

## MY NAME IS GIDEON (Judges 6-8)

Do you ever feel inferior, insufficient, not up to the task, not enough—**not pretty** enough, **not smart** enough, **not strong** enough, **not talented** enough, **not successful** enough? We are going to meet a man today who was familiar with that feeling.

While his story is told in the pages of the OT, by way of introduction, let me read to you what is said of him in the NT. The writer of Hebrews tells us:

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—<sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Of the six names found in that passage, the first is Gideon. He is going to tell us his story and what he learned along the way . . .

### **Gideon:**

Good morning, my name is Gideon, and I am glad to be with you today. My name literally means “hacker” or “cutter of trees.” My story is told in Judges 6-8. What I want you to know is that I have always struggled with a sense of inferiority. I’ve never had much confidence in myself. When I was younger and a teacher or an adult would ask for a volunteer, I would look down and avert my eyes. I never raised my hand and volunteered.

My story really begins during a dark time in my nation’s history. My people never stopped believing in God or worshipping Him, but we just added other gods to worship. God let us know in no uncertain terms that He is a jealous God and that we were not to worship anyone but Him. Worshipping the gods of our neighbors was our besetting sin.

I don’t know if you struggle with wanting to fit in and be like everybody else. That was our problem.

God said we belonged to Him. We were to be His people. He expected to have an exclusive relationship with us, but we had wandering hearts and competing affections. To bring us back to Himself, God had to discipline us. He did it through our neighbors to the east—the Midianites. Those dogs were scavengers. We planted the crops, worked the fields, and they would steal what we grew. We couldn’t stop them. They were like a swarm of locusts gobbling up everything in their path. When they cleaned us out, they would travel back east of the Jordan River and wait until the next harvest. They did this year after year for seven years.

We cried out to God, “Help us. Send us a Deliverer.” You know what God did? He sent somebody, but He didn’t send us a Deliverer. He sent us a preacher, a prophet. That is not what we asked for, but that is what we got because that is what we needed. **I**

**learned that we needed understanding more than we needed relief.** We needed to be convicted of the nature of our sin before we were rescued from the consequences of our sin. We may think we know what we need. God knows what we really need. I don't know what your nation needs, but my nation needed to repent of our sin and turn back to God.

This is when my story gets kind of weird and really surprising. My family lives near a town called Ophrah. It is located in the bread basket of Israel, the Jezreel Valley, just south and west of Lake Galilee. My father had managed to hide some wheat from those Midianite scavengers. He hid it in our winepress which is located under the shade of a big oak tree on our property.

One day, my dad sent me out to thresh that wheat. It was under the shade of that oak tree that a stranger approached me out of nowhere. At the time, I had no idea who it was. As far as I knew, he was just a traveler who had wandered by our place. I was soon to learn this was no mere man. He was a heavenly visitor, an angel or something more. Now, as I look back on it, I'm convinced that messenger from heaven who addressed me was our Lord and Savior, the One you know as Jesus.

He greeted me with an odd greeting. He said, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor." Up until then, no one had called me a man of valor. Here I was, hiding in the shade, hoping the peering eyes of a Midianite scout wouldn't see me. I really didn't know what to say, but he brought up the LORD; so, I thought I would tell him some things I had been thinking. "Where is God? Why has He allowed the things that have happened to happen. Why doesn't He do something?"

He didn't answer any of my questions. Then, He looked deep into my eyes and gave me a command as if I was a soldier in His army. He thundered, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

Whoa! I wanted God to do something, but I didn't want to get involved. Basically, I said to Him, "You've got the wrong guy. I'm not qualified. It is true that the Manasseh is a big tribe, but my clan is probably the least important one in the tribe, and I'm the youngest in my family. You need someone with more influence than I have."

He wasn't swayed or deterred by my excuses. Instead, He said something to which I had no answer. He said, "But I will be with you." Little did I know then how important that promise was: "I will be with you." But I would soon learn its significance and the enormous power of that promise.

My culture is big on hospitality. When strangers show up, we feed them. I said, "Stay here under the shade tree. Don't go anywhere. I'll be back." I came back with goat meat, bread, broth.

The visitor gave me strange instructions. He said, "Put the meat and bread on this rock. Then, pour the broth all over it." So, that's what I did. Then, He took His walking stick, and with His staff He touched the top of what was now a food sacrifice. You would not believe what happened next! From that rock erupted flames of fire. The fire was so intense that the meat and bread were incinerated and no evidence of the broth was left. The next moment, the man vanished from sight. It was then I realized this was no mere man. I literally thought I was going to die, but God spoke to my racing heart and said, "Peace be to you. Do not fear. You shall not die."

I remembered our patriarch, Jacob. He was on a journey. He lay down and had a dream in which God spoke to Him. When he awoke, Jacob said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.”

