



Lessons Learned from a dude named Gideon

By D. Nicole

Day 1

God's blessings follow you and await you at every turn: when you don't follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes, when you avoid sin's highway, when judgment and sarcasm beckon you, but you refuse. For you, the Eternal's Word is your happiness. It is your focus—from dusk to dawn (Psalm 1:1-2, The Voice).

How does one study the Bible? You may have come to passages of scripture that state we are to “hide God’s Word in our hearts.” What does that mean exactly? How do we accomplish that? I have found that studying the Word of God requires:

- 1) Reading God’s word intentionally & consistently
- 2) Reading God’s word conversationally & expectantly
- 3) Reading God’s word obediently

For the first, we need to remember that anything good in our lives requires intentionality & consistency. For instance, if you are trying to lose weight and get in shape, you can’t just go to the gym a few times a month and expect good results. This is something that requires discipline, dedication, and intentionality. The same is true for the word of God. If we are going to have the necessary tools to disciple, evangelize, and fight off the enemy, we need to read God’s Word consistently. We must be intentional about implementing this daily. Secondly, when we read God’s Word, we should read it conversationally and expectantly. You may have heard the word “meditate” used when it comes to studying the Bible. The word “meditate” means to “talk to oneself.” As we read God’s word, we should chew on it, sit with it, and contemplate what we are reading. As we do this, we become more attentive to what God desires to teach us. When our hearts are open and willing, God will lead us to those quiet places and speak tenderly to us there (Hosea 2:14). Questions that we can ask periodically as we study the Bible are: “What are

you trying to say to me, Lord, through this passage of scripture?” “How can these truths I read be applied to my life today?” We should read the Bible with the expectation that God will speak to us. It is meant to be a conversation between you and God. Lastly, we need to read the Word of God obediently. Through our obedience in reading the Word of God as an intentional part of each day, it becomes alive in our heart and our life. It isn’t only about obtaining knowledge. The Word of God illuminates sin in our lives. It exposes what is going on in our hearts such as idolatry, which are things that we put before and above the Lord. It also reminds us that transformation and change cannot happen within our own strength. Studying and meditating on the Word of God tunes our attentions, allegiances, and affections to be centered on the Lord and not this world.

Think this through and Pray it in

Romans 15:4 states, “*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*” It is with the ongoing study of God’s Word that reminds us of this hope, in Jesus Christ, that we can rely on and cling to in this life. Take a moment to pray that as you read and study His Word you would be reminded of this absolute hope and that your openness to the truth of God’s word will be transformative in becoming more like Christ.

Day 2

One of my favorite things to do with my kids on Mother's Day is to go to a Superhero movie. Avengers, Captain America, Thor, Batman, Superman...Marvel & DC Comic movies do not disappoint. We sit there watching these superheroes rise above humanity's limited abilities to save the day. Although the characters in these movies are fictional, there are true stories that we can learn from the Bible, of how God chose unlikely individuals to rise up and accomplish extraordinary things. For instance:

- He used Abraham, a pagan from Ur of the Chaldeans to be the father of many nations (Genesis 12; 17:5).
- He used Jacob, who lied and deceived his earthly father, to be the father of the nation of Israel (Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-40).
- He used Joseph, who was sold into slavery and eventually imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit, to save God's people during a brutal famine (Genesis 37:12-36; Chapters 39-45).
- He used Moses, a shepherd and a murderer, to deliver His people from the Egyptians (Book of Exodus, Leviticus, & Deuteronomy).
- He used an unnamed servant girl to tell Naaman about God (2 Kings 5).
- He used Rahab, a prostitute, to save the Israelite spies from being killed (Joshua 2).
- He used David, an adulterer and murderer to write some of the most beloved Psalms. God also called him a man after His own heart (2 Samuel 11 & 12; Total of 73 Psalms).
- He used Esther, an orphan, to deliver Israel from the hands of Haman who desired to see the Jewish race annihilated (Book of Esther).
- He used Matthew, a tax collector, someone who was hated throughout the community, to follow Christ and eventually write about Jesus (Matthew 9:9-13).
- He used Saul of Tarsus (Paul), who persecuted Christians, to write over one-half of the New Testament (Acts 9).

Because the Bible is filled with many incredible individuals like those above (and many more), I believe we should pay careful attention to the details of each of their lives. They not only serve as reminders of who our God is but also what He can accomplish in and through us. However, I also believe that these stories exist so that we can learn from their mistakes. It helps us see the consequences of sinful behavior and hopefully steer us in the right direction; a direction that is

honorable to the Lord. Lastly, these stories help remind us of God's generous and freely given grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

This is a study on the life of Gideon. In the book of Judges, there are more passages devoted to Gideon (100 verses) than to any other judge. Something else to note is that Gideon is the only judge whose personal struggles with his faith are recorded. Gideon's story is a reminder of how God can make anything out of an individual or do anything with them. However, before God could use Gideon, there were several obstacles to Gideon's faith that had to be addressed, such as: 1) Gideon didn't recognize God's voice, and as a result, he questioned whether God really cared, 2) he questioned whether God really knew what He was doing, 3) he had doubts God would protect them, and lastly, 4) Gideon questioned whether God would really keep His promises.

Before we get started take a moment to pray. It is very important before we study the Word of God that we pray our hearts will be open and tuned in to what the Lord might have for us, as well as making us aware of those areas of our lives that aren't aligned with God's Word. Studying the Bible isn't just about obtaining knowledge of who God is. Studying God's Word is about being open for the Word to transform and change our hearts to become more like Christ.

Although the Scriptural references in this devotional will be provided, I encourage you to invest in a Bible. However, if you can't afford a Bible, or don't have access to one, I encourage you to make notes directly in this study as we "think through and pray in" different parts of the text. Again, the goal in studying the Word of God is that we may be equipped to be effective image bearers and glory spreaders because that is what we were created to do. Remember to take your time through each chapter and enjoy the journey!

Day 3

(Judges 6:1-6)

Judges 6:1-6:

¹The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ²Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. ³Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help. (New International Version)

Right away we read that Israel had done evil in the eyes of the Lord for many years. As a result of their disobedience, God was allowing the Midianites and their allies to ravage the land. Every year, for seven years, the Israelites would work hard to plant crops, but as soon as the crops reached maturity, these armies came in and took everything away from them which left them in extreme poverty. These enemies (Midianites), are described in verse 5, as those who “...came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it.” These yearly raids forced the Israelites to hide themselves and what little they could conceal in mountain caves. In digging deeper, journeying through the timeline of the Israelites, we find in Numbers 25:16-17: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them’” (New International Version). God had commanded the Israelites to kill the Midianites because of the idolatry and sinful lifestyle to which the Israelites were being exposed. Skip ahead to Numbers 31:14-16

¹⁴ Moses was angry with the officers of the army—the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds—who returned from the battle.¹⁵ “Have you allowed all the women to live?” he asked them. ¹⁶ “They were the ones who followed Balaam’s

advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord's people. (NIV)

Israel hadn't obeyed God's order and ended up keeping the women as captives. Who knows why they chose not to obey, but the fact is that the Israelites didn't purge sin in its entirety.

