



Session 10

TIMID WARRIOR

God molds His people into mature believers through acts of service to Him.

JUDGES 6:11-16,25-32

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 wine vat 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, mighty warrior.” ¹³ Gideon said to Him, “Please Sir, 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 power of Midian. Am I not 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 house.”¹⁶ “But I will be with you,” the LORD said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.” [...] ²⁵ On that very night the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then tear down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Build a well-constructed altar to the LORD your God on the top of this rock. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down.” ²⁷ So Gideon took 10 of his male servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night. ²⁸ When the men of the city got up in the morning, they found Baal’s altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it cut down, and the second bull offered up on the altar that had been built. ²⁹ They said to each other, “Who did this?” After they made a thorough investigation, they said, “Gideon son of Joash did it.” ³⁰ Then the men of the city said to Joash, “Bring out your son. He must die, because he tore down Baal’s altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.” ³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Would you plead Baal’s case for him? Would you save him? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead his own case because someone tore down his altar.” ³² That day, Gideon’s father called him Jerubbaal, saying, “Let Baal plead his case with him,” because he tore down his altar.

Look for features in this passage that reveal Gideon’s view of himself. Compare and contrast Gideon’s view of himself with God’s expressed view of Gideon. What does this comparison reveal about how God views humanity?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most of us like the underdog, as long as we are not the one being surprised or beaten by them. When the favored team wins, the story line is not nearly as interesting as when the underdog pulls off the upset. On most teams, there is that favorite player who may not be the fastest, strongest, or most talented, but he or she is the one you want to meet, the one who has overcome the greatest obstacles to be on that team.

Most of us have been the underdog more than we have been the favored one. We can relate to underdogs; they are like us. A win by the underdog gives us hope that maybe we will be the next underdog to pull off the upset.

Why do you think people are drawn to the underdog? What makes the underdog so appealing?

In today's study, we find a judge who even viewed himself as the underdog. The people of Israel needed to be delivered from the oppression of the Midianites. However, God's chosen deliverer, Gideon, was not up to the task. He was timid and afraid. God molded Gideon into a capable leader through his service.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Sanctification*

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 6:1–12:15

For a period of 40 years after the ministry of Deborah, God's people enjoyed rest from their enemies (Judg. 5:31). Then, once again,



“the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (6:1; see also 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). As a consequence, God’s judgment fell upon the Israelites. He “handed them over to Midian seven years” (6:1). The Midianites were nomads from the region east and southeast of the Dead Sea. They roamed the country, seeking grazing land for their animals. Finding Israel too weak to defend themselves, the Midianites plundered Israel.

The Midianites were probably too small in numbers to plunder Israel alone, so they joined with the Amalekites and other eastern peoples and rode their camels all across Israel. The Midianites grazed their own livestock and stole sheep, oxen, and donkeys from the Israelites. They also plundered homes. The Book of Judges describes the Midianites as a swarm of locusts (v. 5). Consequently, the Israelites fled to the hills and hid in the many caves that dotted the limestone hillsides (v. 2).

Having become poverty-stricken because of the Midianites, the Israelites remembered God and cried out to Him (v. 6). The Lord then empowered an unlikely young man named Gideon to deliver His people and to call them back to Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

UNSURE AND UNTESTED (JUDG. 6:11-16)

VERSES 11-12

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 wine vat 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, mighty warrior.”

Gideon was a mixture of fear and courage, doubt and faith. When we think of him, we generally picture him at his moment of greatest courage and faith—leading 300 men against multitudes of Midianites (chap. 7), but we may forget his initial response to God’s call. At first introduction he was ***threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites***. Farmers usually threshed wheat in an area exposed to the wind, like a hilltop, for example. After beating the cut wheat stalks with a rod or stick, they tossed the mixture of grain and chaff into the air with a willowing fork. The wind blew away the lighter

chaff, allowing the farmer to gather the heavier kernels from the ground. Done correctly, the threshing of wheat could be seen from great distances. But fear of being seen by the Midianites forced Gideon to thresh his wheat in a concealed location.

