



Lesson Three



HOW THE WEAK BECOME STRONG (Judges 6:1-35)

Day One: The Sin Cycle

Tragically, in the book of Judges we witness the Israelites repeating a sequence of events over and over—never learning from their mistakes. This ruinous pattern is known as the sin cycle: 1) Israel sinned against the Lord. 2) Israel suffered under their enemies. 3) Israel made supplication for God’s help. 4) Israel was saved by God’s judge. A judge was an unelected military leader in times of crisis before the rise of Israel’s monarchy. Twelve judges ruled over a 300-to-400-year period.

By the time we meet Gideon, Israel’s fourth judge, their enemies have devolved into a hoarding, ravenous mass. The Midianites were “coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it” (Judges 6:5). For seven years, Israel cultivated crops, and before they enjoyed their harvest their enemies swept in to consume every single morsel, leaving the Jews impoverished.

According to the book of Numbers, Israel had previously subdued but failed to completely destroy the Midianites. Now, nearly 200 years later, the sad survivors had multiplied like grasshoppers and mastered the art of war, chasing the Jews into caves and dens to survive. The truth is that the enemies we fail to defeat will eventually metastasize to defeat us. You don’t compromise with cancer; instead, you throw everything in your arsenal at the loathsome disease until every last cell is obliterated. Likewise, don’t negotiate with sin. Conquer it or it will conquer you. “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11, NIV).

READ THE VERSES BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

“Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD because of the Midianites, that the LORD sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.’ But you have not obeyed My voice”” (Judges 6:1-10).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. Our introduction described the fourfold process known as the sin cycle. Using today’s text, fill in the following blanks with the Scriptures that best apply to these four steps.

a. Sin:

b. Suffering:

c. Supplication:

d. Savior:

2. Describe the Midianites. What kind of people were they?

3. How did the Midianites afflict the people of Israel, and how long did it take for them to do something about it?

4. Did God listen to the cries of His people, and how did He respond?

5. List all of Israel's enemies found in this text.

6. What command did God give the children of Israel regarding their enemies and why?

2. MIDIANITES: During the days of Gideon, the Midianites seemingly had no king, leader, or general. They arrived as an unorganized army of warriors swarming like locusts under a might-makes-right agenda and attacked as camel-riding nomads. Because Israel had fallen into idolatry, God's divine protection was removed.

3. FIGHT OR FLIGHT: Psychologists say there is a threefold response to fear: fight, flight, or freeze. For seven long years, the Jews either ran for the hills or froze in place. Their past victories should have served as a promise for the future success if they stood their ground.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

7. Using the following illustration, personalize one of your journeys through the sin cycle.

SIN → SUFFER → SUPPLICATION → SAVED

7. CONQUERORS: Sadly, salvation does not mark the end of sin and temptation. Conversion is just the beginning of a great conflict with three main enemies: 1) the world, 2) the flesh, and 3) the Devil. But with God "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

8. Using the following verse as inspiration, write a prayer offering different parts of your being to God to be used as an instrument of righteousness (e.g., mind, eyes, etc.).

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness” (Romans 6:12-13, NIV).

“No matter what has happened to you in the past or what is going on in your life right now, it has no power to keep you from having an amazingly good future if you will walk by faith in God. God loves you! He wants you to live with victory over sin so you can possess His promises for your life today!”

—Joyce Meyers

Day Two: The Weak Made Strong

God spoke the world into existence. With four simple words, “Let there be light,” God illuminated a formless, empty, dark expanse into a radiant reality. The apostle Paul said that God “calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Romans 4:17).

Michelangelo’s got nothing on the Creator of the universe. Sure, he saw a block of marble and said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” But the sculptor used marble that God had created. He chiseled something out of something. God crafts something out of nothing.

God not only made humans in His image, but He also molds each of us uniquely into a vessel made on purpose and for His purpose. Today we encounter Gideon as a feeble coward hiding from his enemies in a winepress. But God appeared and spoke an attribute, a calling, onto this man’s life that changed him from a worrier to a warrior. We watch the weak made strong right before our very eyes.

