

09

SESSION NINE

The Assurance of Gideon

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will study the story of Gideon—a weak and cowardly leader 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 walk 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.

SCRIPTURE

Judges 6:11-16,36-40; 7:16-22

THE POINT

God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Share the following: A major earthquake struck San Francisco on October 17, 1989. The quake lasted 10-15 seconds and measured 6.9 on the Richter Scale, causing structural damage throughout the Bay Area. The total number of deaths attributed to this event was 63 with another 3,757 injured. The Cypress Street Viaduct collapsed on the Nimitz Freeway instantly crushing many commuters. The quake took place during pregame activities of the 1989 World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics.

How do you think it must have felt to be a part of an event like that? Has there ever been a natural disaster (earthquake, tornado, hurricane, flood, blizzard, etc.) in your area that caused similar devastation? If so, how did the disaster affect your view of God? How did it affect your faith?

There are times when our faith is really strong as well as times when it is not. Most Christians go through times when they struggle to have faith. (Consider sharing a personal story of a time when you struggled to have faith.)

- **Does placing your faith in God mean everything is always going to be great? Why not? Shouldn't it?**

Things will happen to challenge our faith and obedience to God. How we respond is what matters.

Option 2

On a whiteboard, write the following question: “What is your biggest fear?” As students enter the room, give them a sheet of paper with the instruction to anonymously write down one of their greatest fears. After they have had time to write something down, collect their responses.

Read aloud some of the responses without identifying any names. Ask the students how they would counsel a friend in dealing with these individual fears.

Point out that all of us have fears, some real and some imaginary. Either way, God wants us to learn to trust in His presence and power. Share a fear with which you have struggled in the past. Explain how that fear affected you. Describe how God walked with you through it.

- **On a scale of 1 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust), how well would you rate your trust in God's presence and power—especially when you are afraid?**
- **What are some specific situations you anticipate facing this week for which we can pray about?**

Distribute paper and a pencil to each student. Direct them to write their fears in pencil. Then, instruct them to use markers to write over their fears the words of Psalm 56:3-4. Encourage students to memorize the verse and recall it whenever they are struggling to trust in God's presence and power.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God works through our weaknesses and empowers us to accomplish His will.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Gideon:** called by God to deliver the Israelites from Midian; ruled Israel as a judge for 40 years

PLOT

As our story through the Book of Judges continues, we come to a judge many people have heard of—Gideon. For most people, the story of Gideon is about gaining assurance from God concerning His will for our lives. While there is some truth to that, the story of Gideon teaches us so much more—both about God’s character and our weakness.

TIMELINE

GIDEON

God gives strength to accomplish His will.

SAMSON

God uses broken leaders to accomplish His good purposes.

RUTH AND BOAZ

A glimpse of God's love in the midst of dark times.

GOD COMMISSIONS GIDEON

As we continue our journey through the story line 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.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

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 (Judges 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.

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:

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. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." 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." 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?" 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." And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." (Judg. 6:11-16)

When God came to Gideon, he made an incredible promise to him: "The LORD is with you." Notice how this section begins with the angel of the Lord assuring Gideon of God's presence and ends with the same promise. Surprisingly, Gideon responded by questioning God's promise. If God was with them, then why had He allowed Midian to oppress them?

Like Gideon, we sometimes fail to see our sin and 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 reminds us of how Moses responded when God commissioned Him. In both cases, the problem is one of perspective. Both Gideon and Moses first looked to themselves for their source of strength and acknowledged their deficiency. But God called them to turn their eyes to Him and His adequacy.

- **What are some common "Why" questions people ask God today?** (For example: Why would God let [this] happen? Why wasn't God there for me when I needed Him? Why does God allow war and suffering?) (*p. 60, PSG*)
- **What is something you've faced in the past that you didn't understand? How did it affect your faith?** (*p. 60, PSG*)

GOD ASSURES GIDEON OF HIS PRESENCE

Before we read the part of Gideon's story that he is most known for, we need to remember how God called Gideon to pull down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah poles (6:25-26). The Asherah referred to a divine goddess, and the sacred wooden poles were located at places where she was worshipped. Gideon was to set up an altar to the Lord and then sacrifice a bull, using the wood from the Asherah poles.

