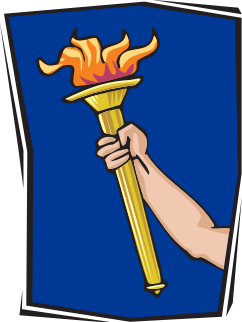




Gideon



In the story of Gideon, we learn an important lesson. God chose a very unlikely man to lead the Israelites to freedom. Gideon was a weak man from a weak family, but God was FAR greater than Gideon's weaknesses. God uses our weaknesses to show His glory when we realize we must depend on Him.

Day #1: Midianite Takeover

If you have Dominos, or Lego bricks, set a large number of them up on end so they are standing tall. We will pretend these are crops. As you set up your "crop," imagine you are an Israelite farmer. You are planting, watering, and pulling weeds. It is not easy to get your crop to grow, but you have worked hard, and it has paid off. It is almost harvest time. You are looking forward eating the "fruits of your labor." Now, admire your crop while you listen.

After God used Deborah and Barak to free them from the evil Sisera, the Israelites lived in peace for 40 years. As we learned last week, as soon as things were going well for the Israelites, they forgot about God and turned away from Him.

† *Once again the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. So for seven years He handed them over to the people of Midian. - Judges 6:1*

The Midianites were very powerful, and they treated the Israelites very badly. Every year at harvest time, the Midianites and Amalekites would come to where the Israelites had planted their crops. The Bible described the Midianites and Amalekites like locusts, because they completely destroyed everything they came across. They stripped the fields bare. (Now, knock down your "crop." All your work is ruined!) The Israelites were left with nothing. It was difficult for the Israelites to even survive.

They cried out to the Lord because of what Midian had done. - Judges 6:7

Recalling the cycle that they repeated over and over, it is no surprise that the Israelites called out to God for help. Tomorrow we will look at God's answer.

* The Israelites only turned to God when they needed something. Certainly it is right to call out to God when we need help, but we should come to God every day - in good times and bad (Acts 2:43-47, Nahum 1:7). Much of the trouble that comes our way would be avoided if we spent time with God every day.

Day #2: Gideon

Imagine that your school was going to participate in a race with another school. The other school was famous for their fast runners. Every year they won the track championship. Your principal was going to choose one student to represent your entire school against the other school's top runner. So, your principal went to the youngest grade of children, say Kindergarten. Then, out of that grade, the principal chose the slowest child to run. Would that make sense? No, we would choose the student with the BEST ability. In today's story, we will watch as one man learns it is not our ability that matters, but God's power.

God sent a surprising message to an Israelite man named Gideon. The message was that God had chosen Gideon to save the Israelites from the Midianites.

† *"But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I possibly save Israel? My family group is the weakest in the tribe of Manasseh. And I'm the least important member of my family." - Judges 6:15*

Gideon thought there must be some mistake. Why would God choose him? He was not a warrior.

The Lord answered, "I will be with you. So you will strike down the men of Midian all at one time." - Judges 6:16

God promised to be with Gideon. We have heard these words before. God said these same words to Moses (Exodus 3:12) and to Joshua (Joshua 1:5). Now He was saying them to Gideon.

* It is very important for us to keep our focus on God. Gideon did not have the ABILITY to go to war and defeat a fierce army, but God certainly did! God promised to be with Gideon, and God ALWAYS keeps His promises. Keep a "promise book." Each time you find a promise from God in the Bible, write it in your book. Keep your focus on God by reading and re-reading His promises.

Day #3: Fleece

Remember, the Israelites had worshipped false gods before the Midianites took over. God's first instruction to Gideon was to tear down altars that had been built to worship the false gods. God told Gideon to build the right kind of altar - an altar for the one true God. Gideon obeyed the Lord, and Gideon became known as a man who would not bow down to a false god (Judges 6:32).

About that time, the Midianite army joined with the Amalekite army and crossed into the land where the Israelites lived, as they did every year (Judges 6:3). All together, there were over 135,000 enemy soldiers.

Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon. - Judges 6:34a

Day #3 continued:

Gideon blew a trumpet to call his army together. Men from many of the Israelite tribes joined Gideon. The Bible tells us there were about 32,000 Israelites ready to fight to take back their land from the Midianites. As Gideon saw the huge army forming, he must have felt very small and weak. He needed reassurance from the Lord, so he asked God to give him a sign.



