

From Worrier to Warrior

Texts: Judges 6:11-12, 25-32, 34

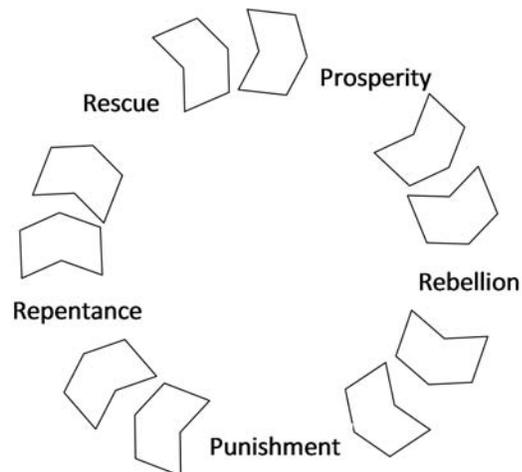
General Direction

To explore the story of Israel's judge, Gideon, as an example of how God uses unlikely people to accomplish his purposes. [Deliver this message after the reading for Week 3 is completed.]

Back Story

The land promised to Abraham and his descendants is now, finally, occupied by the Israelites. In the era of the Judges, there is no federal government led by anointed kings. The Israelites form a loose confederation of tribes with common lineage. Before entering Canaan, the people have been warned that seasons of obedience to God would be rewarded with his blessing, but that blatant disobedience would result in severe punishment. (See Deuteronomy 28).

During the era of the Judges, there are multiple cycles where a season of prosperity gives way to rebellion which leads to punishment, through the means of foreign oppression. The people then cry out to God in repentance and a judge (rescuer) is sent to lead the people against the foreign oppressor. The term judge is not used primarily in a judicial sense, but rather as a name for the military leaders who were raised up to lead the people.



Sermon Purpose and Outline

The cycle of prosperity to rebellion to punishment to repentance to rescue is not only visible in the nation of Israel, but it is evident in our lives as well. Through our study of the life of Gideon, we will see how God met him in his place of obscurity and persecution, and empowered him for a great purpose. But the cycle of sin exerts itself, and Gideon strays from the power that gave him victory, finishing his life in compromise and defeat.

Sermon Question: How does God turn worriers into warriors?

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| 1. Meeting | Judges 6:11-12 |
| 2. Testing | Judges 6:25-32 |
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Sermon Introduction

Do you ever compare yourself to people who are out there doing great things for God and think, “God could never use me like that. I’m not courageous or dynamic. I’m not a natural leader, I don’t have much talent, and public speaking makes me want to throw up.” Well, guess what? That makes you just like Abraham the cowardly liar, Moses the stutterer, David the scrawny shepherd, Esther the orphan, Jonah the fish food, and Peter the impulsive waffler who suffered from foot-in-mouth disease! When God looks for someone to use, he usually chooses the most unlikely person.

Today’s story is another tale of God plucking a nobody from nowhere and using him to do something heroic. In this story about Gideon, we’re going to see that God used him, even though he had issues. Here are a few of his issues. Let’s just take inventory and see if we can relate to any of these:

- **He came from a lousy family background.** Do you feel crippled by your childhood? Do you have trouble moving on from the patterns you learned in your home of origin? This message is for you.
- **He had poor self-esteem.** Do you have issues with feeling worthy? Do you compare yourself to others and always come up short? This message is for you.
- **He lived in fear of bullies.** Are you a hider? Do you deal with fear or anxiety in regards to a situation or a person that keeps you closed, cocooned, shut down? This message is for you.

- **He was a chronic worrier.** Do you worry if you don't have something to worry about? This message is for you.
- **He caved in to peer pressure.** Do you live your life so that other people will approve of you? Are you afraid of criticism, disapproval, or abandonment? This message is for you.

If you have any of these issues that Gideon had, and you think that God can't use you because of that, you're wrong. We're going to see how God transforms a worrier into a warrior.

Connection to the Overarching Theme: The Journey of Faith

Gideon was a cowardly nobody, yet he was called to lead the nation of Israel against its mighty foe, the Midianites, in one of the most miraculous victories ever. Like David against Goliath, Gideon met a big enemy at a great disadvantage, and triumphed because of his obedience to God and faith in his word. Although he is included in faith's Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11, the end of his story is a sobering reminder that a great victory does not guarantee a life of spiritual fruitfulness. One can detour from the Journey of Faith and never get back.

Sermon Question: How does God turn worriers into warriors?