When sin is exposed in our own lives, it is important to deal with it completely. We can't just get rid of little bits and pieces and hope for the best. If sin is not dealt with in its entirety, it can metastasize into something that can bring even greater harm to us and those around us. Judges 6 shows that as a result of their disobedience, the Midianite, Amalekite, and other eastern armies were stealing everything from the Israelites and driving them to live in caves. But this chapter also shows that the Israelites had hit rock bottom and as a result, they cried out to the Lord.

Think this through and Pray it in

Have you ever found yourself crying out to the Lord? Have you questioned why bad things happen and wonder why it seems like God is silent? Does God really care about what is happening to me or around me? Maybe there is unconfessed sin that hasn't been dealt with? Spend time processing these questions with the Lord before moving on. Write down whatever comes up in your time with the Lord.

NOTES:

Day 4

(Judges 6:7-10)

Judges 6:7-13

⁷ When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, ⁸ he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ⁹ I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. ¹⁰ I said to you, ‘I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.” (New International Version)

The Israelites cried out to God for help (vs 6) and then it states (vs 7), “when they cried out to the Lord...He sent them a prophet.” What a beautiful thing. Did you catch it? They cried out (vs7)...God answered (vs 8-He sent them a prophet). God may not have answered them in the way they anticipated or expected...just like it is with us. But, the point here is that God is attentive, and He does answer. The prophet God sent them delivers a specific message to remind His people that: 1) He had delivered them from Egypt, 2) gave them the land and helped them overcome their enemies, and 3) He had given them everything they needed. But, the message was also a reminder that they had not listened to God’s instructions and instead turned to idolatry over and over again. Reading this portion of the story may seem like God is being harsh. However, I don’t believe this delivered message was about rubbing salt in a wound. It doesn’t appear that the Israelites had any idea that their current circumstances with these enemies were a result of their own disobedience, so the message was something that needed to be said. In regards to what we can learn, I believe that God desires for us to turn from our sinful ways and to learn from our mistakes. And yes, God’s discipline or His method in answering our prayers may feel like a harsh rebuke, but if we are living in sin, it is what it takes to get our attention so that we might turn from our sinful ways and seek repentance. Paul writes in Romans 7:18-19 that no

matter how much we desire to serve God in our minds, we find ourselves sinning with our bodies. *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”* Unfortunately, our bodies are eager to respond to the impulses and desires that are aroused by sin. Even if there happens to be moments in our lives where we actually think that we have done well, there are always those elements that speak to the truth that we are not altogether blameless:

Romans 7:21-24

“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.²² For in my inner being I delight in God’s law;²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” (New International Version)

Think this through and Pray it in

Is God trying to get your attention? It doesn’t matter what our race, gender, or cultural background is - we all sin. Spend some time praying for the Holy Spirit to reveal what is going on in your heart. As the Spirit begins to bring elements to the surface sometimes shame and guilt try and flood our thoughts. We can become consumed with thinking that there is no way we can be forgiven. Or we beat ourselves up thinking, “Why did I do that again?” Whatever you may have said or done, you can cling to the promise in Romans 8:1, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Read and pray through these passages before moving on. Highlight, underline, circle whatever comes up for you as you read through these passages. As you write things down, spend time processing those elements with the Lord.

Psalms 139:23-24

*“²³Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

Isaiah 1:18

“‘Come now, let us settle the matter,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’” (New International Version)

Romans 4:7

*“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”
(New International Version)*

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (New International Version)

NOTES:

Day 5

(Judges 6:11)

Judges 6:11

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.

Starting in Judges 6:11, we meet Gideon. It states, *“the angel of the Lord came and sat under an oak tree...where Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.”* Threshing wheat was really meant to be accomplished outside. Usually done on a hill, the farmer would toss the wheat into the air and the wind could then blow away the lighter chaff (the outer shell) from the grain. However, if Gideon had decided to thresh the wheat outside, he would have made himself an open target to his enemy. So, we find Gideon threshing wheat inside, hiding from the enemy. However, we see that in spite of all the years that the Israelites had turned their hearts away from Him, even though there was no evidence of any real repentance that had gone on in their lives, we see in Judges 6:11 that God “came down to help them.” The same is true for us. There is a message of hope that we can experience and embrace and His name is Jesus. He came down and entered into where we are in this condition of death. He is the only remedy that can bring us to maturity and provide the element of eternal life for all of humanity.

Think this through and Pray it in

Take a moment to reflect on the gift of Jesus Christ by reading through and praying in these lyrics from the hymn, *“Amazing Grace,”* written by John Newton, with an additional chorus written by Chris Tomlin and Louie Giglio.

*Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see*

*Tw'as grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed*

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.*

*Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.*

*(additional chorus by Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio,
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*My chains are gone
I've been set free
My God, my Savior, has ransomed me
And like a flood, His mercy reigns
Unending love, Amazing grace*

Day 6

(Judges 6:12)

Judges 6:12

¹² *When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”*

The angel appears to Gideon and says, *“The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.”* If I were Gideon, my first response would be: “Say what? You talking to me?” “Did you just call me, mighty warrior?” This had to be a strange salutation to him. Gideon is literally hiding in a winepress, which is more like a pit that is hidden from view due to enemy raids; using it to thresh wheat because he can’t go outside. Something else that is interesting is that Gideon is described in the Bible as the “least in his father’s house.” Not completely sure why he was the “least” but it may be suggesting that Gideon was probably an outcast, probably because he didn’t worship Baal (Canaanite god). We also learn that he wasn’t someone with courage or a strong faith. Mighty warrior? It sure doesn’t seem that way. But we need to remember that God can use anyone to accomplish His purposes. When the Lord called Gideon, “Mighty Warrior” He was stating what Gideon would become. Gideon may not have believed it or even seen himself that way, but God did.

Think this through and Pray it in

Have you ever felt less-than? Maybe you have felt unimportant or not able to be used for a specific task. I understand that sometimes there will be times you may feel this way, but please remember that these are messages from the enemy, not the Lord. Ephesians 2:10 states that “we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works...” We are His masterpiece, His work of art, His poetry. Sometimes we experience circumstances in which it may take time to re-wire these inaccurate messages that have taken root in our mind. Take a moment to read and process through these beautiful truths. Highlight, circle or underline anything that stands out to you.

Matthew 6:26

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Matthew 10:29-31

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Isaiah 43:1

But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Genesis 1:27, 31a

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...

Jeremiah 1:5a

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...

Day 7

(Judges 6:13-14)

Judges 6:13-14

¹³ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.” ¹⁴ The Lord turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” (New International Version)

Gideon responds, *“But sir...if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?”*

Stopping here for a moment, we come to Gideon’s first obstacle. Did you catch that first part of Gideon’s response? *“But sir.”* He didn’t recognize God’s voice.

