

Podcast Episode 34: Dances With Wolves

QUESTION: Today Denver responds to some of the questions you have submitted for consideration and provides some timely context and recommendations for how we can become one.

DENVER: Right now, if you're sincere, interested, and struggling, probably the most important thing in all of the questions are the focus or the questions about hearing God, and about responding to God, and getting it right from God.

Almost all of us have some kind of gift that exists completely independent of everything else and just resides in you. Oliver Cowdery had a gift in which, essentially, he used a divining rod in order to get answers (yes and no answers). And that's, to me, a weird gift because divining rods—they just seem odd to me. I mean, witching sticks, using something that seems rather more folk magic than authentic Godly gift. And something like that seems strange enough and so off-script that it seems like it could be easily employed to deceive or mislead. So, despite the fact that almost everyone has some kind of independent gift, every single one of us every one of us have exactly the same set of scriptures available that constitute a guide and a measuring stick, a ruler, a set of scales in which the language of scripture helps clarify, instruct, and define.

The problem most people have with using the scriptures in order to find answers from God is that they haven't spent enough time in the scriptures in order to pick out the major themes, the larger context, to begin to see the connections that exist between a statement one place and a statement another place. Very often the scriptures appear to be contradictory because they will talk about a topic in one way, at one point, urging one conclusion, and then a practically identical issue is talked about in another place. And the recommendation, instruction, or result appears to be a contradiction. And so one person plants their feet on the first statement, and with their hands on their hips they defiantly say, “This is the ground God has carved out, and there can be no other,” while badgering you with the language of scripture. And the other person stands on different ground and shakes their fist back saying, “No, no, no, no! This is the standard God has planted!” And no one seems to realize that the same God that said the one thing, said another. As a consequence, God, who is unchangeable, didn't contradict himself. The problem is that you're not getting the point.

It's like saying today is Friday, and it is nearly 9:30 in the morning. That statement will be true at this moment and exactly one week from this moment. And in between there will be a Saturday, a Sunday, a Monday. Everything is in motion; everything is in the process of moving.

When God identified to Abraham a spot in the heavens and said that the throne of God was nigh unto that spot, that statement was true at that moment. And if you asked him to identify the spot today, He would choose a different location in the heavens, and He would say it's nigh unto that. But it is nigh unto that in the same sense that if you stand here and you point your finger—we're in Sandy, Utah—and we point the finger south and say, “The BYU football stadium, into which the wicked are cast and where they are continually burning, is that direction.” It's true (well, I mean, the stadium is there. Whether the wicked are cast there and continually burning, that's a matter for the Christian theologians to sort out). But that's a true statement, but that doesn't mean that it's at the tip of my finger, or I'm touching it. It's pointing to a generalized direction, and the generalized direction would change if we hopped in the car, and we drove south to the city of Nephi. Then we'd have to turn around and completely contradict ourselves.

Now, not all truths are that malleable because of time or because of distance. Time and distance illustrate the problem. Because some person coming into some setting with some set of background qualifications or information are told one thing, and another person is told something different. One person is commanded and given the poles and the charge to heft and to carry the Ark of the Covenant. And another person, who sees the oxen stumble and reaches out his hand in order to stabilize it, is slain because they have violated the command and the jurisdiction that was entrusted to another. And so in the case of an object, the instruction to one and the instruction to another appear to be completely contradictory to one another; but they're not. They are based upon establishing a kind of order that God intends to have unfold in a precise way.

The more you study the scriptures, the more you begin to realize that there aren't two people—one with their hands on their hip insisting they stand on the truth and the correct ground, and another person standing firmly and shaking a fist, and both are entirely correct. Instead, what you begin to see is that these two people have a part of the picture and, as a consequence of having only part of the picture, they need to reason together until they come to a correct conclusion.

There are people who have, when they learn of an issue, have gone to God in prayer and gotten an answer. And I'm going to assume that people are trustworthy enough and sincere enough that when they say they've prayed, and they've got an answer from God, that they actually have. And then someone else repeats exactly the same thing on the same issue, trying to come to a resolution, and they hear from God, and they know what the answer from God is for them. So, one person has an answer, and it's different than the answer given to another person. That

happens. And we should not deny the possibility that God actually spoke to both of them and that both of them have an authentic truth. Hold that thought for just a moment.

