

“Staring Fear in the Eye!”

Judges 6-7

Intro. – Will Willimon, dean of Duke University Chapel experienced a terrifying even in NYC. He was returning to his hotel room after the theater. It was after midnight when he was accosted. Holding a knife to his throat, the attacker said, “Give me your wallet!” Willimon nervously said, “You can have it! You can have it!” The mugger recognized a southern drawl and responded, “You from the South?” “Yes, yes,” Willimon said, “I’m a Southerner.” The thief continued to hold him at knifepoint as he leafed through the wallet. “Sir, I see you’re from South Carolina” he said. “What kind of person would I be if I robbed someone from my home state?” Putting his arm around Willimon he continued, “You better be careful; this place ain’t So Carolina – it’s a jungle. You can get hurt walking around here in the middle of the night.”

We live in perilous times. Fear of crime, finances, loss of loved ones, personal injury, ridicule and loneliness are but a few of the potential ordeals that terrorize Christians and non-Christians alike. We know Jesus said, “*Don’t be anxious about tomorrow*” but it’s tough not to be “uptight.” Fear seems to stalk us constantly. It robs us of sleep, ruins our health, and negates our testimony for Christ.

A man applied for a job as a night watchman for an art gallery. He was asked, “If a fire broke out and you could save one painting, what would it be?” He replied, “The one nearest the exit!” We all can identify with this guy’s instinct. I’ve read that students of human behavior have listed hundreds of phobias or fears. Here are a few I found in what is called “The phobia List”: **chronophobia** = fear of time; **ecclesiophobia** = fear of church; **hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia** = fear of long words; **parakavedekatriaphobia** = fear of Friday the 13th; **syngenesophobia** = fear of relatives; **vestiphobia** = fear of clothing.

Purpose: to better understand how God wants us to overcome our fears

The account of Gideon (our text) is a great example of a man who overcame his fear to do God’s will. He was an ordinary man who initially was a coward. But he learned to put his trust in the Lord and eventually became a man of impressive courage. His account will help you and me stare our fears in the eye:

I A TASK GIVEN BY GOD (6:1-16)

A. Gideon Was Fearful

1. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and gave him a task = lead Israel against Midianites.
2. Midianites were ruthless barbarians and for past seven yrs had ruled over Israel: 6:5-6 “*They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.*”
3. Gideon was afraid – 6:11 “*...Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.*” – Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress so Midianites would not spot/terrorize him... i.e. he was afraid!
4. It was here the Angel of the Lord said, “*The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!*” – Did the Angel of the Lord have hard time keeping straight face? Gideon looked cowardly not a mighty warrior!

B. Gideon Was Doubtful

1. 6:13 “*But sir,*” Gideon replied, “*if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.*”
2. Most of us think or have thought the same way. We sing about God being a Mighty Fortress. We read about God being our Shield and Protector of us...
 - a. why are Christians getting hurt, losing jobs, having family difficulties? How can we conquer fears if God seems so aloof? Where is this God Who protected Daniel in the lions’ den and sent an angel to rescue Peter?
 - b. no thinking Christian can flippantly say, (Psalm 46:1-2) “*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...*”

3. Gideon protested – “*Mighty warrior?! Are you kidding? God has abandoned us and delivered us to the hands of the Midianites. I’m just trying to survive!*” – Sounds hauntingly familiar doesn’t it?
4. Lord replied 6:14 “*Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?*”

C. Gideon Was Full of Excuses

1. 6:15 “*How can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.*” Talk about low self-esteem—this guy had it and as a result he was scared to death!
2. When the Lord sends you and me into similar risky positions, we protest the same way:
 - a. “I’m not a teacher. I wasn’t even a good student.”
 - b. “I’m not a leader. I’m just a cooperative sheep.”
 - c. “I’m not a confronter. I’m a peacemaker.”
 - d. “I’m not a soul winner. I’m a quiet let your light shiner.”
3. Feelings of inadequacy or unpreparedness do not exempt us from involvement... -- *humility* is not low self-image; instead, it is using our God given gifts unselfishly to serve and honor Him alone...
4. For example, we’ve all been given the God given task of winning lost people to the Lord! What excuse(s) have and are we using to not be used of God in this task?

