. And the Bible makes it very clear, Hebrews chapter 11 verse 6, without faith it is impossible to please God. And elsewhere, the Apostle Paul writes that if we do anything without faith, it is a sin. So Gideon is responding, not trusting, believing in God. He's afraid. His actions are born of fear. They're not born of faith. Secondly, and this is another really important reason why we shouldn't follow the example and look for a sign from the Lord when we want a decision to be made, is that his request for a sign did not give him a clear answer. His first request was, Lord, can you do what I ask?

Do you on the fleece, dry on the ground? God answers him, but he still isn't convinced, is he? He still isn't certain. He still isn't sure. So he asks a second time for another sign.

That's telling us, of course, that the very first sign didn't help him at all. Because he could be thinking, of course, in his head, and this is how we might think as well, well, it's probably just a coincidence. A coincidence that the fleece was wet and the ground was dry. Or perhaps I didn't get there early enough and the water on the, the dew on the ground had dried up, but not on the fleece because it soaks it in. So we can make excuses for the signs.

They give us no confidence whatsoever. See, ultimately, faith that needs evidence is not faith, is it? We read there earlier on concerning the ancient believers of old that faith is confidence in what we hope for, assurance about what we do not see. Weak faith, which is always relying upon a sign, which is always doubting, will never be strong faith. It will always be confused faith. We'll always be hopping from one foot to another. Oh, here's a sign that says, yes, I should do it. Oh, but there's a sign that says, no, I've seen two magpies, or whatever it may be.

[ 19 : 43 ] So we ask God to give us a sign, a rainbow in the sky, a phone call, an email, whatever. None of these things will actually convince us of what God's will is, or what it is that he wants for us to do.

But then we can say, well, why did God answer his prayer? Why did God give to Gideon what he requested for? Well, because wonderfully, our God is gracious and gentle and patient with us, and long-suffering.

He knows our weaknesses. He knows that we struggle with. He's a good, gracious, tender, heavenly Father. And like every father, at times, he indulges his children, doesn't he? But here's wonderful encouragement for us as well, comfort for us. Dear friends, we do struggle with fear. All of us do.

All of us are afraid at times. We're not alone. Here's Gideon, a man that God used wonderfully, powerfully, mightily, a man who is gripped with fear. And you may find that you are afraid, afraid of old age, afraid of retirement, afraid of unemployment, afraid for your health, afraid for your children, afraid for all sorts of things.

It's not evidence that we're unconverted if we're afraid. It's not a sign that somehow we are not really Christians if we're afraid. But it's not something that we want to continue with.

[ 21 : 13 ] God wants us to be free of fear. He wants us to trust him. He wants us to know that he is faithful. So God forbears with Gideon. And he puts up with us. And he's patient. And he won't let us go. And at times, he indulges us. Because he is such a good God. But let's come back to this matter of guidance then. Because this is so important. This is probably the greatest question that many of us face.

How do I know what God's will is? How can I discern what God wants for me in my life? As a young person. As I'm older. In the future. How do we go about this? And so I want us to draw some lessons from the rest of Scripture as well.

The first thing which is so important is this. I need to ask myself, do I really want God's will? Do I really want God's will? Or actually, do I want what I want? Because unless we start with wanting God's will, then anything else that we do is meaningless, isn't it? Anything else is pointless.

And the truth is, for many of us, we ask for a sign from God because we want him to rubber stamp our own decisions. We've decided who we're going to marry. We've decided where we're going to live.

We've decided what job we're going to take. What university we want. We've decided in our hearts and determined that this is the right thing, the best thing, the thing that I want. And so, to solve our conscience, which says you should seek God and ask for his will, and to make ourselves perhaps look a little bit godly to others as well, we'll say, oh, we've really prayed about it and ask God to give us a sign about it. But you see, God is no fool. He knows what's in your heart and mine.

[ 22 : 59 ] He knows whether we really want his will or whether actually we just want him to sort of go along with our plans and to bless us whatever we do. Because that's the thing, isn't it? We want to do what we want, but we want God's blessing upon it. We want to do the things that please us, but we want God to agree with us. You see, we've got it completely the wrong way around, haven't we? We are to be submissive to God's will. We begin by having that attitude that says, not my will, but yours be done.

We begin with the attitude, Jesus, you are my God, my Lord. You're the one who rules over my heart, my King. That's an act of faith in itself. That's why becoming a Christian is such a huge act of faith, because becoming a Christian is not only acknowledging my sin and acknowledging Jesus died for me, that faith in him as my sin bearer, but it's that faith that says, Jesus, you are the number one. You are the God of my life, the Lord of my life. I hand over, in one sense, the reins to you. I hand over to you the authority. That's a big act of faith, isn't it? But it continues from there, because every decision we make, every action we do, is about trusting God. The act of faith that says, actually, God, what you want is always the best for me. That's what faith is. What you want is always the best for me. I'm trusting you that your will is best, that you know what's good, you know what's right. Even though I think this is right, God, you know better than me. How many of us could ever say, I know better than God?

