

Gideon (Part 1)

(Judges 6)

Pre-Session Warm Up

If someone came up to you and asked you, "Why do you believe the Bible?" What would you say? Would you be able to tell someone why you believe that Jesus is God and that He came to die for their sins?

How important do you think it is to be a bold witness for the Lord? Do you have fears about standing up for your belief in Jesus? What are some of the fears you have? [Teacher, lead the children in a discussion about the importance of being true to God no matter what others may think.]

You can know that God's Word is true and that He wants you to be bold enough to take a stand for Him. God doesn't want you to be afraid.

In today's lesson we will learn that Gideon was afraid and he needed help to be bold for God.

Opening Prayer

Father, You always want us to choose to say and do the right thing, no matter what other people may think. Sometimes it's hard to take a stand for You, but You want us to be bold and always do what is right and pleasing to You. We don't ever want to be ashamed of You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"
(Hebrews 13:6 NIV).*

Lesson

For the past 2 weeks we have been studying the book of Judges. This is the time period for the children of Israel after Joshua had died and the people were left with no leader.

They would go through cycles of trusting and obeying God, then after a while they would forget about Him. Soon, the Israelites would even start to worship the false gods of their enemies. That would make God angry, so He would allow the heathen nations around them to conquer them. And, the heathen nations would treat the children of Israel harshly until finally they would cry out to the Lord for mercy. And, even though they didn't deserve it, God, in His mercy, would send the children of Israel a judge.

Judges were not kings; they were more like an umpire in a baseball game. They made decisions that helped bring peace and justice to the people. They were also leaders who led the people in battle against their enemies.

Last week we learned about a judge named Deborah. She was a great leader. She was trustworthy, brave, fair and just. The people loved her. They would come to her for advice and she led them into battle.

In Judges 5:31 it says that with Deborah, "...*there was peace in the land for forty years.*"

But now we pick up the story after Deborah had died and the people were left with no leader once again.

Judges 6:1

The Israelites did evil in the LORD's sight. So the LORD handed them over to the Midianites for seven years.

God used His enemies to discipline His chosen people!

Judges 6:2

The Midianites were so cruel that the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds.

The Midianites were so cruel that the children of Israel took to the mountains, to hide in caves and dens.

Judges 6:3-4

Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, marauders from Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east would attack Israel, camping in the land and destroying crops as far away as Gaza. They left the Israelites with nothing to eat, taking all the sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys.

The poor Israelites! Every time they planted their seed, robbers came and destroyed their crops, leaving nothing to eat, and taking away all their farm animals.

Judges 6:6

So Israel was reduced to starvation by the Midianites. Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help.

For seven years the Midianites had destroyed the crops and stolen the people's farm animals. They left the Israelites to starve. The Israelites were frightened and many had fled from their homes. They were forced to hide out in the mountains and live in caves. The Israelites had lost everything. Finally they cried out to the Lord for mercy.

How much suffering they could have avoided if they had turned to Him sooner! Turning to God should not be our last resort; we should look to him for help every day!

Do you think God heard their prayers? God always hears the prayers of those who love Him. He heard their prayers just as He hears your prayers when you pray.

Not long after this, Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites.

Normally, you thresh wheat out in the open. Threshing is the process of separating the grains of wheat from its useless outer shell called chaff. First a farmer beats the wheat, and then he tosses it in the air so the wind will blow away the chaff and the heavier wheat seeds can fall to the ground. Normally, a farmer does this out in a large area, often on a hill. If Gideon had done this, however, he would have been

an easy target for the bands of raiders who were overrunning the land. Therefore, he was forced to thresh his wheat in a winepress where he was hidden from view.

Gideon was frightened. Have you ever been afraid to take a bold stand for God? Being bold for God means doing or saying what is right with strength and courage no matter what other people may think. You may be the only one in your class who believes in Jesus. But you don't have to be ashamed to tell others what you believe. God wants you to be bold for Him.

Gideon was fearful so he worked in hiding.

But, while Gideon worked, suddenly a being appeared before him.

Judges 6:12

The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!"

This is kind of funny in that the Angel of the Lord found Gideon hiding out in a winepress. It doesn't seem like he's a brave and mighty man!

Judges 6:13

"Sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The LORD brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites."

Gideon is blaming God for the bad situation the children of Israel have gotten themselves into. How easy it is for us to blame God for our problems! The Israelites had no one to blame but themselves. They were the ones that had forgotten God and had started worshipping the false gods of the Midianites.

Judges 6:14

Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!"

The Lord encouraged Gideon to go in the strength of the Lord, to have confidence that God was sending him and would give him the power and strength to accomplish His will.

Judges 6:15

“But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!”

Gideon is saying, “Who am I to deliver Israel? My family is poor and I am just a simple man.”

Judges 6:16

The LORD said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”

Once again the Lord encouraged Gideon not to trust in himself, but to trust in the Lord who was sending him.

