



Unit .09

Session .03

The Weakness of a Rescuer

Scripture



Judges 6:11-16,36-40; 7:7

11 The angel of the LORD came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. **12** Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: “The LORD is with you, valiant warrior.” **13** Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, ‘Hasn’t the LORD brought us out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian.” **14** The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!” **15** He said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s family.” **16** “But I will be with you,” the LORD said to him. “You will strike Midian

down as if it were one man.” ... **36** Then Gideon said to God, “If you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you said, **37** I will put a wool fleece here on the threshing floor. If dew is only on the fleece, and all the ground is dry, I will know that you will deliver Israel by my strength, as you said.” **38** And that is what happened. When he got up early in the morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung dew out of it, filling a bowl with water. **39** Gideon then said to God, “Don’t be angry with me; let me speak one more time. Please allow me to make one more test with the fleece. Let it remain dry, and the dew be all over the ground.” **40** That night God did as Gideon requested: only the fleece was dry, and dew was all over the ground. ... **7** The LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home.”

Intro Options

Main Point:
God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

Option 1

There is a thread running throughout the Bible that shows us God is not impressed by the things that often impress us. God is not wowed by muscles, brains, talent, or riches. In fact, the people in the Bible who possessed these often found themselves stumbling with pride and faithlessness.

- **The mind-set of our world is that great things are accomplished by strong people. Why do you think God might choose to do otherwise?**

God loves to use underdogs. From David to Mary, Samuel to Paul, God uses the men and women who *don't* impress us to *wow* us. We don't cheer for them just because they are nobodies; we cheer for them because they realized they are somebody with God on their side. And maybe that gives us hope.

Gideon may be one of the most celebrated of all the underdogs. You'll find him hiding when God calls him and doubting when God gives him assurance. Like a child wanting to jump off the high dive, we see Gideon wanting to obey faithfully, but afraid to actually take the leap.

And this was precisely why God chose him as a judge. It was not Gideon's faith or power that God wanted to use, but rather his weakness. It might seem ridiculous, but we will see that God is most glorified when the vessels He uses are at their weakest.

Option 2

A major earthquake struck San Francisco on October 17, 1989. The quake lasted 10-15 seconds and measured 6.9 on the Richter Scale, causing structural damage throughout the Bay Area. The total number of deaths attributed to this event was 63 with another 3,757 injured. The Cypress Street Viaduct collapsed on the Nimitz Freeway instantly crushing many commuters. The quake took place during pre-game activities of the 1989 World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics.

- **How do you think it must have felt to be a part of an event like that? Has there ever been a natural disaster (earthquake, tornado, hurricane, flood, blizzard, etc.) in your area that caused similar devastation? If so, how did the disaster affect your view of God? How did it affect your faith?**

In this session we learn about the life of Gideon—a weak and cowardly leader who nevertheless was used by God to deliver His people from the enemy. And one of the things we see in his story is that things will happen in life that will challenge our faith and obedience to God. But it is how we respond that matters.

TEACHING PLAN

In Judges 6, Gideon found himself in a difficult situation, one where he surely did not want to be alone. The Israelites had once again committed evil acts against God and so, once again, He had raised up another people to discipline His own. This time, He used the Midianites. After seven years of oppression, the Israelites were in desperate need of deliverance. Things were so bad that the people resorted to hiding in caves, and whenever the Midianites saw that the Israelites were planting crops, they would attack and destroy the produce. The people were starving. They were afraid. And they were stuck. That is when God sent word to Gideon that He was about to use him to rescue His people.

Read Judges 6:11-16



When God came to Gideon, he made an incredible promise to him: “The Lord is with you.” Notice how this section begins with the angel of the Lord assuring Gideon of God’s presence and ends with the same promise. Surprisingly, Gideon responded by questioning God’s promise. If God was with them, then why had He allowed Midian to oppress them?

- **What are some common “Why” questions people ask God today?**
- **What is a trial you’ve faced in the past that you didn’t understand? How did it affect your faith?**

Like Gideon, we sometimes fail to see our sin and guilt, and so we rush to blame God for whatever we are going through. Sometimes, our difficult circumstances are brought about by our own sinfulness, not because God has been unfaithful. Gideon’s perspective shows why God first sent the word of a prophet—He wanted His people to know they were at fault and needed deliverance.

Next, Gideon protested against God’s commission on the basis of his inadequacy (“I am the youngest in my father’s house!”). God’s response (“I will be with you”) was a reminder that the power of deliverance was not in Gideon, but in God’s presence. The scene reminds us of how Moses responded when God commissioned Him. In both cases, the problem is one of perspective. Both Gideon and Moses first looked to themselves for their source of strength and acknowledged their deficiency. But God called them to turn their eyes to Him and His adequacy.

