

TIMID WARRIOR

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

JUDGES 6:11-16,25-32

MEMORY VERSE: JUDGES 6:16

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Judges 6:1–12:15, First Thoughts (p. 104), and Understand the Context (pp. 104-105).
- **STUDY** Judges 6:11-16,25-32, using Explore the Bible (pp. 105-109). As you study, highlight or underline the places where you see evidence of Gideon's insecurity or lack of confidence.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 110-111), More Ideas (p. 112), ideas included in *QuickSource*, and online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Group Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; and A volunteer to study Judges 6:17-24 for More Ideas (p. 112). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outlines of Joshua; Judges; Ruth*); **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Winter 2016-17*); **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line: Joshua; Judges; Ruth*); **PACK ITEM 7** (*Chart: The Judges*); and **PACK ITEM 8** (*Chart: The Oppressors of Israel*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

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?

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 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.

(In PSG, p. 103) **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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 6:1–12:15

A study of the judges reveals the basic truth that every victory was won by the Lord. The judges were merely the human instruments through whom God worked on behalf of His people. We saw in last week's lesson that Barak refused to go into battle unless accompanied by Deborah (Judg. 4:8). Deborah consented, but God won the victory for Barak and Deborah (4:15,23). In this week's passage, Gideon displays a spirit of timidity and fear. When God commissioned him to fight the Midianites, Gideon put out a fleece asking God to cover it with dew while the surrounding ground remained dry. God complied with Gideon's request (6:36-38). But Gideon was not satisfied. He asked God to reverse the process, allowing dew to appear on the ground but not on the fleece. God acquiesced to Gideon's request (6:39-40). The ensuing reduction of Gideon's army from 32,000 men down to 300 was God's way of teaching Gideon to rely on Him (7:1-8).

The story of how Gideon destroyed his father's Baal altar and Asherah pole (6:25-26) enables us to understand how Gideon mustered the courage to fight the Midianites. Thus, to understand today's session, two major themes have to guide our thinking. First, Gideon was a timid, fearful person who was the least likely to lead the Lord's army. He was counseled not to be

afraid when the Angel of the Lord appeared to him (6:23). He carried out God's assigned task but did so at night because he was too afraid to do it in the daytime (6:27). Later, he was too afraid to go to the Midianite camp unless accompanied by his servant Purah (7:10-11).

Second, the Lord was the real Deliverer of Israel. The Lord was with Gideon (6:12,16), sending him to fight the Midianites (6:14). The Lord promised to preserve Gideon's life (6:23), and "the Spirit of the LORD took control of Gideon" (6:34). The Lord promised to deliver Gideon and his 300 men (7:7). God instructed him to go into the Midianite camp because He had given it into Gideon's hand. Gideon acknowledged the promised victory in worship (7:15). At the appropriate moment, the Lord set the Midianite soldiers against each other (7:22). Toward the end of his military campaigns, Gideon pronounced that the Lord would rule over His people (8:23).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 11

The sudden appearance of *the Angel of the LORD* marks the beginning of God's direct intervention in the lives of His people in Gideon's day. Prompted by His people's sin, the Lord allowed *the Midianites* to oppress them. He disciplined them for their disobedience in revering the gods of the Amorites (Judg. 6:10).

The Angel of the Lord came to Gideon in response to the people's crying out to God (vv. 6-7). Who is this Angel of the Lord? The term *angel* means "messenger." Yet, this particular messenger is so closely associated with the Lord that to hear his voice is to hear the very voice of God. Indeed, in Judges 6:14, the Lord Himself is said to speak.

Gideon was a timid member of the tribe of Manasseh living near the Jezreel Valley. He *was threshing wheat in the wine vat* to conceal his activity from the marauding Midianites. His concealed location provided some protection but also limited his ability to separate the wheat from the chaff. Thus, our first glimpse of Gideon reveals a combination of caution and timidity.