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 because of the presence of the one true God, all false gods must flee.

Once the idols had been demolished and Gideon's task was clear, we see him questioning his faith, wondering if God's direction was true or not. Let's take a look:

Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, 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." 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. 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.” And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew. (Judg. 6:36-40)

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 is something we are all to follow. Gideon’s demand for a sign is one of his weaknesses, not one of his strengths.

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

But before we pounce on Gideon so quickly 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.

- **Are you sensing God calling you to do something, such as start a Bible study at your school or with a few friends? If so, in what ways has God shown patience with you? (p. 61, PSG)**

GOD GETS THE VICTORY OVER HIS ENEMIES

The victory of Israel over Midian is one of the most extraordinary battle accounts in the Old Testament. In Judges 7:1-8, God pared the army from 32,000 to 300 men. 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 worshipped God as a sign of his faith and trust in God to accomplish His will through him.

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. And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 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.’” 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.

TIMELINE

SAMUEL HEARS

Samuel hears from God.

Beginning Summer 2016

DEMAND FOR A KING

The people desire to be like the surrounding nations.

SAUL'S DOWNFALL

Israel's first king fails to obey God.

And they blew the trumpets and smashed the jars that were in their hands. 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!” Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. 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. (Judg. 7:16-22)

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

CHRIST CONNECTION

The greatest example of God securing a victory on our behalf through weakness was through the cross of Jesus Christ. God stooped down, put on human flesh, and entered 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. (See Isa. 53.) 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 gaining 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, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:18: “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.”

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.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Calling

The call 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).

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **When it comes to obeying God and following His will, what makes you feel inadequate or “not up to the task”?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is it important for God to deliver us not only from trials on the outside, but also from idolatry on the inside?** *The Israelites had their external trials with the Midianites, but it was their internal heart trials with idolatry that led to their current situation. Salvation from their external trials wouldn't have changed the fact that they were still living in sin and disobedience. They needed to focus on the internal problem first, which would eventually deliver them from their external ones.*
- **When have you asked the Lord for some sort of sign to prove you were on the right track? What was the result?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **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 hope to you in your weakness?** *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 men and women of valor!” The strength to obey God and join Him and accomplish His will does not come from within us, but from God's empowering Spirit.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Sometimes we desire to escape difficult circumstances when God desires for us to face 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 (James 1:2).

- **What are some lessons you have learned during difficult times?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why is the desire to grow in holiness better than a desire to have an easy life void of any hardships?** *This question isn't suggesting that we shouldn't desire or pursue lives that are stress-free. We should be grateful when things are going well, and we should thank God for His blessings. However, our desire to grow more like Christ every day should trump our desire for a life of ease, especially since God may use difficult times here and there to shape us into the image of Jesus.*



HEART

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" (Psalm 24:3-4).

- **According to Psalm 24:3-4, what prevents someone from experiencing God's presence?** *In short, idols. Idols drive a wedge between one's fellowship with God.*
- **What idols have prevented you from experiencing closeness with God lately? Where are you seeking ultimate satisfaction this week?** *Answers to this question will vary.*



HANDS

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. Everything that Gideon needed was supplied when God promised to be with him, even though there were no further details about when or how or where or why. Only the what, or better, the Who. "I will be with you"—that is enough.

- **How does God's presence influence the way we fight sin in our lives?** *We don't defeat sin simply by trying harder but by relying on God's Spirit.*
- **How does God's presence influence the way we evangelize to others?** *We don't win someone to Christ by intellect and persuasive words but by relying on God to speak through us.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPJoshSPR16)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject