

GIDEON

Week 1 | Rascals | Judges 6-8

Deeper Dive

During this time in Israel the "Judges" were considered leaders, and not the type of court judges we think of today. Gideon was one of Israel's judges during this period. As we begin chapter 6, Israel has been worshipping other gods. Therefore, God has allowed the Midianite army to invade them. Gideon, along with many others, are hiding to avoid being attacked. Every time the Israelites plant crops or graze their livestock, foreign armies would raid them. Eventually, all their livestock had been taken and their land was left completely bare. The Israelites are left with no food, safety or provision. This is symbolic because the foreign god they had worshipped, Baal, was a deity that was supposed to provide plentiful crops and livestock. God was showing them that this false god was fruitless to provide for them and to protect them against their enemies. As a loving Father, God's ultimate goal was to restore His relationship with Israel. He was calling them back to himself through an unlikely "Rascal"~ Gideon.

Day 1 - Who me?

READ: Judges 6:1-16

Think about a time that you were asked to do something WAY outside of your comfort zone or your abilities. Maybe you were asked to speak at an important meeting for work, or were put into a leadership role that you didn't feel equipped for, or maybe it was that moment you found out you were having your first child and you questioned your ability to be a parent. All of us have all probably had one of those "who me?" moment in our lives. Gideon was no different, except his experience was directly with God!

Ironically, while Gideon was hiding from the enemy, the angel of the Lord comes and calls him "mighty warrior". These words in Hebrew more literally translate to define a warrior that is proven to be strong, courageous, and mighty in battle. Obviously, since Gideon is hiding, he did not see himself as a courageous warrior. In fact, he says in verse 6:15, "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." Despite his lack of confidence, weaknesses, fears, doubts and questions, the angel of the Lord says "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand". This had to be Gideon's "who me?" moment.

Many times God calls us to do things that are WAY beyond our abilities or comfort zones. It's in these moments that we can either choose to let our doubts and fears stop us from following Him, or we can surrender our fears to Him in faith. Instead of relying on our own abilities and strength, we can trust HIS provision, abilities, and equipping even if we can't see the whole picture just yet.

- When have you experienced a "who me?" moment with God? Is there something WAY outside of your comfort zone that God is calling you to consider right now?
- Do you believe that God could call you TODAY, just the way that you are? What labels, requirements, or restrictions have you placed on yourself? How might God want to redefine those through the power of HIS abilities & strength?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Psalm 139: 23-24** ~Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.
- **Matthew 6:24** ~"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
- **Exodus 20:3** ~You shall have no other gods before me
- **Proverbs 4:23** ~Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
- **Psalm 51:10** ~Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me
- **Deuteronomy 8:2**
~Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands
- **Proverbs 16:2** ~All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Day 2 - From the inside out

READ: Judges 6:25-32

The phrase "the first step is the hardest" is especially true when that first step is inside of ourselves. Like signing up to run in a marathon, we often want to jump ahead to the big celebration at the finish line and skip all the hard "inside" work it takes to get there. God almost always starts from the inside out. He begins with that inner "housekeeping" in order to equip us for His outward calling.

Sometimes this looks like a season of waiting and learning like the wilderness in Exodus. Sometimes it's a season of healthy pruning where God asks us to let go of unhealthy habits or idols in our lives just like our story with Gideon. Maybe you don't have a golden statue or an alter in your backyard, but we can all be tempted to place things in our lives above God. If we take a look at our calendar or bank account, we can quickly see what we prioritize most. For some of us it's our identity wrapped up in our careers, for some it's our children or their sports & activities, and for some it can be a hobby that began as casual fun but has become a top priority in our lives. An idol is basically anything that consumes our time and thoughts other than God. How can we be fully surrendered and obedient to God while prioritizing something else above Him in our lives? As it says in Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters."