VERSE 12

The initial message to Gideon was *the LORD is with you*. God had used the simple assurance of His presence to strengthen the resolve of His servants many times. (See, for example, Ex. 3:12 and Josh. 1:5.) The promise of God's presence is repeated in Judges 6:16.

The Angel of the LORD addressed Gideon by the title *mighty warrior*. God was about to give Gideon an assignment that would develop his strength and resolve. Gideon, who thrashed wheat in a concealed wine vat and displayed a timid personality, was not yet the mighty warrior the Lord knew he would become. God intended to mold Gideon into a mature believer through an act of service to Him.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Midianites in the Time of the Judges" in the Winter 2016-17 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

JUDGES 6:11

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.

JUDGES 6:12

¹² Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."

JUDGES 6:13

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.”

JUDGES 6:14

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?”

JUDGES 6:15

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.”

VERSE 13

Gideon’s response revealed timidity, a quivering faith at best. He addressed the Angel of the Lord with suspicious respect by saying *please Sir*. Gideon voiced his doubts by asking: **if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened?** Gideon was referring to the seven years of oppressive actions by the Midianites enumerated in Judges 6:1-6. He buttressed his doubt of God’s presence by noting the conspicuous lack of His *wonders* spoken of by their *fathers*. God’s wonders refer to the many redemptive acts performed on Israel’s behalf, particularly when He brought them *out of Egypt*.

Gideon’s exasperation was tangible as he said, **But now the LORD has abandoned us**. Throughout this passage the use of *the LORD*, the covenant name for God, reminds the reader of God’s faithfulness even when His servants expressed doubt. Gideon interpreted Midian’s oppression as God’s abandonment. He failed to notice that the Lord was using the Midianites to teach Israel about their dependence on Him.

VERSE 14

The Lord reaffirmed the promise of His presence. Presumably the Angel of the Lord was still the speaker, but the text reads simply **the LORD**. The abruptness of this shift might indicate God’s displeasure with Gideon’s misreading of the situation. After all, Israel had abandoned the Lord, not the other way around.

The Lord commissioned Gideon to do two things. First, he was to **go in the strength** he had. From Gideon’s perspective, he had too little strength, far insufficient to take on the Midianites. From the Lord’s perspective, Gideon had all the strength he needed. As Gideon would discover, the Lord Himself was his strength. Second, God knew precisely what needed to be done, so he commissioned Gideon to **deliver Israel from the power of Midian**. According to Judges 6:1, the Lord had handed Israel over to Midian, so He could just as easily deliver Israel from Midian.

The rhetorical question, **am I not sending you?**, demands an affirmative answer. God was indeed sending Gideon. Though Gideon seemed at the time to be confused and timid, the Lord would mold him into a capable leader. This question reaffirms the promise of Judges 6:12, “the LORD is with you.”

VERSE 15

Like Moses before him (Ex. 3:11), Gideon protested his call on the grounds of personal inadequacy. His question, **how can I deliver Israel?**, revealed Gideon’s deep-seated conviction that he could not liberate his people.

To bolster his argument, Gideon declared his family or clan was **the weakest in Manasseh**. The tribe of Manasseh was one of the largest in Israel and received tribal lands on both sides of the Jordan River. Gideon further revealed his timidity by self-identifying as **the youngest in my father’s house**. The word *youngest* renders a Hebrew word that also carries the ideas of being “little,” “trifling,” or “insignificant.” Gideon was not the man for God’s job, at least from his own self-deprecating viewpoint.

VERSE 16

God's counter to Gideon's overwhelming sense of inadequacy was a robust reiteration of His presence: **but I will be with you.** This is the third time in this short passage (6:11-16) that the Lord guaranteed to be present with Gideon. In each instance the Lord gave timid Gideon an appropriate aspect of his calling. In the first instance, Gideon was given the title "mighty warrior" (v. 12). In the second instance, Gideon was given the commission to go in the strength he had to deliver Israel from the power of Midian (v. 14). In the present verse, Gideon was given the assurance of victory: **you will strike Midian down as if it were one man.** 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 PSG, p. 106) **In what ways do our uncertainties or lack of experience lead us to doubt the very presence of God in our lives?**

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

VERSES 25-26

The Lord spoke to Gideon **on that very night**, signifying the evening of the same day Gideon had constructed the altar to the Lord in Ophrah (v. 24). That night, God gave Gideon two specific instructions. First, he was to take two of his father's bulls: a **young bull and a second bull seven years old.** The young bull was not mentioned again in Judges. The second bull was later sacrificed.