We think we do, though. We act as though we do. Therefore, we've got to come back to this. Do I really want to know God's will? And begin there. Secondly, of course, and these aren't all necessarily in order. That one's in order, but all the rest I'm going to come to are not necessarily in order, but there's a chronological way of working through what the will of God is. Secondly, of course, is what has God already said in his word, in the Bible? This was Gideon, wasn't it? God had already said to him, go, I've sent you. And then he says, secondly, go, I'm with you, and you'll have a victory. He's given the clarity of God's word. There's no need for him to look for a sign.

There's no need for him to check up on God and see whether there's something else that God wants him to do. God doesn't change his mind. If he said it already, then there's no need for us to have any further leading. I'm just going to take one illustration of this. It's a hot potato, okay, so I make no excuses for that. It's something that many people here have been affected by, but it's very important. Who do I marry? As a Christian, who do I marry? Here's somebody that I like, somebody I spend time with, somebody who I enjoy, and I think, you know, I'd like to marry that girl. The trouble is that she's not a Christian. Should I marry her? I'm going to look for a sign.

I'm going to ask God to give me a sign whether I should marry or not. No, you don't need to do that. You just need to go back to the word of God, and the word of God is very plain and clear in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that God does not want his people to marry those who worship anyone other than himself. So we don't need to go just even to the New Testament. We can go back to the Old Testament. Just before God led the people into Canaan, he gave them explicit instructions in Deuteronomy chapter 7. Do not intermarry with them, that's the people of the land that you are living in.

[ 26 : 45 ] Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Now what is God doing? Is he just being prejudicial? Is he just being unpleasant? Is he just being difficult? Is he just saying, you know, be awkward when you live amongst... No, because it goes on. For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods. Everything that God calls us to do in his word, he calls us to do for our blessing and spiritual benefit firstly.

And when we look in low God's word, we find that again and again God's word has much to say about the very real decisions and choices we have to make each and every day. Some of those big decisions.

Does this job that I'm applying for require me to do everything 100% truthfully or actually is it a part in which I've got to be a bit untruthful? Well, I can't take that job because God has said, you shall not bear false witness. God's word is plain and clear. So when we are faced with decisions, we can go back to the word of God and say, is there anything in this decision which is contrary to God's word? Well, God has made clear and plain.

And if we want to know what God's will is, then we need to read God's word. If we're confused and concerned about what God's will is, it could well be that the problem is we just haven't read the scriptures and understood the scriptures and understood the principles of God's word that are laid out and the clarity of God's word. But let's be reasonable. Let's be honest. There are many decisions that we want to make or have to make that are not as simple and straightforward as what does the Bible say. Many decisions we have to make which cannot be resolved simply from scripture in the sense of thou shalt not and thou shall. What should I do when I'm offered a job which means moving my family to another country or another part of the country away from their friends? What should I do about that job?

Should I take it or should I reject it? I'm sure for many of us as Christians there have been times when we have thought, is God calling me to some time of full-time ministry in the mission field or some other work of service? Is that what God wants me to do? How do I discern and know his will for that? Forgive me if I'm touching raw nerves here. Does God want me to undergo chemotherapy for the cancer that I've just been told I've got?

[ 29 : 30 ] Again, when Lord should I leave my home and go into supported living? Because I'm no longer able to care for myself as I should. These are questions that we face, decisions we make and many other besides as well that are important and vital and personal to us. They are heart-wrenching decisions at times.

They tear us apart and we can feel ourselves be very confused and fearful of going this way or that. And there's no flippant easy answer that can be cheaply given.

So how do we work from there? I believe that we should seek the counsel of other mature believers.

I believe Scripture makes that very clear. We should seek the counsel of other believers. Proverbs in chapter 15. Proverbs is a wonderful book. If you want to gain wisdom in making decisions, read Proverbs as much as you can. Proverbs 15 says this, plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.

Perhaps as we talk to people, other Christians, about our predicament and what decision we should make, they may be able to have, they may have experience of that themselves. They've had to face that problem themselves and work it through for themselves and they can perhaps confirm how the way that we're thinking and sensing where God is leading us.

[ 30 : 54 ] See, the reason that you and I have been put into a local church by God is because none of us is an island. We cannot live out the Christian life on our own. We need one another.

We need one another's counsel. We need one another's prayers. We need one another's support and love. We need one another's correction and challenge. And I would urge you, urge you, urge you, urge you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to be as committed as you can to the people of God because you need us as much as we need you.