Gideon and his family certainly struggled with this. God's first step for Gideon was to prune the idols in his life that had separated him from God. He needed to face some inner "housekeeping" before moving into God's calling. God specifically asks Gideon to tear down the alter to Baal on his family's land, and to burn it as a sacrifice to the Lord. This was a generational symbol of surrendering their sin & idolatry to the Lord. Gideon in his weakness was fearful and decided to sneak around at night to obey God. Even so, God is gracious with him in this moment of hesitancy and fear. God doesn't rebuke him or punish him, instead He still honors His promise to Gideon.

- Is there an idol in your own life that you need to surrender to the Lord before you can move into your calling?
- Is there a season of inner "housekeeping" that you need to consider? Is it a season of healthy pruning, like Gideon?
- How has this idol affected your whole family? Take a moment to prayerfully consider where you and your family spend most of your resources: time, money, and energy.
- What would it realistically look like for you to put God first in your life? How would this change your daily schedule or lifestyle? How would this change your family's lifestyle?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **John 20: 24-29** ~Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
- **Romans 12:1-2** ~Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
- **Matthew 4:7** ~ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"
- **Deuteronomy 6:16** ~ Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah

Week 1: Gideon

Day 3 - But I have questions...

READ: Judges 6:17-24; 33-40

We have probably all worked for a boss, had a parent, or experienced an authority figure that wouldn't tolerate questions. The moment we questioned, they became angry or defensive. Especially if this was your experience in childhood, you may have a strong aversion to asking questions or you may have a fear being questioned yourself.

Thankfully God isn't like us or our human authority figures. God is 100% confident in who He is and does not view questions as a threat. God desires for us to understand Him and to know Him more. Therefore, we can trust God to answer our questions, doubts, fears, and even meet us in our moments of anger and sadness. In the books of Psalms, Lamentations, Job, and throughout scripture Godly men and women cry out with questions. God doesn't get defensive or angry. Instead, He meets us where we are, and moves towards us to strengthen our faith.

After Gideon's "who me?" moment, he asks God to confirm His instruction. God graciously meets Gideon in that space of questioning in order to strengthen his faith and confirm His calling. Through a series of miraculous signs, Gideon received the confirmation that he needed to move forward in faith. First, the angel of the Lord proves who he is through the fire. Then, God confirms his instructions to Gideon through the sign of the fleece and the dew. THEN, God does it a second time, just to confirm that it is truly him. Jesus does the same in John 20 when His disciple, Thomas, needed to see the scars in order to confirm it was truly Him. Jesus graciously meets Thomas where He is and says, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Although Jesus tells him that it would have been better for him to believe without seeing, He still graciously gives Thomas the confirmation he needed to strengthen his faith.

It's important to note that asking God for confirmation is different than "testing" God. Scripture warns us against testing God (Deuteronomy 6:16, Matthew 4:7). The difference is the motivation in our hearts. "Testing" God comes from the desire to control or demand something of God. God isn't a magic genie in a bottle that gives you "wishes" or a lucky rabbit's foot that gives you good vibes wherever you go. God is sovereign and has authority over everything. We are His FOLLOWERS, not His guides. In contrast, when we ask God for confirmation, our motivation is to seek faithful reassurance that we are truly following Him.

- What are the questions you have for God that are holding you back? What would it look like for you to surrender those questions to the Lord today? Are you placing human limitations on a limitless God?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Isaiah 55:8-9** ~For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- **Isaiah 40:31** ~But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint
- **2 Corinthians 12:9** ~'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
- **Deuteronomy 31:6** ~Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you

Day 4 - Even if it doesn't make sense

READ: Judges 7:1-22

What happens when your plan B falls through, your plan C runs away, and your plan D requires the skills and equipment you don't have? Sometimes when our self-made plans begin to fall apart, it's because God's plans aren't even in our playbook. Sometimes we need to take a step back, and allow God to work in our situation. As it says in Isaiah 55, His ways are higher than our ways. God could be forcing us to throw out our plans, get out of our comfort zones, and enter a place of trusting in His provision, power and strength.