Think this through and Pray it in

Gideon didn’t recognize the voice of God. As I spend time processing this, I remember times in my own life when I didn’t recognize God’s voice. Have there been times when you haven’t recognized His voice? Have there been times that you have, but chose to ignore what God was saying? Spend some time processing these questions with the Lord. Remember, do not fear or be afraid. He loves you. Be honest and open. Write down whatever comes to mind.

NOTES:

The lesson here is how important it is to remain in God's Word (The Bible) so that we can recognize God's voice. The enemy's tactics have not changed. He desires us to doubt the Word of God, doubt the promises of God, and call God's character into question. And just so you know, the enemy will attack you in this way over and over again. Hebrews 4:12 states, *"¹²For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* Studying God's Word helps us become dependent on the Lord and allow His transformational work to take root in our lives. John 8:31-32 states, *"...Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then **you will know the truth**, and the truth will set you free.'"* I cannot say it enough about how studying the Bible is so important. It helps us become dependent on the Lord and allow His transformational work to take root in our lives. We cannot expect to clearly hear His voice or follow His commands if we do not study His Word. Again, it is more than just obtaining knowledge of the Word. It is allowing the truth of His Word, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to renew our minds and transform and shape our hearts so that we may daily be image bearers of Jesus. Romans 12:1-2 states,

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (New International Version).

If we try to accomplish anything in our own strength, we will fail over and over again. Based on Gideon's response, he obviously had been told stories of what God had done, but at the same time, what was being modeled to him was completely contradictory to the truth about who God is. Because Gideon hadn't experienced these miracles himself, it is what

drove him to doubt as well as not being able to recognize God's voice. However, instead of being angry at Gideon's response, God doesn't get caught up in trying to prove who He is to Gideon. He simply responds to Gideon with His plan to help His people. The Lord says, *"Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"* Going back to Judges 6:12 for a moment, it says, *"The Lord is with you..."* Once again, the Lord has shown that His priorities are confirmed with His presence, *"I will be with you."* Just like Gideon, we can find ourselves in moments where we either choose to allow our circumstances or situations to lead us through fear and doubt, or we choose a known God.

Think this through and Pray it in

Is your faith directed by what you see or how you feel? 2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that faith is not by sight. Faith is choosing to be obedient in spite of what we see or how we feel. Maybe you find yourself in difficult circumstances? Maybe you feel as though God is silent, and you are questioning whether or not He loves you? Maybe you are so overwhelmed by your circumstances you can't possibly see an end or any type of relief from your situation? Take a moment to read and pray through the following verses. Highlight, circle, or underline anything that stands out in these verses.

Deuteronomy 31:8

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." (New International Version)

Deuteronomy 32:10

In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye... (New International Version)

Psalms 32:8

I will teach you and tell you the way to go and how to get there; I will give you good counsel, and I will watch over you. (The Voice)

Joshua 1:9

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (New International Version)

Psalm 139:1-5, 8-10. 15-16

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. ² You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. ⁴ Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. ⁵ You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (New International Version)

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (New Living Translation)

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (New International Version)

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

NOTES:

Being reminded of scriptural truths like these are what help us in our own moments of crisis. It helps remind us who God is and how deeply He cares and loves us. Meditating on scripture is what will silence the voices of the enemy who want nothing more than to thwart our relationship with the Lord; desiring us to doubt God's love and His promises. You might want to choose a passage or two that you just read, write it on something that you can keep in a location where you can be reminded of this truth throughout your day. You may ask yourself what the purpose of this is? In Matthew 4, Jesus was taken into the wilderness and tempted by Satan for forty days and forty nights. Jesus fought Satan with the Word of God because it is a powerful weapon. But in order for us to use God's Word in this way, we must be prepared and put it into practice, through studying and meditating on it daily.

Ephesians 6:11-17

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (New International Version)

Take a moment to pray through the verse(s) you've chosen before moving on and allow these truths to feed and fuel your heart.

NOTES:

Day 8

(Judges 6:15)

Judges 6:15

¹⁵ “Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

We come to Gideon’s next obstacle. He questions whether God knew what He was doing.

Gideon’s response shows his lack of faith and courage. He chose to look at only his own human limitations and weaknesses, which led to further doubt that God could actually work through him.

Think this through and Pray it in

Have you ever felt like that? Have you felt like you don’t measure up? Have you felt like because of choices that you made, you are unworthy to be used? Have you felt that because of your circumstances, you are cast aside or forgotten? Have you felt that maybe God has made a mistake? Be honest with Him. Write down anything that comes up in your time and process through these questions/elements with the Lord.

NOTES:

I wonder if there was something in Gideon that was trying to wrap his brain around how God could forgive and desire to use him to complete the Lord’s plan. It was almost as

though Gideon was stuck in a rut that he couldn't ever be used by God. When it comes to personal wrongs, the times that we fall short, it can be difficult to forgive ourselves or think that God could ever forgive us. Unforgiveness can be debilitating and hinder our spiritual growth. It can cause us to doubt our ability to ever be used by God. However, know this, there is nothing that you have said or done that can't be forgiven. There is nothing about your circumstances, whether created by you or someone else, that can ever keep you from being used by God. How can we know this is true? Read this story about King David.

2 Samuel 11 – 12:1-12 (New International Version)

2 Samuel 11

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. ² One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite."⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶ So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.¹⁰ David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?" ¹¹ Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" ¹² Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵ In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." ¹⁶ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah

at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷ When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

¹⁸ Joab sent David a full account of the battle. ¹⁹ He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, ²⁰ the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall?' ²¹ Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'"

²² The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. ²³ The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. ²⁴ Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead." ²⁵ David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab." ²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

2 Samuel 12:1-14

The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴ "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." ⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

¹¹ “This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”

¹³ Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan replied, “The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. ¹⁴ But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die.”

David was said to be a man after God’s own heart. However, we see that when we are not careful; when we are not in a right relationship with the Lord we will make sinful choices. However, we also see from this story that David took personal responsibility. He confessed. He repented. In turn, David was forgiven. Are we forgiven when we confess and repent of sin? Yes. Absolutely. 1 John 1:9 states, “*when we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” However, we need to recognize that our sin isn’t self-contained, it creates a ripple effect to those around us, and we may reap consequences because of bad choices we have made.

Think this through and Pray it in

Although David was forgiven and was used by God to accomplish many things before his death, there were consequences that David faced as a result of his sin. The same is true for us. Nothing we have done can ever keep us from being able to be used by God. Carefully read through the following verses. Highlight, circle, or underline anything that stands out to you.

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Isaiah 64:8

“Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

Romans 9:21,

“Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?”

Sometimes it is our circumstances that we have journeyed through that open doors for us to proclaim the gospel of Christ. We just need to have open and willing hearts and allow Him to accomplish what He desires, as well as to guide and lead us to where He wants us to go.

Day 9

(Judges 6:16)

Judges 6:16

¹⁶ The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive." (New International Version)

From the previous verse (6:15), even through Gideon's lack of faith and courage, we find that yet again, the Lord's response to Gideon, was one of patience, kindness, compassion, and love. He reminds Gideon that the task at hand isn't something that God is asking him to do alone. The Lord says, *"I will be with you."* The Lord explains that because of this truth Gideon will be able to defeat the Midianites. God's promise to Gideon is that He will be with him every step of the way, and because of this Gideon will experience success in the task at hand.