I want to tell you about a continuing legal education class that I attended involving hiring practices in law firms. The fellow who taught the class (has actually written several books), but the fellow who taught the class said the words “homicide,” “suicide,” “fratricide,” “infanticide,” and “decide” all come from the same word. Every one of them means “cutting off.” When you have to decide something, you cut off something else. So a decision is a fearsome thing.

In society, in history, typically decisions were made by kings, royalty, and the priesthood, and the common man simply did what the common man was told to do by the people in a position to decide. The common man never had to face the fearsome prospect of actually making a decision. Then comes the Industrial Revolution. Then comes democracy. And now we find ourselves in a position in which every member of society is forced continually to make decisions for themselves, and most people just aren't very good at it.

So now, everyone is a decision maker, and we all want to make sure we're not making a bad decision, and so social media has a way of making you feel comfortable because you're inside the herd of lemmings. And at least when you go off the cliff with them you're going to be keeping company, and maybe you'll have a soft enough landing you'll survive, if enough of the bodies below you break your fall.

So in the hiring practices, this fellow, as a consultant, went to advise some large law firms in the East. They were giving tests to prospective legal minds—law school graduates—to decide who [they] would hire. And what he noticed was that the way in which they made the decision to hire was based upon how well the students did on a test. The highest scores were hired, and if you were not among the highest scores, you were not considered for hiring.

He went through and he looked at the test results in detail. What he found was that the people with the highest scores were always getting the same things wrong; they were always overlooking something. And some of the people who got lower scores were picking up on issues that the really bright guys weren't tuning in to.

In a legal environment, if you're trying to make the very best decision, you need to have every single viewpoint represented. Meaning that someone that you're not hiring because their score isn't high enough may be the only person who perceptively, intuitively, intellectually, picked up on a problem everyone else was blind to. And so, in the decision to hire or not hire, his recommendation to the firm was: “You are going to consistently miss and fail on this issue

unless you hire that person or that person because they're the ones that guarantee that when the problem arises, they're going to see it.”

And so the hiring practices were changed, tentatively and experimentally, in order to see what kind of a disaster this choice would render, and it turned out that in the discussion, it improved the overall effect of the law firm.

What if the answer that God gives to one person, based upon their knowledge, their experience, their background, their life, their education, the people they know, the things they've been through, is a true and correct answer that it's important for them to grasp? And what if, because of a completely separate life and experience and education, another person has tuned into an important issue, and God has told him, “Yes, this is important, too” in order for both people to come together in a discussion and have a full and fair and complete understanding, before they reach a conclusion? An answer from God does not necessarily mean it is the conclusion and that all the thinking has been done, and God did it, and so you can shuffle off the responsibility to decide on to God’s shoulders. And you can stand back—both of you—and put your hands on your hips and say, “It's God's fault. I mean, He screwed this whole thing up. He made this mess. God's the author of confusion.”

What if God isn't ever the author of confusion? What if God is the author of enlightened discourse and the author of information exchange, discussion, and search for agreement? What if God is the author of exactly the same scriptures that appear to contradict one another in different settings, at different times, in order to illustrate the necessity for your reasoning through and lively engagement in coming to the correct conclusion? And what if at one point in your life you ought to go left, and at another point you ought to go right, and yet a still third point in your life you blend together, and you go straight? What if it's all there in order to illustrate the necessity of you, as a free and engaged agent in your own right, should take with you this bundle of information and to reason with someone that sees it, but sees it differently, in order for the two of you to finally see beyond the narrow horizon that you live with, and engage in the fact that God’s ways are higher, and He sees the entirety of the circuit of the earth? Not just the little horizon in which we reside, confined as it is by mountains on the west and mountains on the east and a mountain on the south, and you go far enough, one on the north, too—what if God is taking in the whole, and He would very much like (now that He's given different answers to different people) each one of those people to engage in a discussion?

I was talking about this subject with friends last Saturday. And while it's the Hollywood version, and the efforts to portray something in the view of the Hollywood writers, they still do make an effort to try and reflect something that is not outrageously contradictory. But in the discussions that take place inside the teepee among the tribal members, and trying to figure out what to do

with the soldier that's moved into the neighborhood, everyone was invited to come—the male braves were invited to come, and they sat in a circle inside the teepee. And the chief presided. And the medicine man was there. And everyone spoke, and there were sharp disagreements. “Let's go kill this guy. Let's go kill him, steal his stuff. The only thing about him is that he's got a smart horse, and that's not good enough. Let's go kill him. I mean, he dances with wolves. He's strange. He's just not anything other than a threat.” And others were saying, “No, let's investigate. He's done nothing to harm us.” Everyone spoke. The medicine man tried to give wisdom and guidance, and after all that had their fair shake, then the chief made the decision on what they would do.

