

Fil-Am Community Church

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key verses: Judges 6-7

“GIDEON – TRUSTING GOD IN TOUGH TIMES”

Who is your hero? When I was young, from 6 to maybe 12, I had my heroes. They were the so-called superheroes of Marvel and DC comics - Superman, Batman, the Flash, and the Submariner, Captain America, too. I remember when my mom would tag me along to the grocery store, I would always pull her to the comics section and ask her to buy me a Marvel or DC comics. I would cry if she didn't. That was my iPad. I spent hours reading comics at home and devoured every comics I could lay my hands on. I even had a collection of them. I was thrilled by the extraordinary exploits of my heroes and practically lived in their world.

I outgrew them, of course, and found out there were real-life heroes who are much, much better. I'm talking about the heroes we find in the Bible. These are people whose lives we can copy. These are people who did great things for God, fighting evil around them, overcoming insurmountable obstacles, not because of who they are but because of God. Like in the comics, they are transformed from weaklings to superheroes as they placed their faith in God.

We're starting a brand-new series called "Heroes". Over the next several weeks, Pastor Dave and I want to introduce you to some impact

people from the Bible. They weren't the headliners of the Bible. You'll typically hear a lot more about Abraham or David or Paul than these quieter heroes of the faith.

I guess you could think of them as the “not-so-rich-and-famous” of the ancient world—people like you and me: common men and common women who did uncommon things because they trusted the unchanging promises of God.

This morning we focus on a regular guy named Gideon. He is not very impressive at first look, but he makes some choices that flow from his faith in God, and it changed everything. So significant is the mark this very ordinary man made in his time that he is listed in Hebrews 11 alongside the movers and shakers of the OT. Track his story with me as we work our way through Judges 6-7, where we find a primer on trusting God. Please open your Bibles and follow along as I read select verses from chapters 6 and 7. The rest of the verses I'll make reference to in this message.

There are 6 lessons here to help us trust God more.

Here's “Trust” Lesson #1:

I. GOD USES TOUGH TIMES TO GET OUR ATTENTION (Judges 6:1-6).

If you go back to the previous chapter, the last sentence says, “*Then there was peace in the land for forty years.*” So, as we open Judges 6, we find the nation of Israel coming off a time of relative ease. The bills are paid, the kids are behaving, and business is good. Everything's coming up roses. And

as it tends to happen to us all in such times, Israel forgot God. They became self-sufficient; they didn't need God. So the Lord shook things up by rousing an enemy against them to show them how hard life can be without Him.

Verse 1 says that the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD handed them over to Midian seven years. You need to know that the Midianites were extremely powerful and oppressed the Israelites mercilessly. Every year around harvest time, the nomadic Midianites would invade Israel. And v. 5 tells us that they would come in like locusts, ravaging the land. What they couldn't carry with them they destroyed.

The Bible reports that it was so bad many of the Israelites had left their homes to live in caves and strongholds, fearing for their lives.

This went on for seven years, and finally, the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help. Why did they wait so long to turn to the Lord? Because they're a lot like us—they waited until every possible option played out and they couldn't take it any longer; then they cried out to the Lord. Verse 6 tells us that Israel became poverty-stricken because of Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the LORD. How many times have hard circumstances come to us, and we never stop to ask what God is planning for us in those circumstances. Instead we hold out, thinking that we can handle it on our own. Learn this from Gideon: every experience in life is a test. And every trial in the lives of God's people is tailored to draw us closer to God.

Here's the point: When tough times come, instead of looking at them as if God is punishing you, try to see them as God's gift of grace.

Proverbs 3:11-12 (NLT): *“My child, don't ignore it when the LORD disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. ¹²For the LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.”* He loves you too much to let you keep living the way you are. He longs to be at the center of your life. So He has designs in our troubles, and they are always for our good.

C.S. Lewis said it like this, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it's His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

“Trust” lesson #2:

II. GOD ALWAYS SEES MORE THAN WE DO (6:7-12).

The wonderful thing about God is that even though we're slow returning to Him, He is never slow in responding to us. Verses 7-8 show us that when we cry out to God, He listens and then he acts.

But he acts according to his timetable, not ours. Even when we feel like he's not doing anything, he's actually working behind the scenes to help us. For Israel, He first sends an unnamed prophet to call them back to total surrender and full devotion. If you were an Israelite, you would say, “Is that it? What else is God doing? We want some action right now! We can't stand the Midianites anymore!”

Unknown to the Israelites, God's plan also included a most unlikely man named Gideon. We meet Gideon in v. 11 where he is threshing some wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites.

Now some of you know this, but city boys like me don't. Normally, you would want to thresh wheat out in the open so that the wind could blow away the chaff. But Gideon has apparently been stung before, so he goes into hiding in an underground winepress, hoping to avert the attention of the Midianites. It's a pitiful sight, full of frustration, discouragement and fear.