For me, there are moments when I experience fear and doubt with something I feel the Lord has asked me to do. I've made excuses or tried justifying why I can't do whatever the "ask" is or why I didn't follow through, (which might I add, never works out...EVER). Our vision is so limited, but we still feel like we know what is best. And yet, even in these moments of doubt or backsliding, our God still loves us. In spite of who we are and the things we do, He lovingly calls out to us, *"Come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30). Gideon appeared to have a hard time trusting that God knew what was best. Instead, he spent time making excuses or questioning what was being asked of him. Hearing about God or being told stories about God is far from actually knowing who God is. Gideon

didn't have a relationship with God, and therefore he finds himself wallowing in disbelief.

Read Mark 9:20-24:

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³ "If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

The father makes a statement to Jesus, "Have mercy on us, and help us **if** you can." Jesus points out the father used the word "if" and then makes the statement "Everything is possible for one who believes." The father immediately replies back that he does believe and asks Jesus to help him overcome his unbelief.

Think this through and Pray it in

Maybe there is an area of your life where "unbelief" is trying to take root, making you question that God is incapable of dealing with whatever may be going on in your life. Take a moment to pray:

"Lord, have mercy. You state that everything is possible for one who believes. Help me in my unbelief (of or for) _____. " Know that God hears you right now. 1 John 5:13-15, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. "

NOTES:

God has a plan. That plan often is beyond our comprehension, meaning that we aren't always going to understand why elements of His plan lead us through the places of suffering, trials, or difficult circumstances. It is through those trials or difficult circumstances that the Lord can grow and mature us in areas of weakness. As Jesus states in John 15, the Father who is the gardener will prune us so that we can become more fruitful. I do not have a green thumb whatsoever, but I have watched individuals who are blessed with this gift work on rose bushes. Often these once beautiful specimens are trimmed back to these stark, stubby heaps. But as it has been explained to me, it is for the overall health of the rose bush that this process must be accomplished. If it isn't pruned the rose bush becomes weak, poorly shaped, and produces much smaller blooms. How much is true for each of us? God's pruning isn't going to feel great, but it is necessary to help us become stronger and more vibrant image bearers and glory spreaders.

Think this through and Pray it in

What would your "asks" look like if you shifted your focus from being delivered to what God might be trying to show you in the midst of the trial? Praying for deliverance from something isn't a sin. However, I believe that there is a reason behind every lesson that God desires to teach us. Think about what it may look like if your "asks" weren't on being delivered from your situation or circumstance but instead be open to what the Lord would desire you to learn through it all. Spend time talking with the Lord. And the operative word is "with." It isn't only us talking, it also requires listening. Whatever comes up take time to write it down and process it with Him before moving on.

NOTES:

Day 10

(Judges 6:17-24)

Judges 6:17-18

¹⁷ Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸ Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you." And the Lord said, "I will wait until you return."

The conversation shifts with Gideon asking God to give him a sign that it is really the Lord talking to Gideon. This part of the story is where I would response, "GOOD GRIEF." "How in the world can you NOT know this is God? I mean, hello...is anyone home upstairs?" That is not how God reacted. Verse 18, "*And the Lord said, 'I will wait until you return.'*" Seriously? WOW! What a patient Father we have.

Think this through and Pray it in

It is important to take time to study God's character. Patience is one of those character traits we need to be reminded of. God doesn't just show us patience, He is patient. Exodus 34:6 states, ⁶ "*Then he passed in front of Moses and called out, "I am the Lord God. I am merciful and very patient with my people. I show great love, and I can be trusted"* (Contemporary English Version). Again, He doesn't just choose to be patient with us, it is who He is. It is His very nature. Take a moment to process through these truths. Highlight, circle, or underline whatever stands out.

Psalm 86:15

But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Psalm 103:8

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Psalm 145:8

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord isn't slow about keeping his promises, as some people think he is. In fact, God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.

Day 11

(Judges 6:19-24)

Judges 6:19-24

¹⁹ Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

²⁰ The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so. ²¹ Then the angel of the Lord touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the Lord disappeared. ²² When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he exclaimed, "Alas, Sovereign Lord! I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!" ²³ But the Lord said to him, "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die." ²⁴ So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. (New International Version)

Gideon prepares the offering, brings it back, and offers it to Him under the oak. The angel of God gives Gideon instructions in placing certain elements of the offering on a rock. Gideon complies. Then the angel of the Lord takes a staff that was in his hand, touches the meat and bread, and BAM...fire flares from the rock, consuming the offering and the angel of the Lord disappeared. Gideon is now freaking out, thinking he is going to die. This may seem a little dramatic, but when you look at Exodus 33:20, it sheds light on why Gideon might be freaking out. Moses has an interaction with God who says to him, "*you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.*" It is most likely that the Israelites continued to hold on to this belief. Gideon probably thought this applied to his situation as well, which is why he believed he would die. But immediately, the Lord says to him, "*Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.*" Isn't it amazing when you think about the choice of words God uses? If you were trying to get someone's attention what would you say? In the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, Scarecrow and Lion go in and get a look at the great and powerful Oz. Oz

uses all these theatrics to try to prove a point about how big and awesome he is, and it completely freaks them out, so much so, that Lion goes and jumps out the window. Oz used fear and intimidation as a tactic to get his point across. But that is not how God operates. We can approach the throne of grace with confidence knowing that as we do *we can receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need* (Hebrews 4:16). In regards to Gideon, he takes the Lord at his word, and chooses to build an altar and called it “the Lord is Peace.”

Think this through and Pray it in

Take a moment to process through this theme of God helping us. Gideon’s response in building an altar was a symbol of worship and thanksgiving to the Lord for His help. How can this be our response today? 1 Samuel 7:12 states, *“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us.’”* Samuel takes a large stone and sets it in a specific place as a reminder of their victory. He calls the stone “Ebenezer” which means “Stone of Help” commemorating that the Lord was helping them. The point being that it was a common thing for individuals to take a moment to set up stones or altars as reminders. As we think about this concept of the Lord helping us, what “Ebenezer(s)” can you lift up and be thankful for? You don’t have to have a physical stone. Write down whatever comes to mind. Writing it down is a way that can help us remember God’s faithfulness to us.

Sometimes it is very hard to have a thankful heart. I know that has been my own experience. Writing my own Ebenezer’s down has helped my heart not become hardened. Reflecting on my Ebenezer’s helps take my focus off of my circumstances and places them on the Lord. It helps develop a heart of gratitude for who God is and what He has given to us through His son Jesus Christ. If you can’t think of anything, just take a moment to simply thank God for the gift of His son Jesus. Because of what Christ did on the cross, we can spend eternity with Him (John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”*).

NOTES:

Day 12

(Judges 6:25-27)

Judges 6:25-27

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. But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime (New International Version).