In our scripture reading for today, we see this in action with Gideon's army as they prepare for battle. Typically numbers, skills, and equipment matter in warfare. However, in God's playbook the only thing that matters is having faith in God's power & strength. Let's take a look at God's unlikely plan for this epic battle.

1. **Starting with the underdog** - Gideon's army only had **32,000** men as compared to the over 100,000 men in the Midian army. Does God try to recruit more soldiers? No, that would make WAY too much sense. God looks at this weak tribe, with their small number of soldiers, and declares that they actually have TOO MANY! Verse 7:2 explains that God doesn't want them to be tempted to operate in their own strength. God's ultimate goal is for them to put their trust and faith back in Him.
2. **Eliminating fear** - In verse 7:3, God asks Gideon to send the soldiers that are afraid home. This drastically reduces the army down to only **10,000** men. God only wanted those that had faith without fear to stay.
3. **Eliminating complacency** - Next, God asks Gideon to test how the soldiers drink water from a stream. Those that stayed alert could stay, but those that knelt down without concern for potential attack would be sent home. God wanted His army to be faithful, without fear, and prepared to take action in obedience to Him. This reduces the army down to only **300** men. In verse 7:7, God declares that He will be victorious with this tiny little army of soldiers.
4. **Unconventional equipment** - Did God at least equip this tiny underdog army with swords, armor, or shields? No, of course not! He gives them trumpets, empty pitchers, and lamps hidden inside. This doesn't make logical sense, however, God had a plan and they trusted Him. Ultimately, their victory hinged on God's command and not on brute force or human strength.

- Is there an area of your life where it feels like all your plans have fallen through? Is God using this moment to re-define your plans, or to re-define what success looks like for those plans? How could you move towards obedience even when it doesn't make logical sense?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Ephesians 2:8-9** ~For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast
- **John 15:5** ~I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
- **Galatians 6:9** ~Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
- **Psalms 119:11** ~I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you
- **Matthew 26:41** ~Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
- **Joshua 1:8** ~Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

Day 5 - Living with long term obedience

READ: Judges 8: 22-35

Ever worked really hard training & getting healthy for an important race, or pushed yourself to get a big project completed at work, or labored through that senior year to finally graduate? Most of us can relate to that temptation to quit or "slack off" afterwards. Often the relief that comes from having success in something you've worked so hard for, creates a vulnerable space for old unhealthy habits of self-reliance to creep in.

This is exactly what happened to Israel after they were miraculously victorious in their battle with Midian. They quickly fell back into old habits. Gideon made an Ephod out of the gold they plundered, and it immediately became a temptation. Many times in moments of blessing or success we can falsely feel like we can handle things on our own again. We begin to idolize the "plunder" or the blessings verses the one who provided it to us. It's easy to forget the struggle we experienced, and the One who provided us the strength to get through it. How can we prevent this temptation? How can we live in long-term obedience to Him?

1. **Stay dependent, not just desperate** - Gideon felt dependent on God when he felt weak and desperate, but after he had success & victory that dependence faded with his desperation. We should seek God just as much in times of success as we do in crisis. Spending time with the Lord daily, abiding in Him and His word, and having a heart of gratitude & worship towards Him keeps your heart dependent on Him no matter the circumstances. **Read John 15:5**
2. **Don't replace old idols with "good things"** - Gideon didn't worship Baal again, instead he made a seemingly "good" Ephod. Sometimes we replace old idols with seemingly "good things". When the "good things" we are doing for God become more important than following Him, being in His presence, or listening to His voice, then it's just another idol. Doing "good" on your own with God's guidance will lead to pride and a false self-righteous faith. **Read Ephesians 2:8-9**
3. **Obedience is on-going, not a one-time act** - True faithfulness is proven AFTER the big moment. We never reach a "finish line" spiritually speaking. Instead, it's a life long journey of daily surrender & choosing to live in obedience to Him. Each day we can choose whether or not to spend time in prayer, reading the Word, and listening to His voice. Ask yourself, am I living in the shadow my past faithfulness, or am I walking in present daily obedience to Him? **Read Galatians 6:9**