1. Meeting

Judges 6:11-12

*¹¹ The angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat **in a winepress** to keep it from the Midianites. ¹² When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, **mighty warrior**."*

Textual Explanation

The nation of Israel was at its lowest point. They had abandoned God and engaged in idol worship again, so they were spiritually, emotionally, physically, mentally, and economically bankrupt. The Midianites invaded with a force of 135,000 men, forcing the Israelites to flee and hide in caves.

Timeless Principle

When trouble came, Israel didn't have a relationship with God in place, so they couldn't stand up to the bullies – they just ran and hid. Are you having trouble with bullies? Feeling like hiding instead of fighting against wrong?

Cross Reference

You need to be connected with God.

Daniel 11:32b NKJV

*The people **who know their God** shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.*

Textual Explanation

The angel of the Lord **meets** Gideon, tracking him down as he is surreptitiously threshing grain inside a winepress, which he is doing to keep from being robbed and killed by the Midianites.

The angel's greeting could be read sarcastically: *The Lord is with you...mighty warrior – ha!* But instead, this greeting is a word of encouragement, a word of prophecy spoken into Gideon's heart to reveal his new character into which he is about to be changed.

Application

When God **meets** you in your situation, he doesn't come in with harsh words of criticism or accusation. He starts his transformational work in your life with a word of encouragement. He sees your potential and he wants you to see it too. Have you been given a word of hope, an idea of what you could be that just blows your mind because you don't see how it could possibly be true of you? Receive the idea of that new identity, that new name, and allow God to change you into that person.

Textual Explanation

What follows in the text is a conversation between the angel and Gideon, where Gideon protests, and the angel of God responds. Let's see how many of these things you have said to God when you're worried about a situation, and what God has to say in response:

Gideon (v. 13)

- “Why has all this happened to us?” (Questioning God's fairness – why me?)
- “Where are all his wonders?” (Questioning God's power – why won't he help?)
- “Now the Lord has abandoned us” (Questioning God's faithfulness – where is he when I need him?)

God (v.14)

- “Go in the strength you have.” (You've got God's strength at your disposal – act as if you do!)
- “Am I not sending you?” (When God sends you, you can't fail.)

Gideon (v. 15)

- “My clan is the weakest.” (I come from a poor family background)
- “I am the least in my family.” (I am the runt of the family – in a family of runts, I am the runtiest!)

God (v. 16)

- “I will be with you.” (You and me together are a majority! cf. Romans 8:31)
- “You will strike down all the Midianites together.” (This will be a cinch.)

Cross Reference

1 Corinthians 1:27-29

*²⁷But God chose the **foolish things** of the world to shame the wise; God chose the **weak things** of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸He chose the **lowly things** of this world and the **despised things**—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him.*

Application

Many of us miss God's will for our lives because we just can't see ourselves in the role God has for us. But when God **meets** us, he always starts with a word of encouragement, telling us, “You can be more than you are right now.” And when we protest, he says, “I am with you.”

After God **meets** us and shows us our potential, he takes the next step to change us from worriers to warriors, and that is the step of **testing**.

2. Testing

Judges 6:25-32

*²⁵ That same night the Lord said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. **Tear down your father's altar** to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Then **build a proper kind of altar** to the Lord your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering." ²⁷ So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the Lord told him.*

Textual Explanation

The background of the story is that during this time of oppression and depression in Israel, they had decided to try out false gods. They were compromising their faith. So God said, "Gideon, I have a little task for you to do before you take on the Midianites. You know that altar your dad built in the back yard? Tear it down and replace it with an altar to me.”

F. B. Meyer said, *We are first tested in the less before being called to the greater.* Gideon first had to prove himself with a small task before he could be trusted with the large task.

Application

Before God will ever use you in a significant way he will test you.

1. It may be a test of lordship. If Gideon goes and tears down the Baal in his back yard, he is proving his allegiance to God. God wants to see who or what is number one in your life. What is the Baal in your back yard? What consumes all your attention? Is it a friendship, a career path, a

status symbol, an achievement, your own image? God is going to test you in that area and see whether or not you will cut down that idol and make him number one in your life. Before Gideon could lead others to righteousness, he first had to be righteous himself.

2. It may be a test of relationship. Gideon was asked to start right in his own home, with his own family. He had to confront family tradition. He had to break away from the past and stand up to his own father. Isn't that one of the hardest places to live out your Christian commitment – in your own home? Do you ever limit what you do as a Christian because of what other people might think? Are you someone who does a great job at keeping family members from getting upset, but at the cost of living out your own convictions? The most difficult opposition a believer experiences is generally from those closest to him. Before Gideon could reform a nation, he first had to reform his home.

