

going deeper study guide

jump: risk

"The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing, and becomes nothing. He may avoid suffering and sorrow, but he simply cannot learn and feel and change and grow and love and live."

Leo Buscaglia

"If a man is going to do anything worth while, there are times when he has to risk everything on his leap..."

Oswald Chambers



LIFE GROUPS
doing life together

Small groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for the life application of the CORE 4 elements of worship, grow, serve, and share

Barriers to Blessing

Judges 6:1, 6-10 - Israel, once again, found themselves in desperate circumstances because of a judgement from God. God had asked only one thing of Israel in return for His faithfulness (the message from the prophet lists **seven** things God had done for them) - the exclusivity of their worship. This is a very big deal to God - and not just for the Israelites, but for everyone. It's such a big deal that this one thought leads off the 10 Commandments (You shall have no other gods before me) - it could be argued that #2 (Do not make for yourself an idol . . .) is really just an extension of #1. And yet so much of God's instruction directly to Israel outside of the 10 Commandments in the Old Testament is warning them to be careful that they don't worship the gods of other cultures.

And still they fail over and over in this one thing – arguably the most important thing to God. To get a bigger picture of just how important this, read the following: Deuteronomy 7:1-6 / 7:23-26 / 8:19-20 / 11:26-28

Q :: Back to our story in Judges. They were in trouble for following the gods of the Amorites. The “gods of the Amorites,” indeed of the entire area, were the male fertility god Baal and the female fertility goddess Asherah or Ashtoreth. What would “the gods of the Amorites” be in our day and culture?

Q :: How can we, if we are not careful, find ourselves bowing down to these gods of our culture?

Q :: Israel was seemingly locked in a sad pattern in many parts of the Old Testament. The pattern is this: **sin** → **consequences** → **cry out to God** → **deliverance** → **complacency/forgetting God** → **sin**. What is it about God's deliverance that brings about complacency and a forgetting of God?

Q :: Verse 1 of chapter 6 says that God delivered them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years. Based on verse 6 that says they cried out to the Lord, and verse 7 which states that God sent an angel to them **when they cried out**, it can be inferred that it took them seven years to cry out to God. What do you think took them so long?

Read Judges 6:11-13 -- I find this very, very interesting. Gideon sees the trouble his people are in. He senses the distress. He feels the despair. But he fails to make the spiritual connection of their circumstances to their sin. He asks the angel “If the LORD is with us, then why has all this happened to us?”, but naively misses that it has to do with his people's own disobedience. He says that the LORD has abandoned them, when in reality THEY have abandoned the LORD.

A pastor at a small church I attended years ago said something once along the lines of “You can't really expect God to bless you if you are going to live in disobedience.”

Q :: Do we sometimes expect God to bless us in spite of our disobedience? Explain.

Q :: What is the danger of blaming God for something that is really our fault? And how can we avoid doing this?

Q :: When we are in distress, under persecution or on the receiving end of heavenly discipline, isn't our default response question why God has abandoned us, instead of asking what sin in our life might be at the root of what's happening? Why is that?

Don't you really just LOVE how the angel shows up to a man doing his work in extremely confined quarters out of fear that he will be seen by his enemies and has the audacity to say "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior." (v. 12)? This is the Hebrew phrase ***gibbor hayil*** used to describe David's select warriors who had performed great exploits in battle. Gideon, may have looked around. Who? Me?

Is it possible that this has nothing to do with the fact that God knows the outcome of future events and instead has everything to do with the fact that God can see who you have the potential to be, regardless of your behavior at the moment? Gideon protests his weakness, much like Moses did when God called him (Exodus 3:11; 4:10-17). But God gives Gideon the same answer he gave Moses: "I will be with you." Gideon's strength is not in himself, but in God who has promised to be with him. God's vision of Gideon and God's promise to be with him change Gideon's life! God can see us as a "mighty warrior" (6:12) when we see ourselves as "the least in my family" (6:15).

Q :: Were the LORD to appear to you suddenly tomorrow, what would you like His greeting to be?
"The LORD is with you, _____."

Q :: How can our own self-perception prevent us from becoming what God has made us to be?

Digging Up The Roots

Read 6:25-27 -- As God's first act of deliverance for Israel, he gives as his first assignment to Gideon a command to strike at the root cause – Baal worship. Gideon's "might" partly consisted in his willingness or ability to act – to obey the LORD. Now the LORD gives him his first assignment. Before God will deliver the Israelites from their enemies he requires them to forsake the false gods they have turned to instead of the true God.

Like many assignments from God, we will never know what God can do through us until we decide to obey him the first time, and then the second.

Q :: Is the fact that Gideon does this first task as a night mission a sign of weakness or of faith?

Q :: Joyce Meyer says: "Fear never fully leaves a person alone, you have to learn to do it afraid."
Is the absence of fear a necessary part of acting in faith?