In verse 25, the Lord now commissions Gideon to do several tasks before He can use him to accomplish His plan against the Midianites. Gideon’s assignment wasn’t an easy one either. Gideon was told that he had to:

1. Destroy the altars dedicated to Baal and the Asherah pole
2. Build an altar to the Lord, using his father’s valuable bulls as the sacrifice and using the wood from the Asherah pole as fuel.

God’s children were in trouble because they were worshipping Baal (Canaanite god). Before Gideon can take a stand facing the enemy on the battlefield, he was asked to first take a stand in his own village. Although Gideon chose to be obedient, he makes his move in the middle of the night when the village is asleep, because he was concerned with how they would react.

Think this through and Pray it in

The altars were located on high places, so if Gideon were to tear them down, people would see what he was up to. Take a moment to think about two questions:

1. How much do you trust the Lord?
2. What idols may be looming in your own heart that you haven’t surrendered?

Just like Gideon, in order to truly worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness, we must first tear down the altars/idols that have been built to false gods of our hearts. For revival to take root, it starts first with recognizing what is in our own hearts. Take time to process these questions with the Lord. Write down whatever comes up.

NOTES:

Day 13

(Judges 6:28-31)

Judges 6:28-31

²⁸ In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!

²⁹ They asked each other, "Who did this?"

When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."

³⁰ The people of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

³¹ But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." (New International Version)

Someone, in the 10 that Gideon took to accomplish the task ratted him out, and it wasn't long before the whole town knew what he did. Needless to say, the whole town was furious and wanted Gideon to be put to death for destroying the idols. Let's pause for a moment, and read through Deuteronomy 13:6-11,

⁶ If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, ⁷ gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), ⁸ do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. ⁹ You must certainly put them to death. Your hand must be the first in putting them to death, and then the hands of all the people. ¹⁰ Stone them to death, because they tried to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹¹ Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again.

This passage tells us that whoever turns someone away from the Lord should be put to death.

The irony within this part of Gideon's story is that he is trying to turn people back to the Lord, but they want to kill him for it. The mob tells Gideon's father that he needs to bring his son

out to be put to death. However, we read that as a result of Gideon's obedience to the Lord, it moved his father towards revival, he rallied behind his son, and the masses backed down. Through all of this, the Lord has shown Gideon that being obedient, even though there was fear in his heart, resulted in the Lord faithfully protecting him. How wonderful and awesome our God is in blessing us with reminders of His faithful protection, provision, and love.

Think this through and Pray it in

Before moving on, take a moment to go back to those two questions. Spend some time processing these questions with the Lord.

1. How much do you trust the Lord?

NOTES:

2. What idols may be looming in your own heart that you haven't surrendered?

Spend some time with the Lord processing through what the Spirit reveals within your heart.

NOTES:

Day 14

(Judges 6:32-35)

Judges 6:32-35

³² So because Gideon broke down Baal's altar, they gave him the name Jerub-Baal that day, saying, "Let Baal contend with him." ³³ Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. ³⁴ Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. ³⁵ He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them. (New International Version)

Although the mob has dissipated, based on verse 32, there still appears to be this subtle annoyance in the air because of what Gideon did to the Baal altar and the Asherah pole. The town gave Gideon a nickname (*Jerub-Baal*), which at first glance makes you believe it is a positive thing, that revival has now taken root with the people. However, when you find out the meaning of the name (*let Baal contend with him*) you soon realize that their allegiances still seem to be with this false god, not with the Lord.

As the story moves along, verse 33 tells us that "*the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel.*" This is significant to mention because whoever had possession of this specific area controlled the land, controlled the people, and all the resources within the land such as livestock etc. These enemies were fierce and without any mercy or guilt for what they were doing to Israelites. They took control and camped in the land, driving the Israelites to live in caves.

Think this through and Pray it in

How many times have you had a circumstance or situation that seems impossible? It seems as though the forces of the enemy have swarmed in, and

you feel overwhelmed, feeling as though there will be no relief? Be open and honest. I know that sometimes honesty can be incredibly difficult. We may feel that we will be rejected or abandoned. But, that is a lie from the enemy. Satan wants nothing more than to thwart your relationship with God. The truth is that being honest with the Lord is what brings healing to our hearts. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ...”* (Romans 8:35a) No one!

NOTES:

Now that you have spent some time processing with the Lord, I want to point something out from verse 34. It states, *“**Then** the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.”* I love seeing how the Lord moves within this situation. For me, here is where studying the Bible reveals how amazing and awesome our God is, because after reading how awful things were for the Israelites, we get to the word, *“**Then.**”* An immediate response. ***Then*** the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon. With this supernatural intervention, the Lord uses Gideon to call the people to follow him, summoning individuals throughout Manasseh to arms. I know that sometimes in the thick of bad circumstances or situations it may feel like we don’t experience the “then” from the Lord right away. Sometimes we even carry an expectation that the *“thens”* in our situation should be these explosive, dynamic, larger than life kind of moments. But what I

have found to be true in my own situation(s), is that the “*thens*” were the Lord providing me consistent moments of peace. Other times, the “*thens*” were reminders sent through His Word of the depth of God’s love for me and my kids. There were no fireworks or large, grandioso displays, etc. In fact, most of the time, it has been in the solitude of my home. My point is that the “*thens*” happen, not always the way we anticipate or expect, but God does answer.

Think this through and Pray it in

Sit with these verses for a moment. Thank God for being one who not only listens, but who does answer, even if it isn’t the way we anticipate or expect.

1 Peter 3:12a

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer..." (New International Version)

Jeremiah 29:12-13

"Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (New International Version)

Psalms 66:17-20

"I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue...but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!" (New International Version)

NOTES:

Day 15

(Judges 6:36-40)

Judges 6:36-40

³⁶ Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—
³⁷ 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.” ³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he
 squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon 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.” ⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was
 dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

From the beginning of the story until now, Gideon had a clear Word from God, had a face to face meeting with the Lord, experienced fire coming out of the rock, moved forward in obedience and tears down the idols, was saved from the wrath of the town, and God supernaturally intervened in using Gideon to call out to his fellow brothers – a call to arms. But even with all of these amazing moments, Gideon still doubts and comes up with what we know today as “The Fleece Method.” The fleece method was Gideon’s way of being able to confirm that what God was asking him to do, was truly the Lord’s will. He doesn’t test God once but twice. Here is one of my eye-roll moments, as I say, “Oy Vey!” Even though this “fleece method” was probably driven by Gideon’s fear, doubt, and worry, we once again find that God is gracious and supernaturally intervenes and accomplishes what Gideon has asked.

