



“Gideon: Zero to Hero”
Judges 6-8

Idea: There is no limit to what God can and will do in your life when you love Him supremely and follow Him faithfully.

Intro: Do you believe that God is able to use you? Do you believe that God desires to use you? There are so many Christians who trust Jesus for salvation, but don't believe that He can or wants to make something great of their lives for His glory. Maybe you feel that you aren't very gifted or talented. Maybe you feel just like an ordinary person. Or maybe you feel less than ordinary and you will never be able to be used in a significant way for the Lord.

Well, I want to give you some encouragement. The characters that we have been studying in Judges were just ordinary people like you and I. Some we might even say were less than ordinary people, but God used them to do extraordinary things. I want to let you know that no matter what stage of life you are in, what hindrances lay in front of you, how much you lack in

gifts, abilities, or knowledge, God desires to use you in extraordinary ways to expand His kingdom. It is my hope that as we continue to examine the book of Judges over the next couple months, you might see a bit more clearly how God desires to work in your life and empower you to greatly impact the world for His glory. There is no limit to what God can and will do in your life when you love Him supremely and follow Him faithfully.

Inquiry: The problem with Israel and even with Gideon was that they didn't always love God supremely or follow Him faithfully. The lessons that Gideon had to learn were the same lessons that Israel needed to learn. And they are the same lessons that we must learn today. They needed to learn that God is the One True Living God and that there is no other. They needed to learn that God is faithful to His people. They needed to learn that God demands faithfulness from His people. They needed to learn that God is the one who saves and redeems them from their sin.

Israel was slow to learn and even quicker to forget. Following the passing of Deborah and Barak, Israel again did what was evil in the sight of God. So the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the East for seven years. These peoples would raid the Israelites and take everything they had...their herds, flocks, and produce (6:4-5). Israel was devastated and cried out to God for help (6:6).

God responded to their cry by sending a prophet to explain why they were being ravaged. They had not obeyed God (6:7-10). Don't misunderstand what God is doing here. He is not pointing His finger at them and saying, "I told you so." No, He is graciously making them aware of their situation. Their sin and rebellion is what had caused their predicament, and the only way for Israel to experience forgiveness and restoration was for them to deal with the cause of their problems. The same is true for you and I today. God will often times use the mess that we create in our lives to bring us to a place of brokenness. In that moment, however, God does not

immediately sweep in and save the day. He first confronts us with the truth. He points out our transgressions and rebellion. We first must understand and see the reality of our sin. We have to realize that we are dead in our sin before we can be forgiven and made alive in Christ.

The prophet preaches the gospel, and God raises up a savior for Israel. The man God calls out to deliver Israel is Gideon. This is not the guy who puts Bibles in hotel rooms around the globe. Gideon was of the clan of Abiezer in the tribe of Manasseh. He was the youngest son in his family, and from one of the weakest clans in the tribe. In all reality, Gideon was the least likely person to deliver Israel from the Midianites. The Lord, though, wasn't looking at what Gideon was at the time of His calling; He saw who Gideon would become: strong, resolute, and courageous. God delights in using the weak to shame the strong.

The Midianites and Amalekites again came against Israel, and Gideon sounded the call and sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali (6:33-35). 32,000 men responded and rallied around Gideon. God told Gideon that the army was too large. So Gideon sent home every man who was fearful. 22,000 men left that day. Again God told Gideon that the army was too large and that he should send home every man who knelt down to drink from the brook. So Gideon sent home another 9,700 men, leaving only 300 soldiers to fight against an army that was innumerable. Why? God wanted Israel to know and understand that when they defeated Midian and Amalek that it was not of their doing but God's alone (7:2).

The 300 took trumpets, jars, and torches and surrounded the camp of their enemies. They blew the trumpets, smashed the jars, held up their torches, and shouted. The men in the camp were thrown into a panic and starting fleeing and attacking one another. 120,000 men were killed and only 15,000 escaped, which Gideon and his men pursued. God delivered Israel. He took a zero and made him a hero. There are some life lessons to learn from the story of this hero.

1. Disobedience is devastating. (6:1-6)

The passing of the years blurred the memory of the great deliverance of Barak, and the next generation again reverted to an easy-going syncretistic religion that threatened to obliterate Israel's distinctive religion. Their failure to obey God's Word resulted in the devastation of their lives. The judgment of God continued to increase against Israel. In every cycle it gets more and more intense. Here in chapter 6, Israel is left a barren wasteland because of their sin. This is part of God's judgment upon them.

Israel, however, had become a wasteland long before Midian began to raid them. When the people again forsook the Lord and His Word and began to pursue Baal, they became a spiritual and moral wasteland. The worship of Baal promised much, but it delivered nothing but emptiness and depravity as all sin does. This was another aspect of God's judgment against Israel. He gave them over to their sin (Romans 1).

Appl: When you disobey God and His Word the same thing happens in your life. Sin leaves you hallow and empty. It promises you pleasure, power, and prestige, but delivers only guilt and shame. God's Spirit uses the guilt and shame to reveal to you that something is not right in your life. But when you continue to resist, God allows, causes, and brings trouble against you in order to make you aware of your sin and rebellion. The hardships and suffering that you experience are God's judgment, but they are also His graces. He uses them to open your eyes to the reality of your sin and His redemption. He uses them to bring you to a place of brokenness where you will cry out to God for help.

