

Gideon

Judges 6 - 7

PPT Title

Gideon

Main Point: God uses our weaknesses to show His power.

PPT Verse

Key Verse: *But He said to me, "My grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak." - 2 Corinthians 12:9*

Props: 2 pieces of fleece (or faux fur cut into animal skin shape); spray bottle containing water; just prior to teaching, spray one of the fleeces lightly with water.

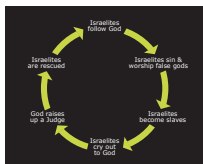
BACKGROUND/REVIEW

PPT

If..., Then...

Say: Last week we saw the beginning of a tragic cycle for the Israelites. God had kept every promise He ever made to the Israelites. He fought for them and blessed them more than any people had ever been blessed (Deuteronomy 7:14). All that God asked of them was for them to obey Him and worship Him alone. God made an IF, THEN promise to His people. God said IF they followed Him, THEN He would bless them and fight for them (Exodus 34:10-11). However, God also said that IF the Israelites did **not** follow Him, THEN He would **not** bless them, and He would **not** fight their enemies for them (Joshua 23:12-13). God **ALWAYS** keeps His promises!

It did not take long for the Israelites to forget about God's goodness, and worship the false gods of the Canaanites. Just as God had warned them, He stopped fighting for them, and they were conquered by other nations. After the people had been enslaved for several years, they cried out to God. In His mercy and goodness, He sent them a deliverer, also called a judge. The judge rescued them from their enemies, and the people followed God. But, sadly, as soon as the judge died, they fell into the temptation of worshipping false Gods again. **Teacher:** Point to the cycle chart and show how this happened over and over. Again, they were given over to their enemies, they suffered, they called out to God, He sent a deliverer, they were rescued, and they followed God - but only until that judge died. Then they chose to sin and the cycle started all over again.



Last week we looked at one of God's judges, Deborah the prophetess. Through Deborah, God commanded Barak to lead the Israelites into war and freedom. Barak did not follow God's command immediately. Instead, he put a condition on God's command to fight the enemy.

Ask: Does anyone remember what Barak's condition was? (You may need to give students a clue: He said he would only go to fight if someone went with him. Who was that person?) He demanded that Deborah go with him.

Deborah agreed to go, but because Barak put this condition on God's orders, Deborah told him that the victory would go to a woman. Ultimately, it did because the enemy commander, Sisera, was killed by a woman named Jael instead of by Barak. We learned that full obedience to God will bring the greatest victory and blessing.

Say: After God used Deborah, Barak, and Jael to free them, the Israelites followed God and lived in peace for forty years (Judges 5:31). Look at our cycle chart. **Ask:** What

do you think will happen next? (If needed, point to top of chart to help kids.) *The Israelites will sin.*

GIDEON (Judges 6)

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. The Israelites even tried to hide from the Midianites in caves and clefts in the mountains. The Bible tells us that every year the Israelites planted their crops and then the Midianites and other tribes came and devoured the crops. There were so many Midianites that no one could even count them. The Bible describes the people like a swarm of locusts because they ravaged everything in their path. They killed the Israelites' animals. They destroyed nearly everything. It was difficult for the Israelites to even survive. There was barely any food left to eat, and very few animals to work the land. (Point to "the Israelites become slaves" on the cycle chart.) So, we are right about here on our chart. **Ask:** Who can tell me what the Israelites will do next? *The Israelites will cry out to the Lord.*

Say: The Israelites cried out to God for help. God always hears the prayers of His people (Exodus 3:7, 2 Chronicles 30:27)! God sent a prophet to remind the Israelites about the amazing things He had done for them by bringing them out of Egypt and conquering their enemies in Canaan. The prophet also reminded them that they did not listen to God's warning about worshipping false gods.



Then God sent an angel to a man named Gideon. The Bible tells us that Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. Threshing wheat is what farmers do to separate the good wheat from the parts of the plant that you can't eat, called chaff. Normally, the separating was done outside. The farmer would actually toss the wheat and chaff into the air, and the wind would blow the chaff away. But because the Midianites devoured everything the Israelites had, Gideon was trying to hide his wheat from them.

The angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon. He said, "Mighty warrior, the Lord is with you." - Judges 6:12

This seems like a strange thing to call Gideon. Here is Gideon, hiding out in a wine cellar to protect a little bit of grain. He doesn't look like a mighty warrior at this point! And we will see in a moment that Gideon doesn't think he is a mighty warrior either. What we will find out is that this name is prophetic. That means it is going to happen. It was God's plan that Gideon would become a mighty warrior. Because it was God's plan, it was as good as done already (Isaiah 25:1).

Teacher note: This is similar to Christ naming Simon "Peter" which means "rock" when at that time, Peter was anything but a solid foundation. His doubt had caused him to sink into the sea (Matthew 14:30-31) and in his doubt, he would soon try to take matters into his own hands by using force to stop the arrest of Jesus (Matthew 26:51-54). And, perhaps the most infamous scene of all, Peter would soon deny that he even knew Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75). Yet, Christ said, "On this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18) By the grace of God, Peter was restored (John 21:15-19) and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). By the power of God, Peter became an unshakable rock. He refused to stop preaching the Gospel, no matter what the threat (Acts 4:20). And as we see throughout Acts, it truly was on the rock of Peter that the church - the same church we are part of today - was built.

"But sir," Gideon replied, "you say the Lord is with us. Then why has all of this happened to us? Where are all of the wonderful things he has done? Our parents told us about them. They said, 'Didn't the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has

deserted us. He has handed us over to Midian." - Judges 6:13

Ask: Who would like to answer Gideon? Who can tell us why this had happened to them? *The Israelites did evil and worshipped false gods.*

Say: God could not have been clearer on this! **God did not abandon the Israelites. The Israelites abandoned God.**

The Lord turned to Gideon. He said to him, "You are strong. Go and save Israel from the power of Midian. I am sending you."

"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."

*The Lord answered, "**I will be with you.** So you will strike down the men of Midian all at one time." - Judges 6:14-16*

PPT

**I will be
with you.**



Gideon is quite surprised at these orders. He explained that he is the weakest person in the weakest family in the whole tribe. It is as if he is saying, "Lord, you must have the wrong person." But God said, "I will be with you." 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. Gideon was still a bit unsure about this. He might have thought he was dreaming. So he asked God for a sign to be sure it was really the Lord talking to him. Gideon went to prepare an offering to give to God. He cooked a goat and made some soup with it. He also made a large loaf of bread that had no yeast in it. The angel told him to put the bread and the meat on a rock, and pour the soup out. Gideon did it. The angel touched the meat and bread with his staff. Instantly fire came from the rock and burned up the meat and bread. Then the angel disappeared. So, Gideon knew it was the Lord who had spoken to him. Gideon built an altar to God on that spot.

Say: Remember, the Israelites had been sinning against God. They had been worshipping a false god named Baal and a false goddess named Asherah.

That same night the Lord spoke to Gideon. He said, "Get the second bull from your father's herd. Get the one that is seven years old. Tear down the altar your father built in honor of Baal. Cut down the pole that is beside it. The pole is used to worship the goddess Asherah."

"Then build the right kind of altar. Build it in honor of the Lord your God. Build it on top of this hill. Then use the wood from the Asherah pole you cut down. Sacrifice the second bull as a burnt offering." - Judges 6:25-26

Gideon got ten of his servants and did just what God had instructed him to do. However, he was afraid of his family and the men in the town, so he did it at night when it was dark outside. In the morning, the men saw that the altar to Baal was torn down. They were furious. When they found out Gideon had done it, they demanded that Gideon's father bring him outside. The men wanted to kill him! But wisely, Gideon's father said that if Baal was really a god, he could stand up for himself. So the men left him alone.

It is amazing that these men were willing to kill one of their own people to defend a false god who had never done anything for them. They were ready to kill Gideon for building an altar to the one true God. These Israelite men had it backwards! The men should have been willing to fight **for** the one true God, and **against** those who worshipped false gods. It was worshipping Baal that had gotten them into the mess

they were in with the Midianites.

The Midianite army joined with the Amalekite army. Many other eastern people joined with them. Together, they crossed the Jordan River and camped in the Jezreel Valley. All together, over 135,000 enemy soldiers were in the middle of the Israelites' territory (Judges 8:10). God's Spirit filled Gideon and Gideon blew a trumpet to call his army together. Many other Israelite tribes joined Gideon's army. So Gideon's army had formed. The Bible tells us there were about 32,000 men ready to follow Gideon into battle to take their land back from the Midianites (Judges 7:3). Remember we learned that Gideon was the weakest person in the weakest family of his tribe? 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.

