

August 2, 2026

CALLED: JUDGES 6:1-4,7-16

Introductory Activity

Ask group members to tell about a time they were asked to do something that they felt inadequate or unprepared to accomplish.

Introduce: Sometimes we feel inadequate or unprepared to perform a task or step into a role because we compare ourselves to others. We might think that others have more experience or a better personality for the role we are being asked to fill or the task we have been asked to complete. Today, we are going to look at the experience of Gideon. It seems that Gideon knows a task needs to be done, but he thinks someone else is better equipped to do it.

Summarize and Transition: Our lesson picks up in Judges 6. (**Teachers' Note: You might refer to the poster titled *The Oppressors in Judges at this point.***) By this point in the book, Israel has already been through 5 cycles of "rebellion, retribution, remorse, and restoration." (ETB LG, 100) The nation had just experienced 40 years, or one generation, of peace under the leadership of Deborah and Barak, as outlined in chapters 4 and 5. As we discussed last week, the people would practice a form of obedience during the life of the judge who delivered them from whatever nation was oppressing them. After the leader's death, the nation would sink deeper into sin. That is what we see in the opening verse of our study today. So, let's dive in and see what happens and what the Lord intends to do.

1. OPPRESSION (JUDG. 6:1-4, 7-10)

Read (or have someone read) Judges 6:1-4, 7-10.

Explain: This passage gives us the backstory to the calling of Gideon, the focus of this and next week's lesson. The passage begins with a recurring theme throughout the book. The historian tells us, "The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD." This evil that the people practice is not your everyday-run-of-the-mill sin or lapses in judgement. Blake Hearson explains, "The concern was not that the people were lapsing in their theological belief (although that was undoubtedly true as well), but that they were actively seeking out and engaging in things that were evil." (ETBC, 92) As we will learn early in the story of Gideon, one of the most pervasive problems in Israel was the people's abandonment of the Lord and their replacement of Him with false gods. One of Gideon's first tasks will be to tear down his own father's altars to the false gods and replace them with an altar to the Lord (6:25-27). In response to this sin, the Lord "handed them over to Midian seven years."

Verses 3-6 explain the manner in which the Midianites, along with the Amalekites and other peoples from east of the Jordan, oppressed the

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Judges and Ruth* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Judges* (NAC)
- *Exalting Jesus in Judges and Ruth* (Exalting)

Judges 2:7

⁷ The people worshiped the Lord throughout Joshua's lifetime and during the lifetimes of the elders who outlived Joshua. They had seen all the Lord's great works he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10

¹⁰ That whole generation was also gathered to their ancestors. After them another generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works he had done for Israel. ¹

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people. It appears that they did not attack Israel with an army intent on subduing and ruling over the nation. Instead, they were marauders. They rode in on camels and “pitched their tents on Israel’s soil and laid siege.” (ETB LG, 102) The Bible says they were “like a great swarm of locusts” (v. 5). And like a plague of locusts, they would leave the land bare as they took from Israel the supplies they needed. Imagine this taking place year after year for seven years. Every time Israel would plant a new crop or start a new herd of cattle, the Midianites would sweep in and take the produce. After several years of this, all the reserves would be gone, and the people would be defeated on multiple fronts. Verse 6 tells us they “poverty-stricken” (CSB), “impoverished” (NIV), or “brought low” (ESV). Block says, “Israel ‘became small’... which says as much about her emotional state as about her economic condition. Israel is completely paralyzed before the Midianite menace.” (NAC, 253)

Consider: What kinds of emotional impact might a believer experience because of their sin?

Explain: The people of Israel experienced the economic and physical effects of sin. They were hungry, and they were hiding, but they experienced an emotional response as well. We will see this more when we examine the person of Gideon. When a believer is involved in sin, they might experience heightened anxiety. They might feel a sense of depression or loneliness. Hopefully, they will eventually feel their need for the Lord. That is what the Israelites finally came to after seven years of oppression. Verse 7 tells us they “cried out to him because of Midian.”

