

# The Provision of God in Our Life

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Go back over to Exodus tonight and I want to pick up where we left off and give you some practical exhortations. We're talking about the presence of God in our lives. We looked at the parallels that God gives us between the nation of Israel and how God led them out of Egyptian bondage, and we ended with God's presence, that he gave them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night that never departed from them, and that is a powerful and encouraging picture of the Lord's presence. As I tried to illustrate to you in the earlier session how they must have had really difficult seasons of time fleeing from the Egyptians and wandering through that wilderness. One writer that I read, one commentary writer talked with great descriptiveness about the barrenness and the isolation of that great wilderness outside of Egypt as the Israelites fled and how difficult that would have been, but at least they could look up and see the cloud in the day time that covered them and the pillar of fire at night that was present there with them.

So let's look at two or three things here right quick and then, again, we'll be in mostly Exodus 12, 13, 14, maybe a little bit others and, again, we shouldn't be long tonight and I know I think I said that last time and we were, but I'm trying not to be, alright? First of all, when we think about how this parallels in type for us, we understand that this is a picture of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life and we're going to try to dissect that and look at that. It's kind of interesting that in this day and it's true really all over the world in the ages of antiquity, that commanders would give signals to their troops by smoke and by fire. They would put up smoke on a hillside and the way they would send up the smoke signal, we're all familiar with that with the Indians, but it occurred in most ancient civilizations because that's the only way they had to communicate long-distance. Then sometimes they would put fire up on a torch and maybe two torches meant one thing and one torch meant another as far as battle strategy. So as the Greeks and the Persians and the others used smoke and fire signals to guide their people, particularly their armies, we see here that God establishes himself as the Commander of the host of Israel. He appears as smoke or as a cloud and then he appears as fire before them.

Now, if you would if you're in Exodus, go over to chapter 40 real quick just for a quick reference, chapter 40, verse 34. In chapter 4, verse 34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." I think that's a beautiful picture of what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. The cloud rested on the tabernacle as soon as it was erected and so when our Lord began his ministry and the initiation, if you will, of his public ministry was his baptism by John the Baptist and the Spirit of God

descends on the Lord Jesus in the form of a dove, the Bible says, and the Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus and Jesus was the tabernacle of God among men. So we have all kinds of beautiful typologies in the Old Testament, that the tabernacle of the Old Testament later became the temple of the Old Testament, was an expression, a statement, of God's presence among his people, and we know that was just a figure or a type of God's true and abiding presence which would come through the Lord Jesus Christ, and then later as Christ resurrected and ascended back to glory, would come in the person of the Holy Spirit.

And we need to be very aware, we need a new awakening, we need a new realization, we need a new devotion to the person of the Holy Spirit without all the ridiculous, unbiblical excess that is so prominent in Christendom today where the Holy Spirit is mentioned. And, once again, the word balanced comes to my mind because over and over I see a lot of good Christians, myself definitely included, and good churches that see an excess and see something that is out of balance and then they run away from it and get out of balance on the other end of the spectrum, and we saw that with the charismatic movement exploding 30 and 40 years ago. I mean, exploding, especially, you go places like South America and Central America and it's an unbelievable growth of Pentecostal and various charismatic groups. And we see that we're aware of things that are troubling and over emphasis on signs and wonders and miracles, and then under emphasis on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So we naturally say, you know, a lot of that troubles us. Don't misunderstand me, they're godly people who love Christ who may be members of those organizations but yet, nevertheless, as a whole, there is a lot of excess there and so Baptists and other evangelicals react, instead of, here's what I've told you a thousand times as your pastor: instead of acting on Scripture, they reacted to the excess and that always gets you in trouble. Did you hear me? You never react to error, you act on Scripture. If Satan can get you looking at stuff out there other than Scripture and reacting, he can get you too far in the other direction. And we've had some of you who are just like Jeff Noblit who in the past, you have overreacted to charismatic excess and got too extreme and began to, not willfully and not in a maybe even a sinful way, but to negate or diminish the essential role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and in the life of the Christian.

