

Seize The Opportunity: To Serve – Judges 6-7

If you've been away over the holidays like we were, let me say welcome back

We had a good time as a family, and I'm thankful for John Cochran, our Associate Pastor, who preached in my absence

I also trust you're ready to dig back in; But it's not going to be in Isaiah

We're going to take a break from that for a bit, and spend a few weeks at the start of a new year – talking about serving, tithing, and giving

B/c the opportunities for ministry continue to multiply, and they're begging to be seized So let's turn to Judges 6-7 (p.205), and start by looking at the example of Gideon, as it relates to serving (**Intro**; 11 a.m. – welcome those joining us via our translation min.)

- Judges is a part of the Bible that talks about various leaders in Israel, or judges as they were called at that time – and Gideon was one of them
He lived around 1200BC – about 200 years *after* the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, and 200 years *before* King David showed up
Two high points in ancient Israel, but in between was a time of national ups and downs
Obedience and peace was followed by disobedience and oppression, followed by a return to obedience, and on it went

And it's during one of those times of disobedience and oppression that we pick up the story, and find God tapping Gideon to deliver them, to lead them
Except Gideon wasn't real keen on the idea; Filled with doubts, hesitations, weaknesses, and fears – he didn't really *want* to serve in that capacity
That's the story in a nutshell

And in it, through Gideon's example, we learn some valuable lessons about serving the Lord; The first of which, is seize the opportunity to serve . . .

Even if others aren't (6:27)

When things need to be done, when opportunities knock – seize them; Even if nobody else is; That's the *first* principle for our lives

You see, despite all that God had done to lead his people out of bondage and deliver them from oppression – they failed to serve him; They disobeyed
He says so explicitly in 6:10b – *You have not obeyed my voice*
That would be like you and I failing to work for Christ, after he saved us from the bondage and consequences of sin; They were laying down on the job

- Not only that, but they started worshipping Baal, a popular idol at the time
They weren't faithful

Except, for a guy named Gideon – he remained faithful, even when others weren't
He did what God wanted, even when others didn't
Like when he told him to tear down the altar to Baal – he did it; Look at 6:27
So Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. He did it at night, but he did it; He was obedient, even though others weren't

And we should be too; When it comes to serving the Lord, don't be bashful about going against the flow; Don't be bashful about seizing the opportunity, even if you're alone
Even if others aren't

Second, seize the opportunity to serve . . .

Even if you lack the strength (6:12-15)

6:12-15 – [12] *And the angel of the LORD appeared to him [Gideon] 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 [all this oppression from the Midianites]? 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.”*

God's like – “Gideon, get after it, I'm with you”

And Gideon's like – “It doesn't seem like it; And I'm the weakest one around”

- There were 3 things going on in Gideon's heart/mind here – see if you don't resonate:
A. He had given up – *the Lord has forsaken us* he says in v13
B. He assumed he was too weak to do anything about it – *my clan is the weakest in Manasseh*, v15
C. He felt unqualified, especially compared to others – *I am the least in my father's house* (15b); Ever been there? Gideon was

But he found out real quick, as he stepped out in faith – that just because things are desperate, doesn't mean God has forsaken you
And just because you don't “have what it takes,” doesn't mean God can't use you
And just b/c you're not the best, doesn't mean God doesn't want you

He does, and he *will* use you – if you're willing and obedient

In fact, one of his favorite tactics is to use weak, ordinary people – to accomplish great, extraordinary things

I love it when we hear people say they're not sure they can serve or lead in a certain capacity; We're like “bingo, you've got the job”
B/c that's exactly the kind of humility in the face of weakness, that God uses most

Seize the opportunity to serve – even if you lack the strength; You might be surprised

Even if you're afraid (7:9-11)

Gideon was; So much so, he did his work under the cover of darkness – we saw that in 6:27; And that wasn't the last time

When God told him to spy on the Midianites a bit later, he said he could take his servant with him if he was afraid – which is exactly what he did; b/c he was

Judges 7:9-11 – [9] *That same night* [after sending 31,700 men home, leaving only 300] *the LORD said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. [10] But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant. [11] And you shall hear what they say, and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.” Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp.*