This is not the only time God transformed someone. Take Simon, whom we also know as Peter, for example. *Simon* can mean either to hear or snub nose. The latter meaning suits him better prior to Christ’s intervention in his life. John MacArthur wrote that “by nature

Simon was brash, vacillating, undependable, and outspoken—with a habit of revving his mouth while his brain was in neutral. I have often referred to him as the apostle with the foot-shaped mouth.”¹ But Jesus gave Simon the new name *Peter*, which means rock. The unstable man was made sturdy with just a word from God. Both names, Simon and Peter, are used throughout Scripture. I think he was called Simon when he stumbled in his flesh and Peter when he walked in the Spirit.

I wish I could see myself the way God sees me. And sometimes I really do. But much of the time, I’m overly sensitive and introspective. Like Gideon, I have my doubts and ask God to give me a sign—assurance that He’s really at work in my life. Isn’t that encouraging to hear? God can look past our weaknesses and see our God-given strengths. And just like with Gideon, the reason we are changed is because God promises to be with us.

READ THE VERSES BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

“Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, ‘The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!’ Gideon said to Him, ‘O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, “Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?” But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.’ Then the LORD turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?’ So he said to Him, ‘O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man’” (Judges 6:11-16).

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

1. Why was Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress?
2. Who is the Angel of the Lord?

1. HIDING: *Sin builds barriers between you and the Lord. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they hid from God in the garden because of shame. Because Gideon and his people committed the sin of idolatry, they hid in caves from their enemies. As a result, God hid His face from them: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).*

¹John MacArthur, “Peter: What’s in a Name?,” Grace to You, July 24, 2017, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B170724/peter-whats-in-a-name>.

3. Explain why the Angel of the Lord called Gideon a “mighty man of valor.”

4. Had Gideon done anything valiant yet?

5. What question did Gideon ask the Angel and why?

6. How did the Angel of the Lord answer Gideon?

7. What excuse did Gideon give, and what comfort did the Angel offer?

5. DISOBEDIENCE: *Gideon assumed that Israel's troubles meant that God had abandoned them. He'd forgotten the lessons of Deuteronomy that if Israel disobeyed God, then the Lord would discipline them. God had not left them; they had left God. They were the cause of their own suffering.*

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

8. Today we saw how the Angel of the Lord called strength out of Gideon's weakness. Journal about a specific area of weakness in your life that you would like Jesus to make strong.

8. EXCUSES: *In Lesson Two, Moses used stuttering as an excuse to avoid God's call. In this week's lesson, Gideon used his lowly birth as a reason God could not use him. Jesus sees our weaknesses as an opportunity to reveal His glory in our lives. Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

9. Read Deuteronomy 28, and then write some of the ways God will bless or curse your life based on obedience or disobedience.

BLESSED

CURSED

“God will meet you where you are in order to take you where He wants you to go.”

—Tony Evans

Day Three: The Angel of God

Thin spaces are here, there, and everywhere. That’s because anywhere God reveals Himself to us becomes a thin place. I’ve encountered God in some very unusual locations. Once, I caught a glimpse of Him in a bombed-out church in Qaraqosh, Iraq. ISIS had pummeled the Christian city into a postapocalyptic ghost town. As our Reload Love team walked through the charred church, our noses itched with the stench from blackened stone walls once burned by thick tar. We waded through the ashes of scorched Bibles and hymnals in the courtyard as we rounded into Sunday school classrooms. There, in the rubble, we encountered Father Roni digging through debris looking for something important.

We asked what he was looking for and if we could help him in the search. He told us, “I’m looking for the felt characters I use on a flannel board to teach the children the Bible.” We joined in on the hunt. Daniel’s lion here. Samson and Goliath there. The priest went on to say, “We will not let evil prevail. We will rebuild and teach our children that God’s love overcomes hate.” When we returned to the States, we were thrilled to send Father Roni the most deluxe flannel board that money could buy.