So let's look at this a little bit. I want to end with some real practical simple guidelines on this, but we have this pillar that appeared before the nation of Israel. It was a pillar of cloud or water vapor, and then at night, a pillar of fire, and I think that's an interesting symbolism there because water and fire are both symbols for the Holy Spirit of God in the New Testament. In John 7, he talks to the woman about, "Out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water." You're not talking about literal water, of course, he's talking about the Holy Spirit of God that comes in and bubbles over and is effervescent in the heart and the life of a child of God. Then the Bible says when the Spirit of God came on the believers gathered there at Pentecost, it came in the form of tongues of fire, fire illustrating the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Of course, we believe that Pentecost was a one time event. There'll never be another event like Pentecost. Now, I would like to have some of the Pentecostal power. I'd like to have some of that Pentecostal revival, but guys need to cease trying to reproduce Pentecost.

God only had one time when he brought the Spirit to anoint the church age and that was Pentecost, and a lot of excess does happen when we try to re-create things that God meant to happen one time in historical chronology. We build off the principles but let's try not to reproduce something God's not reproducing in the same way.

So this picture of the cloud or this image of the cloud which was God's presence, speaks of the Holy Spirit of God and always those two symbols, water and fire, speak of cleansing and purifying. Cleansing and purifying. Now, the sense in which the work of the Spirit of God in conversion gives you a once for all cleansing, and that he establishes for you a standing of justification in the eyes of God which cannot be changed; that's the moment genuine faith is placed in Jesus Christ. But there's also a sense in which the Spirit of God is present in you to do his continual cycles of cleansing and purifying, cleansing and purifying, cleansing and purifying. Remember when Peter was getting his feet washed by the Lord Jesus? Peter, honestly, like any of us probably should be thinking said, "Lord, you don't need to just wash my feet, I need washing all over. I'm just that dirty. I'm just that prone to sin and error, self-centeredness, pride, you name it. Lord, I just need to be washed all over." Jesus said, "No, if you have come to me," and I'm paraphrasing and amplifying, "I've cleansed you, it's just that when you go out into the world you get some dirt back on you again and we just need to cleanse the part that got dirty." And that's that continual purifying work and that's one of the ways, the Scripture to Jesus us, that you know you're a child of God, is you can't get by with sin like you used to. There is a humbling. There is a conviction. There is a troubling. There is a sickening in your spirit about sin that you used to not have. God has changed your heart.

Well, let's talk a little bit more and I'm going to call this I. just the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives which, of course, is pictured by this cloud. First of all, what we want to notice about this pillar of cloud or pillar of fire is that it was God's gracious gift. It was just a gift. God told Moses, "Lead my people out," and God sent those series of plagues and the death angel came in the final plague and the firstborn sons of all the nation of Egypt are killed by the death angel that night and the Egyptians say, "Okay, we've had enough. You can leave. Get out of here." They even gave them gold and silver and clothing, and they left and there was no request, there was no expectation. God just sent something they weren't looking for. You know, I've never seen a true child of God wanting to get saved so that they could get the Holy Spirit. Now, perhaps you grew up in circles that used that language, but not in a true understanding. No, they want to be saved, they want to have sins forgiven, they want to know Christ, but the Spirit is given them as a gift. It comes into their lives.

You know, the disciples, after Jesus left them, were very downcast. They were very fearful. And even before Jesus leaves them, they asked the Lord about, "What's going to happen? What are we going to do?" And Jesus encouraged them in John 4:16 and he said, "I'm going to pray the Father and he shall send you another Comforter." In other words, they didn't ask for this other Comforter, they really wanted Jesus to stay, but he said, "It's going to be better if I go because for now I'm in a finite, limited space here. I make up one human body, but when I go, the infinite omnipresent Spirit will be here with you and

he can do more for you as far as this pilgrimage that I can in my limited incarnate state." So it was a precious gift from God. Friends, the Holy Spirit is not worked up or prayed down, he comes as a gift at regeneration. Did you hear that?

