Unit 9, Session 3

The Weakness of a Rescuer

Summary and Goal
God had used Deborah, Barak, and Jael to give the Israelites victory over the Canaanites and peace and rest in the land for forty years. But once more, the Israelites would do what was evil in the sight of the Lord. This time God would hand His people over to the Midianites, who would oppress them for seven years to such a degree that they would resort to hiding in caves. In this session, we will see God’s patient lovingkindness once more as He responded to the desperate cries of His people. He would provide Gideon, another unlikely judge, to rescue His people and turn them back to Him. Through Gideon, we will see that God uses our weaknesses to shine the light of His glory.

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

Session in a Sentence
God works through the weak so that He might receive credit for the victory.

Christ Connection
God used an unexpected leader in Gideon and a small army of three hundred to rescue Israel from their enemies so that everyone would know that the victory belonged to Him alone. Jesus was the unexpected Rescuer who defeated sin and death to show everyone that salvation belongs to God alone.

Missional Application
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.
Group Time

Introduction

EXPLAIN: Use the paragraph in the DDG (p. 103) to highlight the benefits of power and the damage of too much power when using power tools. You might consider bringing in a power drill, a block of wood, and some screws as part of a demonstration of a drill’s power and too much power.

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.

INTERACT: Ask your group the following question.

What are some times when it is a problem to have too much power? (when elected or dictatorial leaders of a country take advantage of their people without recourse; when a person is unfamiliar with a power tool or a new vehicle and not yet aware of its full capabilities; when one is not capable of handling the power safely and respectfully)

EXPLAIN: When it comes to following God, our power, our strength, is often not a good thing since it can get in His way or distract us from what really does matter—God and His strength. There is a thread running throughout the Bible that shows us God is not impressed by the things that often impress us. God often uses men and women who don’t impress us to wow us. We don’t cheer for them just because they are nobodies; we cheer for them because they realized they are somebody with God on their side. And that gives us hope.

SUMMARIZE: In this session, we will see God’s patient lovingkindness once more as He responded to the desperate cries of His people. He would provide Gideon, another unlikely judge, to rescue His people and turn them back to Him. Through Gideon, we will see that God uses our weaknesses to shine the light of His glory.

For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit www.GospelProject.com/additional-resources.
**Point 1: Strength comes from the God who is present (Judg. 6:11-16).**

**SAY:** In Judges 6, the Israelites had once again committed evil acts against God, so He raised up another people—the Midianites—to discipline His own. After seven years of oppression that forced the Israelites to hide in the mountains, in caves, and in strongholds, God’s people cried out in desperate need of deliverance.

**READ** Judges 6:11-16 (DDG p. 104).

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 winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites. 12 Then the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: “The Lord is with you, valiant warrior.”

13 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.’”

14 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!”

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 family.” 16 “But I will be with you,” the Lord said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to show how Gideon’s self-assessment of himself as weak corresponded with how God saw him, but God also saw what He would do through this “jar of clay.”

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).

**Commentary:** One ordinarily threshed wheat in the open. The wheat would be beaten and then tossed in the air so the wind could help separate the grain from the chaff. But Gideon was not threshing wheat in the open; he was in a winepress, out of sight, hiding from the Midianites and hoping they would not come and destroy his harvest. Not a very valiant activity.
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What are some ways we are weak and God can shine through us? (we are tempted to sin, but in this God provides strength to resist and flee so that our victory over temptation brings praise to Him; we succumb to sin, but when we turn once again to Jesus, God's grace for our forgiveness shines forth and we can get up and walk; we are weak to obey and succeed in our calling, but God's strength is more than sufficient for us)

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to point out that Gideon would accomplish his mission to liberate the Israelites because God had promised to be with him. God's presence and power alone help us to fulfill our mission.

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).

- God’s second statement about His presence with Gideon came as an answer to a question: “Who am I; how can I deliver Israel?” (v. 15). We cannot discount how reasonable that question was. Gideon was right: He was no one. He could not deliver Israel. Without God, Gideon would never triumph, but God’s presence changes everything. God would give Gideon the victory. His power would bring the Midianites to their knees.

Commentary: God spoke the phrase “I will be with you” to His people many times throughout the Old Testament. He said it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3), Jacob (Gen. 31:3), and Joshua (Deut. 31:23; Josh. 1:5; 3:7). He said it to His people through Isaiah (Isa. 43:2) and Jeremiah (Jer. 30:11). And this phrase was used to encourage others who followed God, such as when Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you” (Gen. 48:21).

SAY: Scripture promises that God is with His people, yet it is easy to feel afraid and weak. We want to believe God will be our strength, yet we waver. God’s words—“I will be with you”—meant Gideon was ready for the task at hand because God was ready. But even this assurance was not enough to make Gideon brave.
Point 2: Assurance comes from the God who is patient (Judg. 6:36-40).