None of us can manage on our own and God has put us in a church for that. Seek counsel. Now, I know that you're thinking, when are you going to mention prayer? I'm going to mention prayer now.

But prayer, of course, is something that should have started at the very beginning. But I've put it in this order for a reason. We pray about it. If we want to know what to do, we're faced between two job descriptions or we're faced with a move or whatever it may be.

We need to pray, firstly and foremostly. This is how Proverbs, again, wonderfully puts it. This is the New Living Translation. Proverbs 3, verse 6. Seek God's will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

[ 32 : 10 ] The Older Translation, he'll make your path straight, but it's the same thing. He will show you what to do. Seek God. Commit it to God. Lay it before God. In one sense, it's not the laying of a fleece before God for a sign we need.

It's the bringing and bearing of our hearts before God. Asking for God's will to be made known to us. Asking him to lead us. How will he do that? I'd like you to turn over now in your Bibles to the New Testament and Philippians chapter 4.

Philippians chapter 4, which is found on page 1181. page 1181, Philippians chapter 4, where we have a lovely snippet on the matter of prayer.

And to me, this is solid gold wisdom from God. Verses 6 through to 7. I'll read them and then we'll come back to them. Verses 6, the very top of the page of 1181.

I believe that in these two verses we have when we are to pray, how we are to pray, and how God will answer that prayer.

[ 33 : 35 ] Just in those two verses. Now it's clear that we are to pray in every situation. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation. When are we anxious? Well, we're often anxious because, again, we've got a choice to make, a decision to make.

A quandary, a problem that we need to work through and seek God's will and mind on. And in every single one of those, whatever they may be, we're called to pray. That's why we've got a heavenly father.

That's why we've got a relationship through the Lord Jesus. It's so that we can talk and share and speak and seek. And prayer is not simply a one direction road, is it?

It's not one way flow. That's the whole point. When you've got a relationship with somebody, depending on who they are, of course, there may be some men who are married and the conversation is one way, and they do all the talking and their poor wives are kept silent and they're not allowed to speak.

Okay, fair enough. But it's a two-way. It goes that way and that way. We speak to those we love, they speak to us. We speak to God, he speaks to us. It's a two-way.

[ 34 : 37 ] So we're to pray. How are we to pray? Well, we're told there, with prayer and petition and thanksgiving. Present your request to God. In other words, all sorts of prayer. Prayer is not simply petitioning God.

Prayer is not just asking. Prayer is thanking him, praising him, worshipping him, adoring him, rejoicing in him. But we're to present our request to God, Lord.

We bring it to him. We bring it to him. We give it to him. We ask him. And we need to be specific about our prayers. Don't need to be woolly or vague or sort of in our language.

The language that God listens to is the language of the heart, not firstly the mouth. Am I really, again, praying, Lord, I just need to know your will. I long to know what it is that you want me to do.

I long to know your solution to this quandary. And then we come to, I believe, which is the answer. How are we guided by God?

[ 35 : 36 ] And the first thing I believe is that God answers us by giving us peace. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, I believe. He gives us peace.

Notice it's peace beyond understanding. It's not natural. It's not normal. It's not sitting out and reasonably working things out in our head and getting peace. It's peace that comes from God.

It's supernatural. Holy Spirit, peace. We are believers. We are Christians who are indwelt by the Spirit of God. And His Spirit is that which leads and guides us.

Well, how does He do that? I believe He does it through peace. And I'm going to ask you to bear with me. I'm going to give two personal illustrations. I don't like to do that too often. But in this situation, I think they're appropriate.

First of all, about this matter of peace. Before we came to Whitby, many of you know, we were in Hornington in Devon. And for one reason or another, I'd finished my ministry there in the church.

[ 36 : 34 ] And we were really saying, God, what do you want us to do? A little while after that, this is four years ago, had two phone calls, one from a church in the southeast and one from a church in the north of Yorkshire in a place I'd never heard of before called Whitby.

The other church in the southeast phoned me first and I'd agreed a date to go and preach at that church with the possibility, if things progressed, at looking at becoming their pastor.

Whitby phoned. Secondly, and I made a date for later in that month. I think it was October time. And so I went to the first church and I preached. And they said, please, would you come back?

We'd like you to consider going another step forward in becoming our pastor and looking at investigating that. And I said, okay, that's fine. I then went and came here and preached.

And the elders asked me to do the same, to which I said, no, I wouldn't come up a second time to preach at Whitby because I believed that I needed to deal with one matter at a time, one church at a time.

[ 37 : 37 ] And so Andrew, myself and the children, we went to this church in the southeast a second time and preached and met with the elders there. Good church, sound church, biblical church, lovely church, appreciative church.

But I have to say that there was no peace within my heart. There was nothing saying, screaming out no. There was nothing wrong with the church. And so it just, there was no peace.