- **When it comes to obeying God and following His will, what makes you feel inadequate or “not up to the task”?**

COMMENTARY

Judges 6

Main Point:
God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

11. When the angel of the Lord first spotted Gideon, he was not acting like a valiant warrior. Threshing wheat was done in the open. The wheat would be beaten and then tossed in the air so the wind could help separate the grain from the chaff. But Gideon was not threshing wheat in the open; he was in a winepress—underground—hiding from the Midianites and hoping they would not come and destroy his harvest. Not a very valiant activity. Which is why hearing “valiant warrior” likely threw him for a loop.

12. The words “I will be with you” were spoken by God to His people many times throughout the Old Testament. He said it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3), Jacob (Gen. 31:3), and Joshua (Deut. 31:23; Josh. 1:5; 3:7; 6:16). He said it to His people through Isaiah (43:2) and Jeremiah (1:8; 30:11). And it was used to encourage others who followed God, such as when Israel said to Joseph, I am about to die, but God will be with you. (Gen. 48:21).

Here, God’s statement of His presence to Gideon came as an answer to a question (v. 15). We cannot discount how reasonable that question was. Gideon was right: he was no one. He could not deliver Israel. Without God, Gideon would never triumph, but God’s presence changes everything. God would give Gideon the victory. His power would be what would bring the Midianites to their knees.

God’s promise to be with him meant that Gideon was ready for the task at hand. But even this assurance was not enough to make Gideon brave. You may feel the same way. You have read the Scriptures that promise God is with us, yet you feel afraid and weak. You’re not alone. When God said the same words to Moses (Ex. 3:12), Moses argued over and over that he was not prepared for the task God had given him. We want to believe God will be our strength, yet we waver.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 88, DDG)

God’s Providence

Providence refers to God’s continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God’s preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God’s personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

TEACHING PLAN

Before we read the part of Gideon's story that he is most known for, we need to remember how God called Gideon to pull down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah poles (Judg. 6:25-26). The Asherah referred to a divine goddess, and the sacred wooden poles were located at places where she was worshipped. Gideon was to set up an altar to the Lord and then sacrifice a bull, using the wood from the Asherah poles.

Why did God give such a command? Because two altars cannot coexist side by side. You cannot have an altar to God (v. 24) and an altar to Baal (v. 25)—they are mutually exclusive. God was coming to the rescue of His people, and because of the presence of the one true God, all false gods must flee. But once the idols had been demolished and Gideon's task was clear, we see him questioning his faith, wondering if God's direction was true or not.

Read Judges 6:36-40



Many Biblical commentators observe Gideon's request for multiple signs from God as faithlessness, and they are right. He may have been thinking, "Did I really hear God right? Am I sure this is what He wants me to do? And at this time?" And it was for this reason that Gideon asked God for a sign, and then a second sign, even after the angel of the Lord had shown his power, thus validating his message, before (v. 20-21). We need to see his request for what it really was: unbelief. God had been quite clear in His instructions and promises to Gideon. There was no confusion or misunderstanding, only disbelief and distrust.


▪ When have you asked the Lord for some sort of sign to prove you were on the right track? What was the result?


The victory of Israel over Midian is one of the most extraordinary battle accounts in the Old Testament. In Judges 7:1-8, God pared the army from 32,000 to 300 men. God insisted that His people see their cause as utterly hopeless, so that they would recognize that their deliverance could only be explained by God's power and mercy. Along the way, God continued to reassure Gideon. And finally, Gideon worshipped God as a sign of his faith and trust in God to accomplish His will through him.

Read Judges 7:7



▪ How has God brought good from difficult situations in your life?

God accomplished a unique and grand victory solely through His strength and wisdom. Even the manner of victory showed that the battle belonged to the Lord and that He had accomplished the victory. The 300 men did not even attack; they pursued only after the Midianites were fleeing. 

But the greatest example of God securing a victory on our behalf through weakness was through the cross of Jesus Christ. God stooped down, put on human flesh, and entered our broken world. The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a military ruler, but instead God came as a suffering servant to bear our transgressions and be crushed for our iniquities. (See Isa. 53.) He did all of this to defeat sin and death once and for all. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). 

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

Judges 6

36-40. Ever heard someone say, “Why don’t you lay out a fleece and see what God says”? This is where that saying comes from. But it’s important to note that this text is not meant to be prescriptive—as if this is something we are all to follow. Gideon’s demand for a sign is one of his weaknesses, not one of his strengths.