3. It may be a test of discipleship. Gideon was a worrier. Gideon worried about what his father would think of him (6:27). He worried about what the men of the city would do to him (6:27). He worried about whether or not he was really hearing from God (6:17). He worried that he had gotten the message wrong (6:36). So, he tries a meal offering and fleeces to ask God to convince him he shouldn't be worried. God even gave him the reassurance of overhearing the dream of one of the Midianites (7:10-11) so that he wouldn't worry about going to battle. Worry and trust in God can't coexist. The path of discipleship is blocked if a person has a stronghold of worry in their life. In order to make us more Christlike, God may test us in this area and prove himself to us so we can learn to replace worry with trust. Before Gideon could trust God in the battle, he had to trust God with his worries.

So, after the **meeting** with God and the **testing** by God, we are transformed from worriers to warriors by the **filling** of God.

3. Filling

Judges 6:34

³⁴ Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.

Textual Explanation

Here's where Gideon receives God's power. He has been met by God, he has been tested by God, and now God's power enters his life. God's power always comes after God's testing. In Hebrew, the phrase *the Spirit came upon Gideon* means "the spirit clothed himself with Gideon." It's like

saying "Gideon, I'm going to take over your body." Now he has the spiritual power to go with his new identity of "mighty warrior."

Gideon's first God-empowered act was to blow a trumpet to call the people to assemble for battle. His new role of leader was validated by the fact that 32,000 men responded to his call. Now, under the power of the Holy Spirit, Gideon obeys God in a series of very baffling instructions. His new character of "mighty warrior" is further being proven by his unquestioning obedience. It takes faith to follow God's leading when that leading makes absolutely no sense.

- First, Gideon asks, "Who is afraid?" and 22,000 men raised their hands. He sends them home. Their fear would have spread and crippled the whole army with fear.
- Next, Gideon has them get a drink, and sends home 9,700 more men because their drinking method showed they were careless and lacked caution. They could have endangered the army.
- That left 300 men. Still, Gideon obeys, even though the odds are now 450 to 1, and the battle seems hopeless. The next thing God asks is that they assemble their weapons: clay pots, horns, and torches. Can't you just hear Gideon saying, "Aren't we taking this whole 'God uses the fooling things of the world' thing just a little too far?" God not only uses unlikely people, he uses unlikely strategies.

Well, you know what happens. They surrounded the Midianite camp in the middle of the night, their torches covered by the clay pots, and at the signal, they blew the horns, broke the pots, held up the torches, and then just stood there and watched as the startled Midianite army annihilated each other.

Timeless Principle

When you are filled with God's power, it is easier to trust God, even when obeying him means doing something illogical. Sometimes, God has given us a new identity or a new calling, but the path on which he takes us doesn't make sense. Gideon probably thought that running out there with 300 guys armed with clay pots was not exactly the path to "mighty warrior" he had envisioned. But a person who is filled with God's power is also a person who trusts God, and obeys God even when it seems confusing.

Closing

- So, do you need a meeting with God, and a word of encouragement from him today? We talk a lot about believing in God, but today, you need to know this: God believes in you. You can do something significant for God.
- Are you in a time of testing? Is God seeing what is going to have first place in your life? Maybe you need to do some spiritual housecleaning. Maybe you need to start in your own family.
- Are you in the battle? If you haven't been filled with God's power, you're probably fatigued from trying to fight it on your own. You need to be filled with God's power, then obey what he asks of you, even if it doesn't make sense.

I'm going to close today with the postscript to this story that is pretty disturbing. Gideon's moment of brilliance was just that...a moment. The time from his meeting with God to his glorious victory was probably about one week. But the rest of Gideon's life after that high point was spent in spiritual compromise, idol worship, and moral failure. He collected gold from everyone and formed an ephod that became the new idol, and *it became a snare to Gideon and to his house* (8:27). He fathered 70 sons with his many wives, and he even had a concubine. Yes, he was the leader of the land, the judge, but he used his position for personal profit, sensual pursuits, and a return to spiritual bankruptcy.

So, while Gideon's story is a great encouragement to the worried, the bullied, and the runtiest of the runts out there today, he is also a great warning to the victorious. His life tells us that we won't experience continued victory over evil unless we walk consistently by faith. We may have great accomplishments in the past, but those accomplishments will not secure victory for us in the future if we do not continue living by faith in God and his Word.