Gideon said to God, "You promised you would use me to save Israel. 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 6:36-37



Say: The piece of lamb's wool was called a fleece. **Teacher:** hold up your **wet** "fleece." **Do not let the kids know it is wet.** Gideon laid it outside his tent at night. **Lay your fleece out on the ground.** Early the next day, Gideon got up and checked the fleece. The ground around it was dry, but the fleece was wet. He squeezed the fleece and the water from it filled up a bowl. **Pick up your fleece and let the kids feel that it is wet.**

Gideon was still not quite convinced. A trace of doubt was lingering in his mind. We have all felt these doubts at times. Our minds have a funny way of taking something miraculous and explaining it away. Gideon's thoughts might have gone something like this: "Maybe there was dew on everything, but it just dried up. And the fleece just holds water longer than the ground. Maybe the wet fleece really wasn't a sign from God at all." So he asked for another sign.

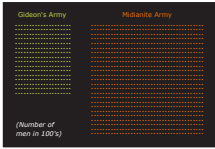
Then Gideon said to God, "Don't let your anger burn against me. Let me ask you for just one more thing. Let me use the wool for one more test. This time make the wool dry. And cover the ground with dew." - Judges 6:39

So Gideon laid the fleece outside his tent again. **Teacher:** lay out your **dry** "fleece." This time when Gideon woke up and checked, all the ground was wet with dew, but the fleece was completely dry. **Pick up your fleece and let the kids feel that it is dry.** This time Gideon must have finally realized that this was indeed a sign from God.

Application: Even today, the word "fleece" is used as a term meaning that someone is looking for a sign of confirmation from God. God was very kind and gracious to Gideon to give him the signs he asked for. God did not tell Gideon he was wrong to ask for a sign, but we must always be careful not to make demands on God or test God. Gideon was earnestly seeking to do the will of God, and he was in a unique situation as he was about to lead over 30,000 men into a battle against an army four times their size. When we sense that God is leading us to do something, there are several key things we must do. First, it is necessary to pray about the action. Also, go to the Bible to make sure the action is in line with God's word. God will never ask you to do something that is contrary the Bible! Also, talk to your parents and other people who love the Lord and who follow His word. The Bible says it is wise to seek the advice of godly people (Proverbs 15:22).

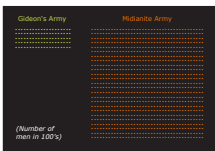
PREPARING FOR BATTLE (Judges 7:1-8)

Say: Gideon's army was camped just south of the Midianite army. The Israelites numbered about 32,000 soldiers, while the enemy numbered 135,000. Let's take a look at how these numbers compare to each other. **Refer to power point chart. If not using powerpoint, prepare a similar chart on paper or white board.** Each dot on this chart represents 100 soldiers. **Ask:** Does this look like a fair fight to you? *No.*



Say: God didn't think these numbers were right, either. Listen to what He told Gideon:

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. I do not want Israel to brag that their own strength has saved them. 3 So here is what I want you to announce to your men. Tell them, 'Those who tremble with fear can turn back. They can leave Mount Gilead.' " So 22,000 men left. But 10,000 remained. - Judges 7:2-3



Wow. Well, that is not the direction we were expecting. Now there were *fewer* Israelites than before. Let's take a look at how the armies matched up now. **Refer to new power point chart.** Notice why God sent some men away. God did not want the Israelites bragging that they won the battle because they were so strong. God wanted the praise for winning the battle to go to Him! **Ask:** How would you feel if you were a soldier in Gideon's army now? *Nervous, scared.*

Say: God had another message for Gideon.



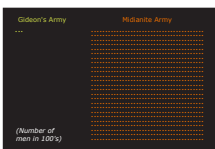
The Lord spoke to Gideon again. He said, "There are still too many men. So take them down to the water. I will sort them out for you there. If I say, 'This one will go with you,' he will go. But if I say, 'That one will not go with you,' he will not go."

So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord spoke to him. He said, "Some men will drink the way dogs do. They will lap up the water with their tongues. Separate them from those who get down on their knees to drink."

Three hundred men lapped up the water. They brought it up to their mouths with their hands. All of the rest got down on their knees to drink.