Now, there are certainly times after you're saved that you must do some work to acquire the filling of the Spirit or maybe the power of the Spirit, but to receive the Spirit is a gift from God. Let's not be like Simon the magician. Simon saw the great powers and wonders and works the early apostles were doing and Simon the magician went following along and this is the exact same thing that happens in Christian ministries and churches all the time in every age, he thought, "Ah-ha! I like this. This looks powerful. This will get me advanced. Why, this will help my popularity. This will increase my power in the community. I think I'll join this group." So he goes up to Peter and says, "Hey, I want this ability to lay hands on people and impart the Holy Spirit to people. Here's some money, can I buy it?" Peter looked at Simon the magician and said, "May you perish with your silver because you thought you could buy, earn, the Holy Spirit of God." It's only a precious gift that God gives. He gave the Israelites that gift of his presence and he gives us the gift of his presence in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Another key, I think, parallel concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is not just that it's God's gracious gift, is that it wasn't given until the nation left Egypt. The type there for us is in Egypt they killed the lamb, remember that? That was the Passover lamb they were told to kill and they had to take a hyssop branch and mark their doorpost with the blood of that lamb so the death angel would not visit the household of the Israelites where the blood was applied, but pass over those, then they left and then the Holy Spirit came. I don't want to go too far with typologies, but I do believe there's a figure there for us. The Lamb of God dies, the Lord Jesus Christ, then he leaves in the resurrection, and then the Spirit of God comes and that's the way it happened for Israel. They killed the lamb, they leave Egypt, the picture of the resurrection, and then the Spirit's presence comes and begins to minister among them.

Now, in Romans 5:1, the Bible talks about being justified by faith. You come down a few verses in Romans 5:5, the Bible talks about the love of God has been poured out within our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Now, the Spirit of God must be at work or a man will never be converted. It is the work of the Spirit, however, the abiding presence and fruitful ministry of the Spirit occurs after belief, and that's what this pillar represents, the abiding presence and blessings and ministry of the Spirit of God. So we see beautiful types of our own Christian life in this presence of the Holy Spirit that we see figured by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

Secondly, let's talk about provisions, the provisions of the Holy Spirit in our life that we learn from the nation of Israel. First of all, we see that God speaks to them from the cloud. As a matter of fact, Exodus 33:9, "Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses." Now, there are people today that would like for that to be more than a type; they want to claim that they have literally had an actual experience with the presence of God in some sort of powerful, visual, or even God speaking to them in verbal ways. I

want to say to you that I just categorically reject that, and the reason I believe that and I don't have the hours to go into it, is that God has spoken once for all and finally through this precious holy book. He gave us the word of God. Now, he didn't have, the ancient Jews did not have the word of God. They had to receive it through prophets, but then God used prophets and apostles to pen for us the word of God and the Holy Spirit was superintending through those men to pen for us the Gospel and the truth which was once for all delivered to the saints through these holy apostles, and you might ask me to historically or intellectually defend that, here's my answer to you: I can't. I don't need to. All I do is read it and study it and the Spirit of God lights a fire in my soul that it's the truth of God. Don't ever think that it's your job to intellectually convince someone the Bible is God's word. Listen, the only reason men will not receive and submit to the word of God is because they love self and they love sin. Period. Unbelief is not an intellectual problem, unbelief is a wickedness problem. Did you hear me? They can put on the pseudo-intellectual presentation but unbelief is not intellectual weakness, it is moral wickedness. Listen, the reason why men do not yield to the word of God is they don't want to yield to an authority into their lives because this book exposes you. It is the halogen of God to show you what you are and what you are before a holy and true God. It leaves you bankrupt and impotent, desperately needing a Savior and proud men will not go there by themselves. They'll only come to that conclusion if the Spirit of God leads them there.

So, I'm talking about the provisions of the Spirit in our life. First of all, God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit of God. This Holy Spirit is still God's spokesman today. What do you think Jesus meant when he said this: my sheep hear my voice? You know, it's just amazing, you sit in the Sunday school class, you listen to a man share the Gospel with you, you listen to a Gospel preacher preach the word, and you feel like, "Jesus is speaking to me. The Lord is speaking to me. It's just real. I just sense it." What is it? That's the Holy Spirit speaking to you. "My sheep hear my voice," and that's why we have to be so guarded about the pulpit ministry in the church that we only put out sheep food because sheep food is used by the Spirit of God to draw the sheep of God to that food and to that truth. He still speaks. Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Holy Spirit says to the churches." The point is if you don't hear, it's because you don't want to hear, and you're enabled or unable, rather, to hear.

Well, one provision of the Holy Spirit is God speaks to us. He spoke to the Egyptians out of the cloud. Secondly, the cloud gave them light. Reflecting on this event, the Psalmist said in Psalm 105:39, "He spread a cloud for a covering and a fire to illumine by night." I think that illumination of the fire speaks of wisdom; the capacity to see the root issue; the ability to see things from God's perspective. Only the Spirit of God can give a man that ability. Isaiah 11:2 says that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of strength, the Spirit of knowledge, and the Spirit of the fear of the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit that gives men wisdom about the condition of man.