Guide and Ask: How did God respond in verse 8 to their cry for help?
(TEACHERS’ NOTE: I AM NOT GOING TO SPEND ANY TIME ON THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHET. WE DISCUSSED THIS LAST WEEK. THE PEOPLE’S SIN IS THEIR ABANDONMENT OF THE LORD AND WORSHIPPING FALSE GODS.)

Explain: He sent them a prophet, not a deliverer. God could have sent a judge immediately to rally the people and throw off the oppressive Midianites. However, “if the Lord had sent a judge immediately, Israel would not have seen their own sin...It places them in a position to hear from the Lord as they look for deliverance.” (Exalting, 75) We can learn from the Lord’s response because it has implications for a believer when they are involved in sin. Before the Lord will deliver us from the effects of our sin, we must understand that we have a sin problem.

Throughout the book of Judges, the people struggle with repentance. They will call out for help, but rarely do they acknowledge their sin (the exception is in chapter 10). But God acts in grace and mercy throughout the book. However, to truly experience the freedom they desired, they needed to repent of their sin. That is why God sent this prophet. He wanted the people to really grasp the situation. The same is true for us. If we really want to experience freedom in Christ, we must acknowledge our sin and repent of it. Moreover, when we are helping others like friends or wayward children,

Notes:

“In any case the present account portrays them not as caravaneers but as camel-riding warriors, who may have been driven by the need to supplement the [inadequate] foodstuffs being produced in their own territory.” (NAC, 252)

“due to the fact that the Midianites seem to have been nomadic and migratory, they did not conquer and rule over an area in the same way as a more stationary people.” (ETBC, 93)

we have to gently help them understand the sin that might have gotten them to the point of being “brought low.”

Summarize Transition: All of this is a prelude to God’s call of Gideon, but it can be instructive for us. The effects of sin can be severe. The Israelites rebelled against their God and suffered for it. All sin is rebellion, and we should expect consequences if we continue in sinful behavior. The only way to experience freedom is by looking to Christ in repentance. Only then can we experience deliverance. Let’s look at the next passage and see who God calls to lead the people. Our lesson will take a distinct turn, and we will focus on God’s call to all believers to do the work of ministry.

2. COMMISSION (JUDG. 6:11-14)

Read (or have someone read) Judges **6:11-14**.

Explain: We have already seen what the oppression of the Midianites looks like on the macro level. Let’s zoom in on Gideon and see what the oppression looks like on the micro, or individual, level. When we do I think we will see a defensive, defeated, and desperate man. The passage sets the scene for us. **Gideon was on the defensive.** We find him threshing wheat *in* a wine press. “Normally, *threshing* grain was done outdoors on a high spot so the wind could blow away the chaff. But to **hide** this wheat from the Midianites, Gideon was working below ground in a sunken winepress—a less than ideal spot.” (ETB LG, 104) Gideon is hiding. He does not want to draw the attention of marauding Midianites. If they see him throwing the grain into the air so that the chaff blows away, they might come take it and leave his family hungry.

Believers can Find Themselves on the Defensive, as well. The Israelites were facing oppression because of their sin. This put them on the defensive. Redmond argues that churches (read believers) are sometimes on the defensive because of their refusal to wholeheartedly, faithfully live out their faith. (see Exalting, 74-75) He might be correct, but I think there is a more subtle form of defensiveness that believers face. We *do* live in a culture that is hostile to our Word-based conviction. This hostility is magnified by the algorithms that run our social-media feeds. It is heightened by legacy media as well. In response to this heightened sense of hostility, believers tend to become defensive in the same way Gideon did. They might withdraw to their winepress and hide from the world. They might huddle up with “people like me.” In their churches, they might say “me, you four, and no more.” If we are going to be Kingdom disciples who make disciples, we cannot withdraw from the world. We are called to invade the darkness. We are called to be Christ-like and leave the safety of the ninety-nine and go after the one.