The Lord spoke to Gideon. He said, "With the help of the 300 men who lapped up the water I will save you. I will hand the Midianites over to you. Let all of the other men go home." - Judges 7:4-7



WOW! Now, all but 300 men were sent away! Let's see how this looks. **Refer to new power point chart.** 300 men against 135,000 men. Do you think these 300 men were praying now? Before, when the whole Israelite army was together, some of them might have thought, "I'm not too worried. That Gideon is a good leader, and we have our best fighters on the front lines. I think we'll do okay." But with only 300 men taking on 132,000 men, they *had* to depend on God! **Ask:** How many of us would volunteer to fight on Gideon's side in a battle with numbers like this?



Say: Let's not forget the most important part of the Israelite army. **Refer to new chart with GOD in the equation.** Now, this really turns things around! Now the Midianite army is the underdog by far! Because God was fighting for Gideon's army, the Midianites wouldn't stand a chance.

Gideon sent the rest of the men back to their tents, and the 300 men took their supplies.

GOD GIVES MIDIAN TO GIDEON (Judges 7:9-25)

Say: The Midianite army was camped in a valley below the Israelite army. In order to give Gideon the courage to lead the battle, God sent Gideon and one of his servants to the edge of the enemy camp during the night. There were so many soldiers and camels that it seemed like counting them would be like counting the grains of sand on the seashore. There, Gideon overheard two Midianite soldiers talking. One man told the other about a dream he had. In the dream, a round loaf of barley bread rolled into their camp and destroyed a tent. The man's friend explained that the bread was a symbol of Gideon, and he believed that God would fight for Gideon and the Midianites would be destroyed.

Gideon rushed back to his own camp. He called out for his men to get up because God had handed the Midianites over to them. He separated his men into three groups of 100 each. He gave each man a trumpet and a clay jar with a torch in it. Then Gideon's men positioned themselves all around the camp. At the same time, all the men blew their trumpets and smashed their jars to reveal their torches. Then they shouted the battle cry, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon."



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. The army ran away to Beth Shittah toward Zererah. They ran all the way to the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. - Judges 7:22



The Midianite army was frightened and startled at the sudden sound and light piercing the night sky. In their confusion, they began fighting each other. Those who were left ran away from the valley. Gideon called out the other Israelite tribes to chase after the soldiers who fled. All of the soldiers and their leaders were tracked down and killed (Judges 7:24-25; 8:10-13, 21). The Midianites never tried to attack the Israelites again (Judges 8:28).

The Israelites were so happy with Gideon that they wanted him to become their king, but Gideon refused.

The people of Israel spoke to Gideon. They said, "Rule over us. We want you, your son and your grandson to be our rulers. You have saved us from the power of Midian."

But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you. My son won't rule over you either. The Lord will rule over you." - Judges 8:22-23

This was a wise response from Gideon. It was not even Gideon who defeated the enemy. **Ask:** Who defeated the enemy? *God did.*



Say: Now that is a great ending to a story. But, sadly, that is not the end of the story. I hate to mention it, but remember our cycle chart? Gideon asked the people to give him some of the jewelry that they had taken from the enemy. They gave him a large amount. He took the jewelry and made an object out of it. It looked like the apron that the high priest of Israel wore. Gideon may not have intended to do wrong, but it ended up becoming like an idol to the people. He placed it in his home town and the Israelites began to worship it.

Gideon lived for 40 more years after the Midianite battle. The Bible says there was peace during those 40 years. Who can guess what happened as soon as Gideon died? *The Israelites sinned and followed false gods.*

Say: The Israelites went back to following the false gods like Baal. Next week we will look at the next cycle of the Israelites.

Application: Many times in the Bible, we see that God uses those who are weak or those who are in an impossible situation to show His power and might. As we saw with Gideon, God specifically chose the weakest person in the weakest tribe to lead His people into battle. Then we saw that God decreased the size of the army, then decreased it again, until there was just a handful of men up against a sea of warriors. At the time, anyone watching all of this would have shaken their head and said, "There is NO way Gideon's side would even stand a chance." But God showed that nothing is too difficult for Him to accomplish. It was all about God's power, not Gideon's.

