

God Makes a Mighty Warrior

Summary and Goal

Gideon, though a weak and cowardly leader, was used by God to deliver His people from the enemy. In the life of Gideon, we see how the God who sends us out to do His will is the same God who gives us strength to fulfill His will in obedience. God assures us of His love through His patience and kindness toward us, and He reveals His good and loving character by bringing victory through weakness. In response to God's grace, we are to answer God's call to service and trust in Him to empower our obedience.

Main Passages

Judges 6:11-16,36-40

Judges 7:16-22

Session Outline

1. Our strength comes from God who sends us (Judg. 6:11-16).
2. Our assurance comes from God who shows patience (Judg. 6:36-40).
3. Our victory comes from God who saves through weakness (Judg. 7:16-22).

Theological Theme

The strength to obey God and join Him on mission does not come from within us but from God's empowering Spirit.

Christ Connection

God called Gideon to be part of His plan to defeat the enemy, and He went to great lengths to assure Gideon of His presence and power. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God now assures us of His presence and power as we take part in His plan of worldwide redemption.

Missional Application

God calls us to service, trusting that the God who sends is also the God who strengthens us for the task.

Session Plan

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Session 9

Pack Item 8: The Judges Map

For this session, highlight:

- Gideon's location
- Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, the tribes comprising his army (Judg. 6:35)

Point 1 Option

Before the group meeting, enlist a volunteer to read the "Essential Christian Doctrine" *Calling* (leader p. 108; PSG p. 85) and to share his or her testimony of God's call to salvation through the proclamation of the gospel.

Note: Perhaps someone who came to faith in Christ during his or her adult years would make the experience of God's call most vivid.

? For Further Discussion

What are some people's responses in the Bible to being in the presence of God or of an angel?

How might this affect the way we view our time in prayer and worship?

Introduction

Remind the group about the state of Israel during the period of the judges, making note of the cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance (*refer again to Pack Item 7: The Judges*). Speak about how on this occasion when God heard His people's cries, He sent a prophet before He sent a judge, someone to help them learn that holiness is more important than the absence of pain (leader p. 106; PSG p. 83).

- ? What's the difference between these prayers: "God, please deliver me from this trial" and "God, don't let me out of this trial until I have grown from it"?

Summarize the session on the story of Gideon—a weak and cowardly judge who nevertheless was used by God to deliver His people from the enemy (leader p. 107; PSG p. 84).

1. Our strength comes from God who sends us (Judg. 6:11-16).

Read Judges 6:11-16. Then describe Gideon's calling and God's promise to be with him. Show the similarity between our own tendencies and Gideon's questioning of God during difficult circumstances. Connect God's promise to be with Gideon with Christ's promise to be with us (leader pp. 107-108; PSG pp. 84-85).

- ? What aspects of obedience to God's mission make you feel inadequate, or "not up to the task"?

Highlight that Gideon seemed to understand that he was having a divine encounter because he addressed the angel as "LORD." Remark upon why Gideon's terror in God's presence might seem strange to us. Point out that we might need *more* of Gideon's awe at the presence of God (leader p. 109; PSG p. 86).

- ? What aspects of God's presence might startle us?
- ? What aspects of God's presence comfort and embolden us?

2. Our assurance comes from God who shows patience (Judg. 6:36-40).

Briefly remind the group that God called Gideon to destroy objects of idolatrous worship and practice, evidence of His love for His people (leader pp. 109-110; PSG pp. 86-87).

- ❓ What would have been the result if God had delivered His people even while they still were pursuing idols?
- ❓ Why is it important for God to deliver us not only from trials on the outside but also from idolatry on the inside?

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 6:36-40. Address the issue of “laying out a fleece” to discover God’s will by noting that this passage is descriptive rather than prescriptive, displaying one of Gideon’s *weaknesses* rather than his strengths. Show how the story reveals God’s patience with our lack of faith (leader pp. 110-111; PSG pp. 87-88).

- ❓ When have you asked the Lord for some sort of sign to prove you were on the right track? What was the result?

3. Our victory comes from God who saves through weakness (Judg. 7:16-22).

Explain how Gideon’s story demonstrates God’s power working salvation through human weakness, both in Gideon himself and in the size of his army. Then read Judges 7:16-22. Communicate how this manner of victory showed that the battle belonged to the Lord. Connect this truth with our weakness and God’s strength with respect to sin and evangelism (leader pp. 111-112; PSG pp. 88-89).