Discuss: What are some ways that believers can practice *Christ-like*, Kingdom-advancing offense? (We do this first by not being offensive. To put it plainly, Christians cannot be jerks to those around them. Spiritually, we do this by praying on offense. **Pray fervently** for your neighbors, co-workers, and friends. We go on the offensive by **bearing the light of Christ’s love**. Help those in need; love the lonely; care for the widow [and not just the ones in your church]. We go on the offensive by actually **using our words to share the gospel**. I think one sign of our defensive posture is the lack of evangelism among believers. Why don’t we visit people on Wednesday nights? Are we afraid? Defensive people are afraid. Why don’t we introduce ourselves to guests in church? Are we clannish? Defensive people are clannish. Why don’t we step out and start new small groups?

Notes:

Are we uninterested in growth? Defensive people do not do the work to create space for new people. [See the Notes Box on why new small groups are important.])

Gideon was on the defensive. **He was also defeated.** When the angel (Christ?) approaches him, He calls out, “The Lord is with you, valiant warrior.” Gideon’s response is one of defeat. Now, we have to cut him a little slack. First, he does not yet know to whom he is speaking. Second, he was probably a little hot, tired, and frustrated after trying to thresh the grain in a wine press. Nevertheless, his response is telling. He skips over the valiant warrior part completely and focuses on the assessment that God is with him, and even then, he applies it to the nation, not himself. He asks, “If God is with us, why are things so bad? If God is with us, why isn’t He doing great things like He did in the past?” You see, Gideon is defeated because of his circumstances. Remember, earlier we said that the nation had enjoyed 40 years of peace prior to the 7-year oppression of the Midianites. That means Gideon was born in a better time, and now he was suffering. And he was blaming God for it instead of the people’s sinfulness.

Believers can Feel Defeated at Times. This defeat can manifest in our personal lives. Things are going badly on the homefront. Things are going badly at work. Things are going badly at school. Sometimes this is just life. We should guard against feelings of defeat in these situations. Instead of *reacting*, we should *respond* in prayer, devotional reading of God’s word, and silent reflection before the Lord. (See the Notes Box on devotional reading and silent reflection.) Defeat can also manifest in the local church. A lack of growth or a lack of excitement can lead to feelings of defeat. A lack of growth in our small group can lead to feelings of defeat. A lack of interest by those in our small group can lead to a feeling of defeat. In these cases, unlike the personal situations mentioned above, this might not be “just life.” In these cases, we might need to look at ourselves and ask whether there is something wrong. Maybe the lack of growth is a result of a lack of effort. Maybe it is a sign of sin—laziness? pride? intolerance? lovelessness? Maybe, like the Israelites and Gideon, we need to stop looking at the Midianites or blaming God and look at ourselves.

Discuss: How can a church or a small group go from defeat to winning in ministry? (Sometimes, the first step is repentance of individuals, groups, and the church. Repentance of laziness, pride, intolerance, and lovelessness. Repentance is recognizing sin and turning in the opposite direction. If laziness is the issue, we need to begin as individuals, groups, and churches to start doing the work of ministry and evangelism. (By the way, many of us are not lazy people. We work hard all week in our jobs and families, but for some reason we

Notes:

New Groups are necessary for growth in the church. Anecdotally, our church has seen growth in small groups in the periods after we start new groups. Yes, your friends will come to your group, but unconnected guest typically find it difficult to merge into an existing group. Currently 76% of people who come to worship at our church also attend a small group. That is higher than some church, but it is a decrease of more than 13% since 2022. We currently need:

A New Young Couples Group—Our young adult groups have aged into not-so young families. I know of enough young adults who leave after worship to populate a new small group.

A New Not-So-Old-Not-So-Young Couples Group—We have the senior adult couples’ group and a few middle aged couples groups. We need a group for those grandparents of older elementary kids.