Maybe our meeting with a young, eager priest was really an angel, unbeknownst to us (see Hebrews 13:1-3). He certainly rose to saint status in our hearts and minds. And just like our encounter with Father Roni, Gideon encountered *the* Angel of the Lord in a very unexpected place—a well-hidden winepress. And the Angel spoke of a peace that comes from God, our Jehovah Shalom.

It seems strange that the Angel of the Lord spoke of peace in the midst of seven long years of unrest. But that’s usually when we need peace the most—when surrounded by trouble. In fact, God never promised us freedom from struggle. But He did promise to give us peace that

4. How did the Angel of the Lord instruct Gideon to present his offering? Describe how it was received.

5. What realization did Gideon have, and how did it make him feel?

6. What three promises did God offer to comfort Gideon?

7. Describe how Gideon responded to his new revelation of God.

4. CONSUMING FIRE:

The writer of Hebrews acknowledged that God is a flame that cannot be quenched: “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29). Consuming can mean to use up, to destroy, or to absorb someone’s attention. It can represent judgment or purification. In the case of refinement, what may God be burning away?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

8. Fill in the following chart to discover how others responded to an encounter with God in a thin space.

SCRIPTURE	RESPONSE TO GOD’S APPEARANCE
Genesis 32:30	
Judges 13:21-23	
Isaiah 6:5	
Daniel 10:17-19	

9. We've learned that God often brings peace during trouble. Using the word PEACE as an acrostic, list some ways God has brought peace during trials in your life.

P (e.g., Painful Times)

E

A

C

E

9. **PEACE** is not the absence of war but the presence of God. The kind of peace that Jesus brings frees us from fear and worry. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Won't you let His peace rule in your heart today?

"If God be our God, He will give us peace in trouble. When there is a storm without, He will make peace within. The world can create trouble in peace, but God can create peace in trouble."

—Thomas Watson

Day Four: The Still of the Night

Israel suffered defeat at the hands of the Midianites because "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD" (Judges 6:1). That phrase is repeated four times in the book of Judges. What evil had they committed? It can be reduced to two things: 1) forgetfulness of their God and 2) faithlessness by serving idols. Basically, they were breaking the first and second commandments over and over again.

Why did they keep abandoning God to adore the gods Baal and Ashtoreth? Because it was much more fun. Both were fertility gods, and the worship they accepted involved sexual activities with temple prostitutes that included various forms of perversions such as orgies and excess alcohol. Gideon could not banish the Midianites until he dealt with the problem in his own backyard. Baal had to go before Midian could go.

Our God is a jealous God. He will have no rival. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24, NIV). It is the same with us. We cannot serve God with a divided heart. Before we can have victory over our sins, problems, or habits, Jesus Christ must be the undisputed Lord of our lives.

READ THE VERSES BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

"Now it came to pass the same night that the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it; and build an altar to the LORD your God on

top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down.' So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the LORD had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night. And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built. So they said to one another, 'Who has done this thing?' And when they had inquired and asked, they said, 'Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing'" (Judges 6:25-29).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. What fourfold instruction did God give Gideon?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
2. Who did the idol belong to, and what significance did that hold?
3. Describe the "proper arrangement" (v. 26) God asked Gideon to make to offer a burnt sacrifice and the reason for it.

2. SINS OF YOUR FATHER:

God was raising up a reformer in Gideon. As with all of us, repentance must travel from our hearts into our homes. It is there we must tear down our personal idols before going public. "The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

(1 Peter 4:17-18).

3. SEVEN YEARS:

A timeframe is mentioned twice in our text. In verse 1, we learn that the Midianites had harassed Israel for seven long years. In verse 25, God commanded Gideon to take a specific bull "of seven years old" from his household to sacrifice to God. God's timing is perfect. He knows all your days before even one comes to pass.

4. Did Gideon go alone? Why or why not?

5. Explain why you think Gideon fulfilled God's commands at night.

6. What did the men of the city discover the next morning?

7. After an inquiry, who was the culprit in defacing public property?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

8. God began Gideon's campaign against the Midianites at his father's doorstep. List any idols that may still stand in your home. Journal about how you can remove them and create an altar to God in its place.

