



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*A Few Good Men... and Women*

Judges 6–8

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*series: The Story*

In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did as they saw fit. We lived in this amazing land God promised us; so you would think it would have been a joyful time for Israel, but it was quite the opposite. If you don't know, we went from being a group of wandering nomads who left Egypt to this massive group of people with the best land, as far as the eye could see. Moses was never able to enter this land, but God chose Joshua to lead us after Moses' passing. Once Joshua passed away, it was like we forgot everything God had done for us. Our people forgot about the Ten Commandments and we slowly accepted the ways of the Canaanites. Instead of worshipping the Lord, we participated in cult activity.

We kept finding ourselves in a recurring cycle. We would sin and turn our backs on the Lord. Once we did this it was like God was against us; the nations around us would oppress us. It was almost like God sold us into their hands. When we finally came to our senses, we would repent. And once we repented, God would raise up a leader to deliver us. It was like God knew our repentance was coming. This happened with Othniel, Ehud and Deborah who lived before me.

Oh! I'm so sorry, I was so caught up in my story that I forgot to introduce myself. I'm from the tribe of Manasseh, on the west side of the Jordan. My clan, the Abiezrites, is very small. My father's name is Joash, which means "God has given." My name is Gideon, but during my lifetime some people called me Jerub-Baal for my actions. I'll get to that part later in my story.

My tribe, Manasseh, is centrally located in the Promised Land. We have a wonderful land where grain grows well because of the light dew we receive on the hills. Manasseh is a fragmented tribe. It happened because some of our people wanted to stay on the East side of the river while the rest of us wanted to take the land God had promised us. Our tribe has a large portion of land but numerically we're one of the smaller tribes.

When you know all of this about our tribe, our location, the agriculture and ability to sustain livestock it's no wonder the Midianites invaded our land. For seven years they came into our fields, stole our grain, ate our sheep, slaughtered our cattle and harassed our people. We couldn't protect ourselves from them. They rode in on camels and we had nothing to combat their attacks. They were a horrible people, bent on taking all we had, and each year it got worse. There were so many of them! When they settled in the valleys, their numbers were so great they looked

like a plague of locust. Some of our people were so scared of the Midianites they hid in the hills and found caves in the mountains to use as their home. It's embarrassing to admit, but I was scared of them too. They became so oppressive that we finally cried out to the Lord to save us.

### **An Unexpected Visitor**

One day while I was threshing wheat, things changed. An unexpected visitor came to visit me. He sat under the oak tree near my home in Ophrah. There I was, threshing wheat in a winepress so the Midianites wouldn't see me and steal my grain. When I looked up and saw him, he startled me. I asked myself, "Who is this guy? What is he doing here?" Then he said the words I can never forget: "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." I wanted to say, "If I'm such a mighty warrior, why am I hiding in a winepress threshing wheat?" but I held my tongue. I decided to go a different route and ask him about our current situation, "If the Lord was with us as He was once with our ancestors, then how come we are so oppressed by these foreigners?"

As our conversation progressed, I was almost certain I was talking with the angel of the Lord. It came to me because of how he spoke, what he knew and how he looked. He commanded me, "Go in the strength that I have." He told me "God will be with you" and "He will defeat the Midianites." I was skeptical. I reminded him, "How will you use my clan? We are the weakest in all Manasseh and I am the least in my family." His answer calmed my fears "I will be with you, leaving none of the Midianites alive." And that's when it dawned on me: you can't be too small for God to use you.

At this point I knew it was the angel of the Lord, so I asked him to wait while I prepared a meal for him. After preparing a huge meal, I returned and served him. Then the most fearful thing happened. The angel touched the meal with the tip of his staff, and the whole thing was consumed by fire, and he was gone. My skepticism quickly turned to belief and I realized I had just been in the presence of the Lord. I was scared for my life at this point! I thought I was going to die!

Later that night God spoke to me. This time He called for action. God gave me precise instructions to tear down my father's idols, build a new altar to the Lord, and burn the idols. I'm sorry, I forgot to tell you that we worshipped idols too. My family participated in worshipping the Lord but we also worshipped Baal and Asherah; we had these idols at our home. I was so scared. I

wanted to follow the Lord but I was scared of how the people in our town would treat me, so I took ten of my father's servants to help me tear down the idols at night. We did exactly what the Lord asked me to do. I barely slept that night. I tossed and turned in my bed. All I could think about was how holy the Lord was and how He would not allow idol worship. God didn't want us to worship Him a little. No! God wanted us to worship Him **only**.

When the sun rose that morning, I was certain my clan would kill me for tearing down the altars. They began investigating the scene for clues and it didn't take long for them to figure out I was responsible. From my room I could hear them shouting for my dad to bring me out so they could kill me. I was so scared, I didn't know what to do. Thankfully my dad spoke up and said, "If Baal is god, then he can plead his own cause. Are you really going to fight on the side of Baal? Whoever chooses to fight for Baal will be killed by tomorrow morning." My fears subsided a little after hearing this. As the townspeople walked away, they began calling me "Jerub-Baal" which basically means "let Baal contend with him." As the voices faded in the distance, my heart rate returned to normal and the sweat stopped pouring down my face.