Second, Gideon was to **tear down the altar of Baal** belonging to his father and **cut down the Asherah pole beside it.** Before Gideon could deliver Israel from the Midianites, he had to take the first step of ridding his own family of idol worship.

God instructed Gideon to **build a well-constructed altar to the LORD.** The Hebrew term rendered *well-constructed* referred to precisely laid rows of stones. Interestingly, the same term referred to the alignment of armies for battle (1 Sam. 4:2; 17:26). In the present context, the term referred to the special care Gideon was to take in building the altar by carefully aligning the stones. However, the metaphorical sense of preparing for spiritual battle might apply as well.

The Lord told Gideon to build the altar **on the top of this rock.** The Hebrew term refers to a place of safety and protection. In Gideon's case, the specific location might have been a safe place the town's people fled to during a Midianite attack. The symbolism was powerful. The altar would be used to worship Yahweh, the ultimate protection and safe place for the Israelites. As the people fled to their safe place, they would be fleeing toward the altar of the Lord.

JUDGES 6:16

¹⁶ "But I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man."

JUDGES 6:25-26

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."

JUDGES 6:27

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.

JUDGES 6:28

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.

JUDGES 6:29

²⁹ They said to each other, "Who did this?" After they made a thorough investigation, they said, "Gideon son of Joash did it."

Gideon was instructed to sacrifice the **second bull** as a **burnt offering** using **the wood of the Asherah pole** he had cut down. The burnt offering was specifically to restore the relationship with God and to atone for sin. The wooden Asherah pole, once representing the Canaanite goddess Asherah and garnering Israel's misguided worship, was used as firewood to consume the burnt offering. The image of false religion was destroyed in the process of reestablishing true religion.

VERSE 27

Gideon took 10 of his male servants, a certain indication his family was not quite as poor as he indicated earlier (Judg. 6:15). The affirmation that he **did as the LORD had told him** indicates Gideon was maturing in his faith in God. He was taking these first steps of obedience to become God's mighty warrior. Yet his timidity was not so easily vanquished. Gideon was **afraid of his father's household and the men of the city**. Instead of obeying God in the broad light of daytime, he carried out his mission clandestinely at night.

What first steps has God led you to take to develop your maturity as a believer and signify your commitment to Him?

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

VERSE 28

The morning after Gideon's nighttime mission, **the men of the city** discovered three things. First, **Baal's altar** had been **torn down**. Second, the **Asherah pole** beside the altar had been **cut down**. Finally, **the second bull** had been **offered up on the altar that had been built**. Perhaps the bull had been previously designated as an offering to Baal. These three discoveries confirmed Gideon's complete obedience to God's command.

Ironically, the worshipers of Baal and Asherah became the first witnesses of God's guidance of Gideon. The Lord had given Gideon a simple, achievable task in order to strengthen his resolve for greater challenges later. The purpose of this task was to build Gideon's trust in the Lord.

VERSE 29

Gideon's fear of the men of the town (v. 27) was well founded, as indicated by their reaction the next morning. The men of the city asked: **Who did this?** Then **they made a thorough investigation** and discovered **Gideon son of Joash did it**. One wonders what the investigation entailed, but no details were given. The Hebrew writer utilized two verbs side-by-side, both meaning "to seek" or "to search," to emphasize the intensity of the probe. One scholar noted that "a secret known to ten men is no secret," so tracing the destruction of the Baal altar back to Gideon would not have been difficult.