As I watch our culture, you know, we are now a post-Christian nation. We've just rushed past having a Christian consensus in this world, or at least in our country, like we

used to have. And I hear people come up with all of these conclusions and I'm particularly troubled about this whole notion that every lust and desire men has must be basically good. We've got to applaud and accommodate every lust men have, almost. You've got to understand there was a day when parading and promoting homosexuality in the public square would have been unheard of in our nation. Now, here's what I'm saying: if these dominoes keep falling and only God could keep them from falling, then I think we're going to see all kinds of other perversions that men are going to be able to stand up and very logically say, "I was born this way too! I must be tolerated and accepted and promoted and celebrated for all of my lusts." All the vileness and wickedness. Do you know why? Listen, because they don't understand the condition of man. If you understand what the Bible, if you have the wisdom to grasp and receive what the Bible says, the Bible says men are fallen, men's hearts are desperately wicked. Therefore there must be disciplines, training, education, restraints and limitations so that men do not give into all of their lusts and all their desires. That's what alley cats do, not men made in the image of God even though fallen.

So what do we need? We need wisdom to understand what man is. You take a fallen creature with the hormonal drive that God puts in there and say, "Okay, whatever you feel like doing, we're going to celebrate it," you're going to have a society of corruption and even anarchy, and that's the road we're on. But only the Spirit of God gives that wisdom, and if we're going to have that wisdom and that Spirit back in our country, we're going to have to have pulpits that preach the truth about man and about his fallenness. And on and on we could go about the areas of wisdom, but the Spirit of God gave them light to see things they couldn't see had he not been there.

Well, he was speaking to them, he was giving them light and then, of course, closely attached to that, he was serving as their guide. The cloud was an infallible guide to lead them through a trackless desert. Let's see if I can read some of this to you because it just shows you the desperate geographical, topographical situation they faced as they left Egypt. The Israelites had quit Egypt, they had broken off from their old life and were about to plunge into a wild waste of sand and rock which separates Africa from Asia by almost an impassable barrier. They took the north line of march and they would come upon the sandy desert. Before them would stretch endless sands yielding nothing but small stunted shrubs, broad plains, newly reared hills, valleys dug out by last week's storms, the hills and the valleys and the plains all sand, sand, sand, and still more sand, and the only sand, and sand, and sand again. The author said, you've got to understand what a desperate wilderness these guys went into; how desperately they needed the pillar of fire to illumine God. Can I remind you that when you came to know the Lord Jesus Christ you began to realize, "Lord, I am in a wasteland. I am in a wilderness. I need the Spirit of God to guide me," and we have him and he will. Romans 8:14 says, "All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God."

Now quickly, III. the protection of the Holy Spirit. The protection of the Holy Spirit. I think it's very interesting that in Exodus 14:19 and 20, as the pillar of fire came between the Israelites and the approaching Egyptians, the Bible said he was a light to the Jews but he was darkness to the Egyptians. Now that's interesting. He was light to Israel but he

was dark to the enemies of Israel. That's a fearful and solemn truth that not only is the Spirit of God actively revealing, perhaps he's just as actively concealing from some. Did you hear that? The Spirit of God is not only a light revealing the things of God to some, he is purposely darkening and preventing some from seeing the light. You say, "I don't think God does that." He did it to the whole nation of Egypt right here in the text, Exodus 14. What did Jesus say in Matthew 11:25 after a number of the Jewish authorities had rejected him? Jesus in effect lifts his hands towards heaven and says, "I thank thee, O Father, Creator of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and hast revealed them unto babes." Wow.

Are you like me? Without intending to have an unbiblical view of the Holy Spirit, by the way, he's a person, he's not a thing, but without intending to have an unbiblical view, I just kind of thought the Holy Spirit was only in the business of convicting men of sin and showing men Christ and helping them turn in repentance and faith. Now, that's a great and wonderful work he does, but the Holy Spirit of God is involved in many ministries all the time, and one of the ways he protects, and I think for a church family this is vitally important, that many will come into a church, a church that is striving to be sound and biblical and Christ-honoring, and they will see nothing but darkness. They just won't be attracted to it. It's just not interesting to them. There's just not anything there for them. And then others will come in like the 34 who are presently in our membership class and feel drawn and excited and want to be a part. What's the difference? To one it's a light, it's a guide, it's alluring, it's attractive. To others, "I'm not interested."