I do believe that there are moments in our lives where we can become crippled by indecision. We are at the crossroads not knowing what direction we are to go. For me personally, I believe that the fleece method is not a biblical method for determining the will of God. The reason I believe this is based on James 1:5 which states, *“if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* This is God’s promise to us anytime we need wisdom within any decision. I believe there are two questions that are key factors when faced with indecision: 1) What does the Bible have to say? and 2) What does godly counsel say? For the first, Psalm 119:105 says, *“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* The Bible provides us insight and a clear perspective to the decisions at hand. The Word of God can expose within our hearts what our priorities are and also what we value most. For instance, in Genesis 13 Abraham and his nephew Lot were at an impasse, and Abraham makes the decision that it is important for them to part ways. He gives Lot first choice as to which part of the land he wanted. It states in Genesis 13:10, *“Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered...(this was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east...Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.”* Lot’s true colors shine about who he really is with the decisions that he makes. He takes the best share of the land but at the cost of living near Sodom, a city that continually dishonored God. His heart was driven by greed and selfishness. The scriptures state that Lot never stopped to think about what Abraham might need or what was even fair within this decision. As we seek the scriptures during times of indecision, it can help reveal and illuminate what is going on in our hearts. Psalm 37:4 states *“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”* However, if we

are only delighting in our flesh, or following the whims of our hearts, then the decisions we end up making are for our own selfish desires, not what the Lord has for us. Jeremiah 17:9 states, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?”* This is important to remember because our hearts can lead us astray if we are not careful. As we come before the Lord, it is the Holy Spirit who can speak directly to our hearts and bring to light what is necessary for us to make godly decisions.

Secondly, besides seeking scriptures, I believe that it is wise to ask individuals who are not only godly, but are the type of people who will tell you the truth...what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. Proverbs 12:15, *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.”* Be open and teachable to what they may say. Sometimes the counsel we receive isn’t always going to be what we want to hear, however, when the individual(s) are grounded in God’s Word, we can experience peace as we listen. After listening it’s important to process and pray through what they have said.

Think this through and Pray it in

What is going on right now in your life? No matter how big or small – what types of decisions are you faced with today? Have you sought God’s Word? Has the Lord brought to mind someone to talk to? Take a moment and lift these matters up to the Lord. Pause and pay attention as the Spirit begins to reveal what is in your heart and how to proceed. Be open to whatever message may come. The answer may not be what you desire, it may be “wait.” It may be, “be still.” These answers are not easy to hear. But remember that He does hear you, He sees what is going on in your life, He loves you unconditionally, and He does know what is best for your life.

NOTES:

Day 16

(Judges 7:1-15)

Judges 7:1-15

Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. ² The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.' ³ Now announce to the army, 'Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

⁴ But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

⁵ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the Lord told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink." ⁶ Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

⁷ The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home." ⁸ So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. ⁹ During that night the Lord said to Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. ¹⁰ If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah ¹¹ and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp." So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. ¹² The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

¹³ Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream," he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."

¹⁴ His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."

¹⁵ When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The Lord has given the Midianite camp into your hands." (New International Version)

In Judges 7, Gideon and the 32,000 men that came forward are camped out waiting to find out what was next. The Lord says to Gideon that he has too many men. God explains to Gideon that He desires for the people to know, without a shadow of a doubt, that it is because of the Lord that the Midianites will be defeated. The Lord then gives him instructions in how to bring the number down; Gideon complies, and 22,000 men leave. Now left with only 10,000, God says to Gideon once again that there are still too many men. In order to thin down the numbers even more, the Lord has Gideon lead the men down to the water, and he is to separate them by the way they drink the water. There was one group who lapped the water like dogs, and a group that knelt down to drink the water. The “lapping like dogs” group won which left Gideon with 300 men. Sometimes I wonder why pieces of information like, the number of men left to fight, are important to note? What I realize is that God’s ways are not ours (Isaiah 55:8-9, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”*). It isn’t up to us to try and figure out the “whys.” His plans are far beyond our comprehension. It is up to us to simply trust in a known God (Proverbs 3:5-7, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil”*).

Later that evening, God speaks to Gideon and tells him that He is going to give the Midianites into his hands. However, God also adds that if Gideon is afraid, he and his servant can go down to the outpost campsite first. Guess what? Gideon goes to the campsite – I know, shocker! But again, we find the Lord’s compassion and patience with him. Like with Gideon, God knows us and knows what is going on in our hearts (Psalm 139). The lesson

learned in this part of the story is that God gave Gideon the option to go down to the outpost campsite, because He knew Gideon's weaknesses. The same is true for us.

Think this through and Pray it in

There are many verses that emphasize how God says He will personally be with us. He promises to strengthen, help, and uphold us through any situation or circumstance we may be journeying through. Spend some time processing through these verses. Write down what comes up in this time with the Lord.

Isaiah 41:10

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Isaiah 41:13

"For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."

Isaiah 43:2

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

Psalms 32:8

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you."

Psalms 40:17

"But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay."

Psalms 34:17-18

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

NOTES:

When Gideon is at the campsite, the Lord gave one of the guys in the camp a dream that Gideon would be triumphant against this fierce army. Isn't that awesome? God is so good. He is faithful and provides Gideon with the necessary words to bolster up strength and provide courage to Gideon's heart.

Think this through and Pray it in

These verses are reminders that God understands us and doesn't condemn us because we have doubts and fears. Spend time processing through each verse and highlight, circle, and/or underline what stands out to you in these verses.

James 1:5

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” – Keeps giving us wisdom and doesn't scold us when we keep asking.

Hebrews 4:14-16

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”— Great high priest in heaven sympathizes with our weaknesses.

James 4:6

“But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble’”— Keeps giving us more grace.

The other awesome element to point out in this part of the story is that as Gideon hears this interpretation of the dream, the first thing he does in response to it is *“he bowed down and worshiped”* (7:15). I believe that Gideon knew that for him to become a successful warrior, he must first be a sincere worshipper. After that he returns to where the masses are camped proclaiming to everyone that the Lord has given the Midianites into their hands.

Think this through and Pray it in

When you experience the Lord’s blessings is your first response to bow down and worship Him? Do you openly proclaim your thankfulness for who He is and what He has accomplished? I don’t ask these questions to impose guilt or shame, only to take a moment to reflect what our responses are to God’s provision and blessings. Take a moment and write down how God has blessed you and spend time thanking Him. No matter whether your list is great or small, the point is to take a moment to praise and to thank Him for what He has accomplished in and through your circumstances.

NOTES:

Day 17

(Judges 7:16-25)

Judges 7:16-25

7:16-25

¹⁶ Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

¹⁷ “Watch me,” he told them. “Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. ¹⁸ When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’”

¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. ²⁰ The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!” ²¹ While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

²² When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. ²³ Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. ²⁴ Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.”

So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they seized the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. ²⁵ They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

To recap, there are 135,000 Midianites and 300 Israelites. That is 450 Midianites to every one Israelite. I think we can all agree that at first glance, those numbers don't produce lots of confidence that victory would be on Gideon's side. Another element to add is the fact that instead of armor and swords or other weapons that one would expect on the battlefield, Gideon hands out trumpets and empty jars with torches inside. Can you pause and think on

this for a minute? You are made aware of how many enemies are out there. They hate you, they will kill you if provoked, and you are handed a trumpet, a jar, and a torch. That is absolutely crazy.

Think this through and Pray it in

We must remember that God's ways and His methods are far from traditional. We are called to be obedient. Gideon has accepted that the Lord is with them and that God alone will make them victorious. What is the Lord calling you to do today? Is there something that He has asked you to do? Are you being obedient to that call? Take time to process these questions with the Lord. Write down whatever comes to mind.