See, I would like to see women, and not just braves, included in the circle. I would like to see the chief, that was called upon to make the decision, be random and not one person—a title and a role that is temporary, transitory, and could be imposed on anyone at any time. And I would like to see the medicine man, who's going to give the spiritual guidance, be random, transitory, and could be anyone at any time, but still sitting in a circle while they reason it through.

I would like to see, for example, everyone randomly draw out of a hidden box or bowl, either stones or buttons or whatever. And if they're buttons, for example, whoever draws the black button is the “chief.” Whoever that falls on, man or woman—it doesn't matter—they're going to be the “chief.” And whoever draws out the blue button, they're going to be the “medicine man,” and they're going to give the prayerful and religious viewpoint, confining themselves entirely to just that. And that everyone else who draws a white button is simply a member of the council that gets to speak. And if someone would like to observe but not to speak, they needn't draw a button. But, if you ever draw the black button or the blue button, you can never draw and be chief again until everyone else has been chief. And you can never be the medicine man, the holy man, until everyone else has had that opportunity, also. And that we do something like that, which is transitory and temporary— everyone acknowledging that if you've gotten a prayerful answer, it is important for you to come and to voice that prayerful answer, in order for the decision that ultimately gets made by the random person assigned to have some enlightenment, based upon the word of God to you, otherwise it may not be considered.

But that within community, no one gets to control. Within community, authority is equally distributed. Within community, you may be imposed upon to do the cutting, to do the deciding, whether you want that role or not. Male or female, it doesn't matter—you may have that responsibility imposed upon you. And when it comes to you, face it bravely. Take the advice of the medicine man, and if you are the medicine man for that council, prayerfully come, prayerfully participate. And realize it's not your responsibility to advise based upon partisanship but to advise based upon the wisdom of God. I mean, I might say the medicine man has to

always be a female, but I think this ought to be experimented with before you say, let's settle down that way.

Because I think the culture of Native America, and the remnant that is on this land, has some real benefits as a model or as an example. But I also think that settling into a lifelong position, like being the chief for life, is a responsibility that is more aristocratic than it is unifying, and that by passing responsibility out among various people, that everyone gets to feel the awful weight, the terrible responsibility, the disappointment, the frustration, and the learning that comes from having to make a decision after everyone is given their input. Because some people simply refuse to lay down, for the heart of the community, their own heart. They refuse to be soft-hearted, open-hearted. They insist upon, by the hardness of their heart, that they get to establish rule. The antecedent to that is the accuser of the brethren.

The *Book of Mormon* says it's not often that the voice of the people are going to choose error. Well, the voice of the people, in the context of making a decision, if a decision can be made in no other way, should be heard in this kind of a cooperative, enlightened outpouring of viewpoints, however diverse they may be, however difficult to reconcile they may be. I think it's one model that can be experimented with, and it may be experimented with to good effect.

We are at the incipient stage of trying, as a people, to become of one heart and one mind. And we don't get there by having forceful, intransigent, single minds insisting that when they see a truth it is all the truth, it is the only truth, and it can never be compromised, modified, or altered in any particular because it is their truth. Whereas God has many truths, and He tells you to take no thought for the morrow, on the one hand, and then He tells you if you don't provide for your own, including the members of your own family, you've denied the faith, and you're worse than an infidel. Well, which is it, Lord? Reconcile them. Reason it through together. See what your responsibilities are. See how you come to the full circuit, the full circle.

You look up in the heavens, and at one moment there's a crescent moon, and it happens to be waxing or getting larger day by day. You look up at another moment and it's a crescent, but it appears to be waning and growing less day by day. And then again you look up at other times and it's altogether gone, and at other times it's bright, and it's full. Because things are in motion, and things change. Circumstances change; people change.

If you give the exact same answer to the same question asked by the same child when they're two years old as you do when they're 40 years old, you're an idiot. You're an unworthy parent. There are developmental stages in everything, including in our knowledge of God. And we're supposed to be one.

So sit in a circle, and reason together, and shift responsibility. And sometimes you're chief, and sometimes you're grateful that you aren't.

The foregoing comments by Denver Snuffer were recorded on September 7, 2018 in Sandy, Utah.