The Angel of the LORD, apparently clothed as a traveler, came by and stopped under an oak tree. The oak tree provided shade and shelter for the wine press. One can visualize Gideon, fearfully preoccupied with his efforts, suddenly realizing the presence of another. Gideon may have been puzzled by the Angel's referring to him as a ***mighty warrior***. One can also imagine Gideon surveying the surrounding area for someone else before asking, "Are you talking to me?" The Angel of the Lord was probably speaking prophetically when he called Gideon a mighty warrior, which he would become when the Holy Spirit empowered him as a deliverer. The Angel of the Lord declared to Gideon: ***"The LORD is with you."***

VERSE 13

¹³ Gideon said to Him, "Please Sir, 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."

Gideon gave voice to what many Hebrews thought. He asked: ***why has all this happened?*** Gideon had heard his forefathers speak of God's wonders, even their deliverance out of Egypt. Gideon must have questioned the power of God to deliver. He did not understand why the Lord handed them over to Midian. Because of spiritual disobedience, the Lord had withdrawn His protection and withheld His blessings, allowing the Midianites to conquer.

VERSES 14-16

¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not 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 house." ¹⁶ "But I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man."

Presumably the Angel of the Lord was still the one speaking here, but the text simply reads ***the LORD ... said***. The Angel of the Lord did



not answer Gideon's question. He simply commanded Gideon to go and deliver Israel from the Midianites. Perhaps anticipating Gideon's hesitation, the Angel of the Lord encouraged him by asking his own question: ***Am I not sending you?***

We can see Gideon's feelings of insecurity. When told to deliver Israel, he asked: ***how can I deliver Israel?*** Gideon admitted: ***my family is the weakest in Manasseh*** [muh NASS uh]. Gideon's recognition of being ***the youngest*** in his family only caused more insecurity.

Again, the Lord guaranteed His presence with Gideon (see also v. 12). Because of the Lord's presence, victory was assured. The idea of mighty Midian having no more power than one man was the Lord's way of reassuring Gideon he could successfully fulfill God's calling on his life. God was molding Gideon into a mature believer.

In what ways do our uncertainties or lack of experience lead us to doubt the very presence of God in our lives?

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Focus on Judges 6:16. Paraphrase the verse as if God were guaranteeing your victory over your biggest problem. Put yourself and your challenges in the verse. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by putting yourself in the verse? How does this verse speak to your biggest problem?

A FIRST STEP (JUDG. 6:25-27)

VERSES 25-26

²⁵ **On that very night the LORD said to him, “Take your father’s young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then tear down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Build a well-constructed altar to the LORD your**

God on the top of this rock. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down.”

In verses 17-24, Gideon requested a sign from the Angel of the Lord as an indication of God’s favor. He gave the Angel a gift of meat from a young goat and unleavened bread. The Angel of the Lord touched the gift with his staff, fire consumed the meat and bread, and then he vanished from Gideon’s sight (v. 21). Realizing that this visitor was an angel, Gideon built an altar and worshiped the Lord (v. 24).

On that very night, the Lord instructed Gideon to **tear down the altar of Baal** that stood at his father’s house. The existence of a family altar shows how pervasive the worship of Baal had become. Before Gideon could defeat the Midianites, he had to confront the paganism within his own family.

Gideon was to **cut down the Asherah** [uh SHEE ruh] **pole**. Asherah poles, first recorded in Exodus 34:13, were associated with pagan worship. According to ancient mythology, Asherah was the wife of El, and her most famous son was Baal.

After God told Gideon to destroy the objects of pagan worship, the Lord instructed him to build an **altar to the LORD** on the site. Gideon was to use the wood from the Asherah pole as fuel for the burnt offering. He would transform a place to worship Baal into a place to worship the Lord.

VERSE 27

²⁷ So Gideon took 10 of his male servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night.

Perhaps the fact that Gideon took 10 of his male servants indicates his timidity. Or, perhaps, the sheer size of the pagan altar and Asherah pole required assistance. We might give Gideon the benefit of the doubt as to why he recruited 10 servants to help him, but this verse clearly communicates timidity in that Gideon was too afraid to do it in the daytime, so **he did it at night**.