- ❓ The mind-set of our world is that great things are accomplished by strong people. How does the story of Gideon turn that mind-set upside down?
- ❓ How does Gideon’s story give you hope in your weakness?

Conclusion

Recall that the greatest example of God securing a victory on our behalf through weakness is through the cross of Jesus Christ (*refer to “Gideon’s Army of 300” on Pack Item 4: Seeing Jesus in the Promised Land*). Tell the group that we don’t sign up for God’s mission because of the power *we* have to offer but because of the presence *God* has promised (leader p. 113; PSG p. 90). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission” (PSG p. 91).*

Point 2 Option

Before the group meeting, enlist a volunteer to research the distinction between descriptive passages and prescriptive passages in the Bible. Ask the person in 3-4 minutes to explain to the group the differences between these two kinds of passages (perhaps giving a couple of examples) and why this distinction is important in interpreting and applying Scripture.

Christ Connection: God called Gideon to be part of His plan to defeat the enemy, and He went to great lengths to assure Gideon of His presence and power. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God now assures us of His presence and power as we take part in His plan of worldwide redemption.

Missional Application: God calls us to service, trusting that the God who sends is also the God who strengthens us for the task.

Expanded Session Content

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Session 9

Voices from the Church

“Gideon’s story is much bigger than...Gideon. Like everything else in the Bible, his story is actually about God and His people. It tells of His love for them, His enduring and boundless mercy toward them, and His strength operating in spite of—even through—weakness in them.”¹

—Priscilla Shirer

Introduction

As we continue our journey through the storyline of Scripture, we see how the Judges cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance continued. In Judges 6, the Lord gave the people over to their enemies for a period of seven years. The situation was dire. God’s people were forced to hide out in their own land, in dens they made for themselves in the mountains. Meanwhile, their enemies, the Midianites, overran their land, devoured their produce, and took their livestock. The author describes the state of Israel this way: “And Israel was brought very low because of Midian” (Judg. 6:6).

“Brought very low.” This is the inevitable result of following the path of sin. Sin never fulfills like we are tempted to believe; it always brings us low. It takes away and destroys. No wonder Satan is referred to as the deceiver of the world (Rev. 12:9). He promises something that he never delivers on. Sin promises delight but brings shame and condemnation.

This time, however, when God heard His people’s cries, He chose not to send a judge at first but a prophet. The people needed someone to deliver them, but God chose to send them someone to proclaim His word to them. The prophet’s words reminded the people of God’s grace (Judg. 6:8-9), His commands (v. 10a), and why they stood accused (v. 10b). God didn’t send this prophet simply to slap their wrist and say, “I told you so.” Instead, He gave them His word as part of rescuing His people. He wanted them to learn the truth.

Sometimes we desire to escape difficult circumstances when God desires for us to interpret them and learn from them. God’s plan is not just to bring relief but also to bring about growth in His people. Holiness is more important than the absence of pain. If holiness truly becomes our greatest desire, then there is even profit from pain because we know God uses our trials to shape and equip us (Jas. 1:2-4).



What’s the difference between these prayers: “God, please deliver me from this trial” and “God, don’t let me out of this trial until I have grown from it”?

Session Summary

In this session, we will study the story of Gideon—a weak and cowardly judge who nevertheless was used by God to deliver His people from the enemy. In the life of Gideon, we see how the God who sends us out to do His will is the same God who gives us strength to fulfill His will in obedience. God assures us of His love through His patience and kindness toward us, and He reveals His good and loving character by bringing victory through weakness. In response to God’s grace, we are to answer God’s call to service and trust in Him to empower our obedience.

1. Our strength comes from God who sends us (Judg. 6:11-16).

After God sent a prophet to deliver His message, He raised up an unlikely man and chose to make a mighty warrior out of Him. Take a look at the calling of Gideon:

¹¹ Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, 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, sir, 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.”