SAY: Judges 6:34 says that “the Spirit of the LORD enveloped Gideon.” Clothed with the Holy Spirit, Gideon rallied people behind him to fight off their oppressors, the Midianites. The stage seemed set for Gideon to step forward and rescue God’s people through His divine power. But that is not what we see happen next.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Judges 6:36-40 (DDG p. 105).

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.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to highlight Gideon’s requests for what they were: doubt. Gideon’s example of laying out a fleece, therefore, is not a commendable one to follow.

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.

• **Doubt:** We might be able to excuse Gideon’s request for a sign—at least the first one. But even after the first fleece turned up exactly as he had prayed, Gideon still wasn’t sure. Perhaps Gideon rationalized the result: Only the fleece was wet this morning simply because it had soaked up all the water around it. His anxiety was choking out his faith. And so, once again he gave in to his doubt and faithlessness and asked for yet another sign, which God would give.

• **Laying Out a Fleece:** Anyone who has been called by God to do something that strikes fear within them or causes one to feel anxious or overwhelmed can surely relate with Gideon, wanting assurances of future steps. It’s possible that we too have laid out a figurative fleece, or even multiple ones, before God. Thus, we shouldn’t condemn Gideon, but we should learn from his negative example and do rightly. We must remind ourselves that God’s Word given to us is perfect. We may not always be comfortable with what God calls us to do—we might not even like it—but trusting Him in faith at all times, even through our weaknesses, is what spiritual maturity looks like.
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

What are some reasons we are tempted to “lay out a fleece” instead of take God at His Word? (we are afraid of what obedience may require; God’s calling may seem beyond our own abilities and we don’t like to be in over our heads with anything; we struggle to rest in God’s power and presence to accomplish what He has called us to do; we are hoping for a way out of God’s calling)

EXPLAIN: Reference the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to show God’s patient grace in fulfilling Gideon’s requests for signs.

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.

- One of the simplest definitions of grace is “an undeserved gift.” Though Gideon did not merit the signs he asked for out of his doubt, God graciously gave them anyway. God shows us His grace when He saves us, forgives us, loves us, and helps us, but also when He patiently walks with us through our fears. Though we shouldn’t be afraid, sometimes we are. Though we should believe, sometimes we struggle. Though we should obediently walk on the path set before us, sometimes we’re too anxious to take the next step, and sometimes we trip and fall. God responds to these doubts and fears with grace, not wrath.
- God lovingly and patiently meets His children where they are to take them where they need to be. This is what spiritual growth and maturity looks like: God changing us, slowly but surely, moment by moment, to trust Him more and live more like Him.

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

How has God shown you patient grace when you were afraid regarding His calling? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
**Point 3: Victory comes from the God who is powerful (Judg. 7:2-7).**

**SAY:** Most of us would never worry about having too much money, time, or ability. Similarly, the leader of a rebel army likely would never worry about having too many troops; in warfare, the more troops the better. But unbeknownst to Gideon, having too many troops was precisely his problem.

**READ** Judges 7:2-7 (DDG p. 106).

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.”

**EXPLAIN:** Reference the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) as you clarify that God’s commands in this passage were to address the people’s potential for pride and to secure the praise for Himself.

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.

- **Pride** is disregard for God and focus on self. Pride makes us believe we know better than God, can handle our problems apart from God, and deserve the credit instead of God. Pride is ready to consume us, often a willing target, at every turn in life. Just consider Adam and Eve, Cain, the tower of Babel, and Pharaoh.

- God wanted Gideon to feel helplessness, and trust, as his forces were pared down. He did not want Israel believing they had won the victory over Midian. He did not want Gideon elevated as a great war hero. God wanted His people to celebrate and depend upon Him, to worship and praise Him alone, so He took away any confidence they could have in human strength. God is the same today; He is still jealous for His glory. He wants us to trust Him, so He is willing to take away our sources of strength too.
INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

Why does God always deserve the praise for our victories? (He is the Creator; the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord [Job 1:21]; God is sovereign over all of life’s circumstances; our battles are fought and won in His strength and power, not our own)

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 106).

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.

FILL IN THE BLANKS: Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 106).

God Is Omnipotent: God is all-powerful: 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 rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Omnipotent”: God is all-powerful: 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, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.
EXPLAIN: God took Gideon, a fearful man who took one small step of faith at a time, and through him gave His people victory over the Midianites. But God used Gideon and his army of three hundred for much more than that; He used them to show the Israelites His power and whom they could rely on for even greater victory. Sound familiar? Jesus was a nobody from a throwaway town. He was not a trained religious, political, or military leader, but using a small ragtag group of men, Jesus turned the world upside down, or perhaps more accurately, right-side up. Jesus’ message was one of victory, not over the Romans but over sin and death through faith in Him. Just as God wanted the Israelites to see that victory over the Midianites was by His power alone, Jesus showed that there is only one way to experience victory over sin: Him. And now it’s our turn. We are the Gideons of this generation. Turn to the only One who can march you to victory and enable you to proclaim loudly, “God is the champion!” Admit your weaknesses, trust in His power, and give Him the praise.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 107), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

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?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, we are weak and You are strong. Thank You for patiently bearing with our lack of confidence in Your power and for Your faithfulness to Your promise to remain with Your people. Help us to serve You in the power of the Spirit as we proclaim Your Son, Jesus, to those in need of the Savior. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 108-110), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 111) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 111) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

**Daily Study**

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 3** as a part of point 3 in the session: *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.*

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1:** “For every sin in our lives, there is forgiveness and restoration and peace. But the first step is allowing our eyes to be opened to see the truth.”

