

Unstuck

4. When you can't decide

January 27-28, 2018

We're in a series on the book of Joshua, learning how to get Unstuck in life. The Jewish people were stuck in the desert until Joshua led them into the land God promised them. We get stuck short of what God promised us. Instead of God's joy we can get stuck in a grim existence. We drift instead of living out God's purpose in the same way as the Jews before they got unstuck and moved into the Promised Land. Please turn to Joshua 9.

Anyone here ever received an email from a scammer? Comedian James Vietch decided to respond to a scam email from someone calling themselves "Alexandra."

"Alexandra": Hi, sorry to bother you but I made a trip early this week to London, UK and had my bag stolen with my passport and credit cards in it. I need \$2000 to pay for a ticket and settle hotel bills.

James: To be honest, I'm a bit annoyed you've spent the past week in the lap of luxury and haven't contacted me at all. I thought we were close; what happened? Also, what's your room like?

"Alexandra": Don't be please you know my head was filled and I was a bit confused but now you promised to help my mind is at rest cant you be able to get the funds by today

James: I know how you feel. If I'm paying the bill though do you think you could at least steal me some towels?

"Alexandra": James try and get back to me with update let me know if you have sent the funds

James: Remember Tuscany? Those huge waves? All I want to know is whether you still love me. Tell me you still love me?

"Alexandra": Yes I still love you, just wire the funds so we can spend time together.

James: Write me a poem. Nothing large; just a simple one, just for me. Something about Tuscany.

“Alexandra”: I will write you the poem that is no problem but i need to get things straight first okay? wire the funds so i can get everything done and we can meet.

James: I'm not doing anything until I get a poem.

“Alexandra”: Fine, I can see you are not helping. Thanks for your time.

*James: We'll always have Tuscany*¹

Email scammers try to trick us into sending them our money. There is a spiritual parallel here. Scammers want us to give away what is ours by believing them.

We give away what God promised us when we believe a lie.

Joshua 9 tells us that the Jews got stuck in an unnecessary war in the Promised Land because they believed a lie. The Jews were conquering the land of Canaan (which today is called Israel.) God had promised the land to them centuries before. He commanded them to drive out the all people who lived there.

The city of Gibeon was located in that land, and the people who lived there got really nervous when they saw that the Israelites had wiped out Jericho. The Gibeonites figured they were next. If a walled city like Jericho couldn't hold them off, they knew there was no way they could withstand the Israelites. God told the Israelites to conquer the people who lived in Canaan, but they were supposed to be at peace with the surrounding nations.

So Gibeon's leaders came up with a plan to trick the Israelites into sparing them. They would pretend that they lived far away - outside the area the Israelites were trying to conquer. They dressed up in old, beat-up clothing with worn-out sandals. They got some moldy bread and some old, brittle wine skins. Then they got on some tired-looking donkeys and rode into the Israelite's camp saying, “Wow, that was a long ride! We are soooo tired from traveling all this way.” They said, “We are ambassadors from our people, and we came to welcome you to the neighborhood. Since we live *so far away* from here, let's make an alliance between our peoples; let's commit not to attack each other.”

Joshua and the Jewish leaders said, “How do we know you are not people from nearby here that we are supposed to wipe out?” The Gibeonites said, “Oh, we live in a country that is far away from here -- *really* far. Look at this dry, moldy bread; when we started out it was warm out of the oven! Now look at it! It's terrible!”

¹ Veitch, James. Dot Con (Kindle Locations 52-55). Quadrille Publishing Ltd. Kindle Edition.

So the Israelites took a bite of the bread and said, “Nasty!” They saw the Gibeonites clothes looked bad, and there was no more wine in the old cracked wine skins. They said to each other “That story checks out...” Joshua and the Israelites said, “You want a treaty? Why not... let’s do it.” So they signed the treaty. But just three days later, the Israelites discovered that they had been tricked. These travelers were actually from the next town over! They had tricked Joshua into promising not to attack them. Even though they had been tricked into it, the Israelites honored their commitment; they didn’t attack Gibeon. They had made an oath, and they were going to honor to it.