The Spirit of God protects his church that way. Do you understand that God is just as active repelling some as he is in drawing others? Now, you listen to your pastor, that's not our job. We go after all men, amen? We are all men everywhere to repent and believe in the Gospel, and we keep working until they're dead and gone because if God saves, no man is without hope. Yet, in the final analysis, God causes us to humble ourselves and acknowledged that he is sovereign in everything, those to whom he gives light, and those to whom he gives darkness like he did here to the Egyptians. Paul wrote in the epistle, "The things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man." They are spiritually appraised. He cannot understand them, the Scriptures says. We find ourselves as the children of God loving things that the world cannot see because God is revealing them to us and protecting us through all that revealing and hiding.

Secondly, not only was he darkness to the Egyptians and does he conceal things from men today in some cases, secondly, the cloud was given to them as a covering, the Bible says. The Psalmist reflecting back on this event said in Psalm 105:39, "He spread a cloud for a covering." God provided a shelter for his people. Now, this was unique. All the people of this day in this region never traveled during the daytime, it was just too hot. They traveled at night, but the Jews had a special ability because of the presence of the cloud. They could travel all day and all night. They had something others didn't have. I picture that as a covering that, first of all, of comfort, the comfort of his presence from the scorching heat, and what a comfort the Holy Spirit is in our lives. How many thousands of times have we been reading the Scriptures and, by the way, that is the real time when you'll sense the Spirit of God, is when you're reading his word. By the way,

the Holy Spirit wrote this, and I've never met an author that didn't like to commend his work. When you are in his work, he typically manifests himself in a special way. As a matter of fact, the only other time I'm aware of, now, you can correct me later and I'll receive it, that the Holy Spirit promises he shows up in a special way is during church discipline. At the end of the instructions on how to carry out church discipline, he says, "Where two or three of you agree together, there I am in your midst." He means, "I'm going to show up in a special, encouraging, strengthening way when you're doing these particular things," and that one was church discipline. So he's there to comfort us like he comforted the children of Israel in that scorching, arid sun.

Secondly, he's a covering of strength. He gave them a power and enablement to do what others could not do, and I think that's one of the ways God wants to prove the authenticity of your Christianity, is he puts you in situations where most people would grow bitter and you don't. Most people would get angry and maybe you wrestle with it but you repent and get back on track so you don't get angry. Most people would be jealous, but you just choose not to. I told a man the other day, I forgot what the situation was, I said, "Look, you do what you think's right," and it was going to affect me personally and I said, "Look, I will not be offended because I'm choosing not to be offended. I'm not waiting to see if I feel offended, I'm choosing not to. I'm going to tell my feelings to get right in line with what I decide." Amen? Because we have a strength others don't have. And over and over and over, trials will come. Maybe you teach in the school system, maybe it's down at the office, maybe it's in the factory, or maybe it's somewhere in the public square, and a situation comes up and you handle it in God's strength because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and others around you think, "How do you do that?" I've even had people say, "You're really strange," because I wouldn't react the way my flesh wanted me to. Now, I have, by the way, and I've had to repent but do you know what? Very often your witness is better if you blow it and go back to that unbeliever and say, "I'm a Christian and I just blew it. Will you please forgive me? I shouldn't have acted that way." That's a more powerful witness than if you're perfect all the time in many cases.

But what am I saying? You have a strength in you that they don't have and so as the Egyptians looked at the Jews traveling away from them and they saw they had an abiding enablement of that cloud, they thought, "How could we ever deal with this? They can travel all day long and then all night long with this guidance and with this covering. They get covering by day, guidance by fire at night." So that's why in my earlier message, you remember, God said, "Okay, start going around in circles so the Egyptians will think you're crazy and they need to come and capture you and bring you back as their slaves so I might be glorified in Pharaoh."

Well, thirdly, not only was it darkness to the Egyptians and the Holy Spirit is darkness to some men today, not only was he a covering that's a covering of comfort and strength but, thirdly, as far as the protection of the Holy Spirit, the cloud was never taken away during their wilderness journeys. Never taken away. We ended pretty much here in the earlier session so I'll not much more than mention that but that's the beautiful thing about the Holy Spirit of God. You can quench him and you can grieve him, but you cannot abolish him from your life. He's there and he will not let. You've got to understand,



you're God's masterpiece work and he who began a good work in you is going to perform it until the day of Christ Jesus, and the Spirit of God has been commissioned by God himself to come and bestow himself and manifest himself to you and work in your life to guide you, to guard you, to comfort you, to reveal the things of Christ to you, to enable you with strength to do things others cannot do, and he will not leave your life if you're a child of God.