VERSE 30

The men of the city demonstrated their devotion to their idols by insisting Gideon **must die**. They commanded Gideon's father, Joash, saying, **bring out your son**. The verb *bring out* is in the command mode. The crowd was angry. Gideon was to be executed because he tore down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole. Ironically, the very actions that put Gideon in good standing with the Lord put him in bad standing with society.

VERSE 31

Joash challenged all who stood against him clamoring for Gideon's life. His two rhetorical questions (**Would you plead Baal's case for him? Would you save him?**) answered the men's religious zeal in defending Baal with a negative comment about Baal's inability to defend himself. Joash insisted that if Baal were real, then whoever pleaded his case would **be put to death by morning!** Through Gideon's actions, Joash had been reminded that Baal was a false god. Since it was Baal's altar someone tore down, Joash told the mob: **if he is a god, let him plead his own case.**

Joash refused to hand Gideon over to the men for execution. He mockingly challenged them, calling on Baal to defend his altar if he was really worthy. Joash's refusal to surrender his son to the mob seemingly facilitated his own spiritual journey back to the Lord.

(In PSG, p. 109) **How has God drawn you closer to Himself by working in the lives of those around you?**

VERSE 32

Often, moments of great spiritual import give rise to major changes in people's lives. Joash changed Gideon's name to **Jerubbaal** [JER uhb-BAY uhl] to mark the destruction of the altar of Baal. The name *Jerubbaal* means "let Baal contend." God was molding Gideon into a mature believer, but He started by giving him the assignment of destroying the family altar dedicated to Baal. From this decisive moment, Joash decided to defend his son instead of handing him over to an execution squad. Henceforth, Gideon would be called Jerubbaal. Every time his name was mentioned, people would be reminded that Baal was called to defend himself but never showed. Thus, Jerubbaal became a reminder of the sin of trusting an impotent idol.

Did God's discipline and molding of Gideon succeed? We read in Judges 7:1-25 that Gideon delivered God's people from the hands of the Midianites with only 300 men. He also was victorious over other Midianite rulers before his death (8:1-35). God worked through a timid leader to secure victory.

JUDGES 6:30

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."

JUDGES 6:31

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."

JUDGES 6:32

³² That day, Gideon's father called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead his case with him," because he tore down his altar.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: As the group arrives, invite volunteers to name their favorite sports team. Note that while we all enjoy cheering for winning teams, some of us may have a favorite team that is always the underdog.

DISCUSS: *Why do you think people are drawn to the underdog? What makes the underdog so appealing?* (PSG, p. 103)

LOOK: Quickly review the events covered to this point in our study of Judges. Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Joshua; Judges; Ruth*), **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Winter 2016-17*), and **Pack Item 4** (*Time Line: Joshua; Judges; Ruth*) as visual guides to aid your discussion.

TRANSITION: *Let's turn to Judges 6 to see how God raised up an unlikely underdog named Gideon to become a strong servant.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Briefly summarize the information in Understand the Context (pp. 104-105; PSG, pp. 103-104). Then call for a volunteer to read the third paragraph on page 103 in the PSG beginning with, "In today's study, we find a judge ..." to set the stage for today's study on Gideon. Invite another volunteer to read Judges 6:11-16 aloud, noting that God saw Gideon's potential, while Gideon could only see his own inadequacies.

GUIDE: Instruct the group to silently read the paragraphs under Verses 11-12 in the PSG (pp. 104-105) and underline some of the facts they find about (1) the Midianites, (2) the Angel of the Lord, and (3) why Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine vat. Call for volunteers to share what they learned.

