



First Baptist Church Selmer

FIRM FOUNDATION • GIDEON • JUDGES 6:11-16; 7:9-15; 8:22-35 • 10/1/2023

MAIN POINT

Despite Israel's unfaithfulness and Gideon's initial fear, God called and encouraged Gideon to deliver His people.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Are you the type of person who is comfortable with risk? Why or why not?

Are there certain areas of life in which you are more comfortable with risk than others?

It's easy to get frustrated, scared, or apprehensive when we think God is asking us to do something that seems impossible. And He often does just that. When God appeared to Gideon and called him to be Israel's deliverer, Gideon had his doubts. He doubted whether it was truly God who was calling him, and he doubted whether he had really heard God's instructions correctly. One cannot be too hard on Gideon for his doubts; after all, what God was calling Gideon to do was risky and dangerous, and Gideon was not by nature a man dripping with courage. Nevertheless, once Gideon's doubts were dealt with, he was bold in obeying the Lord even though he did not know what the outcome would be.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JUDGES 6:11-16.

11 "Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezerite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. 12 And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor.' 13 And Gideon said to him, 'Please, my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian.' 14 And the Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?' 15 And he said to him, 'Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.' 16 And the Lord said to him, 'But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man.'" (ESV)

What was Gideon doing when the angel of the Lord first appeared and spoke to him?

How do you think Gideon felt when the angel addressed him as "mighty man of valor"?

What was Gideon asking the angel in verse 13? Do you think his questions were out of line? Why or why not?

Have you ever felt like Gideon when you felt God leading you to do something?

God invites us to do things for His honor that far exceed our own capabilities. When we focus on our own abilities, we impose limits on what we believe God can do. When God assigns a task, He promises His presence and strength to accomplish it.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JUDGES 7:9-12.

9 "That same night the Lord said to him, 'Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. 11 And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.' Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance." (ESV)

What did the Lord instruct Gideon to do to lessen his fears about advancing on the Midianite camp? Why would it take courage on Gideon's part to do as the Lord asked?

What does it mean to you that the Lord was not frustrated or upset with Gideon over his fear about the upcoming battle?

God could have been angry at Gideon for being afraid; instead, He showed Him a glimpse of His power. The character of God, not the change in circumstances, is the antidote to our fear. Along with that, God uses other believers to support and encourage us as we face doubts and uncertainty in our attempts to serve Him. We can provide support and encouragement to others who are stepping out in faith to serve the Lord.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JUDGES 7:13-15.

13 "When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, 'Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat.' 14 And his comrade answered, 'This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.' 15 As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, 'Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into your hand.'" (ESV)

How did God encourage Gideon in this passage?

How did the man's words bring encouragement to Gideon and acknowledge God's provision as well?

What are some things you need to remind yourself are true about God in order to take on the things He asks you to do?

How does reminding yourself of God's character change your perspective about risk?

In His grace, God goes before us and then goes with us as we complete the tasks He gives us. When we are afraid, we can trust in the character of the One who is sending us. No matter what the outcome is, we know we will be successful when we are obedient. But, obedience in our past doesn't guarantee our obedience in the future.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JUDGES 8:22-35.

22 "Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, 'Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also, for you have saved us from the hand of Midian.' 23 Gideon said to them, 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you.' 24 And Gideon said to them, 'Let me make a request of you: every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil.' (For they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites.) 25 And they answered, 'We will willingly give them.' And they spread a cloak and every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. 26 And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold, besides the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian, and besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels. 27 And Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in the city, in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his family. 28 So Midian was subdued before the people of Israel, and they raised their heads no more. And the land had rest forty years in the days of Gideon.

29 Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and lived in his own house. 30 Now Gideon had seventy sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, and he called his name Abimelech. 32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, at Ophrah or the Abiezrites.

33 As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god. 34 And the people of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hand of all their enemies on every side, 35 and they did not show steadfast love to the family of Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) in return for all the good that he had done to Israel." (ESV)

Gideon refused the status of king, but he acted as one by taking a royal share of the military plunder and creating an idol. What tends to become an "ephod" in your life, something you worship in place of God? What needs to happen in order for you to submit that thing to God?

Verses 27-35 tell us the effect of Gideon's ephod on the nation he led. What was Gideon's legacy as a spiritual leader and military warrior? How is Gideon's life a warning for us?

Gideon manufactured an idol in the form of an ephod, a garment worn by the priests and used as a means of determining God's will. Gideon's intent was to glorify himself, founding

his own cult-like the Canaanite kings. The result was spiritually disastrous, ensnaring all of Israel in prostituting themselves. The narrative ends where it started—at Ophrah—suggesting that nothing had changed. Baal had changed his shape, but the idolatry continued. The oppressive Midianite kings had been replaced by Gideon, who was acting like the worst kind of king. After Gideon’s death, Israel went from bad to worse and prostituted themselves in the worship of the Baals.

Gideon’s story ends on a sad note in Judges 8, and we are reminded that past victories do not guarantee future successes. But this is not the last time Gideon is mentioned in Scripture. In Hebrews 11, Gideon was listed as a man of faith who obeyed God. Gideon’s story didn’t end well, but he was still God’s chosen leader, and God worked through him in spite of his sin. As Gideon’s story shows, it is all too easy to slip back into a place of sin when we quit looking to God as our Mighty Warrior.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is God calling you to do right now that makes you nervous?

How can we as a group stand together to encourage each other in what God has told us to do?

What is one practical way you can continue to remind yourself of the character of God when you feel afraid?

PRAYER

Thank the Lord for inviting His people to participate in His mission, and that we accomplish His will by His strength, not our own. Thank Him for the ways He encourages us, and ask Him to help us look for ways to encourage one another in serving and honoring Him.