I was speaking to the LORD, and I did not know it. Like Jacob I built an altar. I used stones and erected an altar on that very spot. I called it, “YHWH Shalom,” which means, “The LORD is peace.”

It wasn't the last time the LORD would speak to me. He did so the very next night. He told me to do something that needed to be done, but I really didn't want to do it because I was afraid it would really get me into trouble. As I said before, my people added idol worship to the worship of God. On my father's property as an altar set up in honor of Baal and an Asherah pole which was an altar to a female deity. God told me to use my father's bull to tear down the altar to Baal, to cut down the Asherah pole. Then I was to kill my dad's bull, cut it up, and place all that meat on the wood of the pole I had cut down. I was to burn it all before the LORD.

I recruited ten of my dad's servants to help me telling them they had to be quiet about it. We used my dad's pull to pull down the altar of Baal, and being the hacker that I am, I cut down the Asherah pole and hacked it to pieces. I hacked up the bull, placed it on the wood from the Asherah pole, and offered it up to God as a sacrifice. I did just what God commanded, but I did it at night so that no one would see me and stop me. You may fault me for doing it a night, but as I saw it, God told me to obey Him. He didn't tell me I had to be a hero.

Just as I expected, the next morning when the townsfolk saw that the altars to their false gods were destroyed, they were hopping mad. They were ready to kill whoever it was that was guilty of this outrage.

Imagine that. They were the guilty ones. They were the ones who had dishonored God, and they wanted to kill the man responsible for standing up for the One who had delivered our people time and again. Yet, in their eyes, someone else was the criminal.

I am here to tell you, “Get ready. When you stand up for God you will be seen as the guilty one. You will be hated and reviled.”

They performed a quick investigation. I think one of the servants I recruited ratted me out because they fingered me as the one who did it. They went to my dad and demanded that he turn me over to them. I don't suppose me dad was too happy that I had sacrificed his bull without his permission, but I was proud of how he answered our neighbors. He grew a backbone. He bowed up and said, “If Baal is offended, let Baal fight for himself. If you are found fighting for Baal, God's gonna get you.” They backed down, but they gave me a nickname—Jerubbaal which means, “Let Baal contend against him.” I didn't mind. Baal is not a real God. No matter what, you don't ever want to do anything that will induce the real God, YHWY, to fight against you. That would be a fight you could never win.

The harvest was getting close. We learned the Midianites along with the Amalekites were massing getting ready to invade us yet again. This time, with God's help, we were determined to fight. I send messengers throughout Manasseh, and our neighboring tribes—Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali—to send us fighting men. I didn't send anyone to

Ephraim, and I would hear about that later.

Meanwhile, I felt a need to talk to God. I needed to be sure God was really in this, that I hadn't imagined what I believed He was telling me. I feel a little foolish now, but I gave God a test. I said, "LORD, if you are really going to use me to deliver your people, then make it clear." I put a fleece on the threshing floor, the real threshing floor, not under the tree, but up the hill, in the open, where the wind can get to it. I said, "God, if you will let the dew gather on the fleece but keep the ground around it dry, I will know You are in this whole thing."

The next morning, I got up, rushed to feel the fleece. It was dripping wet. I squeezed out a bowl full of water, but the ground all around it was dry as a bone.

That should have cinched it, but like I said, I'm insecure. I lack confidence in myself. I don't want to let all these people down. For the first time in a long time, they are ready to fight. I said, "LORD, don't get mad at me, but let's do this one more time just so I can be sure. This time, let the fleece be dry and the ground around it wet with dew. The next morning, that's the way it was. I stood a little taller and breathed a little easier that day.

Have you ever the feeling that God is in this? You have the confidence that He's gonna show up. That's a great feeling. I'm not telling you that you need to go out laying fleeces on your property because you have something that I didn't have. Today, the Holy Spirit lives in those who belong to God. You can ask the Spirit to confirm the truth of what you hear God saying. Consult Him. He will make it clear. He will give you an inner testimony that you can fully trust.

It is a good thing that I didn't send out scouts to get me a count of the opposing troops. It was only later that I learned they had fielded a combined total of 135,000 soldiers. I knew they had a lot, but I had no idea they had that many. I was feeling good that we had assembled 32,000 fighting men. I didn't realize we were outnumbered 6 to 1. I was more than a little concerned when God decided we had too many troops. Who know what He had me tell them? "Hey, guys, if you are afraid, you're dismissed. You can go back home." Did you know that 22,000 people took the offer and left? Now, we were down to 13 to 1.

God, however, thought the army was still too numerous. There is a spring that runs near the battlefield. God had me take the troops down there to get a drink. If they laid down and lapped like a dog, I was to keep them. If they knelt down and cupped water with their hand, I was to send them home.

There were 300 jokers who lapped like dogs. They were the ones, the only ones, I was to take into battle. Now, we were down to 450 to 1. I felt that sense of insecurity and insufficiency rising.

