

Gideon: The Principle of the Unexpected Leader

Judges 6 & 7

Good morning, men. So, who thinks that they're the strongest man in the room, after me of course? You can nominate somebody that you think is the strongest man. By the way, you need to be a good sport, too. So Kinnis has been nominated. Keith Thomas. I saw Creston nominate himself over here, but we'll just pretend that didn't happen. Who else? Kinnis, would you be willing to be a good sport this morning? Come on up Kinnis, and bring your chair with you.

So let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning. This is a new group that we have going, United Grove Men's Group. Guys that are both mature and new in their faith. They are meeting once a week at Union Grove Baptist in Gladewater, TX. The leader is Brian Zappa. So I wonder if you would join me in welcoming this new group to the Man in the Mirror Men's Bible Study. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome men, glad to have you with us!

So Kinnis, we're in this series of how God makes men, and wow he's really made you like a real man! So I wonder if you would do something for me here, if you would lift that chair, you can use both hands, and then I would like you to hold it out with your arms extended. You can lock your elbows, and why don't you just turn sideways there so the guys can see you. Okay, and then you just hold that position and I'll get back to you here in just a minute.

All right, so the question I want to ask you, men, is what is something that God has asked you to do that you don't think that you have the strength to pull off? Maybe you have doubts or fears about it. It could be that you have just gotten news that you're going to be a father, you've never been a father before and you're terrified! You don't think that you have the strength to do that. Or maybe it is something like you have never really had a personal ministry before, and so somebody has asked you to lead a small group and you're thinking, I don't have what it takes to do that. I wouldn't know where to start. Or maybe... How's it going over here, by the way Kinnis? Still good. He is a former professional baseball player so it makes sense that he'd be able to do well. He won't be pitching for a while now! Thank you so much Kinnis!

So what could we conclude from this little illustration, this chair illustration? When I say that you have something that you think that God is calling you to do and you don't have the strength to do it, based on this chair illustration, one thing you might conclude is that, you know you're right! You really don't have the strength to do this thing. You really don't have the strength to stay in this marriage when your spouse is an alcoholic, and she's constantly going off the wagon. Maybe it's not the initial shock of fatherhood that's the problem, but parenting later on. We had one of our leaders here at the Bible Study once say when his children became teenagers that being a father of teenagers has brought out the worst in me. He said I just can't do it. So there are things that you have in your life that you believe that God is calling you to do, but you just feel weak, you don't feel like you have the strength. Not to mention, that there are many fears and there are many doubts that come with this thing that you're doing. There's a man in the Bible like that, too, his name is Gideon. We're going to look at his life this morning. The title of the message is this: *Gideon: The Principle of the Unexpected Leader*. This is a man

who as far as we know never aspired to anything, and he was just standing around, minding his own business when God intervened in his life. We're going to take a look at what happened to him and we're going to each learn a valuable lesson about how God actually turns our weakness into strength, and he does that for his glory.

The Reluctant Liberator

So the first thing we want to look at is the story of this reluctant liberator. You should be at Judges 6. And the story begins that the Midianites had been oppressing the Israelites for seven years because the Israelites had worshipped other Gods and God was disciplining them. There's a whole message by itself! When we do worship other Gods, God is going to discipline us, and so they were being impoverished by these Midianites. They were coming in and ravaging the land, destroying the crops, people were fleeing, hiding in caves and trying to get away. Gideon was hiding out in a wine press, trying to hide some meal so that he could feed his family. Against that back drop of this man cowering in fear, we find in Judges 6:11 that this happened:

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

Now what is it that God saw? This was a man who was terrified of his own shadow! Probably the least likely man in the Bible to be called a mighty warrior! And yet God saw something that Gideon didn't see. Here's the thing, we see ourselves as we are, God sees us as we're going to be, as he's going to make us. So what did Gideon see? Verse 13:

"But sir," Gideon replied, "If the Lord is with us, why has this happened? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hands of the Midianites"

Why? Where are all his wonders? The Lord has abandoned us. What did Gideon see? He saw weakness, he saw fear, he saw doubt. God saw what Gideon would become, but Gideon could only see what he was right now. So even in our own circumstances, do you see what God sees or are you willing to have him open your eyes to see what he sees? Verse 14 says this:

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hands. Am I not sending you?"