Now, real quick, a very simple but, I think, very sound guide to knowing the will of God. Now, what I mean knowing the will of God, what I mean is the Spirit's means of showing you his will, and I'm listing these of what I believe are in order of importance. Now, I'm not talking about if you're in unrepented of sin. If you're in unrepented of sin, the will of God gets real clear, repent of the sin. Okay, but as far as you know you're walking with God, you're not harboring any unrepented of sin, here are six things on knowing the will of God. Now look, you can find these in a number of places, even though I didn't copy anybody's anything, but basically this is what has come out of the last 400-500 years of Bible Christianity, okay?

Number 1: do you desire to do something? Why would I say that's number 1? Because typically you aren't going to try to do something that you don't desire to do. If you're walking with God, you have no sin to repent of, do what you want to do. What do you desire to do? When I was working with students here years ago, we had some young ladies, some girls in the youth group that honestly tried so hard at pleasing the Lord and they got this thing of carrying a cross so big in their minds they actually thought they should court and marry someone they didn't like because that's, "I'm showing my love and service to God." I said, "Look, if he's ugly, don't court him. If you don't desire it, don't do it." Do you desire to do it? Alright, that's 1.

Number 2: Scripture. Does it violate any tenant of Scripture, and here's where you might get some counselor advice, you know, do you see anything biblically here that's an issue? Well, I don't know why, it typically goes back to courtship and marriage. I guess that's the big life decision most people make and so are there any Scripture reasons why you can't pursue courtship, engagement and marriage with this person? So you check it out with Scripture. Are they converted? The Bible says that you should not be found together with unbelievers, so if they are not converted, it's not God's will. It doesn't matter how much you desire it. So here's where Scripture comes in and vetoes your desire if it's not biblical and right. And on and on we could go, but look, what does the Scripture say about it?

Number 3: what do the authorities say? I don't mean the police officers, I mean any authority God has placed over your life. If you're a young person, your mom and dad. If you are a church member, church elders, or maybe somebody, even church deacons, whoever might be an authority figure in your life. How do they feel about it? Can they give you their blessings?

Boy, have we had a number of guys, girls too, come through the youth ministry and they know God has told them to do this, and God has spoken to their heart, and they know the

will of God, the problem is their parents don't agree with it. And what you find, listen, over and over again, their parents may not even be saved but their parents know something about them most other church members don't. Their parents know they have a lot of immaturities and a lot of character issues, and their parents are not saying no to following God, they're saying, "Yes, to grow up some and then I'll give you my blessing on these other things." God knows what he's doing when he told us to submit to God-ordained authority. This was so taught to me as a young person. I'm just, I'm honest, I'm shocked today. I'm shocked. I'm shocked when people who tell me they love God will bypass or ignore the guidance of God-ordained authority. It's just astonishing to me and I want our young people to think that way. About the worst thing that could ever happen to our students is to have a role model in front of them that dishonors biblical authority and excuses it.

Fourth, a desire, what does the Scriptures say, the blessing of biblical authorities, the counsel of other Christians; a place to talk and pray with other brothers and sisters in Christ. You've got to be a little careful here because a real Christian friend will reprove you but we don't always act like real Christian friends. Very often we're very prone when they're our buddies to tell them what we know they want to hear and not really what they need to hear. So you've got to be a little careful here. "Oh yeah, God told me too." Yeah, you've been watching too much Benny Hinn is what you've been doing.

Number 5: circumstances. It wouldn't be very likely that God's called you to be a rocket scientist if you're making D's in chemistry and physics, alright? I mean, those things do come into play. It's probably not God's will for you to seriously pursue marriage if you haven't got a job yet. It's probably not God's will. "Yeah, but God told me." I'm telling you, you're crazy. You're not getting married yet. Come on, let's don't spiritualize this stuff. The Holy Spirit does not work contrary to logic and reason that's clear to everyone. Circumstances. On and on we could go there.