Please do something for me. I'll put a piece of wool on the threshing floor. Suppose dew is only on the wool tomorrow morning. And suppose the ground all around it is dry. Then I will know that you will use me to save Israel. I'll know that your promise will come true." - Judges 6:37

Early the next day, Gideon got up and checked the piece of lamb's wool, also called a fleece. The ground around it was dry, but the fleece was soaking wet. Gideon was still a little unsure. He asked God for another sign. This time, he asked for the ground to be wet and the fleece to be dry. Gideon woke the next morning to find the ground was wet and the fleece was dry.



It was kind of God to give these signs to Gideon, but it was unnecessary for Gideon to ask. God had already PROMISED victory. Remember that there is no reason to ever doubt God's word. Once God makes a promise, it is as good as done!

Day #4: Preparing for Battle

The Bible tells us there were 132,000 Midians and Amalekites ready to fight against 32,000 Israelites.

Get some pieces of cereal (or similar items) to do a demonstration. Count out 40 pieces and make a pile. These will represent the Midianite army. Now count out 10 pieces and place them in a different pile. These will be the Israelite army. This is about the same "ratio." Does this look like a fair fight to you? Listen to what God said:



*The Lord spoke to Gideon. He said, "I want to hand Midian over to you. But you have **too many** men for me to do that." - Judges 7:2a*

Too many men?! The Israelites were already out-numbered 4 to 1. Why would God say this?

"I do not want Israel to brag that their own strength has saved them." - Judges 7:2b

God did not want the Israelite army to think they were such great warriors that they did not need God. God wants His people to depend on Him. God wanted everyone to know that HE ALONE brought the victory to Israel. So God told Gideon to announce that any man who was afraid should go home. 22,000 men left; only 10,000 remained. (Now, eat 7 of your "Israelite" cereal pieces.) But God said there were still too many men. God told Gideon to take the men to the water's edge. All the men who got on their knees to drink from the river were sent home. This left only 300 men! (Eat 2 1/2 of your "Israelite" cereal pieces.) Now the Israelites were outnumbered 440 to 1! But don't

Day #4 continued:

forget what God had PROMISED Gideon:

The Lord answered, "I will be with you." - Judges 6:16a

With God fighting for Israel, no enemy would have a chance.



When God does something only God can do, **He will get the praise.** The Bible tells us we should want people to see less of us, and more of God (John 3:30). It is FAR better for people to see God's power than anything we have to offer.

Day #5: Victory

With only 300 men to battle the massive enemy, God knew Gideon needed another boost of courage. He sent Gideon to go to the edge of the Midianite camp late at night. There, Gideon overheard one of the enemy soldiers predicting that Gideon's army would win the battle (Judges 7:9-14).

Gideon worshipped God. Then he rushed back to his own camp and awoke his men. He gave each man a torch covered with a clay jar and a trumpet. At around ten o'clock at night, in complete darkness, the 300 men surrounded the enemy camp. All at the same time, each man blew his trumpet and broke his jar, exposing his torch. No doubt, the Midianite army was frightened and startled at the sudden sound and light piercing the darkness.



When the 300 trumpets were blown, the Lord caused all of the men in the enemy camp to start fighting each other. They attacked each other with their swords. - Judges 7:22a

In their confusion, the Lord caused the men of the Midianite army to fight each other. Those who were left ran away. As they fled, Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country calling for other Israelites to chase the enemy. Some of the Israelites came to help. All of the Midianite army were captured and killed. The Midianite people never tried to attack the Israelites again (Judges 8:28).

So, 300 men were handed victory over 132,000 men. God kept His promise to hand the enemy over to Gideon. God kept His promise to be with Gideon. Remember, Gideon was the least important member of the weakest tribe of Israel. And Gideon's army may have been one of the weakest armies in history. But **God used these weaknesses for His glory.** Gideon's weaknesses were an opportunity for God to show His power.



Try to view your weaknesses as holes in your life. Each hole is an opportunity for God to pour in His power and grace. Don't be discouraged by your weaknesses. Instead, rejoice for God's power to fill your life. The bigger the hole, the more God can pour in!

*He said to me, "My grace is all you need. **My power is strongest when you are weak.**" So I am very happy to brag about how weak I am. Then Christ's power can rest on me. - 2 Corinthians 12:9b*