It's so interesting to me that God never argues with anyone in the Bible. He just tells us what he wants us to do. He doesn't necessarily tell us what he's going to do, he just tells us what he wants us to do. Now in the case of Gideon we're going to see he actually does tell Gideon what he's going to do, which is very unusual. But at this point he's not. Verse 15:

"But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the weakest in my family."

So why did God choose the weakest man from the weakest clan to be the deliverer of Israel? He did it for the simple reason of there being no confusion about who was doing the delivering. If he had picked

the strongest man from the strongest clan, what would have happened? God would have had to share his glory with that man. The people would have had adulation and worship and praise for the strong leader that lead them. But that's not what God wanted to do, God wanted to bring glory to himself through this. So this is a picture of a globe. This is actually a picture that I have on my desktop screen. I think I mentioned this before. The reason I have this here is to remind me that we are very small. Find yourself on that globe somewhere. But when you also look at it, we are very special. We are very small and we are very special at the same time. When I look at that globe, it reminds me that no matter how strong I am, my strength is weakness. My strongest strength would be less than God's weakest weakness if he had any. Your strongest strength would be weaker than God's weakest weakness if he had any! Just a little reminder.

Here's the Big Idea today: **God makes men by turning our weakness into strength in such a way that only he can get the glory.**

We don't talk enough about this around here, but God is doing things for his own glory and his own purposes. And yes he wants us to have an abundant life and that's part of his purpose, but even giving you and me the abundant life, the purpose of us having an abundant life is so that we would turn to him and praise him and give him the glory, honor, majesty, reverence, awe, dominion, and blessings that he is due. **God makes men by turning our weakness into strength in such a way that only he can get the glory** and that's exactly what is going on right here with Gideon. And guess what? That's exactly what is going on with us too. Each and every day he takes our weakness, even the weakest parts of our weakness, and he turns those things into strength in such a way that only he can get the glory. That's what's going on here in the story.

What Happened?

So next, let's take a look at what happened. Three things are worth mentioning here. The first, giving Gideon signs. At verse 16 the Lord says:

"I will be with you, and you will strike down the Midianites as if they were but one man."

Gideon replied, "If now I've found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me."

I need to know, God, that it's really you talking to me. Have you ever had a prayer like that? Have you ever had a thought like that? God's asking you to do something and you think oh my gosh I wonder if this is just me making this up in my own imagination? I had too much pizza last night, it could be that! Lord, is this you, or is this just me wanting it to be you? So he asks for a sign. Men, you can ask God for signs. God gives signs all the time, every day, in every way. So you may have a dramatic sign like Gideon gets. The voice of the Spirit whispered to him I will be with you. You may hear the voice of the Lord give you that kind of assurance, that might be your sign. This first sign that Gideon gets here is that he makes an offering to God and God consumes the offering with fire. Somebody in this room has probably had a sign of such dramatic effect that it was just as though God had burned up an offering!

The next signs are the famous fleece signs that Gideon asks for. Gideon asks that this wool fleece be covered in dew and that the ground around it be dry and then I'll know it's you God, and God did that! Now he's had two signs so far right? And he's so filled with fear and doubt at the beginning that even these two signs haven't been able to get rid of all the fear and the doubt. So he says Lord, forgive me, but just one more sign. Tomorrow let the fleece be dry and the ground around it covered with dew, and

God did it. Because God was committed to converting this weakness, fear, and doubt into strength so that this man could deliver. And guess what? Aren't you glad he did this? I mean it would have been very nice and tidy if after God had given Gideon these marching orders if he would have sucked it up and gone off to fight the enemy in battle. That would have been cool, but then what would that have done for us? When we face the same situation but we're still filled with doubts and fears about what we might be able to do and we're still hesitant to do the thing, God has given us a paradigm here of giving signs and he will give you signs.