NOTES:

Gideon rallies the troops, taking these trumpets, jars, and torches, and encircles the enemy camp. Gideon gives the men instructions that at his signal, they were to blow the trumpets, break the pitchers, reveal the torches, and then shout, "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" That is exactly what they did, and as a result, God sent confusion into the ranks of the enemy, and they began attacking each other. When the battle was over, 120,000 Midianites had killed one another, and the other 15,000 fled. The battle was won. God had answered Israel's prayers. He used a common man to accomplish His purposes. Victory doesn't depend on strength or numbers. Victory depends on the obedience and commitment that we have to the Lord.

DAY 18

(Judges 8:1-21)

Judges 8:1-21

Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, “Why have you treated us like this? Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight Midian?” And they challenged him vigorously.

² But he answered them, “What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren’t the gleanings of Ephraim’s grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?” At this, their resentment against him subsided.

⁴ Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. ⁵ He said to the men of Sukkoth, “Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”

⁶ But the officials of Sukkoth said, “Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?” ⁷ Then Gideon replied, “Just for that, when the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briers.”

⁸ From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Sukkoth had. ⁹ So he said to the men of Peniel, “When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower.” ¹⁰ Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of the armies of the eastern peoples; a hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had fallen. ¹¹ Gideon went up by the route of the nomads east of Nobah and Jogbehah and attacked the unsuspecting army. ¹² Zebah and Zalmunna, the two kings of Midian, fled, but he pursued them and captured them, routing their entire army.

¹³ Gideon son of Joash then returned from the battle by the Pass of Heres. ¹⁴ He caught a young man of Sukkoth and questioned him, and the young man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven officials of Sukkoth, the elders of the town. ¹⁵ Then Gideon came and said to the men of Sukkoth, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you taunted me by saying, ‘Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your exhausted men?’” ¹⁶ He took the elders of the town and taught the men of Sukkoth a lesson by punishing them with desert thorns and briers. ¹⁷ He also pulled down the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town. ¹⁸ Then he asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What kind of men did you kill at Tabor?” “Men like you,” they answered, “each one with the bearing of a prince.” ¹⁹ Gideon replied, “Those were my brothers, the sons of my own mother. As surely as the Lord lives, if you had spared their lives, I would not kill you.” ²⁰ Turning to Jether, his oldest son, he said, “Kill them!” But Jether did not draw his sword, because he was only a boy and was afraid. ²¹ Zebah and Zalmunna said, “Come, do it yourself. ‘As is the man, so is his strength.’” So Gideon stepped forward and killed them, and took the ornaments off their camels’ necks.

Read through this section of the story again. I believe there are moments where we gloss over certain sections because it makes us feel uncomfortable, or maybe it feels out of place, and/or maybe it is difficult to understand. Whatever the case may be, I've learned that even in the most confusing passages, that make you go hmmm, there are incredible truths that we can learn. At the beginning of Chapter 8, one of the main truths that pops out is how well Gideon handled the situation with the Ephraimites. What comes to mind in this interaction with Gideon and this other tribe is found in Proverbs 15:1, "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*" He definitely was skilled in being incredibly diplomatic and as a result, tensions ceased and there was no conflict between the tribes.

Think this through and Pray it in

Let's take a minute and sit with Proverbs 15:1. I can honestly say, I have failed multiple times in having a gentle answer when there is tension or conflict in my life. It is only when I surrender control, that I can experience transformation. Gideon, continues to rely on the Lord's strength and in his obedience the Lord has provided him success. I know for me, because I want things resolved quickly, I go charging in which never...I mean never works out in my favor. In truly leaning into the Lord and allowing the Spirit to help me recall the truths of God's Word is what allows me to listen more and say less. But it does require me to be still so that I may experience Him speaking to my heart. Reflect on Proverbs 15:1 and sit with the Lord before moving on. Write down whatever comes up in your time with the Lord.

NOTES:

DAY 19

(Judges 8:4-9)

⁴ Gideon and his three hundred men, exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit, came to the Jordan and crossed it. ⁵ He said to the men of Sukkoth, "Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian." ⁶ But the officials of Sukkoth said, "Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?" ⁷ Then Gideon replied, "Just for that, when the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, I will tear your flesh with desert thorns and briers."

⁸ From there he went up to Peniel and made the same request of them, but they answered as the men of Sukkoth had. ⁹ So he said to the men of Peniel, "When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower."

In Judges 8:4-9, the interesting thing to note is that in Gideon's pursuit of these two kings it has the initial appearance that it is through Gideon's obedience that he pursues Zebah and Zalmunna, the two Midianite kings. But in further study, what seems to surface is that Gideon's pursuit has more to do with Gideon feeling obligated to fulfill his duty of what is defined as "blood revenge." In better understanding what this is, let's take a look at some verses in Deuteronomy 19.

Deuteronomy 19:4-13

⁴ This is the rule concerning anyone who kills a person and flees there for safety—anyone who kills a neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. ⁵ For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. ⁶ Otherwise, the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him even though he is not deserving of death, since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought. ⁷ This is why I command you to set aside for yourselves three cities.

⁸ If the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as he promised on oath to your ancestors, and gives you the whole land he promised them, ⁹ because you carefully follow all these laws I

command you today—to love the Lord your God and to walk always in obedience to him—then you are to set aside three more cities. ¹⁰ Do this so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land, which the Lord your God is giving you as your inheritance, and so that you will not be guilty of bloodshed.

¹¹ But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbor, and then flees to one of these cities, ¹² the killer shall be sent for by the town elders, be brought back from the city, and be handed over to the avenger of blood to die. ¹³ Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you.

It is likely that some of Gideon's relatives might have been murdered by these kings. However, we do not know that for sure. This pursuit of Gideon seems to point more towards personal vengeance than in being obedient to the Lord's call. There is a balance between what we should do to move forward and when we need to trust God to handle the circumstances in our life. I went through my own situation where it was incredibly hard to be still and trust God to take care of things. In my humanness, I wanted to move forward, but I learned that there were simply times I needed to be still and allow God to work the situation out in His timing and in His way. Although we can try and speculate as to what is happening here, we don't know what the motivation was behind Gideon's actions. Only God knows what was in Gideon's heart. He does eventually catch up with these two kings and declares to them that he in fact is going to have them executed. Gideon asks his oldest son Jether to carry out this execution, however, Scripture states that he did not because "he was only a boy and was afraid." With the culture of the day, it would have been incredibly insulting for these two kings to be killed by a boy, someone who wasn't experienced or the best warrior in the lot. Maybe Gideon was trying to provide an opportunity of honor and status for his son. We don't know how old this boy was, but the fact that the scriptures state he was a boy leads me to think he was young and not yet experienced in life. The kings taunt Gideon and Gideon carries out the execution himself. This is an abrupt end to this section of the story, but I do

believe it warrants taking a moment to reflect on what has just happened. All the time before this part of the story we see Gideon second guessing himself, or being somewhat timid and afraid. But now we see a different side of Gideon charging forward to complete a task without any hesitation. However, it makes me wonder if Gideon's choices were justifiable, or if he should have left the discipline/punishment up to God?

Think this through and Pray it in

Maybe you have dealt with being wronged or maybe you were betrayed? In regards to Gideon, we don't know what was going on in his heart, only God knows. But I do believe it is important to pause and reflect on even the parts of the story that have more questions than answers. As we process and meditate on the Word, I do believe the Holy Spirit can illuminate within us the lessons we need to take away from the passage(s) in question. The following are verses that give us instructions on what to do when we've been wronged or hurt. Highlight, circle and/or underline what stands out to you in each of these verses.

Proverbs 25:21-22

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."

Matthew 5:44

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

Luke 6:28

"...bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

Romans 12:19-21

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

NOTES:

Day 20

(8:22-35)

8:22-35

²² *The Israelites said to Gideon, “Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.”* ²³ *But Gideon told them, “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.”*

²⁴ *And he said, “I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from your share of the plunder.” (It was the custom of the Ishmaelites to wear gold earrings.)*

²⁵ *They answered, “We’ll be glad to give them.” So they spread out a garment, and each of them threw a ring from his plunder onto it.* ²⁶ *The weight of the gold rings he asked for came to seventeen hundred shekels, not counting the ornaments, the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian or the chains that were on their camels’ necks.* ²⁷ *Gideon made the gold into an ephod, which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.*

²⁸ *Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon’s lifetime, the land had peace forty years.* ²⁹ *Jerub-Baal son of Joash went back home to live.* ³⁰ *He had seventy sons of his own, for he had many wives.* ³¹ *His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also bore him a son, whom he named Abimelek.* ³² *Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*

³³ *No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god* ³⁴ *and did not remember the Lord their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.* ³⁵ *They also failed to show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) in spite of all the good things he had done for them. (New International Version)*

The battle is over, the enemy defeated, and in Judges 8:22, we find that the Israelites have asked Gideon to be their leader and rule over them. Gideon responds by saying no to their request and following it up with the statement, “The Lord will rule over you.” And our hearts cry out, “Ah, that’s so great! You go Gideon.” But then, seconds later, Gideon asks for their gold, and the Israelites give him what would be the equivalent of millions of dollars in gold. Gideon makes an ephod, which was a garment worn by the priests over their chests. And what happens? The Israelites start to worship it. We can’t speak to the intentionality of

Gideon's heart. I would like to think that Gideon had good intentions for desiring to create this. Maybe he desired to have something that helped them remember the victory the Lord had given them? But I do believe we can speak into the fact that Gideon didn't use discernment or wisdom in making this decision. Why? Back at the beginning of this story, we find that Gideon had to destroy the idols because the Israelites were worshipping these false gods instead of the Lord. So now, with the creation of this ephod, the same cyclical sinful pattern of behavior is happening all over again. Judges 8:27 states, *"all Israel prostituted themselves by worshipping it, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family."* And then in Judges 8:33, *"No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals...They also failed to show kindness to the family of Jerub-Baal (Gideon) for all the good things he had done for them."* Instead of a happily ever after ending we learn that Gideon did not finish well.

Think this through and Pray it in

How could this story have turned out differently? Process through your own circumstances. Are elements of your story the same as Gideon or different? When we study God's word, it isn't only about the happy moments, or the feel-good moments of God's people. It is taking to heart the mistakes. It isn't about judging them. It is about recognizing how easy it is for each of us to fall into the same habitual or cyclical patterns of sin, when our attentions, allegiances, and affections aren't centered on the Lord first. Spend some time processing through everything you read within this chapter. Take a moment to write down whatever comes up for you in this time. After that, go back through with what you have written and process it with the Lord.

NOTES:

DAY 21

(Conclusion)

I know that the story of Gideon doesn't have a happy ending so it may beg the question, why study stories like Gideon? Stories like his are important because they show us that we too can be used, no matter our background or circumstances. However, they also show us that the enemy wants nothing more than to see us fail and not finish well. But, one thing to note is that even though Gideon's ending was disappointing, he is mentioned, along with others in Hebrews 11, as a hero of faith. Isn't that amazing? Here is a man who was hiding, basically in a cave, but then through a development of faith and trust, surrenders to be used by the Lord to defeat an army of 135,000 Midianites, with only 300 men. It is this part of Gideon's story that reminds us of his faith that led him to be used in such a powerful way.

What we need to remember is that we will not finish well by placing our faith in neutral and hope for the best. This will only produce hearts within us that are lukewarm. Revelation 3:15-17 states, *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked"* (New International Version). No matter the difficulty or challenges within any situation, we must choose obedience and dependency on Christ. Otherwise, our indifference will only lead to idleness, which produces lukewarm hearts. The enemy wants to see us hardened and self-satisfied, and he will do anything and everything possible to thwart our relationship with Christ. Remember that *"...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual*

forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Remembering who our battle is against helps us persevere when dealing with disappointing or discouraging circumstances. Instead, we can choose to sit with the Lord and ask: “God whatever happens today I desire to remain in You (John 15). Because my flesh is tempted to try and accomplish things throughout my day in my own strength, I pray that you would draw me near to you, Lord, so that I don’t go off the beaten track. Help me to see and to understand what You are doing so that I might accomplish Your will in my life.”

Think this through and Pray it in

- 1) Are there things in your heart that are keeping the Spirit from doing His transformative and restorative work in your life? Idols? Desires?

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- 2) What might you be trying to accomplish in your own strength? What would it be like to have an open and willing heart to the Lord for His Spirit to do a transformative work within you?

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- 3) How does it make you feel to know that God is there with you no matter what you have done or has been done to you? That He is there no matter what is going on in your heart? No judgment, no condemnation...just love. A love that desires to see you grow and mature in His son Jesus Christ.

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Through Gideon's story we see how God shines his light through brokenness and imperfection to accomplish a great victory. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 states, *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body."* God desires to accomplish a transformative work within you. It doesn't matter what you have done, what has happened or is currently happening to you. What matters is what you choose to do right now...from this moment forward. He is faithful and just, He will forgive you of your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). No one is too far gone to experience God's forgiveness. When we are open and willing, God can shine through our own brokenness and imperfection to accomplish great things in and through us. There is absolutely no end to what God can do!

Father, out of Your honorable and glorious riches, I pray that you strengthen me. Fill my soul with the power of Your Spirit so that through faith the Anointed One will reside in my heart.

May love be the rich soil where my life takes root. May it be the bedrock where my life is founded so that together with all of Your people I will have the power to understand that the love of the Anointed is infinitely long, wide, high, and deep, surpassing everything anyone previously experienced. God, may Your fullness flood through my entire being.

This is a doxology of praise to the One with power that is beyond understanding.

Now to the God who can do so many awe-inspiring things, immeasurable things, things greater than I ever could ask or imagine through the power at work in me, to Him be all glory in the church and in Jesus the Anointed from this generation to the next, forever and ever.

Amen. (Ephesians 3:16-21)

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