2. Fear, not faith, seeks for a sign. (6:17-22, 36-40, 7:9-14)

Gideon had spoken with the angel of the Lord. This was most likely a Christophany. Whether or not it was an angel speaking or the Lord Himself, Gideon had heard from God. He had heard the Lord call him a man of valor (6:12). He had heard the Lord say, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel" (6:14). Still, Gideon's response was to look at his inability and weakness rather than to gaze upon the greatness of the one speaking to him. He feared because his eyes were upon himself rather than upon God. Therefore, Gideon wanted a sign. He needed to know that he had correctly heard God.

He first asked the Lord to confirm His calling through a food offering (6:17). Then when the Spirit of the Lord led him to call out the men for battle, he again asks for a sign (6:36-40). As God's Spirit leads Gideon to reduce his army to 300 men, he is fearful. He wants a sign, but this time Gideon doesn't ask for one. God, though, gives permission to go down to the camp and listen to the fear in the hearts and minds of the enemy.

Do you see the graciousness and patience of our God in these passages? Gideon's faith was inconsistent; it knew moments of uncertainty as well as heights of confidence. The Lord was patient with him and graciously accommodated Gideon's request. He fully understood the frailty of human nature.

Appl: The reality is that Gideon didn't need a sign from God because He already had a word from God. The Word of God is enough. I don't think Gideon questioned the Word; he questioned whether or not he had correctly heard the Word of God. His desire for God to give him a sign reveals immaturity in his faith. When you're young in the faith, you don't know how to distinguish God's voice from all the other voices in your life. But as you mature in the faith, you are able to more clearly distinguish God's voice. We see this

progression in Gideon. In chapter 7, even though there was some hesitancy, he didn't ask for a sign. God graciously gave him one though.

Learn to walk by faith and not by sight. Learn to trust the Word of the Lord. Learn to hear His voice and follow it.

3. God always puts more on your shoulders than you can carry. (7:2, 22)

I have heard a lot of well-meaning people state that God will never put more on you than you can handle. Unfortunately, they are just wrong. The truth is God will always put more on you than you can handle. That is exactly what the Lord did to Gideon. He commanded him to reduce his army of 32,000 soldiers down to 300. The enemy had a force like the sand on the seashore (7:12). The object was not to reduce Gideon's army to a particular kind but to a particular number. The 300 were not elite Spartans or Navy Seals. It was a group so inadequate that when the battle is won, there would be no mistake as to who did it (7:7).

God is teaching Israel two things through Gideon and the battle with Midian. First, God reveals His grace. It makes no sense that the Lord would intervene in the battle on behalf of Israel. They had consistently walked in rebellion against Him. They had whored after the idols of Canaan. There was no love for God in their hearts. Israel only turned to God when things were so bad that they had no other options. Second, God reveals His sufficiency. Gideon only had 300 men to fight against 135,000. There was no humanly possible way for him to win. But he had the Lord, and He is always enough. God is sufficient.

Appl: God always puts more on your shoulders than you can carry. In those times when you have no

solutions to your problems; and all you have is God, understand that He is graciously inviting you to learn to trust Him in a new way. He doesn't have to do it. He desires to do it. When you are walking in rebellion, He would be just in wiping you from the face of the earth. Instead, God shows you His grace and invites you to trust Him again. In those times when you have no solutions to your problems and all you have is God, understand that He is sufficient. The Lord can do more in a moment than you could do in a hundred lifetimes. He is sufficient and all you need.

Illust: I have a friend whose little girl has an aggressive leukemia. She is struggling right now as she undergoes treatments. It breaks my heart to see them walk through these uncertain days. I don't understand how they can be so strong. Yes, I do. God is sustaining and upholding them through it for His glory.

4. Pride will take you down. (8:7,9, 16-17, 21, 27)

Gideon began this journey as a fearful young man who doubted God's call upon his life. After God proved to be the sufficient Savior, pride began to rise up in Gideon like he had something to do with it. We see this pride in Gideon's response to the men of Succoth and Peniel. They feared the retribution of Zebah and Zalmunna if they escaped and heard that they had helped Gideon. Pride had replaced Gideon's fear. It hadn't been that long since Gideon was fearful of Zebah and Zalmunna. But by chapter 8 Gideon was offended as if he had been the one who won the battle.

Gideon's pride continues to grow. Earlier he had broken down his father's altar of Baal, but after the taste of victory over Zebah and Zalmunna, Gideon took the crescent ornaments from their camels. He also asked every man for the earrings from their spoil. In doing so Gideon disobeyed the Word of God.

The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God.

– Deut 7:25

Gideon made an ephod from the gold and set it in Ophrah. By doing so he led his family back into idolatry. Gideon went from zero to hero to zero again as a result of his pride.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. – Prov 16:18

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

– James 4:6b

Appl: Don't ever lose sight of who you were and all that God has done in and through your life. Don't take credit for anything. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should (Romans 12:3).

Conclusion: There is no limit to what God can and will do in your life when you love Him supremely and follow Him faithfully. He delights in taking zeros and turning them into heroes. God, however, will not share His glory with anyone. Therefore, heed the lessons we learn from Gideon. Disobedience is devastating. Fear, not faith, seeks for a sign. God will always put more on your shoulders than you can carry. And pride will bring you down.

Our hope is in Jesus Christ who forgives our disobedience and develops our faith. He carries our burdens and gives grace to the humble.