The last one is: feelings. Feelings. "I just feel like God told me." Have you ever heard the verse: the heart is desperately wicked and deceitful beyond all things? Your heart will lie to you. I just want to say it straight up and straightforward, I want to be clear about it: I've had my fill of guys who are not careful with the Scripture, not honoring God-ordained authority, not listening to the counsel of godly friends, but their rook card, have you ever played rook? You pull out the bird and what happens? That's it, you've won. Their rook card is, "God told me." No matter, I mean, no matter what else, "No, God spoke to me." You see, then you can't answer back or you're dishonoring God. It's the rook card. Look, if God told you, he's going to tell your mom and dad first. If God told you, and things related, things you think you ought to bring before the church pastors, God will give the church pastors the same heart, and if he doesn't, it's your job to be patient and humble and respectful to your authorities until they see you have the character and the calling or the direction to do that very thing. So feelings come last.

Let me go back to Pam and I. I've used this a lot with kids through the years, but we're really old, old people now. We're grandparents. We're not even relevant anymore. She's about the best looking grandmother you'll ever see but we are grandparents. First of all, I

desired to court her. That was very easy. I just desired it. It was kind of a funny thing, I desired to court a lot of girls in my life. Does that mean all of them were God's will? Of course not, but I really desired to pursue a serious relationship with Pam to seek marriage.

Secondly, I looked at Scripture. Pam had had a real revival in her life in recent months before she and I began to see each other. God had grown me some and dealt with some things in my own heart and so we were both committed and I felt like growing Christians, who believed the same basic doctrines of the Christian faith. Scripture seemed very clear. I talked to Clifford and Helen and got their blessing. I talked to my father who was an agnostic and got his blessing. "Wait a minute, you talked to your dad who was an agnostic?" God said to submit to your parents. God said he can move the king's heart like rivers of water; he can just move that heart wherever he wants it. Even though he was not active in my life at all and even though I knew he would just rubber stamp, I wanted to honor what God said, and if my father who was an agnostic said, "Jeff, I don't think it's right," I would not have pursued the relationship, because my God is big enough to do what his word says he'll do.

I talked to my mom. As you know, my mom was an Alzheimer's victim and, at that time, she was still pretty much able to understand things and, at that time, she really hadn't met Pam. We just had started courting and she heard about this beauty queen girl, and she didn't like the idea. She wasn't real high on Pam and told me she wasn't. If you've ever been around my mother, there's a reason why my mother was called Sgt. Geraldine by my friends. Real straightforward. Real plain. Didn't never doubt what she felt or believed about things. Well, I thought, well, this is kind of a stop in the road and she said, "Well, I need to meet her," and so she met Pam and she realized very quick this was not a girl that was just flash and glitter, that she had a heart and soul and was very genuine and very committed to Christ, and in 15 to 20 minutes, completely loved Pam 110%. As a matter of fact, from that point on, if ever any issue came up, it was her and Pam against me. Always. So she gave me her blessing.

I went to my pastor and my associate pastor and said, "Do you see any reason why we should not pursue a serious courtship, engagement and marriage relationship? If you do, tell me. I don't want to be not honoring the God-ordained authority over my life." And they gave me their full blessing and encouragement.

I sought the counsel of friends and got their counsel and their insight. Circumstances begin to work out. I was at a place where I was making enough money I could pay the bills and Pam was in a place where she was finishing up her studies and so the circumstances looked like that would all work out. Then, of course, the feelings were definitely there. We both felt like this was God's will. Again, you may not know this but Pam and I are very different in a lot of ways. I mean, Pam originally thought that guys who hunted were strange people. Now, why are you nodding your head for, Sandra, back there like that? But we have so much in common in Christ that it keeps the relationship real and it keeps the relationship alive.

I think if you'll follow those steps, I'm confident if your heart is humble, you can find the will of God. The Spirit of God is present, he protects, he guides, he illumines, he darkens to some, he comforts, he gives strength, and he wants you to find God's best for your life. But don't make him some mystical thing. Don't turn the work of the Holy Spirit into something that's much more akin to the black arts of the occult or to the silly foolish superstitions of voodoo and witchcraft. All of this putting out fleeces and, "Well, this must be God's will because this happened and that happened." Don't be ridiculous. Look, why do you think he gave you this book? Why do you think he said, "Children, honor your parents"? Why do you think he said, "Submit to your elders"? Because that's the way the Holy Spirit administers his guidance. Well, amen.

Let's stand in prayer.