When God came to Gideon, He made an incredible promise to him: “I will be with you.” Notice how this section begins with the Angel of the Lord assuring Gideon of His presence (“The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor”) and ends with the same promise (“But I will be with you”). Surprisingly, Gideon responded by questioning God’s promise—*If God was with them, then why had He allowed Midian to oppress them?*

Further Commentary

“The dialogue between the angel of the Lord and Gideon is not without its humorous undertones, as Gideon, described as ‘a mighty man of valour’ (v. 12) and as the prospective saviour of his people, protests, in contrast, his utter inadequacy and weakness. However, it is when a man is fully conscious of his own weakness and the difficulties of the situation that the Lord can take and use him. The man who relies upon his own innate strength is not likely to draw upon the Lord’s grace, nor give him the glory for anything that is achieved. It is also equally true that the Lord saw not only the man that was—weak and timorous, but the man that could be—strong, resolute and courageous.”²

—Arthur Ernest Cundall

Voices from Church History

"[God's] purpose is for me to depend on Him and on His power *now*. If I can stay calm, faithful, and unconfused while in the middle of the turmoil of life, the goal of the purpose of God is being accomplished in me."³

—Oswald Chambers
(1874-1917)

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

67. Calling

The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the gospel and internally through the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are essential, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

Like Gideon, we sometimes fail to see our sin and our guilt, and so we rush to blame God for whatever we are going through. Sometimes our difficult circumstances are brought about by our own sinfulness, not because God has been unfaithful. Gideon's perspective shows why God first sent the word of a prophet—He wanted His people to know they were at fault and needed deliverance.

Next, Gideon protested against God's commission on the basis of his inadequacy ("I am the least in my father's house"). God's response ("I will be with you") was a reminder that the power of deliverance was not in Gideon but in God's presence.

The scene is reminiscent of how Moses responded when God commissioned him. In both cases, the problem was one of perspective. Both Gideon and Moses first looked to themselves for their source of strength and (to their credit) acknowledged their deficiency. But God called them to turn their eyes to Him and His adequacy.

God often assures His people by pointing them to His presence (Gen. 28:15; 46:4; Isa. 41:10). His company has always been our source of strength in the midst of the storms of life. That's why, with the psalmist, we say: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Ps. 23:4).

"But I will be with you." Everything that Gideon needed was supplied in that brief statement. Basically, God has nothing else or more to offer you. You can go through a lot with that promise. It does not answer your questions about details. It only provides the essentials. Nothing about when or how or where or why. Only the what, or better, the Who. "I will be with you"—and that is enough.

As followers of Christ, we trust in Jesus' promise to empower us through His Spirit (Acts 1:8). No matter how inadequate we may feel, God sees us and says: "Mighty warriors!" The strength to obey God and join Him on mission does not come from within us but from God's empowering Spirit. It's no wonder that the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations") ends with the same promise (Matt. 28:20: "I am with you always").



What aspects of obedience to God's mission make you feel inadequate, or "not up to the task"?

Gideon seemed to understand that he was having a divine encounter. In Judges 6:13, he called the angel “Sir” and then changed the address to “LORD” in verse 15. To ensure that the message was real, He asked for a sign (vv. 17-21). God granted Gideon’s request and convinced him of His presence, but the presence of God made Gideon fear for his life. Only after receiving reassurance from God did Gideon respond in worship.

On the surface, it seems strange that Gideon responded with such terror to being in God’s presence. Don’t we *want* to sense God close to us? Don’t we *yearn* for His presence in our lives? Perhaps the strangeness of Gideon’s reaction is a sign that we have forgotten what an incredible gift it is to have access to God’s power and presence.

In the days of the temple in the Old Testament, only the high priest could go once a year behind the veil that separated the holy of holies (God’s presence) from the people of God. When Jesus was crucified, this veil was torn in two. And after His ascension, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to empower us and give us His presence forever. Maybe we need *more* of Gideon’s awe at the presence of God so we can be truly grateful for God’s presence and power and be stirred up to worship God for who He is.

- ❓ What aspects of God’s presence might startle us?
- ❓ What aspects of God’s presence comfort and embolden us?

2. Our assurance comes from God who shows patience (Judg. 6:36-40).

Before we read the part of Gideon’s story that he is most known for (setting out a fleece to hear from God), we need to remember how God called Gideon to pull down the altar of Baal and then cut down the Asherah pole (6:25-26). “Asherah” referred to a divine goddess and the sacred wooden poles erected at places where she was worshiped. Gideon was to set up an altar to the Lord and then sacrifice a bull, using the wood from the Asherah pole.