God promised to give Gideon the strength he needed to overcome the Midianites. But, in spite of this clear promise from God, Gideon made excuses. He was only looking at himself. He saw only his own inabilities and weaknesses; he failed to see how God could work through him. He wasn't trusting and believing in God, was he?

How different Gideon was from Deborah. Deborah had great faith and trust in God; Gideon didn't.

Judges 6:17

Gideon replied, “If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the LORD speaking to me.”

So Gideon goes off and prepares a meal for the Angel of the Lord and brings it to Him.

Judges 6:19

Gideon hurried home. He cooked a young goat, and with a basket of flour he baked some bread without yeast. Then, carrying the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot, he brought them out and presented them to the angel, who was under the great tree

Judges 6:20

The angel of God said to him, “Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock, and pour the broth over it.” And Gideon did as he was told.

Judges 6:21

Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and bread with the tip of the staff in his hand, and fire flamed up from the rock and consumed all he had brought. And the angel of the LORD disappeared.

Now that would have been enough to convince most people that this person talking to Gideon was no mere human being. This Angel of the Lord was an appearance of God Himself!

Later that night the Lord spoke to Gideon and told him to pull down the altars that his father had built to the false gods. And he obeyed.

Judges 6:27

So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD had commanded. But he did it at night because he was afraid of the other members of his father's household and the people of the town.

So, here again, Gideon shows himself to be a coward, doesn't he?

The next morning when everyone woke up, they found the altars to the Midianite gods destroyed and the men of the city were outraged. They wanted to kill Gideon.

Judges 6:33

Soon afterward the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east formed an alliance against Israel and crossed the Jordan, camping in the valley of Jezreel.

The enemies were preparing for battle.

Judges 6:34

Then the Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon with power. He blew a ram's horn as a call to arms, and the men of the clan of Abiezer came to him

What verse 34 says is that “*the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet*” to call the children of Israel to action. Gideon started to assemble his army. But Gideon wanted to be absolutely sure he was doing God's work exactly in God's way. He wanted to be sure God was with him. So, he prayed and asked God to give him a sign.

Judges 6:36-37

Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, prove it to me in this way. I will put a wool fleece on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised."

God was faithful to do just as Gideon requested.

Judges 6:38

And that is just what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water.

The next morning the fleece was very wet. Gideon could wring water from it! Still Gideon was not completely sure. He prayed that God would give him another sign.

Judges 6:39

Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. Let me use the fleece for one more test. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew."

Again, God was faithful to do just as Gideon asked. God wants us to have faith and trust in Him.

Judges 6:40

So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew.

The next day the ground was wet and the fleece was dry. Now Gideon knew for sure that God would be with him and that God had chosen him to lead an army against the Midianites. God wanted Gideon to know that He was his strength.

But Gideon didn't show his faith and trust in God very quickly, did he? We don't have to guess or wonder if God loves us and will keep His promise to never leave us or forsake us. We can have faith that God will always enable us to do His will. God will help you to be bold for Him. You can know that He is with you everywhere you are and will help you do or say the right thing. [Teacher, review today's memory verse.] God wants you to be bold and do what is right.

Gideon was learning to be bold and God was going to use him greatly. Next week we will learn about the exciting battle Gideon has with the Midianites.

Closing Prayer

Father, there are going to be times in our lives when we need to take a bold stand for You. But we don't want to be ashamed of believing in You. Help us learn, as Gideon learned, that you are our strength. Help us to say as Isaiah said, "I will trust and not be afraid." We want to become bold witnesses for You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities**Craft Corner****Game Center**

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. When the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord how many years did God give them into the hands of the Midianites?
 - a) seven
 - b) fourteen
 - c) twenty
2. The Midianites
 - a) Were kind to the Israelites
 - b) Ruined their crops and took all their animals
 - c) Killed their children

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3. When the Israelites cried to the Lord, His response was:
 - a) "Too bad, I'm not going to help you."
 - b) "Since you've obeyed Me, I'll help you."
 - c) "Do not worship the gods of the Amorites."
 4. Who did the Angel of the Lord appear to and say, "The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor!"
 - a) Gideon
 - b) John
 - c) Moses
 5. When the Lord told Gideon He was sending him to save Israel, Gideon said:
 - a) "Yes, I am well able."
 - b) "I don't believe you."
 - c) "Give me a sign."
 6. Which of these things did the Lord NOT command Gideon to do?
 - a) Tear down his father's altar to Baal
 - b) Build an altar to the Lord
 - c) Offer a pigeon for a burnt offering
 - d) Offer a bull for a burnt offering
 7. What did the town's people want to do to Gideon when they saw he had pulled down the altars to their false gods?
 - a) They rejoiced and wanted to make him their leader.
 - b) They were mad and wanted to kill him.
 8. What sign did Gideon ask from God before he fought the Midianites:
 - a) Dew on a wool fleece
 - b) Fire on the altar
 - c) A pot of gold