As I say he might whisper it to you. It might be that you sit down and get advice from a friend and that God will give you a sign through the advice, the counsel of a trusted friend where he just quickens something that your friend says to your heart and you know that that's what you're supposed to do. It might be reading a verse of scripture. You don't know what to do, I think I'll read my Bible. I did this once when I was trying to figure out what to do with a recalcitrant investor and it said he who keeps his oath, even when it hurts. I had made an oath to this guy and I was thinking whether or not I should do that, because the pain was going to be so awful to do it, but I decided to do it because God quickened a verse of scripture to my heart. He might give you a sign like that, or he might give you a sign by giving you that job in another city. Or not giving you the same job in the other city, that might be the sign that he gives. The sign that he gives you might be that your boss doesn't fire you even though you refuse to lie for him. That's a sign from God, you see. So God is giving signs all the time and everywhere around you. You can chalk these things up to coincidence or you can say that God is real and he's working in our lives.

I think I may have mentioned this before, about a year ago I was having one of my bi-weekly melt downs and I was just thinking, God I want men to be disciplined more than you do. Of course that's when I know I need to take a little break. But I said God I just can't do this. We had launched this initiative. Fifteen people in an office up in Casselberry decided they were going to hire three hundred and thirty staff all around the country. So we're now at about a year into it, and I said God I just can't do this. It's just too hard, I don't have the strength to do it. I'm paralyzed with all kinds of fears and doubts. And God said to me in one of a dozen times God has spoken to me in a very clear way. He said you've been faithful, stay the course. Okay, that was all I needed! It's now a year later, and I've never had another doubt since. Because God gave me a sign and he will do that for you. He will, ask him for a sign. You need a sign? Trying to figure out how to overcome this weakness, this fear, this doubt? You want to be strong? Ask God for a sign. He will give it to you. He might not give it to you the way you want it, or in the timing that you want it, but he will give it to you.

So that's the signs. The second thing that happened in chapter 7 verse 2:

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands."

And here's why: "In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her."

He had assembled thirty two thousand soldiers to fight against the Midianites, and God said hey this isn't going to work, you have too many men. Because what happens now if you win the battle, I will not get the glory. Others will not give me the glory for doing this, and so he said everyone that was afraid could go home, and twenty two thousand went home. And then God said you still have too many men! So, let everybody that laps up water with their hand stay and let everybody who bends down to the stream to drink the water go home. And three hundred guys lapped water with their hands, and God said okay, with these three hundred men, I'm going to hand a hundred and thirty five thousand

Midianites into your hands. Are you crazy? Now God, I was concerned that this might not be you, this may just be me wanting it to be you, but now I know it's not you. This couldn't be you! Three hundred men, a hundred and thirty five thousand troops. The result of the signs, God gets the glory. The result of reducing the number of troops, God has the potential to get the glory.

The third thing that we see actually happen here is in chapter 7 verse 22, when the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men in the camp to turn on each other with their swords. In other words, what happened next completely flabbergasted the world, both then and now. Through the carefully choreographed attack of Gideon by three hundred men, a hundred and thirty five thousand people were thrown into panic, chaos and confusion. They turned on each other with their swords. I just can't imagine if there has ever been a battle plan that has ever been that unique before. And then they fled, and as they fled it must have looked like the highway of death in desert storm, with people just throwing off their gear and running as fast as they could. Then Gideon reassembled his larger force and went after them, routing the Midianites and freeing his nation. The weakest man from the weakest clan, this guy who was filled with cowering fears had delivered his land. And the result was that there was no confusion about where the victory came from. God received the glory. And so whatever's going on in your life, no matter how puny you feel, you may feel like the biggest spiritual pigmy this side of San Francisco, and there's no possible way that God could use you to complete the task that he's given you, the mission that he's given you that you don't feel you have enough strength to do. Guess what? You're right, you don't have enough strength to do it, but **God makes us by turning our weakness into strength in such a way that only he can get the glory**, the Big Idea for today. Our job is to be faithful, and his job is to give us the victory in such a way that he will get the glory.