We saw the same principle way back when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. God instructed Moses to lead them right up to the edge of the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army was chasing right behind them. They were trapped. It looked like an impossible situation. This set the stage for God to do an amazing thing. He did what only God can do. He parted the sea, and the Israelites crossed on dry ground. The Bible puts it this way:

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the things of this world that are common and looked down on. He chose what is not considered to be important to do away with what is considered to be important. So no one can brag to God. - 1 Corinthians 1:27-28

PPT Verse

In the New Testament, God told the apostle Paul, "My power is strongest when you are weak." (2 Corinthians 12:9) So Paul said he was happy in the hard times, when things were difficult. Paul even said he was thrilled to tell people about his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Paul said, "I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become." (2 Corinthians 12:10, The Message)

Teacher: Demonstrate with two glass jars the exact same size. **Say:** Let's say these jars represent two boys' lives. **Hold up one jar and say:** This boy seems to have everything going for him. Let's name him Bobby. **Write "Bobby" on the jar with a permanent marker.** But our second boy (**hold up the other jar**) has many hardships, or weaknesses. We'll call him Sam. **Write "Sam" on the jar.** Bobby has a strong family life. He has great parents who get along and take great care of him. **Hold up a large rock.** Let's say this large rock represents this boy's family life, because it is very solid and strong. **Place it in the "Bobby" jar.** On the other hand, Sam's family is in kind of a mess. His parents don't get along and there is a lot of stress in their home. **Hold up a very small rock.** We'll say this small rock represents his family life because it not strong. **Place it in the "Sam" jar.** Schoolwork comes easily for Bobby. **Hold up another large rock.** This rock stands for Bobby's good grades. **Place it in Bobby's jar.** Unfortunately, Sam struggles in school and his parents can't seem to find time to help him. We'll say this small rock represents Sam's academic ability. **Place it in Sam's jar.** Lastly, Bobby has lots of friends. He often has friends come over to play. **Hold up another large rock.** We'll say this rock represents Bobby's strength in friendships. **Place it in Bobby's jar.** Sam, however, is actually a little afraid to get close to any other kids. He doesn't want to make friends because he doesn't want to invite anyone to his house to play. This small rock will represent Sam's friendships. **Place a small rock in Sam's jar.** **Hold up both jars. Say:** All of the areas we discussed - family life, schoolwork, and friendships - are strengths in Bobby's life. But in Sam's life, through no fault of his own, these areas are weaknesses.

Now, let's see how God can turn things around. Let's imagine that God wants each boy to accomplish something. Let's say, for instance, God wanted one of the boys to start a club at school so he could share God's truth with lots of other kids. We'll say that filling this jar is the same as accomplishing this goal of starting the club and having many kids attend. **Hold up both jars.** Look at the jars. **Ask:** Whose jar is closer to being full? *Bobby's*

Say: Bobby has many things going for him, many strengths. Bobby may rely on his own strengths to accomplish starting the club and having lots of kids attend. But in order for Sam to accomplish the same thing, he would really need to rely on God's power. We will use water to represent God's power. **Hold up one pitcher of water.** This is God's power pouring into the life of each boy. **Pour water from one pitcher to fill Bobby's jar, and water from the other pitcher to fill Sam's jar. Hold up the pitchers to show that Sam's pitcher has less water.** **Ask:** Whose life needed more of God's power? *Sam's.* **Say:** It is Sam's life that had so many weaknesses that he could not accomplish starting the club without God's power. You never know how God's power might look in this situation. God might even change the weather to rain out the championship soccer game so that all the kids ended up going to Sam's after-school club!

With all of his strengths, no one would be surprised if Bobby started a club that was very successful. After all, he is smart and popular. But if Sam started a successful club, with all of his weaknesses, people might wonder how it all came together. When God does something only God can do, **He will get the praise.** The Bible tells us we should want people to look at us less, and look at God more (John 3:30).

Say: Now, there is nothing wrong with having strengths. God equips each person some strengths and allows each person to have some weaknesses. At different times, we will feel we have more strengths or more weaknesses than at other times. Don't be discouraged by your weaknesses or difficult times. Instead, rejoice at the opportunity for God's power to fill your life! Remember, no matter what you are going through - family illness, death of a loved one, parents fighting, being made fun of at school, hard time with grades, hard time with friends - when we are weak, God is strong. When we can't, God can. When we are unable, God is more than able! And then, as it should be, God will receive the glory He deserves.

PPT Main Point

Main Point: God uses our weaknesses to show His power.