The Incredible Shrinking Army

Read 7:1-7 -- Probably the main thing Gideon is known for (other than the Bibles in the hotel rooms . . . sorry, I couldn't resist), is the reduction of his army to only 300 against a vastly outnumbering a Midianite army. In verses 2-3, He tells Gideon to send home anyone who is afraid. If I had been Gideon, I would have been embarrassed to obey such a command. Gideon is a new leader. He's concerned with how others perceive his leadership. He has just emerged as a bold, young leader who has, presumably, raised an army of 32,000 on the basis of his "own" personal charisma. What will people think if he dismisses two-thirds of his army by allowing the fearful to go home, no questions asked? It seems most un-general-like. Yes, there is Biblical precedent for such a move (Deuteronomy 20:8). But what will people say?

If Gideon allows his pride to dissuade him from obedience he puts his whole army and country in jeopardy -- and proves what God has just said about men's propensity to pride at their achievements. However, God does explain the reasons for dismissing two-thirds of the army:

“You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her...” (7.2)

God knows us well. We’re so easily tempted to take credit for the things that go well, but blame God when they fail. Our pride is so deceptive, we may not even recognize the signs.

God cannot allow Israel to take credit for the victory, or they’ll restore their disastrous pattern of depending upon themselves and failing to rely upon the true God. Until Gideon came along it took seven years of oppression and poverty before they humbled themselves enough to “cry out to the LORD for help” (6:6). The ability to leave God out of the equation of their victory would only undo all the redemptive work done by Gideon in tearing down the altars, and have them right back into the pattern of forgetting God and suffering the consequences.

The army is reduced by two-thirds, but 10,000 men is still too many for God’s plan. God instructs Gideon to march the rest of the army down to the water – presumably the spring of Harod – where God will “sift them.”

Out of the 10,000 people that remained, 9700 kneeled down and drank straight from the water where as 300 evidently stood, and used their hands to bring the water to their mouth. Many commentaries and study notes will say that God was only interested in the smaller group who were more watchful and alert, and didn’t give themselves over completely to their natural needs. So in all, 300 people remained... that’s 300 Israelites versus 135,000 Midianites. Israel was outnumbered 450 to 1! Well, outnumbered that is apart from the small fact that Israel had one Almighty God on their side!

Q :: An important thing to note is that the 10,000 remaining soldiers themselves, all of whom were keen to be used to fight Midian, didn’t even know there was a test going on when they were getting a drink. Likewise, God tests us, looking for hearts that are truly His, and these tests come in the ordinary events of our daily lives often without our knowing. What might some ways we are tested without knowing it?

I am reading through the book *Crazy Love* by Francis Chan, and have come to a grinding halt after chapter 4. Those who have read the book know why I stopped here. For those who haven’t, let me just tell you the title of the chapter: *Profile of the Lukewarm*. To say that it is convicting is both a gross understatement, and doesn’t really tell the whole story. A few parts have really rocked me to my core, and I am struggling to figure out what to do next. Parts seem very appropriate to Gideon’s story. Consider this excerpt:

“LUKEWARM PEOPLE are continually concerned with playing it safe; they are slaves to the god of control. This focus on safe living keeps them from sacrificing and risking for God.”

To say that Gideon was not playing it safe is, also, a gross understatement. Interesting, is it not, that God calls Gideon a mighty warrior then puts him in a position where he has to rely COMPLETELY on the LORD for his success, and not on his own might? Think there’s a lesson in that for us?

Q :: How do we, as believers, end up “playing it safe”?

Q :: In our efforts to become what God intends us to be, how do we balance the need to act in faith with the fact that, like Gideon, we may have to put ourselves massively “at risk” and in a position of having to rely completely on the LORD to become that which He sees us capable of becoming?

Q :: If making the “Jump” - or the leap - of faith requires risk, is there anything you are not willing to risk?

Conclusion

It’s tough to know exactly where or how to end this. I think these questions of risking it all for God – putting yourself in a position of complete and utter reliance on God for your success – deserve much thought and careful introspection before getting ourselves in over our heads. I think oftentimes as Christians that we are so programmed to give the churchy answer, that we don’t fully grasp the reach and scope of the question. Sometimes if we did, I think that our right-sounding answers would not come quite as quickly.

The story of Gideon is great one. One that fills us with admiration of a man who would trust God to the extent that he did. But what of us? Are there oppressors in our lives that we are laced to stand against? Are there battles yet to be fought? Is there a sifting out to be done in our lives – a sifting of the resources we may be depending on to bring us the victory? Is there a call on our lives to place ourselves in a position where ONLY God can make this thing work out?

Francis Chan has another quote that I think is quite powerful - albeit not quite phrased in the purest of terms. It is this:

“I don’t want my life to be explainable without the Holy Spirit. I want people to look at my life and know that I couldn’t be doing this by my own power. I want to live in such a way that I am desperate for Him to come through. That if He doesn’t come through, I am screwed.”
--Francis Chan, *Forgotten God*

Do we want our life to not be explainable without the Holy Spirit? That is the story of Gideon - risking it all and placing any chance for success and deliverance SOLELY in God’s hands. To be honest, I don’t yet know what that looks like for me and my family. My prayer is that God makes it more clear.