He was afraid, but did it anyway; He seized the opportunity to serve, *despite* his fear
And God provided; He provided 10 servants in tearing down the altar to Baal
And then one servant in spying out the Midianites
IOW God knew he was afraid, and provided just the right help, at just the right time, to
get him through; And he'll do the same with you

- I can't *tell* you how many times I've experienced this in my life
Just when I think the odds are insurmountable, or the problems unsolvable, or the
situation impossible, or the fear unbeatable . . .
God gives me just the right thing, just the right thought, just the right encounter – to
encourage me and spur me on; Over and over and over again

And he'll do the same for you, if you seize the opportunity in spite of *your* fears
Like your fear of kids; Or youth; Or fatigue; Or people; Or who *knows* what else
Seize the opportunity anyway; Even if you're afraid; God will provide; Fourth . . .

Even if you have doubts (6:13,17,36-40)

Gideon certainly did; He doubted that God was at work; Look at 6:13 again
*Gideon said to him [the angel of the LORD], "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?'"*
Despite what the old timers were saying, Gideon doubted that God was still at work
among them

He even doubted that it was really God who was speaking to him; Look at v17
*And he said to him [Gideon said to the angel that is], "If now I have found favor in your
eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me."*
He not only doubted that God was still at work among them, but that he was still
speaking to them; Still giving instructions; Still leading them

- And then, later on in v36-40, he doubted that God would actually *use* him – and tested
God to confirm it; Literally risking his life; Twice
[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.*

Gideon doubted that God was at work, he doubted that God was *speaking* to him, and he
doubted God would *use* him
Ever been in that boat? I have; And it's kept me from serving far too many times
But not Gideon – he got confirmation with his fleeces, and *seized* the opportunity

- And about now you're probably wondering if you should do the same
If you should test God's voice, or his compulsion within you, or his will for your life –
with a fleece or sign of your own

And I'd say you *can*, but I wouldn't put *all* your eggs in that basket; I wouldn't base your
decision on that alone; B/c it's not normative in the Bible
Just b/c it's cited, doesn't mean that's what *we* should do; It's *descriptive*, not
prescriptive

IOW the fleece was a miracle, in an extreme situation, that God used to show his
greatness, and the lengths to which he's willing to go, to accomplish his purpose
In this case, overthrow another *country*
And if an angel shows up at your doorstep telling you to do the same – please *do* put out
a fleece; But even then, the rest of Scripture doesn't support it . . .
As a normal means of discerning God's will

- What *is* taught and demonstrated when it comes to discerning the will of God, is . . .
Sensing the *Spirit* of God *within* you – like Jesus did
Listening to the *people* of God *around* you – like Paul did
Reading the *word* of God in *front* of you – like the Bereans did
And paying attention to the *events* of God *about* you – like Jonah did

It's a series of checks and balances like a 4-legged stool – leave any one of them out, and
you're on shaky ground
But get confirmation from those 4 sources, and you have the means to overcome your
doubts, and seize the opportunity to serve

Next from Gideon's example, is seize the opportunity to serve . . .

Even if it doesn't make sense (7:2-7,16-18)

Sometimes the opportunities that God gives you to serve, are either completely
overwhelming or entirely impossible; Either way, they don't make sense
That was Gideon's situation; Here was his chance to be a hero; To set the captives free;
To ride into town on his white stallion; To save Israel from her enemies
Which was all well and good if there weren't 135,000 of them! That's what you find a
little later on; In fact, 7:12 says – [they] *lay along the valley like locusts in abundance*
That's not an opportunity to serve, it's a slaughter
So overwhelming it didn't make sense

- But that's not the half of it; God wanted Gideon to do it w/ only 300 men! Judges 7:3-7
[3] *Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and
trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'* Then 22,000 of
the people returned, and 10,000 remained.
[4] *And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to
the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one
shall go with you,' shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall
not go with you,' shall not go."* [5] *So he brought the people down to the water. And the
LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps,
you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink."* [6] *And the
number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all
the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. [7] And the LORD said to Gideon,
"With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand,
and let all the others go every man to his home."*
"What? You want me to save Israel with 300 men, against 135,000? Are you crazy? That
doesn't make sense;" That *must* have been Gideon's thought

- And as if *that* wasn't enough, look at v16-18

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.'"