***8. IDOLS** come in many shapes and forms. They can be internal like putting our will before God's will, or they can be external like a closet full of shoes or the car in your garage. You'll know something has become an idol if your heart values it more than God.*

9. An altar is a place of sacrifice. A sacrifice is something that costs us. King David said, "I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24, NIV). Offer a prayer asking God if there is something in your life that He is asking you to sacrifice to Him.

“Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God.”

—Andrew Murray

Day Five: The Beginning of the End

Have you ever heard of the imposter syndrome? It's the feeling that you're not good enough even when there's evidence to the contrary. Maybe you feel like you don't belong or you don't deserve to be included in a particular group. A cascade of these kinds of thoughts leads to anxiety, insecurity, and dread. Maybe you're an employee and you feel you don't deserve a raise despite years of service and success. Perhaps you feel like you're less pretty, trendy, or clever than your friends. And once they figure it out, you'll be an outcast.

Some may argue this isn't a “real” concern, because humility is a good thing, right? But imposter syndrome isn't an overestimation of yourself; it's an underlying feeling that you're a fraud so you compulsively work to the point of exhaustion. Its symptoms include people pleasing, perfectionism, or playing a role.

Maybe we could look at Gideon from this lens when we first meet him hiding in the winepress. He was positive that he was *not* who God thought he was. How could God use someone from the wrong side of the tracks or the bottom of the barrel? But God kept insisting that he was the right guy for the job. And in case he was afraid to go it alone, the Lord promised His presence along the way.

That's the key to overcoming the imposter syndrome as a Christian. We're keenly aware that without God we can do nothing. But with God all things are possible. Today, in our text, we see the Spirit of the Lord come upon Gideon when it's time to face the enemy head on. The Hebrew term for *came upon* literally means to clothe or to put on like a garment. Think about it. The very person and power of God came to rest upon Gideon. The man once alone in a winepress now had God engulfing him and an army to support him.

I don't know if you suffer from not feeling good enough, maybe we all do from time to time. But let me say it loud and proud: *you are enough*. God has a plan for your life, and He chose you on purpose. Why don't you claim this verse as your own: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:31-32).

READ THE VERSES BELOW AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

“Then the men of the city said to Joash, ‘Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it.’ But Joash said to all who stood against him, ‘Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!’ Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, ‘Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar.’ Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them” (Judges 6:30-35).

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION:

1. What did the men of the city demand and why?

2. How did Joash respond? Explain his reasoning.

3. What name was Gideon given and why?

4. List the enemies of Israel and describe their actions.

5. How was Gideon transformed, and what did he do?

3. JERUBBAAL: *Gideon's given name meant great destroyer. After he destroyed the altar of Baal, the city folks gave him the new name Jerubbaal, which means contender with Baal. Put them together and we see his prophetic purpose was to destroy Baal and deliver Israel from the Midianites who worshiped this idol.*

5. TRUMPET: *The trumpet was made of a ram's horn and called a shofar. The call of the shofar was a symbolic battle cry of the Jewish people and a reminder of the covenant between them and their God. God blew the trumpet on Mount Sinai: "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled" (Exodus 19:16, NIV).*

6. List those who gathered to stand with Gideon. What motivated them?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

7. Journal about a time you were persecuted for righteousness' sake, like Gideon was. How did God defend you? What did you learn?

8. Jesus said, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20, NIV). God came to Gideon's side as others joined in the battle. Who could you ask to join you in the fight? Will you pray and plan to gather a team?

"Outside of Christ, I am only a sinner, but in Christ, I am saved. Outside of Christ, I am empty; in Christ, I am full. Outside of Christ, I am weak; in Christ, I am strong. Outside of Christ, I cannot; in Christ, I am more than able. Outside of Christ, I have been defeated; in Christ, I am already victorious. How meaningful are the words, 'in Christ.'"

—Watchman Nee