Lessons For Life

Let's take a final look here at a few lessons for life. I'll give you four. The first one, God is not limited by your weakness. Take this away, God is not limited by your weakness. Now Kinnis could not hold a chair out here for more than three or four minutes. Most of us probably couldn't have done it for one or two minutes. And he's probably the strongest guy in Orlando! But Kinnis has done and is doing great things for God, because God is not limited by his weakness, God has been infusing his power and strength into Kinnis, but he's been doing it in such a way that God gets the glory and not the man. And that's what he's doing with each of us. I've mentioned here before, we started this Mission Mississippi thing, and I went there and one of the pastors said you know we're really glad you're here. We've had a group of pastors here that have been praying for years that God would send us a man, and we're glad he sent you. We're a little surprised he sent you, you remind me of that passage how God uses the weak things of this world. And it's true! I had no experience, no resume in doing something like that. I was weak and I was a afraid because I had never done anything like that before! You've got your thing, your task, your mission, your calling that God has given you to do. You're wondering, how can I do this? I don't have the strength to do it, I can't pull this off, and you're right, you can't! But God can! And he's going to make us in such a way that he turns this weakness that we have into a strength but in such a way that only he can get the glory.

Second lesson, God turns our weaknesses into strength. We have a couple in our church and our daughters grew up together, and the husband ran off with another woman. They got divorced. And I think it was five years later, they were reconciled. God reconciled their marriage. It was brutal! I mean it was really a terrible situation, and God took their failure, their weakness, and has turned it into this fabulous redemptive marriage ministry to hurting couples. They've helped dozens and dozens of couples

to reclaim what it means to have a Biblical marriage out of their weakness. God has used their weakness and turned it into strength!

One of our men here had a son die of AIDS, and God used that to give him a ministry to lead other young men with AIDS. One young man dying of AIDS said to him why should I listen to you? The next day he asks him the same thing, and again the next. Finally after several days he said well, my son died of AIDS too, and then he was open to listen, because God used the weakness and turned it into a strength. And that's what he'll do with each of us.

The third lesson, don't have any illusion of success apart from God. We see in this story that Gideon turned to God and he so closely identified what he was doing with God that the only way that he could fail would be if God failed first. In other words, he said okay God, you're in front of me. He put God between himself and the Midianites. The Midianites could not have prevailed against the three hundred unless they first prevailed against God. So don't have any illusion of success on your own apart from God. No matter what situation you find yourself in, you always have one more card to play; you can play the Gideon card. You so closely identify what you're doing with God that you put God between you and whatever that thing is.

The final lesson, give God the glory. Make sure that you give God the glory! When he engages you and turns your weakness into strength, and you do succeed, and you can look back and see that he's done it in such a way that no one else can get the glory, be sure to give God the glory. Be sure to tell people why this thing has happened. One of our members lead a retreat a couple weeks ago and a man who had been separated from his family for three months went before the church and that marriage was reconciled. They were giving God the glory, the man that was helping them do it gave God the glory. Sometimes I sign my letters for the glory of Christ and no other reason, just when I'm really wanting to make sure that others understand that what I'm saying is for him and no other reason, comma Pat! The Big Idea today, **God makes us by turning our weaknesses into strength. He does it in such a way that only he can get the glory.** Let's pray.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, our dearest Father. Lord thank you so much for the story of Gideon! We see all of these powerful men in the Bible, but thank you for this weak man, somebody we can relate to in such a personal way. Father I just pray that whatever it is that you have asked each of us to do that we just don't feel strong enough to do, that you would show us that through faith and dependence upon you, you can and will turn our weakness into strength. And you'll do it in such a way that you get the glory, and we will give you the glory. And everybody said, amen.