And so I phoned Barry, in fact it was, and said, yes, if you'd still like me to, I'm happy to come up a second time. Came up a second time with the family and preached.

And there was a peace. You hadn't invited me to be your pastor yet. You hadn't said, yes, we want you to come or anything else. But there was a peace. I can't explain it.

I can't say why there was a peace here than the other, except that we took that as being the Lord's leading. The Lord confirmed that when, as a church, you invited me through the membership to come.

[ 38 : 35 ] So there's a sense of peace. Are we seeking that peace in our hearts? And I believe that God will give us something of that peace within as we seek to know his will. The second thing is, and it comes there, he will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What does that mean? I think it means that he will protect us from fearing making the wrong decision. Or rather, he will protect our hearts and minds so that we will know that even if we step out in faith and it doesn't actually work out, that this, again, is God's will.

And I'm going to use an illustration about that in a moment as well. We're trusting God to overrule our mistakes or our perceived mistakes or our decisions. When we've gone through the process of prayer and through the scripture and through seeking counsel, and we get to the end and say, right, this seems to us, within our heart before the Lord, the right decision to make.

And yet it doesn't work out. Our hearts are still guarded. And the illustration, again, I apologize for it being personal. Some of you know this already. The reason that I'd finished my ministry in Honington, in Devon, was because two years earlier I'd been asked to go to Cyprus with the possibility of pastoring an international church there.

And so as a family, I think it was 2012, we went to Cyprus, spent two weeks there at the hottest time of the year. It was about 40 degrees. And from that came an invitation to go in a year's time to take on the work, to move to Cyprus whole stead.

[ 40 : 15 ] So we did the things that I said we should do. We sought counsel. We spoke to many Christian believers and prayed with them. We spoke to a missionary organization about whether we could work with them and support them.

We prayed about providential matters concerning finance and all those sort of things. And again and again it seemed that the Lord was lining things up, that this was the right thing to do.

And we had a peace about it. We had a peace that this was right. This was a big step, a huge step. But we had a peace about it. We went back in the April time of 2013.

And again, everything seemed to be going ahead and fine. No problem. We were due to move in the July of 2013. In the May of 2013, God shut the door completely.

And there was no way we could go. Absolutely no way. It was completely removed from us. There was no possibility. Nothing we'd done wrong necessarily. Nothing that had happened. We hadn't changed our minds.

[ 41 : 13 ] Close the door. No. Why? And so we're sitting there going, why, Lord? We prayed. We sought counsel. We did everything right. But ultimately, the Lord, we trusted, had a purpose in it.

The purpose was to bring us here, whether you like it or not. But that was his purpose. We couldn't see that then, but we see it now. And so when we pray and seek the Lord doesn't mean that every decision we make when we seek him is suddenly going to open the doors wonderfully and everything's going to be perfect.

And that's the problem we have, isn't it? We think that if things are difficult for us or hard for us or seem to go wrong, that somehow God has let us down or that we have failed God.

But it's not the case. If in our hearts, and we believe that in our hearts we are seeking God's will, God overrules. He's got a bigger purpose.

And when we pray in that way, he guards our hearts and our minds. He protects us and protects the path we take so he brings about ultimately his perfect will.

[ 42 : 16 ] I'm going to close with these words from Revelation chapter 3. It's the Lord Jesus who's speaking. And this is very important for us to remember. These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.

What he opens, no one can shut. What he shuts, no one can open. Let's pray together, shall we? Let's pray.

Lord our God.

Your will is best. Your will is always best. Because you know best. And you do best. And you act in best. And you think best.

And right at the start, Lord, we acknowledged that we are the foolish things of this world. And the weak things. And Lord, we don't always know what's right. In fact, that's where we get anxious because we want to go this way or that way.

[ 43 : 20 ] And we're not sure which is best or right, which is good for us or our family or whatever. However, sometimes we judge things without, first of all, asking, what do you want?

Because whatever you want, Lord, is always good for us. Even though at times it will be painful and difficult. But life is. We pray, oh Lord, that you would help us in the decisions that we all must face.

Perhaps there's some of us even here this morning who really do have difficult, hard choices to make about the future, about work, life, whatever it may be.

And we do pray, Lord, that you would put within our hearts that desire for your will, firstly and foremostly. And that, Lord, you would guide us and direct us in your word and by your spirit and through your people.

Lord, we want to do your will. Help us to trust you. That we will do your will. And that, Lord, you will work in and through our lives to bring about all that is good and pleasing to you, which ultimately must be and will be good for us.

[ 44 : 29 ] Hear us then as we bring these prayers to you now with thanksgiving for all your goodness and faithfulness thus far. Amen. Amen. Be careful then how you live.

Without as unwise, not as wise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

And peace to the brothers and sisters. Love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.