The Weakness of a Rescuer

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** God works through the weak so that He might receive credit for the victory.

**MAIN PASSAGES:** Judges 6:11-16,36-40; 7:2-7

If you have ever hand-driven a screw into wood, or some other hard material, you know that power can be your friend. Sometimes a power screwdriver or drill will tighten a screw that is impossible to tighten with a regular screwdriver. But other times power is not a good thing; using too much power can strip a screw head or strip the wood from a screw hole. Power is usually a good thing, but not always.

What are some times when it is a problem to have too much power?
Group Time

Point 1: Strength comes from the God who is present (Judg. 6:11-16).

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 winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: “The Lord is with you, valiant warrior.”

Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, 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.”

The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!”

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 family.” But I will be with you,” the Lord said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.”

When the angel of the Lord first came to Gideon, he was not acting like a warrior but was hiding from the Midianites, and God told Gideon to go in strength and liberate Israel from her oppressors. Far from being valiant, Gideon considered himself weak, and that was exactly how God saw him: weak and afraid. Yet God looked past who Gideon was to see what He would do through him. Gideon was a weak “jar of clay,” the perfect vessel for the task God was giving him, the perfect container to reveal the extraordinary power of God (2 Cor. 4:7).

What are some ways we are weak and God can shine through us?

The angel said the Lord was with Gideon, but he had felt abandoned by God. The Midianites’ oppression had left the Israelites wondering what had happened to the God who had given their ancestors victories in Egypt and beyond. God had brought the fury of the Midianites upon His people, but God was still listening to His people even though they did not listen and obey (Judg. 6:1-10). He would raise up Gideon to deliver them. Gideon was no one, but God’s presence with him would change everything. In the same way, Jesus encouraged His disciples for their mission with these same words: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).
Point 2: Assurance comes from the God who is patient (Judg. 6:36-40).

36 Then Gideon said to God, “If you will deliver Israel by my hand, as you said, 37 I will put a wool fleece here on the threshing floor. If dew is only on the fleece, and all the ground is dry, I will know that you will deliver Israel by my strength, as you said.” 38 And that is what happened. When he got up early in the morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung dew out of it, filling a bowl with water.

39 Gideon then said to God, “Don’t be angry with me; let me speak one more time. Please allow me to make one more test with the fleece. Let it remain dry, and the dew be all over the ground.” 40 That night God did as Gideon requested: only the fleece was dry, and dew was all over the ground.

Gideon asked God for a sign, and then a second sign, even after the angel of the Lord had already validated his message with a sign of fire from a rock (vv. 20-21). We need to see Gideon’s requests for what they were: doubt. God had been quite clear in His instructions and promises to Gideon. There was no confusion or misunderstanding, but Gideon struggled with disbelief and distrust. He just couldn’t take God’s word for it. So, laying out a fleece is far from a commendable example to follow; it’s a sign of one’s doubt in God’s calling.

What are some reasons we are tempted to “lay out a fleece” instead of take God at His Word?

Gideon’s fear and doubt were not met with rebuke but rather with grace. God was in no way required to grant Gideon’s request for a wet—and then a dry—fleece. If God were human, He’d likely have thrown up His hands and given up on Gideon, but thankfully, God is no man. Instead, God extended patient grace to Gideon, and He does that for us as well.

How has God shown you patient grace when you were afraid regarding His calling?

Voices from Church History

“Longsuffering, forbearing patience is to be the Christian’s reflection of the character of God. It is part of God’s character to be slow to anger and quick to be merciful.”

Point 3: Victory comes from the God who is powerful (Judg. 7:2-7).

2 The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many troops for me to hand the Midianites over to them, or else Israel might elevate themselves over me and say, ‘My own strength saved me.’ 3 Now announce to the troops: ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained.