### **Faithless Before Battle**

Shortly after the townspeople left my house, the Midianites crossed the Jordan to camp in the valley of Jezreel just four miles from my clan. This wasn't some fun family camping trip. They were here to oppress us again, take our food and kill our people. Some of the more educated people estimated there was 135,000 of them camping in the valley. We were overmatched; there were too many of them. I was beginning to wonder if God would really use me to save Israel.

Immediately the Spirit of the Lord came upon me. I'm not sure how to put this into words other than a sense of what I was about to do would be completely led by God, something I had never experienced before. I grabbed a ram's horn and blew it, summoning all the men of my clan to join me in battle. I sent messengers to all of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, calling them to join us in the battle. Every day more men came. They were all unwilling to allow these eastern-people to steal our food and sell our cattle; we had had enough of their behavior.

Looking around I saw the men God had sent and I went to Him with a big request. I didn't have bad motives; I just wanted to make sure God would be with us. I said "God, if you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." When I woke up in the morning it was exactly as I had requested. The fleece was wet and the ground was dry. It's an understatement to say the fleece was wet. The fleece was drenched! I wrung an entire bowl full of water from it!

You would think that would convince me but seeing the huge number of men in the camp of the Midianites, I was so scared. Then I said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew." When I woke up in the morning, it was exactly as I had prayed. All the ground was covered in dew, but sitting in the middle was this perfectly dry fleece like a ray of hope. I was shocked! How did God do this? My fear subsided and my confidence grew in the Lord.

### **Less is More in War**

Early the next morning all the men woke up. We had camped at the spring of Harod opposite of the men who wanted to oppress us. As I lay on my mat, I practiced the battle speech I intended to give to the men. I decided to stand up and begin practicing what I would say in my tent, trying to get just the right words: "Men, there are about 135,000 Midianites down in the valley and there are about 32,000 of us. I'm not great at math, but this means we each need to kill about four men for us to win this battle. Now I imagine not many of you have killed another man and neither have I, but..." No matter how much I practiced, it all seemed wrong. The words didn't flow and each try only revealed the fear inside me.

Then God spoke to me. With all the fear I had, I welcomed His voice. He said, "Gideon, you have too many men for me to deliver the Midianites into your hands." I thought God was joking. How could we have too many men? But He wasn't joking. Then He said, "If you take them all into battle, they will boast against me. You need to release those who are scared." I wanted to ask God if I could leave too at this point. I took a deep breath and walked out of my tent and found a place where I could assemble the men so they could all hear me.

With the sun to our left and the smell of morning dew everywhere, I repeated what God had said to me. "If anyone is scared, you are free to go home." I thought maybe a couple hundred would leave. I was shocked when I saw not hundreds, not thousands, but tens of thousands leave. There were audible sighs of relief when I made the announcement. None of them lingered, they just quickly packed their supplies and headed for home. Even when they were out of eyesight, you could still see the dust trail from their departure. It was so disheartening.

After those men left, we regrouped. It was communicated to me that 22,000 men had left due to fear. So 22,000 men were gone. We lost over two-thirds of our army that morning. I did my best to remain optimistic, knowing we still had 10,000 men ready to march into battle. This thinning of the men drastically changed my speech. Now instead of killing four men each, we had to kill about thirteen men each. This would not be easy for men who

had never fought in a battle before. Before I could talk, God spoke to me again, "You still have too many." What, too many now?

God instructed me to take the men to the river's edge to get a drink. As they drank, He told me this, "The ones who get on their knees and lap water like a dog are to return home. The men who scoop the water out with their hands to drink will stay." As the men drank, I watched and noticed there were significantly more who lapped water like a dog. Even though the sun was shining brightly, the more the water rippled from lapping, the bleaker the situation became in my mind. After each man had his fill of water, I announced to them what God had told me: "If you knelt down to drink and lapped the water like a dog you are free to go home, but please leave your supplies with us. All the other men will stay." I watched in shock as 9,700 men walked away from our army that afternoon.

How could our army be too big? I'm not even sure you could call it an army now but either way we were too big. Looking back, I can clearly see; you can't be too small for God to use you, but you can be too big. Our army was too big for God to receive the glory so it had to be thinned down to an elite group of men who would engage in battle. Looking back on that afternoon and the faces of those 300 men I know none of them had an ounce of fear in them. Each of them was alert to their situation and would be alert when we finally engaged in battle.

After 31,700 men left, the day was almost over and the sun was no longer high in the sky. I was emotionally exhausted, and if we were to battle this vast army tomorrow, we would need more than a good night of sleep. While I was sleeping God woke me up and softly spoke, "Go down to the camp of the Midianites." I wasn't sure if I was dreaming, but God's voice continued "I am going to deliver them into your hands, and if you're afraid to attack, bring your servant Purah with you to hear what they are saying."