- **Day 4:** “What we believe—the gospel—matters, and it is designed by God to change us deeply and eternally.”

Visit [www.GospelProject.com/Blog](http://www.GospelProject.com/Blog) for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

**Encourage One Another**

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 111) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to help one another live in a state of constant self-conscious dependence on the God who works through the weak.**

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

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

“The dialogue that ensued between Gideon and the angel of the Lord reminds us of the similar encounter between God and Moses (Ex. 3–4). Moses gave many reasons why he was not suited to be a leader, and Gideon did the same (6:15; see Ex. 3:11; 4:10). In both cases, God’s answer is the same: *I will be with you* (6:16; Ex. 3:12). God’s presence with any servant of the Lord makes all the difference (Gen. 26:12-14; 39:2-5,21-23; Mark 16:20; Acts 18:9-10; 2 Tim. 4:16-17).”

“The angel of the Lord—the Lord’s personal representative who spoke with his full authority—appeared to Gideon at Ophrah, a town probably located in the Jezreel Valley. Gideon’s name means ‘the one who hacks or cuts down,’ a fitting name for the man whose first task in the Lord’s service would be to cut down Baal’s altar. Other aspects of Gideon’s demeanor are less promising. In view of the threat of the Midianites, he was threshing wheat in a winepress, a shallow depression in the rock, a safer location than the more exposed threshing floor. Gideon’s natural reserve will emerge again as the narrative unfolds, and it is in sharp contrast to the title given to Gideon by the angel—valiant warrior.”

**Point 2: Assurance comes from the God who is patient (Judg. 6:36-40).**

“Gideon successfully rallies the tribal armies, but then gets cold feet (6:33-35). Here is a clear indication of the declining effect of the divine enabling. *The Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon*, but he fails to allow himself to be roused into action the way Othniel was (see 3:10). Gideon remains torn between the task and timidity, a vacillating hero who must be propelled at every step with signs of assurance. This time, Gideon receives the sign he asks for, but realizes that it may not be a miracle (6:36-38). He probably realized that when the night dew condensed on the floor and fleece, the wool would be more likely to retain moisture in it. The stone floor would have dried by morning. As it happens, fishermen living on arid desert islands have been known to obtain water for their living by trapping dew in large fleeces laid out each night. So Gideon rearranges his conditions and asks for a retake (6:39-40). The patience of God with this fearful judge is to be admired! As for Gideon, his cry could well be ours: ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’ (Mark 9:24).”
“Before the actual military engagement, Gideon again displays his reluctance to be a leader, for he asks for confirmatory signs from God (cf. v. 17). On the one hand, Gideon’s fears are understandable: the task he is preparing to do is difficult and dangerous. On the other hand, the angel’s appearance and promise (vv. 11-24) already included a confirmatory miracle (v. 21), and Gideon had already begun to obey (vv. 25-27) and to see God’s protection (v. 31). In any event, God stoops to Gideon’s level and grants the signs requested.”

“The fleece incidents are far from being a model for the discernment of God’s will. As we have already discussed, these are expressions of doubt and lack of faith. By his own admission, Gideon already knew God’s will and promise, for this had been carefully articulated to him by the angel of the Lord (6:14-16). His problem is his lack of willingness to trust the Lord, to take him at his word. Thus, the fleece incidents are about Gideon’s unbelief and stubbornness in response to God’s call. In such cases, God is not obligated to respond, and if he does, it is only by grace. Those who use this passage as a means of discerning God’s will are simply misapplying Scripture.”

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

“The reader can only imagine Gideon’s increased dismay when he saw the response of the troops to the refining conditions prescribed by Yahweh. While ninety-seven hundred knelt to drink water [like dogs], only three hundred brought the water up to their mouths with their cupped hands and lapped from them. But this handful of men represents the pure gold which Yahweh desires in his service. His intentions are clarified in v. 7. Promising Gideon that he will indeed rescue Israel with the three hundred who lapped [from their hands] by handing the Midianites into their hands, he orders him to dismiss the rest.”

“lest Israel boast. God made it clear from the very beginning that the glory for this victory was to be all his. This makes all the more absurd the Israelites’ request after the battle that Gideon rule over them because he had supposedly delivered them from the Midianites (cf. 8:22).”

References
The Gospel Project®
Adult Leader Guide CSB
Volume 7, Number 3  Spring 2019

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Printed in the United States of America


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This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in Light of the Gospel

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.