But that treaty had long-lasting, unintended consequences for Israel. First, Even though God had promised *them* the land, they were now stuck with sharing it with the Gibeonites, who weren’t supposed to be there. That meant they were going to live with less than God promised. Second, Israel got drawn into a war they weren’t supposed to fight. Chapter 10 tells us that other armies attacked Gibeon, and Israel had to help defend it because of the treaty they signed. So Israel had to take the time and effort to fight battles they weren’t supposed to fight... all because they were tricked into signing a treaty God didn’t want them to sign.

Be careful who you believe. Joshua 9:14 tells us why Israel believed the Gibeonites: **v. 14** *The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. The Israelites didn’t ask God, so they believed the enemy.* They paid more attention to the Gibeonites than they did to God. It’s not like they *didn’t know* they could ask God what to do. Up to that point, God had been communicating a lot to Joshua. God had told Joshua how to lead, when to cross the Jordan, how to conquer Jericho.

God would have told Joshua what to do with those Gibeonites. All he had to do was ask God, “Should we make a treaty with these guys or not?” God would have answered him! But Joshua didn’t ask. And neither did anyone else. As a result of that one decision, they got stuck in a war they didn’t need to fight. And even worse, they got stuck sharing the Promised Land with people that shouldn’t have been there. They fell short of receiving all God promised. Making decisions without asking God leaves us stuck with less than God promised.

If we don’t ask God, we will believe the enemy.

The Gibeonites were enemies to Joshua and Israel. And yes, we have an enemy, too. Our enemy is not people from another place. Our enemy is a spirit called the devil. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. The enemy hates you and has a plan to destroy you. The enemy wants to do more than take our money - the enemy wants to destroy us in every possible way: wreck our relationships, ruin our health and kill our bodies. If the enemy can keep us from claiming the promises of God, he keeps us from living out God’s plan for us.

Some doubt the reality of Satan. But Jesus clearly said he is real. Look at the headlines every day and see what people do to each other, and it is hard not to believe there is a personal evil force at work in the world. Ephesians 6 tells us we are in a war with the devil's forces. **Eph. 6:11-12** *Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

The devil is scheming against you. Like email scammers, the devil is trying to separate you from God's promises for your life. God promises us peace; the devil wants us stuck in anxiety and fear. God promises love; Satan wants us stuck in loneliness and bitterness. God promises to transform you into the image of Jesus, Satan wants you weak from lack of prayer and your life looking more like reality TV than Jesus. God promises you contentment and meaning, Satan tries to trick you into chasing meaningless materialism and shallow pleasures. God promises an abundant life; the devil wants to keep you stuck apart from God.

The devil's main strategy is to lie to us and get us to believe him. In **John 8:44** Jesus said *[the devil] is a liar and the father of lies*. Remember, the devil can't take anything from you -- he only gets what you give him. He will try to trick you into giving away what God promised you. The way he does that is to get you to believe his lies when making a decision.

To avoid getting stuck, ask God before making decisions.

We won't believe the devil's lies if we ask God what to do. And God will answer us when we ask! In **Psalms 91:15** God says, *He will call on me, and I will answer him*; When we seek God's direction, he will answer us. Here is a promise from God in **James 1:5** *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.* It might take some time, but we can ask and God promises he will answer.

How do we ask God about a decision? It's not complicated:

Prayer - We talk to God and ask him to help us make the decision.

Reading Scripture - God's ways and will are revealed in the Bible. When we read it, he will bring to our attention what we need to know.

Counsel of other Christ-followers - which is why we need to have Christ-centered friendships like those in a small group.

Our lives are shaped by the decisions we make. If we want God to direct our lives, we need to ask him before making decisions. If we don't ask God, we'll believe the enemy.

Ask God when making:

Moral decisions

We face moral choices all the time, some big, some little. The choices we make will play a big part in whether we get stuck in life or not. We all know that bad moral choices can really mess up our lives. We need to ask God about them so we don't believe the enemy.

- You promised your boss that if you were promoted you would stay in the position for two years, but soon you got a much better offer with another company. Do you stay or go? Ask God!
- You realize that the people you eat lunch with are making racist comments most days, do you keep eating with them or not? Ask God!
- The ATM spits out an extra \$100 - do you keep it or not? Ask God!
- The one you love asks you to move in before you're married, do you do it or not? Ask God!