II A TEST GIVEN TO GOD (6:17-40)

A. “Mighty Warrior” Still Afraid

1. 6:17 “*If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.*”
2. Yes, Gideon was still fearful; so, God gave him several “signs” i.e. assurances

B. Signs Given by God

1. 6:18-23 Gideon makes offering to the Lord – the Angel of the Lord took the tip of His staff and touched the sacrifice and fire flared from the rock base consuming meat and bread. The Angel disappeared and Gideon trembled for “...*he had seen the Lord face to face.*”
2. Same night God told Gideon to make a 2nd offering (6:25-26)
 - a. God was instructing Gideon to symbols of idolatry/immorality and burn them as a statement to the community a time of repentance has come! 6:27 = Gideon still afraid but does it!
 - b. men of town a ticked, go to Joash, Gideon’s dad asking for Gideon (had intent to murder him)
3. Joash was courageous – appears as first to repent – 6:31 “*But Joash replied to the hostile crowd... Are you going to plead Baal’s cause? ...If Baal is really a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.*”
4. Point is this: courage is contagious – one standing up to evil inspires others to do likewise!

C. Gideon Gets a Backbone

- 6:34 “*then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.*”
- 1. Still apprehensive, Gideon “puts out the fleece”... God responds = He is with Gideon!
- 2. Don’t use “putting out the fleece” to know the will of God – often used in superstitious manner...
 - God has given His Word to reveal His will. God’s will, will be apparent... Don’t expect neon lights pointing out “His will” in simple matters... Don’t expect miracles when they have not been promised, but His providence has!

III A TRUST GIVEN IN GOD (7:1:25)

A. From Coward to Warrior

1. 7:1-2 “*Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands.’*”
2. You know the rest of the story: 32,000 reduced to 10,000 after those who *trembled with fear* were told to go home... 9,700 told to go home after getting drinking in an unprepared manner...
3. With 300 remaining men, Gideon was now confident and trusting in the Lord

B. Gideon Trusted God

1. Evidence (after evidence, after evidence...) convinced Gideon God really meant what He said...

2. This is what the Lord asks of us – believe AND trust His Word... Do we believe and trust that God means what He says?...

C. Gideon Got in the Fight

1. The second response that helped Gideon overcome his fear was obedient action – got in the fight!
2. Courage is NOT absence of fear – courage is being afraid BUT proceeding anyway!
 - a. 7:9-10 *“During that night the Lord said to Gideon, ‘Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah.’”*
 - b. note: Gideon did NOT say, “That won’t be necessary, Lord. I’m not one bit intimidated...”
 - c. what they heard = Midianites were afraid of them – Gideon’s response? 7:15 *“When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshipped God.”*
3. Returned to camp and took bold action – *“...follow my lead”* and lead he did... 7:21 explains it all *“While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.”*
4. Three qualifications of a courageous leader: 1) reassuring confidence (“we’re going to do this”)... 2) clear communications (“this is what you are to do”)... 3) solid example (“do as I do”)...
5. There comes the time must trust God enough to take action or put another way “get in the fight”!

Conclusion: It was right in the middle of WW II that a young man from Hammond, IN answered the call of God to attend school and prepare for the ministry. 1944-1948 were the years he prepared himself at the Cincinnati Bible Seminary. He took criticism from his friends, neighbors and even his own family for not enlisting and fighting in the war. But this young man understood he wasn’t “ducking his duty” nor was he “taking the coward’s way out.” He was enlisting in the Lord’s army choosing to live counter to the popular trends and culture then. His influence only God fully understands. But this much I know, this young man became a man who was unafraid to stare fear in the eye. I know, because he impacted my life. Now I have the opportunity to do likewise – to stare my fears in the eye, live counter to the popular trends of our culture and to remind you, my brothers and sisters in the Lord and what He said in Proverbs 28:1 *“The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.”* Will you join me in this endeavor? Will you see the call of our Lord to meet this task head on? Will you stop testing Him and start trusting Him? Will you stare with me into the eyes of fear?!