A New Men’s Group—We have not started a new men’s group in over a decade. We need a fresh group for new men to join.

But is not enough to simply start new groups. These groups must be *on mission* to grow disciples in the Word and reach out to others and invite them to join the group.

Devotional Reading and Silent Reflection: Far too often when life gets busy or confounding, we neglect the Lord and His Word. And when do we come to our time in the Word or time with the Lord, we come *to get something* or *to get feed*. Devotional reading is simply letting the Word wash over you and letting the Lord speak from the passage. This is not a time of study or a time to “get a nugget to get me through the day.” It’s quiet and reflective. It can allow time to sit quietly with the Lord and just love Him and be loved by Him—to experience His presence in the still quiet moment.

become really lazy when it comes to the work of God and the work needed in the church.) If pride is the issue, that will require a lot of heart-work and prayer. The same with intolerance. However, both can begin with a declaration to be welcoming, followed by the work of hospitality. Lovelessness is sometimes obvious. Other times, it manifests in clannishness. Our groups and our churches might say they are loving, but that love doesn't extend to those outside of our close-knit group or to those different from us. We will backslap our friends all day long, but we will not ask a new person (or a person who has been in church for 3 years) their name. Instead of showing interest in new people, we huddle up and tell stories or rehash the football game. We need to recognize when we are lacking in loving actions and then love people.

So, Gideon was defensive and defeated. But I also think **he was desperate**. After hearing his complaint, the angel (Christ?) says to him, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!" It is as if He doesn't even note Gideon's defensive and defeated posture. He simply tells the man to go in God's strength and do the work that needs to be done. One reason I think He does this is because He can see that Gideon is a man of work. Gideon is not curled up in a ball bemoaning the state of things. Instead, he is working to provide for himself and his family during these trying times. He can't solve the problems faced by Israel, but he is desperate to care for his family. "It's been said that when it comes to God's call, He prefers a moving target. Moses was tending sheep, as was David." (ETB LG, 104)

Believers Can and *Should* be Desperate. I have been told, "A busy church is a happy church." That might be the case, but I would say "An active individual, small group, or church is a *ready* individual, small group, or church." The world is dying and going to hell. Families are falling apart. Our communities are addicted to drugs. And we live like practical universalists. Universalism is a heretical doctrine that says God is just going to take everyone to heaven in the end because He is loving. We will not dive into the error of that belief. Mostly, we won't discuss it because most church members don't believe it. But we often live as if we do—we are practical universalists. This means that we are *not desperate* for the souls of others. This means we are *not desperate* for the dissolving families that live near us or sit near us at the ball games. This means we are *not desperate* for the health and soul of the young, addicted man we avoid at the gas station.

I know this sounds harsh, but the inaction of many believers reveals our lack of desperation to see the gospel change lives. Our inaction reveals itself in our lack of *intentionality* to be on mission every day *and* on Sunday. God wants to use us, but He will not magically do so. He prefers a moving target. He will use those who are active. An individual will never lead someone to faith in Christ if he is not sharing the gospel. A small group will never grow if it is not inviting new people. A small group will never grow in the faith if they are not actually studying God's Word *with the aim of life transformation*. (Yes, a minister might bring a new person to your group, but they will not stay if your group is not active in studying *and* applying the Word. They come to a small group to be on mission for God. If your group is not, new people and new believers will not stick.) Lastly, a church will never impact its community if it does not have ministries aimed at life change.

Summarize and Transition: We can look a lot like Gideon in the good and bad ways. Yet don't miss what the angel (Christ?) did. He said, "Go. Do the work. I will empower you." Don't miss that. He did not get down on Gideon. He told him to get to work. Christ (nor I) is down on anyone. He (and I) just wants us to look at the situation, climb out of the winepress, and get to work—IN HIS POWER. Let's conclude with two verses that sound negative but are really exciting if you know the rest of Gideon's story.