Why did God give such a command? Because two altars cannot coexist side by side. You cannot have an altar to God (v. 24) and an altar to Baal (v. 25)—they are mutually exclusive. God was coming to the rescue of His people, and (as we’ve seen) He promised them His presence, but because of the presence of God, all the false gods must flee.

Voices from the Church

“Before they can throw off the enemies around them (the Midianites), they have to throw off the enemies among them (the false idols of Canaan). This is always the main way that we get renewal in our lives. God will not help us out of your obvious, visible problems (money problems, relationship problems, etc.) until we see the idols that we are worshiping right beside the LORD. They have to be removed first.”⁴

—Tim Keller

Further Commentary

“Gideon’s test of Yahweh occurs in two stages. First, he proposes to lay a fleece of wool on the threshing floor overnight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground around it is dry, then he will know [and presumably accept] that Yahweh will fulfill his promise to deliver Israel through him...God’s demonstration of the veracity of his word exceeds normal expectations. In the morning the fleece is so wet Gideon is able to wring a bowl of water from it. Unlike Yahweh, Gideon is not true to his word. Gideon’s refusal to believe and/or accept the divine word and the divine sign leaves the reader suspicious that Gideon is trying to get out of his assignment. In any case, although he initiates his new demand apologetically, this should not blind the reader to the manner in which Gideon is trying to manipulate God. As we have witnessed so often before, the remarkable fact is that Yahweh lets himself be manipulated. Despite the nation’s spiritual disaffection, he is obviously more interested in preserving his people than they are in preserving themselves.”⁵

—Daniel I. Block

God loves us too much to allow rival idols to exist in our hearts. The most loving thing God can do for us is to expose and demolish our idols. He knows that true satisfaction is found when we lose our idols because only then can His presence be most felt. As the psalmist declared: “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully” (Ps. 24:3-4).

- ❓ What would have been the result if God had delivered His people even while they still were pursuing idols?
- ❓ Why is it important for God to deliver us not only from trials on the outside but also from idolatry on the inside?

Once the idols had been demolished and Gideon’s task was clear, we see this man wobbling in his faith, wondering if God’s direction was true or not. Let’s take a look:

³⁶ Then Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, ³⁷ behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said.” ³⁸ And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew.” ⁴⁰ And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Ever heard someone say, “Why don’t you lay out a fleece and see what God says?” This is where that saying comes from. But it’s important to note that this text is not meant to be prescriptive—as if this were something we all should follow. Gideon’s demand for a sign, even two, was one of his *weaknesses*, not strengths.

The word Gideon used is “test”—a direct violation of Deuteronomy 6:16, where humans are prohibited from testing God. Even Gideon seemed to understand that what he was doing was not what God desired (he even asked God not to be angry with him!). Gideon had heard from God and knew His will (Judg. 6:14-16,36).

But before we pounce on Gideon to condemn him, we ought to recognize in this story a realistic picture of the doubt, fear, and lack of faith that we face whenever we struggle to follow something the Lord has clearly shown us. No, this story isn't here to show us how to set out a fleece to test God. But neither is it here for us to bash Gideon's lack of faith. Instead, the point of the story is to reveal God's patience with us when we find it hard to trust Him. God is willing to stoop down and reassure us when we are afraid.

 When have you asked the Lord for some sort of sign to prove you were on the right track? What was the result?

3. Our victory comes from God who saves through weakness (Judg. 7:16-22).

The victory of Israel over Midian is one of the most extraordinary battle accounts in the Old Testament. God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). This has been the major theme of Gideon's life—his lack of status and relative obscurity (Judg. 6:15), his fear of the Midianites in threshing out the wheat in a winepress (6:11), his fear of family and townspeople (6:27), his need for additional assurance (6:36-40), the radical reduction of his army (7:2-8), and his fear of the battle and need for additional encouragement (7:10-15).

Gideon is not a Hollywood hero, but rather, his human weakness is highlighted throughout this story. Why? We see the answer in Judges 7:2, when God called for the reduction of Gideon's army: "Lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'" This is the key to salvation and to God's power. It is not in our effort but in our surrender. It's not about our impressive skills but about God's glory in salvation.

In Judges 7:1-8, God pared down the army from 32,000 men to 300. God insisted that His people see their cause as utterly hopeless so that they would recognize that their deliverance could only be chalked up to God's power and mercy. Along the way, God continued to reassure Gideon. And finally, Gideon worshiped God as a sign of his faith in God to accomplish His will through him.