No swords, no clubs, no *traditional* instruments of war – that would make sense
Just trumpets, torches, and voices
And a plan, by anyone's standard, that was ridiculous and crazy
A recipe for disaster, that also didn't make sense; Except to God
Whose obvious purpose was to make sure that he alone received the credit and glory

He even said so; Look at 7:2 – *The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'*
God will stop at nothing to make sure he gets the glory; Sometimes even using a plan that doesn't make sense

- Like when it doesn't make sense for your schedule; Or your life
Or when the odds of success are nil; Or the money to do it is lacking; Or the way doesn't seem clear; Or the method leaves something to be desired
Or the leader doesn't seem capable
Sometimes God calls you to serve him, when it doesn't make sense

And if he does, don't go home scared like the 22k; Or sit on the sidelines hoping somebody else will step up; Seize the opportunity and serve
Even if you have doubts; Even if you're afraid; Even if you lack the strength; Even if others aren't; Why?

- **Because God is with you (6:12,16,34)**

If you confess Jesus Christ as Lord of your life; If you've repented of your sins and trust him by faith to save you; If your life bears the marks of your allegiance to him . . .
Then God is with *you*, just like he was with *Gideon*
It's the trump card of all trump cards when it comes to serving God, "even if"

6:12 – *The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."*

6:16 – *The LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man [i.e. in their entirety]."*

If God is the impulse behind your service, and accompanies you along the way – there's nothing to worry about; He will take care of it – "even if"

Not by might, nor by power, but by [his] Spirit (Zech 4:6)

Like it says in v34 – *The Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon, and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.*

And as a follower of Christ, you not only are clothed with the Spirit's *power*, but indwelt by the Spirit's *presence*

In which case there's no excuse to sit on the sidelines

If God is with you, what else matters? If God is for you, who can be against you?

Seize the opportunity "even if" – b/c God is with you, and . . .

- **The need is real**

This is where the rubber meets the road right now in our church

The need for you to serve is real; Especially in the area of Service Teams and Children's Ministries

Made all the more glaring as we start a satellite campus in West Davenport later this month; With 82 people going over there to serve, the need is even greater here

In fact, in Children's Ministry alone, we need 73 people

73 people who will seize the opportunity, even if

Which sometimes requires a *change of attitude* doesn't it? Just like Gideon

Instead of critiquing those who had it wrong or were doing it wrong, he did what he could to make it right

Instead of treating his worship of God as a once-a-week religious check-off, he got involved; And some of you need to do the same

And sometimes, that requires a change of attitude

Other times, it requires a *change of priorities*; Again, just like Gideon; Think about it

He had a pretty good life; And he could have kept it that way – minding his own business, keeping to himself, and staying out of trouble

But he set it aside, stepped up to the plate, and seized the opportunity

Instead of assuming someone else would do it, or waiting until the last possible minute so that somebody else would fill the need and he wouldn't have to – *he* did it

He put God's priorities ahead of his; He made sure things of *eternal* consequence, took precedence over things of *temporal* consequence

He lived to serve; And stayed with it; No flash in the pan; He stuck with it; B/c the need was real

And so is ours; Seize the opportunity to serve, even if – b/c the need is real . . .

- **And the opportunities are endless**

From youth leaders to Small Group leaders, band members to service teams – the list is long; You can see that on your bulletin insert

So let me encourage you to take a look at that, consider the needs, and get involved

Consider your gifts, and see what fits

Don't look for the *easiest* thing to do, but the thing God *wants* you to do

And if you need to, stop by the appropriate kiosk and talk to someone, or call the church office

But whatever you do, seize the opportunity to serve

Prayer – Find us faithful in our service to you and your work of ministry here in our church; Use us to the utmost; Stretch us, and find us glorifying you in the process
And use our tithes now, in the same way