Moral decisions come up without warning. It can be hard to think of asking God when we are in the heat of the moment. One way to make it easier to ask God is to stop sampling sin. Verse 14 gives us one of the reasons Joshua and Israelites didn't ask God about how to respond to the Gibeonites. **v. 14 *The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD.*** The Israelites *sampled* what the Gibeonites brought. It's hard to listen to God while we are sampling sin.

If we are struggling to figure out what God is telling us about a choice, we need to ask ourselves whether we are already sampling sin while we're asking God. If we are sampling sin, we're already on the path away from God's promise. As soon as we realize we have a moral decision, we need to stop and focus entirely on hearing from God, then make the choice.

Another obstacle to hearing from God is listening to the crowd. One of the enemy's lies to us is, "Everyone else does it, so it must be fine!" In researching this message I found a game called Moral Dilemma. I am not recommending it because I don't know much about it. All I know about it is the description I saw in the advertisement: "A rude, adult party game where the right answer is always determined by your peers." In some ways we are all playing Moral Dilemma every day. We make moral choices, but here is the truth: the right answer is NOT determined by your peers or friends. The right answer to a moral choice is determined by God. If you ask God, he will tell you! Don't live your life by going with the flow of those around you! The crowd is often flowing in the wrong direction. **Revelation 12:9 *that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*** When we listen to the popular opinion, it will often be the lie of the enemy.

Yes, we need to ask God. However, there are some things I don't need to ask God about. I don't have to ask God about what he has said already.

- I don't have to ask God about whether to stay faithful to my wife. God is clear on that.
- I don't have to ask God about whether I should give generously.
- I don't have to ask God about whether I should take care for my body.

When I know what God has already said, I don't need to ask again. I need to ask for strength to do it, but I don't need to ask for guidance.

Ask God before making a commitment

The Israelites made a commitment to the Gibeonites without asking God and it cost them. We can prevent ourselves from giving up what God promises us by asking God before we make commitments. For example, God has promised to provide for our needs, but we can give up peace by getting in over our heads in debt. Rather than asking "What do I want?" or "What do I deserve?" or "What does everyone else have?" I need to ask God "What should I commit to?"

Ask before making financial commitments. It can keep us from getting in over our heads. A couple years ago Linda and I thought it was time to buy our first house. It was a big step, so we prayed a lot about it. We asked God about whether it was the right time, and how much we should spend. We applied wise counsel, and looked at the numbers and made sure we could manage our other commitments. Then we asked God's guidance about which house we should buy. Eventually we found a place we liked. We had to make an offer quickly because of the demand. When it came time to sign the papers, I was tempted worry about making that kind of financial commitment, but Linda reminded me, "We prayed a lot about this." So I signed with peace. Ask God.

Ask God before making *time* commitments. Whenever I find myself overscheduled and slammed with more to do than time to do it, I know that I've said "yes" to something God has not asked me to do, because God never directs me to do more than I have time to do. If you are lacking God's peace because you are always rushing and out of time, look over your schedule and ask, "God, is there anything I'm doing that you didn't call me to do?"

Ask God before making a relational commitment like *Marriage*. God will guide us if we ask, "Is this the person I'm supposed to marry?"

If you realize that you did not ask God and got stuck, maybe your faith had not grown to that point yet.

Ask God if I've already made a wrong choice.

The Israelites realized that they made the wrong decision in making the treaty with Gibeon. But they didn't break their oath. That was smart. We never make it right by doing wrong. If you recognize that you've made a wrong decision, it is not the end of the story. God will guide you from where you are, even if you wish you weren't there. Just ask him. "God, I realize I listened to my enemy instead of you. Now what do you want me to do?" He will answer.

Here's what I've seen. Those who repeatedly make choices by asking God to guide them see an accumulation of God's blessing on their lives. It's like compound interest -- one God-led choice builds on another, and their lives are marked with God's blessing. I'm not saying they don't ever suffer - none of us can opt out of that. I'm saying that their lives bear the mark of God's hand on them.

You don't have to be stuck. Your life can be marked with God's blessing -- just ask God.