In case you ever wonder if God has a sense of humor, read v. 12: "*When the Angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said: "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior."* Was God being sarcastic? Or did He see more than Gideon saw? I believe God saw what He was about to make of Gideon; it was time Gideon saw it too.

Hey, brothers and sisters, do you know who you really are? One of the biggest lies we tell ourselves is that God uses only special people. People who are gifted, talented, beautiful, educated, and so on and so forth. We put ourselves on the shelf. But if you're a Christian, you know what the Bible says?

You're extra special. Why? Let's look at some verses to see who you are in God's eyes. Please let us read together these verses:

First of all,

You are God's child. (John 1:12, "*But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God*" (NLT))

You are His friend. (John 15:15, "*I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.*" NLT)

You are His masterpiece (Eph. 2:10, "*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*" NLT)

You have been justified, meaning, you're no longer guilty of sin (Rom. 5:1, *"We are justified (acquitted, declared righteous, and given a right standing with God) through faith"* AMP).

You are freed forever from condemnation from God (Rom. 8:1, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* NIV).

You are adopted into His family. (Eph. 1:5, *"He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will."* HCSB)

Your citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20, *"But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives."* NLT).

And you have everything from Him you need for life and godliness! God knows who you are, even if you don't. And He will work to help you see your true identity.

God was going to use Gideon in a mighty way. But Gideon didn't know about it, he wasn't aware of God's plans.

He looked at himself and there wasn't much there. That's what he thought. His inferiority complex limited him to do what he was capable of.

Turn to your neighbor and say, "You are extra special to God." And if you're beside your mate, turn to them and say, "You are extra special to me, too." Be sure that's your mate.

So don't limit yourselves. God wants to fulfill His purpose through you today. Are you in hiding? Or are you doing what God wants?

Trust Lesson #3:

III. GOD ASSURES US OF HIS PRESENCE (6:13-24).

After being called a mighty warrior, Gideon begins to question God: *“But sir,” Gideon replied, “if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? 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 hand of Midian.”*

Verse 14 records something that must have caught Gideon off-guard. It says that the Lord turned to him. He looked Gideon full in the face and said, *“Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not sending you?”* Gideon still wasn’t doing the math in this divine equation, so he begins to note just how unimpressive his resume is. He is the weakest link in his clan, the youngest in his family. He doesn’t have any authority to call out the cavalry from his own tribe, let alone from others.

But God allays his fears by assuring him of His presence. In v. 16, *“The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.”*

Gideon needed a personal encounter with God. God met him right where he was, giving him a sense of peace and purpose by His promised presence. You know, Napoleon’s soldiers allegedly said,

“When Napoleon takes our hands and looks at us, we feel like conquerors.” In the same way, there’s something that changes in us when we listen to God’s voice and look “full in His wonderful face.” Suddenly, His plans and purpose become the most important things on earth.

You may be in a tight situation today just like Gideon. You're facing insurmountable odds. You're resigned to your situation. "I don't think this problem is ever going to go away. I might as well live with it." Or you're on the verge of giving up. "There's no hope in this situation. What can I do? Goodbye, world."

Friend, God is with you. This is the promise from his Word, "*He's right there with you. He won't let you down; he won't leave you.*" Deut. 31:6 MSG

So, Gideon has just been pumped up by the Lord. But he's far from being ready. He needs to learn the next lesson and we too need to learn it.

Trust Lesson #4:

IV. PRIVATE FAITHFULNESS IS A PREREQUISITE TO PUBLIC USEFULNESS (6:25-32).

Before Gideon can be used publicly, he must first clean up his own backyard. His family was breaking the 1st and 2nd commandments, with idols to Baal on their property. So the first assignment from the Lord was to take his dad's special seven-year-old bull and tear down the idols. Then, Gideon was to sacrifice that prized bull using the wood from the destroyed idol.

What's the point in telling us this? If you want to learn how to trust God, you must first set your own house in order. Before God can use you mightily, you must clean up your act first. He must be magnified in your own life, in your own home. Private worship prepares us for public power from God. There are no short cuts.

So, is there anything you've been holding on to? Is there any sin that you're clinging to? Knock down your idols. Confess your sin.

Deal with it and return to full obedience to God. And don't think that you've committed the vilest of sins that it's hard for you to come back to God. God is faithful to forgive you whatever sin that's lurking in your own backyard. The Bible says, *"If we tell Him our sins, He is faithful and we can depend on Him to forgive us of our sins. He will make our lives clean from all sin."* (1 John 1:9)

Now, sometimes, when you clean up your act, it will stir things up. For example, if you used to gamble or bet on horses with some friends and now you don't go out with them anymore, they will call you names and worse, avoid you altogether. But be encouraged. God will honor those who honor Him!