God knew that. I didn't ask for a sign. Instead, He gave me an option. You can go attack now, or if you are afraid go down and spy out the enemy camp. If you do that, you will hear some encouraging news. I was needing some encouragement; so, I postponed the attack orders and did a little reconnaissance of my own. I took my attending servant with me. I had never seen so many troops massed in my life. If God thought this was encouraging, He was mistaken. God, however, said I would be strengthened by what I heard, not what I saw. Being still and quiet to keep from being detected in the enemy

camp, I overheard one soldier recount to another a dream he had. In his dream, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and flattened a tent. His friend offered an interpretation to the dream. He said, “This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp.”

How did this man know my name and the name of my father? I didn’t think anyone me except the few people in my community. I really never expected to hear an enemy soldier prophesy the destruction of his own army.

I safely returned to my own camp smiling the whole way. I came back strengthened and fully confident that God would fight on our behalf, and we would win the victory. Per his instructions, I divided the 300 into units of 100. I gave each man a clay jar which housed a candle a shofar, a ram’s horn. I gave them explicit instructions as to what they were to do with each.

That night, the 300 surrounded the enemy camp. At the right time, following my signal, in unison, each man blew his shofar. You’ve heard such a sound! Then, each soldier broke his jar. That shattering noise reverberated throughout the enemy camp! God so confused the enemy camp that they began to fight and kill one another. We just sat back and watched them. We didn’t suffer a single casualty on our side. When all was said and done, they lost 120,000 men. Only 15,000 enemy soldiers survived the massacre.

I called for reinforcement to block the way of retreating Midianite troops. This time, I sent a message to Ephraim, and they successfully captured and executed two Midianite princes.

After battling my fears and battling my foes, I found myself in a battle with my friends. Our fellow tribe of Ephraim took me to task that I hadn’t invited them to the battle. They were hot. They thought they had been snubbed. I’m sure you have read the proverb of Solomon, “A soft answer turns away wrath.” That hadn’t yet been written back in my day, but God helped me to keep my cool and to give a soft answer. I said, “Oh, what have I done in comparison to you? You are the ones who succeeded where I had failed. You are the ones who captured the princes of Midian. I can’t compare with your accomplishments.” They straightened their robes, held their heads a bit higher, and forgot their anger.

Here is some free advice: When your critics are proud, it does no good the trade criticism. Compliment them where you can. They will walk away feeling justified, and you can get back to doing what God called you to do.

Speaking of being proud, I was so proud of my men. They were utterly exhausted, but they didn’t know the word *quit*. They kept pursuing the enemy and pressing the victory.

I knew they needed food. What I did next is not something of which I am proud. In fact, there are several things of which, sad to say, I am embarrassed. They are chronicled for you in Judges 8. You can read about my failure. It is all there in black and white.

To be brief, I overstepped my bounds of authority. I lost my patience, and I mistreated the inhabitants and the leaders of a couple of Israelite cities who I felt who were not doing their part. Some say I used the army to wage my personal crusades. They may be right.

I also have to admit that I let the success go to my head. My troops recovered an

immense amount of treasure, gold, jewels, precious stones. I admit it. I got greedy. I amassed over 40 pounds of gold earrings. I acquired for myself the treasures of conquered kings, pendants, royal clothing, even the gold chains that hung around the necks of their camels.

At one time in my life, I was clothed with the Spirit of God. Foolishly, I traded that to be I clothed in the garb of earthly kings. Sadly, my riches became a trap for my me and my family. I used the gold from the gold earrings to make a large object of religious worship. I allowed false worship back into my life.

I practiced polygamy. I had many wives who bore 70 sons for me. I had another son from a concubine. I believe your pastor is going to tell the sad and sordid tell of him next Sunday.

I have discovered that when you feel insufficient, not enough, it can cause you to stumble in one of two ways. Either, you use it as an excuse to do too little, of you use it as inspiration to do too much. I fell to both temptations at different periods in my life.

Dear friend, find your identity in God. When you believe that you are not enough, you will discover that He is enough. He will supply what is lacking. He will equip you to do what you could never do on your own. And, unlike me, if you will keep your focus on Him, the treasures of this world will hold no allure because nothing on this earth can compare with the treasure that is your God.

Thank you for letting me be with you today. Your pastor has come closing comments.

### **Pastor:**

I want you to notice Judges 8:28. That is the last time we find the phrase “and the land had rest.” It never occurs again in Judges. The people forfeit their rest because they pursue other gods. They refuse to make their God their sole allegiance.

Gideon is both a heroic and tragic character. He rightly knew that he didn’t have what it takes, but God called him a mighty man of valor because he looked beyond who Gideon was and saw what he could become through God’s help.

When God looks at you, He doesn’t see you as you are. He sees who you are becoming and will become through the shaping influence of His Spirit.

Find your identity and completeness in Jesus, and then, keep your eyes on Him.