¹⁶ And he divided the 300 men into three companies and put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars, with torches inside the jars.

¹⁷ And he said to them, "Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. ¹⁸ When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon.'"

Voices from the Church

"The Lord is merciful to work with a less-than-ideal people—people who need extra signs or encouragement and do not have the courage to attack immediately."⁶

—John Piper

Further Commentary

"Gideon's earlier hesitancy was now gone. He led his men to the battle, instructing them to follow his example. When they came to the 'outpost' at the edge of the Midianite camp, they were to blow their trumpets and to shout as their battle cry, 'For Yahweh and for Gideon.' The pairing of the Lord's name with that of Gideon strikes a discordant note. After all, this was a battle that the Lord had taken great pains to make clear would be won by His might alone, greatly reducing the size of the Israelite army so that they would not be able to boast (v. 3). The strategy worked out exactly as planned. The 'beginning of the middle watch' would be midnight. Gideon's three groups, spread out surrounding the camp, would sound like a much larger army. The element of surprise, combined by a divinely induced fear, sent the Midianites fleeing for their lives and fighting one another in the confusion. The victory was not just the result of successful psychological tactics. It was 'the LORD' who 'set' the Midianites' 'swords... against each another.'"⁷

—Iain M. Duguid,
HCSB Study Bible

Further Commentary

“After Gideon’s victory, the Israelites wanted to make Gideon their king. He refused and insisted that God was their King. Still, Gideon lived like a king, acquiring wealth ([Judg. 8:26]) and a harem (v. 30). Gideon asked every Israelite to give him a gold earring from the plunder. He fashioned the gold into an ephod. Normally, an ephod was a priestly garment, like an apron. Gideon’s ephod became an object of worship for Israel (v. 27). Gideon may have hung this golden ephod on an image, and Israel worshiped the ephod like an idol. Like other leaders in Hebrew history, Gideon began well, but he did not end well. He followed the Lord at first, but later he led Israel into idolatry. He did not influence his many sons to follow the Lord. After Gideon died, the Israelites forgot the Lord and returned to their old ways, provoking another cycle.”⁸

—J. Mark Terry,
Biblical Illustrator

¹⁹ So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰ Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” ²¹ Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. ²² When they blew the 300 trumpets, the LORD set every man’s sword against his comrade and against all the army. And the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath.



God accomplished a unique and grand victory solely through His strength and wisdom. Even the manner of victory showed the battle belonged to the Lord and He had accomplished the victory. The 300 men did not even attack; they pursued after the Midianites were fleeing.

Don’t miss the picture of God granting victory through human weakness, as long as those human beings are depending on Him. We are saved in weakness and are being saved and sustained in weakness as we rely on Him. For example:

- **Sin:** We don’t defeat sin simply by trying harder but by relying on God’s Spirit and God’s church.
- **Evangelism:** We don’t win someone to Christ by intellect or by persuasive words but by relying on God to speak through us.

In our struggle against the enemy, we recognize that God displays His power through our weakness. We win the war from the inside out—by turning our hearts to Christ in faith.

- ❓ The mind-set of our world is that great things are accomplished by strong people. How does the story of Gideon turn that mind-set upside down?
- ❓ How does Gideon’s story give you hope in your weakness?

Conclusion

The greatest example of God securing a victory on our behalf through weakness is through the cross of Jesus Christ. God stooped down and put on human flesh and came into our broken world.

The Jews expected a Messiah who would be a military ruler, but instead, God came as a Suffering Servant to bear our transgressions and be crushed for our iniquities (Isa. 52:13–53:12). He did all of this to defeat sin and death once and for all: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Not only is the cross a reflection of God’s winning the victory in weakness, but the message of the cross itself is a message that people who are relying on their own strength or intellect stumble over: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

Recognizing the strength that God displays through human weakness, we can be bold when we answer God’s call to service. We trust that the God who sends us out is the God who will sustain us on the journey. We don’t sign up for God’s mission because of the power *we* have to offer but because of the presence *God* has promised.

CHRIST CONNECTION: God called Gideon to be part of His plan to defeat the enemy, and He went to great lengths to assure Gideon of His presence and power. Through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, God now assures us of His presence and power as we take part in His plan of worldwide redemption.



Voices from Church History

“It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.”⁹

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)