DISCUSS: *What do we learn about Gideon in verses 11-16? How did the Angel of the Lord describe Gideon? How did Gideon describe himself to the Angel of the Lord? What did God promise Gideon? Does the way we see ourselves always align with the way God sees us? Explain.*

EXPLAIN: *The Lord's promise, "I will be with you," was the ultimate answer for all of Gideon's worries and concerns about his weaknesses. The same holds true for us today: God goes with us when we are serving Him.*

DISCUSS: *In what ways do our uncertainties or lack of experience lead us to doubt the very presence of God in our lives?* (PSG, p. 106)

TRANSITION: *Now let's see God's bold instructions for Gideon in verses 25-27.*

READ: Use the information in the first paragraph under Verses 25-26 (PSG, p. 107) to help fill in the events that occurred in verses 17-24. Then direct someone to read aloud Judges 6:25-27, pointing out God's bold instructions and Gideon's mixed reaction. Point out that God called for Gideon to get rid of the idol worship, starting within his own family.

DISCUSS: *Where do we see evidence of Gideon's confidence? Evidence of his lack of confidence? When are we guilty of not fully trusting God? How can we encourage each other to trust God more?*

SHARE: *We don't know if Gideon took 10 servants with him because it was a big job to be done or because he lacked confidence to go alone. The Bible does tell us that he went at night because of his fear of being seen during the day.*

DISCUSS: *What are the first steps you would recommend to help a person move toward the goal of spiritual maturity? (PSG, p. 108)*

TRANSITION: *Let's look at verses 28-32 to see how Gideon's father steps into this story.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Judges 6:28-32, as the group listens for how Gideon's father defended his son's actions. Use the information under Verses 30-32 in Explore the Text (p. 109) to help the group better understand Joash's actions and motivations.

DISCUSS: *How has God drawn you closer to Himself by working in the lives of those around you? (PSG, p. 109)*

SHARE: *We might not feel much like mighty warriors, but with God's help, we have all the resources we need to complete the task in front of us. Our boldness can also give others courage.*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the last two paragraphs under Verses 31-32 (PSG, p. 109) to help the group recall the rest of the story of Gideon's life. Point out **Pack Item 7** (Chart: *The Judges*) and **Pack Item 8** (Chart: *The Oppressors of Israel*) to help emphasize Gideon's role as a judge and his major accomplishments.

DISCUSS: *As Gideon influenced his father, how might a person's Christian service influence others?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

ASK: *How can God use us despite our moments of timidity or lack of confidence? How does our continued obedience to God over time help to grow our faith? When we lack confidence in ourselves, how can we refocus to place our confidence in God?*

DIRECT: Encourage the group to consider their responses to the questions under In My Context (PSG, p. 110). Focus attention on the first question set: *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.* Allow time for volunteers to share their responses.

DO: Challenge the group to focus on God's sufficiency when they lack the confidence needed to serve God well.

PRAY: Ask God to strengthen and grow every member of the group into a fully mature believer as he or she serves Him day by day.



PRACTICE

- Compare your faith to Gideon's. *Are there areas where you are timid?* Look for opportunities to grow your faith through acts of service and obedience to God.
- Send the group a text message or email encouraging them to grow their faith by daily obedience to God in every area of life.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the introduction, display a to-do list or your planner or calendar on your smartphone. Sometimes we feel like we just cannot get it done—whatever the task might be. Ask: *When have you felt overwhelmed by a job or task?*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement Judges 6:11-16, ask: *How can insecurity become debilitating?* Allow time for volunteers to respond. Then call for a volunteer to read Hebrews 11:1,32-34. Stress that from the humble, insecure beginnings we see in Judges 6:11-16, with God's help, Gideon went on to become the man of faith we read about in Hebrews 11.
- To supplement Judges 6:25-27, pre-enlist a volunteer to study Judges 6:17-24 and briefly tell the events that occurred between Gideon and God in those verses.
- To supplement Judges 6:28-32, discuss: *How did Joash defend his son Gideon against the angry men of the city? How did Joash mock the men? Do we need to "defend" God? In what ways does God defend Himself?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Call attention to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 110): *Identify actions you can take to strengthen your faith. What plans do you have for taking the actions you have identified?* Call for volunteers to share responses. Encourage the group to implement one or more of these actions for a strengthened faith.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Read the words to "All the Way My Savior Leads Me," by Fanny Crosby, to encourage the group to look to Jesus' leadership as they seek to grow in obedience to Him.