4 Then the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many troops. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say to you, ‘This one can go with you,’ he can go. But if I say about anyone, ‘This one cannot go with you,’ he cannot go.” 5 So he brought the troops down to the water, and the LORD said to Gideon, “Separate everyone who laps water with his tongue like a dog. Do the same with everyone who kneels to drink.” 6 The number of those who lapped with their hands to their mouths was three hundred men, and all the rest of the troops knelt to drink water. 7 The LORD said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home.”

The Midianite army was at least 120,000 strong (Judg. 8:10). Gideon had rallied 32,000 men to his cause. They were still outnumbered, but it was possible the battle could break in their favor. So God called on Gideon to pare down his forces. The reason? To combat the people’s pride and secure the praise for Himself, to whom it rightfully belongs.

Why does God always deserve the praise for our victories?

God cut Gideon’s force from 32,000 to 10,000 to 300 in order to defeat 120,000 Midianites. What could 300 do against such an army? Nothing, except that God would fight and deliver Israel through His power. That is what He wanted Gideon, Israel, and the surrounding nations to know. Instead of this story encouraging the use of fleeces, God’s wants us to believe that He always fights for His people in power, and wins.

God Is Omnipotent: God is __________________________: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created. As Christians, we ________________ in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great ________________ by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.
My Mission

Because we have been rescued from our sin through Jesus, we answer His call to service, trusting that He is with us and will empower us to win the victory for His glory.

• How is God calling you to trust Him and take your next step of faith, perhaps even into an overwhelming situation?
• What are some ways your group can step out in faith in the omnipotent God?
• Whom do you know who might be living in fear right now? How can you encourage them with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Notes
Daily Study

Day 1: Judges 6:1-24

The Midianites oppressed the Israelites and made life terrible for God’s people. They attacked them, destroyed their crops, stole their livestock, and laid waste to the land. And because of this, Israel was “poverty-stricken” (v. 6).

You might feel like an Israelite today, ambushed and decimated by your enemy. But we must start with the very first verse in this passage: “The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD handed them over to Midian” (v. 1).

When adversity comes, as followers of God, we should seek His face and ask, “Lord, is this chastisement? Are You using this difficult situation right now to pull me back to You?” Not all pain is God’s discipline for sin, but God’s discipline is often painful. And if what we are experiencing is His loving discipline, we need to know that so we can identify and repent of the sin we have committed, rest in His grace and mercy, and enjoy renewed fellowship with our God.

For every sin in our lives, there is forgiveness and restoration and peace. But the first step is allowing our eyes to be opened, seeing the truth that only God can reveal.

Where in your past might God be pointing you to unconfessed sin? What steps can you take to turn away from it and to Christ?

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.”

—Priscilla Shirer

© 2019 LifeWay Christian Resources
Day 2: Read Judges 6:25-40

Though they were God’s chosen people, loved and shepherded by Him, the Israelites were openly worshiping pagan gods. So God instructed Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal and the Asherah pole and build an altar to the one true God in their place. So Gideon did just that—in the dark when nobody could see him.

Does that sound like us? We are called to stand for God and point others to the gospel. But sometimes when we have an opportunity to do just that—to speak truth in our culture—we freeze. We don’t know what to say or perhaps how to say it, so we end up saying nothing.

As believers, we need to remember that the stand we take for God is not taken alone—the Holy Spirit is with us and empowers us—nor is our stand the first stand God’s people have taken, and it won’t be the last.

How has God positioned you to take a stand for Him in your community? What will you do this week to take such a stand?

Day 3: Read Judges 7:1-14

The way God whittled down Gideon’s army was far from random. First, He had Gideon send home all who were afraid. Second, it seems God further narrowed down the army based on who was wiser when it came to drinking water. The remaining force of three hundred men was small in number yet the bravest and wisest of Israel’s army.

In much the same way, God has chosen “armies” for each of us—fellow believers to stand shoulder to shoulder with us in life, no matter what may come our way. Who is in your army? Perhaps it is a parent, who has modeled the humble, sacrificial love of Christ. Perhaps it is a long-term friend who has shown you what faithfulness looks like. Perhaps it is the teacher or pastor who has demonstrated how important it is to understand and live out the gospel.