3. REASSURANCE (JUDG. 6:15-16)

Read (or have someone read) Judges 6:15-16.

Explain: Verse 15 sounds like an excuse. One scholar says, “He drops the bluster and begins instead to make excuses.” (Preaching, 135) Others compare him to Moses (Exodus 3:11; 4:10) in this situation. They might be correct. He might be offering excuses. But in those excuses, he recognizes the need and opportunity. Gideon says that he is nobody. The nation needs a leader, but a nobody can’t lead the nation. He says his family is nothing. They don’t have the resources to do what needs to be done. He goes on and declares that he is the runt of this nobody family. But Gideon is lacking the spiritual vision that was present in Caleb’s life, which we discussed a few weeks ago.

Discuss: How can our view of ourselves get in the way of saying yes to God?

Explain: Sometimes believers can let their feelings of inadequacy keep them from saying yes to God. Sometimes a believer’s lack of resources can keep him or her from stepping out for God. Sometimes we just feel too small to do what God calls us to do. The same can apply to a small group. “We are just a bunch of old women. What can we do for God?” “We don’t know a lot about the Bible. If new people come to our group, we will look dumb.” “We are just 6 or 10 people; how can we really have an impact on our church or community?” Churches can be the same way. “There are only 70 (or 200) of us. We can’t go to the nations.” “Our budget is too tight to start that ministry.” “The problems of our community are just too many for us to have an impact.”

We should stop and note three things. One, **we are not as small as we think we are**. If you read further into Gideon’s story, you will discover that Gideon wasn’t as much of a nobody as he thinks. His father had clout and at least some amount of wealth. I think Gideon’s defeated attitude had colored the way he viewed himself. The same can be true of individuals, small groups, and churches. We all have resources at our disposal. They might not be monetary or tangible, but we have them. Take the older lady’s class, for example. It is possible that they know many people in the community. They might have taught them or their kids in school. They might have worked with people in the community. These connections are a great strength of this group. Their second greatest strength is their age. They can invite people to church or share the gospel all day long with folks, and out of respect for their age, many people will at least hear them out.

The second thing we can learn from this passage is that **God loves the underdog**. He always has. Think of Moses, the stuttering, murdering hothead. Think of David, the young shepherd boy. Think of Peter, the hotheaded fisherman. Think of Saul, the proud, sinful persecutor of the church. God wants to reveal His glory to the world by using the unexpected.

The Third thing we learn from the passage is the most important. The angel (Christ?) turns to Gideon and says, “But I will be with you.” We might have excuses. We might have actual *reasons* why we can’t do what God is calling us to do. But honestly, that is the point. If we answer the call of Christ and follow Christ while doing the work, **He will give us everything we need** to do the work He called us to do. Moreover, we will achieve great things. Gideon would strike down the entirety of the Midian forces as if it were one man. Now, he *would* have to fight. God didn’t say Gideon would just stand by and watch. No, God said he would *fight*, and he would fight in God’s power.

Summarize and Transition: This commissioning of Gideon can be encouraging to us. If God calls, when God calls, He will empower us beyond our inadequacies and our excuses to do the work of the Kingdom.

Called: Judges 6:1-4,7-16

CONCLUDE

God has already called us to the work of ministry. He did so in the Great Commission and in Acts 1:8. If we are defensive or defeated, we should ask the Lord to put us on mission and successfully work through us. If we are inactive, we should get active. We might not know what to do or how to do it, but we should start doing something. All of us can love others. All of us can welcome the guest. All of us can sweep the church stoop or pass out bulletins or invite someone to join us in small groups. All of us can walk across the sanctuary and introduce ourselves to someone we do not know.

The true challenge this week is one of the hardest you might hear. Go and sit alone with God and read the story of Gideon. Ask God to make you desperate for the lost and hurting in your community. Then tell God you want to be used. Then ask Him to give you power. **Then just start doing something for the Lord.**