Quietly I got up and roused Purah from his sleep. We snuck into the camp of the Midianites. I had never been this close to a Midianite. They were everywhere in the valley. The smell of their camels was distinct and everyone was asleep... well, not everyone. Purah and I snuck up to the edge of their camp as one man was explaining his dream to another man. My heart was racing so fast and I was in such suspense that I can't tell you exactly what they said, but basically one man had a dream that a loaf of bread was rolling into the camp. His friend interpreted the dream to mean that God had given the camp into the hands of the Israelites and that I, Gideon, would win the battle.

Immediately I fell to the ground, not because someone had spotted us but because of an overwhelming sense to worship the Lord. I had been so riddled with fear over the last seven years and now God used the dream of this foreigner to encourage me to attack the camp. It was true, God would use our small group

to beat this huge army. After worshipping God at that place, we hiked back to our camp as quickly and discreetly as possible. After gathering our breath, we woke the men and assembled them. I divided our men into three companies of a hundred each and commanded them to follow my lead and do exactly as I would do. I repeated myself, "You must do exactly as I do."

We descended on the Midianites in the middle of the night, a time no man would expect a group so small to attack. As we strategically surrounded the edges of the camp, all of the men followed my lead. We began smashing jars and blowing trumpets. Finally I yelled, "For the Lord and for Gideon!" and each man did exactly as I did; smashing jars, blowing trumpets and yelling, "For the Lord and for Gideon!" The Midianites woke from their sleep to the crashing of jars and loud trumpet sounds. With swords in hand, they began killing each other as we watched from the edges. It was a frightful sight to see, something I hope you never experience.

That night God provided a great victory for the Israelites through my leadership. Over the next couple of days, we chased down anyone who escaped and put them to the sword. The killing didn't cease until all 135,000 Midianites and other eastern people were dead. The people who once brought terror on my people would never cause terror to my people again. I commanded all the men to loot the dead, taking their gold, expensive clothing and swords. The loot we took was expansive and expensive! This lesson God was teaching me finally came true; God used a small group of men to defeat the Midianites.

### **Back to My Old Ways**

God first taught me this when the angel appeared to me. I was taught it again after smashing down the altars at our home. I learned it yet again when the Midianites invaded the valley, when I prayed for the fleece and when we were victorious in battle. But even though God was teaching me this lesson over and over again, I can't say I lived that truth for long. Once the looting ceased, I went back to my hometown of Ophrah.

Much to my surprise, I was asked to be king over Israel. I thought about the request briefly but quickly responded, "I will not rule over you, neither will my sons. The Lord your God will be your king." Even though in my words I said I wouldn't be king, looking back, my actions seemed to tell a different story. My actions even communicated this at the edge of the Midianite camp when I commanded the men to shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon." Then I asked each man to give me a share of his loot. Sitting at my feet was a pile of gold weighing 43 pounds. I'm told this would equal around \$800,000 of your money.

What I am about to share next with you is quite embarrassing. Most people remember me as the man who prayed and God answered his prayer on a piece of wool. I'm asking for you to please not judge me for what I'm about to share. With this pile of gold

sitting at my feet, I decided to take some and fashion it into an ephod. I'm sure many of you don't know what an ephod is, so the easiest way to explain it is that it's like a covering you put over something. With the ephod fashioned, I rebuilt my father's idols and placed this ephod on it. I'm not sure why I did it; it just seemed right to do. I never intended for it to happen, but all of Israel came and bowed down to these idols. Standing here today, it's clear that I was the first leader to officially sponsor idol worship in Israel.

One day I was sharing my battle story, and at the conclusion a young boy asked me, "Gideon, how come you turned back to idol worship?" No one had ever spoken to me like that in my life. The older I grew the more the question bothered me. Had I become too big for God to use me? After the battle with the Midianites I guess I just coasted in life. I enjoyed people knowing my name and coming to our small clan; I think pride got the best of me.

So why I am sharing my story with you? My entire life I thought I was too small for God to use me, and then once He did I became too big. Some of you have fallen into the same sin I did at the end of my life. I understand your day and age is different

than mine, but it's easy to determine by looking around; people aren't really that different. You have technology and have excelled in warfare, travel and science. You can accomplish a lot on your own, and this may have led you to believe you don't need God anymore. Please, let my life serve as a reminder of your desperate need for God.

On the other hand, some of you think like I did when the angel of the Lord first appeared to me. You think you are too small for God to use you. You see the people serving in this church and compare yourself to them, thinking "I can never do what they do." You see the leaders in your community and compare yourself to them or make assumptions based on your family history just like I did. You are not too small for God to use you. God is looking for humble people just like you to do mighty things for His glory. The reality is, you can't be too small for God to use you, but you can be too big.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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