God chose Gideon’s army; He has chosen yours too. And just as with Gideon’s, He knows exactly whom you need in your battles to fight alongside you, encourage you, and speak strength into your heart.

Whom has God placed into your life as your army? When was the last time you thanked Him for them? When was the last time you thanked them for standing faithfully by you?
Day 4: Read Judges 7:15-25

We love transformations. From fixer-upper homes to total body makeovers to restaurant re-dos, we enjoy watching something not-so-great turn into something amazing. Gideon is one of the great transformations in Scripture. From a fearful, hiding thresher to a brave warrior, his story is a favorite in all of Scripture because we see such a drastic change.

In Judges 7:15, we discover what led to Gideon’s transformation: “When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship.” He had heard God’s word, witnessed His powerful presence, and believed the truth. And that brought him to his knees in worship.

What we believe—the gospel—matters, and it is designed by God to change us deeply and eternally.

When was the last time you responded to God in spontaneous worship? How can you add more worship of God in your life?

Day 5: Read Judges 8:1-35

You may read Judges 8, turn up your nose, and think, “That’s how the story of Gideon ends?!!?” Gideon disciplined some Israelite leaders in one city with thorns and briars and killed the men of another city because they refused to help Gideon’s soldiers. He also crafted what became an idol out of the spoils of war. And to top it all off, we see that he had seventy children because he had “many wives” and at least one concubine (Judg. 8:30-31).

It’s not the ending we would expect, or pen if we were writing the story. True stories don’t always end the way Hollywood stories end. But here is what we need to remember: This story is not about Gideon; it’s about God! God delivered the Israelites, and even when they would live in idolatrous disobedience again, He would be ready to forgive them and bring them back to Himself again. That is the essence of this story. That is the essence of the Book of Judges. And that is the essence of the gospel story that runs throughout every page of Scripture. God’s superabundant grace is poured out generously upon His people, most notably through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

What are some seasons of defeat in your life? How can you walk in freedom from the past?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- Strength comes from the God who is present (Judg. 6:11-16).
- Assurance comes from the God who is patient (Judg. 6:36-40).
- Victory comes from the God who is powerful (Judg. 7:2-7).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

When has God used an unexpected person in your life to embolden your faith or confirm a decision? What made it apparent to you that God should receive credit for this?

In the spirit of Gideon’s story and James 1:17, what practices can you begin to develop this week to ascribe ultimate credit to God for all good things, for all of His good gifts to you?

Notes
UNIT 7
SESSION 1
1. Tony Evans, Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009) [eBook].

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4
1. Amy Carmichael, Thou Givest … They Gather (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1958) [eBook].

UNIT 8
SESSION 1
1. Noël Piper, Treasuring God in our Traditions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 64.

SESSION 2

SESSION 3
1. Betsie ten Boom, quoted in The Hiding Place, by Corrie ten Boom with Elizabeth and John Sherrill (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2006), 84.

EASTER SESSION

UNIT 9
SESSION 1
1. Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ, in The Essential Works of Andrew Murray, ed. Tracy M. Sumner (Barbour, 2008) [eBook].

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5
In these sessions of *The Gospel Project*, we experience some of the most exciting narratives in Scripture. There are accounts here of sin and judgment, of moral decline and merciful intervention, and of rescuers who need rescue. Through it all, one thing is clear: God is with His people and He is faithful to His promise.

It’s important to keep that central theme in mind because many people read these stories about the conquest of the land and try to find examples for emulation. To be clear, we can learn a lot from these Old Testament heroes (see 1 Cor. 10), but we cannot implement their virtues apart from our connection to the Vine—Jesus Christ Himself, the One who bears fruit in us and through us.

As we walk through our present wilderness, struggling against sin and encountering sorrow, we know that the God who has gone before us is faithful. He is the One who prepares the way for us to be His ambassadors. He is the One who breaks the chains of our idolatry and lifts our gaze to His unchanging glory.