We can criticize Gideon’s continued timid approach to the Lord’s plan. Or we can celebrate the fact that Gideon did what God instructed him to do, in spite of his apprehension. In this, we can find encouragement in recognizing that Gideon overcame some of his anxiety. His accomplishments should be interpreted as progress



toward the goal of spiritual maturity.

What are the first steps you would recommend to help a person move toward the goal of spiritual maturity?

A FATHER'S DEFENSE (JUDG. 6:28-32)

VERSES 28-30

²⁸ When the men of the city got up in the morning, they found Baal's altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it cut down, and the second bull offered up on the altar that had been built. ²⁹ They said to each other, "Who did this?" After they made a thorough investigation, they said, "Gideon son of Joash did it." ³⁰ Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he tore down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

Gideon's fears of the men of the city were justified. When they awoke the next morning, they discovered their pagan worship site destroyed. They were angry and inquired among themselves who did it. Their investigation identified Gideon as the guilty person.

With Gideon identified, the men of the city demanded that Joash, Gideon's father, surrender his son to them. They intended to kill Gideon.

VERSES 31-32

³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead Baal's case for him? Would you save him? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead his own case because someone tore down his altar." ³² That day, Gideon's father called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead his case with him," because he tore down his altar.

Joash staunchly defended the actions of his son. He began to question the men, wanting to know if their intent was to plead Baal's case for him.

Joash warned that anyone who pleaded for Baal would be put to death. He probably aimed this warning at anyone who tried to harm his son or who tried to turn his property back into a place to worship Baal. He then added, ***If he [Baal] is a god, let him plead his own case.*** God had declared to the Israelites that vengeance was His, and He would repay. Baal himself should deal with the one who tore down his altar.

What might the writer have been attempting to communicate regarding Joash? Recall that the pagan altar of Baal and the Asherah pole belonged to him (v. 25). Yet here, Joash defended Gideon and his actions. Could Gideon's spiritual development have inspired Joash? Did Joash, encouraged by the courageous action of his son, renounce his own worship of pagan deities and return to the true worship of God? Perhaps Gideon's service of the Lord motivated Joash to do likewise.

How has God drawn you closer to Himself by working in the lives of those around you?

To commemorate the event, Joash gave his son a new name: ***Jerubbaal*** [JER uhb-BAY uhl]. The name means "let Baal contend." Perhaps in a mocking manner, Gideon's new name challenged Baal to defend himself. Obviously, Baal did nothing since Baal was only an idol. The name would serve as a reminder of Baal's impotence.

In chapters 7 and 8, God continued to mold Gideon into a mature leader and to work through him to secure victories for His people. Outnumbered 135,000 (8:10) to 32,000 (7:3), the Lord instructed Gideon to reduce his soldiers lest, when experiencing victory, Israel might boast, saying: "I did it myself" (7:2). Gideon dismissed 22,000 soldiers (7:3). Of the 10,000 remaining, Gideon, again at the Lord's instruction, reduced them to 300 (7:6-7). The Lord told Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men" (7:7).

Gideon armed his soldiers not with swords and shields but with trumpets and torches (concealed inside a pitcher). During a momentary lull in the security of the Midianite camp (7:19), Gideon and his 300 soldiers blew the trumpets and shattered the pitchers to expose their torches. The confused and frightened Midian army broke ranks and fled. "So Midian was subdued before the Israelites, and they were no longer a threat" (8:28). The writer of Judges also recorded: "The land was peaceful 40 years during the days of Gideon" (8:28). The Lord utilized a timid servant to bring about complete victory for His people.

IN MY CONTEXT



- God often uses weak and imperfect people to bring about His purposes, knowing they will have a greater dependence on Him.
- Christians grow spiritually by obeying God.
- God is more than capable of defending Himself and His followers.

As a Bible study group, list sources of insecurity a person may have. Discuss as a group how God can work through the insecurities listed. Record insights gained about the sources of insecurity that give you the greatest difficulty.

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Identify actions you can take to strengthen your faith. What plans do you have for taking the actions you have identified?

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Identify ways Christ defends Himself in our world. What is your role in pointing others to Jesus? Whom do you need to challenge to consider the truth of the gospel, and how will you do so?

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MEMORY VERSE

“But I will be with you,” the LORD said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.” —Judges 6:16