The word Gideon used is “test,” a direct violation of Deuteronomy 6:16 where people are prohibited from testing God. Even Gideon seemed to understand that what he was doing was not what God desired, asking God not to be angry with him. Gideon had already heard from God and knew His will. (See Judg. 6:14-16,36.)

But before we pounce on Gideon so quickly to condemn him, we ought to recognize in this story a realistic picture of the doubt, fear, and lack of faith that we face whenever we struggle to follow something the Lord has clearly shown us. No, this story isn’t here to show us how to set out a fleece to test God. But neither is it here for us to bash Gideon’s lack of faith. Instead, the point of the story is to reveal God’s patience with us when we find it hard to trust Him. God is willing to stoop down and reassure us when we are afraid.

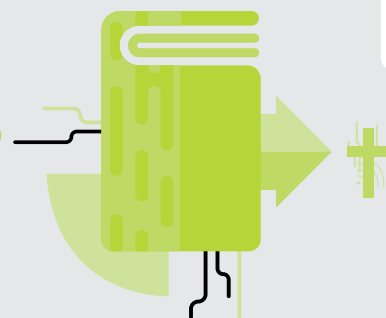
Judges 7

2-7. What God wanted Gideon to feel in that moment was helplessness and trust. God did not want Israel believing that they had won the victory over Midian. He did not want them elevating Gideon as a great war hero. He did not want them celebrating the army as liberators. God wanted His people to celebrate Him; to worship and praise Him alone, and to depend on Him. God, in His infinite wisdom, knew that the Israelites would attribute the victory to Him only if He took away any confidence they might have in human strength. So He did.

The Bible is full of stories of people attempting to elevate themselves over God. Adam and Eve believed they knew what was best for them, better than even their Creator (Gen. 3:1-7). Cain killed Abel, ignoring God’s warning about his anger (Gen. 4:6-7). The people in the valley of Shinar rejected God’s commands and instead wanted to make a name for themselves with a great city and tower (Gen. 11:1-9). We call this disregard for God and focus on ourselves pride. And just as pride caused people in the Scriptures to sin against God, pride continues to trip us up today.

(p. 89, DDG) Christ Connection

God used an unexpected leader in Gideon and a small army of 300 to rescue Israel from their enemies so that everyone would know that the victory belonged to Him alone. Jesus was the unexpected Rescuer who defeated sin and death to show everyone that salvation belongs to God alone.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What are some ways we are like Gideon?

What can we learn from his story regarding trusting in God's word?

Heart



Why is it a good thing that Gideon describes himself honestly—as the weakest family member with no remarkable gifts or talents?

What is God nudging you toward that you feel woefully inadequate to do? How can God use your weakness to reveal His strength?

Hands



How does God's promise to be with us change the way we approach things throughout our week?

How does God's promise to be with us motivate us to show and speak the gospel to those around us?

Main Point: **God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.**



Head

Any of us who have ever been called by God to do something that strikes fear within us or makes us feel anxious or overwhelmed can surely relate with Gideon. We may have wanted the same assurances he craved in this moment. We too, may have laid down a figurative fleece, or even multiple ones, before God.

We shouldn't condemn Gideon unless we have walked in his shoes. However, we can learn from his example, and remind ourselves that God's Word, given to us, is perfect. We may not always be comfortable with what God calls us to do—we might not even like it. But trusting Him in faith at all times—even through our weaknesses—is what spiritual maturity looks like.



Heart

Gideon's response in Judges 6:15 shows that he saw himself honestly—he was the youngest of the weakest family in Manasseh. And that is exactly how God saw him as well. God is not unaware. He knew exactly who Gideon was. He knew exactly how afraid he was. But unlike Gideon, God did not stop there. He looked past who Gideon was to see what He would do through him. Gideon was a weak, jar of clay, the perfect vessel for the task He was giving him—the perfect container to reveal the extraordinary power of God (2 Cor. 4:7).

In the same way, God gives us His power and His victory for the tasks He has called us to. Of course, rarely do we respond to a God-sized task with immediate courage. However, we can start with baby steps, relying on Him for strength and direction as we remember that He will use our weakness to bring glory to Himself, and we will never do that alone. God will always be with us.



Hands

God often assures His people by pointing them to His presence (Gen. 28:15; 46:4; Isa. 41:10). His company has always been our source of strength in the midst of the storms of life. Everything that Gideon needed was supplied when God promised to be with him, even though there were no further details about when or how or where or why. Only the what, or better, the Who. “I will be with you”—that is enough.