It happened to Gideon. Evidently, this bull was community breeding stock owned by Gideon's family. Verse 30 reports that the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die..." But Gideon's act was already affecting some change. His father, Joash awoke to the truth and stood up to the men, asking in v. 31, *"Are you going to plead Baal's cause?"* He concluded with a brave statement, *"If he is really a god, let him defend himself..."*

There's nothing like you becoming bold and courageous when you are right with God. You see, sin in our lives prevent the power of God from being demonstrated. In fact, the Bible says that we grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin. As a result, the Holy Spirit cannot fill us and he can't use us.

A story is told of the preacher D.L. Moody who was going to hold an evangelistic crusade in London. The religious leaders gathered to talk about plans for the crusade. Some of them, however, were not happy about the coming of the American preacher. One of them stood up and said, “Why, is Moody the only one who can bring the gospel to the people of London? He doesn’t have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit!”

Another quickly stood up and replied, “But the Holy Spirit has a monopoly of Moody!”

Does the Holy Spirit have a monopoly of you? If he does, then he can use you like he did Gideon and Moody. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:18 NLT, *“Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”*

Trust Lesson #5:

V. GOD IS PATIENT WITH US AS HE GROWS US (6:33-40).

If this were a movie, when we got to v. 33, ominous music would be playing. It says the Midianites and their partners are getting ready to make their annual raid. But instead of cringing in a cave, v. 34 says the Spirit of the LORD enveloped Gideon, and he blew the ram’s horn and the Abiezrites rallied behind him.

Gideon had taken a huge step of faith in his private faithfulness and now God’s Spirit was drawing people from far and wide. Thirty-two thousand men show up, ready to fight!

But watch this. Even after his encounter with Almighty God, even though he had been obedient to clean shop at home, and even though the

Holy Spirit was empowering him, Gideon still struggled with doubts. He knows that God has promised to save Israel through him, but he's looking in the mirror and the reflection he sees doesn't look encouraging.

Notice vs. 36-37. *"Gideon said to God, 'If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised- look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.'"*

I love how loving, tender, and patient God is with us. Gideon is making a deal with God. He wants a confirming sign. And the Bible says the next morning, God gave it to him: the fleece was wet and the ground was dry. Even when this "Doubting Thomas" of the OT reverses the test in v. 39, asking that the fleece be dry and the ground covered with dew, God graciously confirmed His power to Gideon. Our Lord was developing this man into a fully convinced servant, matching each doubt with kind reassurance. God will show you the same patience as well as you seek His face, allaying your fears to grow you into a man or woman of God.

Trust lesson #6:

VI. SUCCESS IS DETERMINED BY GOD'S POWER, NOT OURS (7:1-8).

Gideon's now ready to rumble but God has other plans. God says to him, "You've got too much people. Why don't we send some of the men home? I don't want you to brag and say, 'We did it!'"

God then proceeds to give Gideon a couple of tests to whittle the number down. The first test culled 22,000 men out of the army, leaving 10,000. Still too many, said God.

So in v. 4, a second test was given. God tells Gideon to take his men down to the water and let them drink. Weed out any men who stick their face down into the water to drink; keep the ones who ladle the water to their mouths with their hands. Gideon must have gulped hard when he counted how many were disqualified: 9700 were out, leaving only 300 men.

Can you imagine how Gideon felt? Chapter 8 tells us that the Midianite army numbered 135,000 men. That's 450 Midianites to every one Israeli soldier. God wants Gideon's army to face this horde with a mere 300 men who know how to drink politely!

God created an impossible situation of human weakness to exalt His own strength. This is His specialty! What did Jesus say in Luke 18:27? "*What is impossible with men is possible with God.*" Here's a good lesson for us at Fil-Am: Accomplishing God's purposes is not determined by the bottom line on a finance sheet or the size of our congregation or the efficiency of our plans. We need to attend to all those things, sure.

But the truth is, God is looking to glorify Himself on earth through people who are fully dependent on Him, who believe He is with them and are ready to charge the hill in the name of the Lord! Amen? God doesn't need a majority vote from us on this; He doesn't need us at all. But He invites us to join Him in doing His will. When we do, we reap the benefits and He gets the glory. D. L Moody once said: "Give me ten men who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God, and I shall change the world."

It happened in Israel. In one of the strangest battle strategies in history, the 300 went out with trumpets, torches and jars to meet the marauding Midianites. God sent confusion into the ranks of the enemy so that they began attacking each other. When it was over, 120,000 Midianites had killed one another and the other 15,000 fled. It was over. God had answered Israel's prayers. He used a common man who believed God.

God uses tough times to get our attention. Is He getting your attention today? God always sees more than we do. Do you see yourself as He does? God assures us with His presence. Can you sense His presence with you now, urging you to trust Him? Private faithfulness is a prerequisite to public usefulness. Are there things in your life, in your home that need to go so God can move in power in your life? God is patient with our faith process. He meets you right where you are with what you need. Success is determined by God's power, not ours. Will you trust Him today—with your life, with your children, your finances, your decisions, your husband or wife?

Let us Pray....