COMMENTARY

| JUDGES 6:11-16

6:11-12 The prophetic speech ends abruptly. It is followed neither by repentance nor judgment but, surprisingly, by the provision of another deliverer. The angel of the LORD—

the Lord's personal representative who spoke with his full authority—appeared to Gideon at Ophrah, a town probably located in the Jezreel Valley. Gideon's name means "the one who hacks or cuts down," a fitting name for the man whose first task in the Lord's service would be to cut down Baal's altar. Other aspects of Gideon's demeanor are less promising. In view of the threat of the Midianites, he was threshing wheat in a winepress, a shallow depression in the rock, a safer location than the more exposed threshing floor. Gideon's natural reserve will emerge again as the narrative unfolds, and it is in sharp contrast to the title given to Gideon by the angel— valiant warrior.

6:13-16 Gideon's response challenged both aspects of the angel's greeting. First, he cast doubt on the Lord's presence with Israel. The angel of the Lord did not appear to hear Gideon's objection. Instead, he commissioned him to be the mighty warrior that God had named him. This provoked Gideon to challenge this aspect of the angel's greeting as well. Gideon claimed that he was doubly unsuited for this task. Yet the rest of the story casts doubt on Gideon's assertions: His father was a substantial landowner in the city, with the resources to build and maintain an altar to Baal, and Gideon was able to call on ten servants to assist him in pulling down the altar. These were hardly the signs of a man whose family was of no importance. All of Gideon's excuses were useless besides the single fact that the Lord would be with him.

| JUDGES 7:9-15

7:9-14 The army was now sufficiently small, so the Lord commanded Gideon to get up and begin the action against the camp of the Midianites. Yet instead of immediate action, there was further delay while Gideon's continuing fears were addressed. The Lord told Gideon that if he was afraid to go against the Midianite camp, he should secretly visit it and listen to what the Midianites were saying. He crept down to where he could see the Midianites, Amalekites, and . . . Qedemites, i.e., "eastern peoples" spread out like a swarm of locusts, with innumerable . . . camels. Visually nothing had changed since the opening verses of chap. 6. Yet what Gideon heard told a different story—God had given members of the enemy force a dream that was utterly demoralizing. It is ironic that the Midianites were quick to grasp the significance of a dream, while Gideon was slow to believe repeated signs and direct messages from the Lord.

7:15-16 Eavesdropping on this conversation at last had the desired effect on Gideon. In response, he bowed in worship, acknowledging the truth of the Lord's words, now that he had heard them repeated by pagans. He returned to Israel's camp and finally delivered to

his men the instruction he had received from the Lord in v. 9. Gideon divided his small army into three divisions and “armed” them with a ram’s-horn trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a torch. Clearly, unless the Lord fought for them they would have no chance of victory.

| JUDGES 8:22-35

8:22-27 The Israelites recognized the significance of Gideon’s behavior. They asked him to rule over them as the founder of a dynastic line. Though they carefully avoided the word king, it is clear that they were offering Gideon that office. The rationale that the people gave is telling: For you delivered us from the power of Midian. The Lord’s work in raising Gideon as deliverer had become obscured. Gideon’s response was orthodox. He replied that neither he nor his sons would rule over them; the Lord would rule over them. Even as he formally refused the status of king, however, he failed to contradict their assertion that it was he who had saved them from the Midianites. He also proceeded to act precisely as a king would. He asked for a royal share of the plunder, gold earrings from every man, representing a symbolic token of submission to him. As in Ex 32, where earrings were used in the making of the golden calf, so Gideon used these earrings to manufacture an idol in the form of an ephod, a garment worn by the priests and used as a means of determining God’s will. The amount of gold suggests that the garment included an idolatrous image. Gideon’s intent was to glorify himself, founding his own cult like the Canaanite kings. The result was spiritually disastrous, ensnaring all Israel in prostituting themselves.

8:28-32 The narrative ends where it started—at Ophrah—suggesting that nothing had changed. Baal had changed his shape, but the idolatry continued. The oppressive Midianite kings had been replaced by Gideon, who was acting like the worst kind of king. Along with supporting idolatry, Gideon married many wives and had seventy sons, a family structure forbidden to kings in Dt 17:17. He also intermarried with the local population, taking a concubine from Canaanite Shechem, with whom he had a son named Abimelech, which literally means “my father is king.” Positively, the land had peace for forty years during Gideon’s lifetime, but from this point on in the Judges narrative, Israel never again attained rest. This negative portrayal of kingship suggests that the phrase “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (17:6) did not portray an earthly monarchy as the solution to Israel’s problems.

8:33-35 After Gideon's death, Israel went from bad to worse and prostituted themselves in the worship of the Baals. Baal was worshiped in many local manifestations, including Baal-berith ("Baal of the Covenant"), who was the patron deity of Shechem. It is ironic that in worshipping a god whose name includes the word for "covenant," Israel forgot the covenant faithfulness of their own God, Yahweh, who had delivered them from the power of their enemies. The place where this Baal was worshiped, Shechem, was where the people had renewed their covenant with the Lord at the end of the book of Joshua when the people swore never to worship the gods of the land (Jos 24). Nor did they show kindness to the house of Gideon after his death. The word for "kindness" (Hb chesed) is often used in covenantal contexts, and it suggests that Israel forgot Gideon's acts of deliverance as swiftly as they forgot the Lord's. The irony of Israel's return to Baal worship is heightened by the use of Gideon's other name, Jerubbaal, "Let Baal Contend."