

Gideon's Call

Bible Background • **JUDGES 6-8**
Printed Text • **JUDGES 6:11-18**
Devotional Reading • **PSALM 83:1-12, 18**

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **DISTINGUISH** God's criteria for choosing leaders from those set by humans; **REMEMBER** a time of feeling unqualified for a task because of perceived inadequacies; and **WRESTLE** with doubts about personal capabilities and requesting signs in a twenty-first century context.



After a few years of working as a sales associate at a tech store, James was ready to move toward a new position as a sales manager. With only a few years of experience under his belt, James was up against stiff competition from candidates who already had management experience. Despite this, James was committed to arriving to work on time, and was usually one of the last people to leave work. He strove to show the love of Christ to every customer he encountered throughout the day. His coworkers, however, often scoffed at how happy he'd be to make a "measly sale" on small-ticket items. One day, James mustered up the courage to ask his supervisor for an opportunity to discuss how he could be better prepared for the management position opening up. "James, you're a great associate," she said. "And I think you're ready to move beyond a sales manager position. You're ready to run the entire store." "Me?" James gasped. James didn't feel like his three years of experience made him qualified enough to run the entire store and manage other people who had more experience than he did. "Yes, you!" his manager exclaimed. "Apply for the general store manager position next week. I think you have a good chance at being hired." *God doesn't always call the equipped, but He always equips the called. Have you ever faced a task where you felt you were not adequately equipped?*

Keep in Mind

"And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour" (**Judges 6:12**).

KJV

Judges 6:11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.

18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

NLT

Judges 6:11 Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites.

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

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

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

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

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

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

18 Don’t go away until I come back and bring my offering to you.” He answered, “I will stay here until you return.”

The People, Places, and Times

Children of Israel. The book of Judges comes after the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua’s guidance. When they arrive, the Israelites quickly return to old habits of idol worship, and God calls for judges to “rule” them to create some sense of order there. For many years, the Israelites were at odds with Canaanites and other tribal groups like the Midianites and Amalekites, who eventually challenged Israel’s dominance in the Promised Land. The repeated disobedience by the Children of Israel would be a common theme throughout the Old Testament as God looked to establish His people and their leaders in history.

Midianites. The Midianites were a group of people who descended from Abraham’s fourth son through his concubine Keturah ([1 Chronicles 1:32](#)). The Midianites, who settled in northeast Arabia, would adopt Arabian customs and cultures. Their name pops up in Genesis and Exodus with the stories of Joseph and Moses because of their close proximity to the Israelites. The Midianites were just one of the many nations that would rise against Israel while in the Promised Land.

Background

Israel had become a corrupt nation in God’s eyes, worshiping false idols, abandoning the Lord who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Throughout the book of Judges, the people of Israel were overtaken by other nations around them. In an effort to guide the Israelites, God appointed judges to help them diplomatically follow His Law, but the Israelites still wanted to follow their own agendas and worship false gods. God desired for the Israelites to remember their ancestors’ experiences—traveling through the wilderness so that they would learn how to honor God. But every time God delivered them from their evil ways, the Israelites returned to idolatry. Because of their repeated disobedience, other nations residing in the Promised Land began fighting against the Israelites and testing Israel’s faithfulness to God. By the time we get to the calling of Gideon in [Judges 6:11–18](#), the Israelites were severely oppressed by the Midianites and Amalekites, who had taken over every stronghold and resource in the land. Gideon’s response to the angel of the Lord is reflective of Israel’s long history of remembering what God has done for them—but also questioning His ability to lead a nation with a history of disobedience.

In Depth

1. Doing What You Can (Judges 6:11–12)

When the angel of the Lord visited Gideon, he was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to avoid drawing attention to himself. During biblical times, people would often thresh wheat at the top of the hill so that the chaff of the wheat could be carried away in the wind, leaving only the useful part of the wheat behind. Gideon threshed the wheat in a winepress, usually located in a pit, so that the flying chaff wouldn't give away his location to the Midianites who had taken over the land. By working there, he could hide his produce from those who might try to steal it. Gideon continued doing what he could to live through the oppression. Though Gideon was performing a common task in fear, the angel of the Lord reassures him that God was with him, even before Gideon could verbalize his fears. This reassurance would be the first of many confirmations for Gideon that he would be victorious against the enemy.

2. Remembering the Past (v. 13)

Because Israel had faced many trials in the Promised Land, Gideon was skeptical that God would be with him and the Israelites. First, Gideon expresses these concerns by questioning the angel's words: "If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?" Gideon's expectation for Him to help them doesn't consider Israel's disobedience being the catalyst for what feels like an absent God. Second, Gideon recalls a time when his ancestors spoke of a God who delivered and redeemed them from troubles of the past, questioning whether He would do it for them now. Again, Gideon neglects to reflect on how their troubles are due to the people's disobedience, not to a God who could not deliver them. Sometimes we forget what role we played in a particular situation. Gideon's focus was on God's supposed absence, instead of how Israel's responsibility for their troubles.

3. Qualifying the Call (vv. 14–16)

God responds to Gideon to remind him of his own abilities to do what was necessary to save the Israelites: "Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from Midianites. I am sending you!" (v. 14). Gideon questions whether he is qualified to do what God has asked of him because he is the "least" of his tribe. Gideon thought that because he was the smallest in stature or status, he would not be able to defeat the army of Midianites. God qualifies us to do His work. Whenever God calls us to His work, He knows that we are capable. Because God can see the end from the beginning, He already knows we can be successful at whatever He asks us to do—if we do it in His strength.

4. Worshiping and Waiting (vv. 17–18)

God reassures Gideon that He will not only give him a sign, but wait for him to return with a sacrificial meal. This exchange between God and Gideon is the affirmation that Gideon needed to get over his fears and go in obedience—and a sign that Gideon was willing to go forward in

obedience despite his fears. This beautifully demonstrates how God is caring, loving, and concerned about the things we are concerned about; He was willing to wait on Gideon so he could be reassured through this act of worship. God often meets us with the same kind of loving patience. He knows we are prone to worry and fear.

Search the Scriptures

1. Did Gideon give a good reason for not being qualified to rescue the Israelites ([Judges 6:15](#))?
2. Was it wrong for Gideon to ask for reassurance that it was the Lord speaking to him (v. 17)?

Discuss the Meaning

People are always looking for reassurance that they are the right fit for a job, project, or relationship. When we don't measure up, we can often become skeptical that God has called us to something. How can we be reassured that whatever God brings to us, He will also give us the tools to be successful?

Lesson in Our Society

Because we live in a society that emphasizes being "qualified," we can lose sight of what it means to be gifted and called by God, even if we do not meet man-made qualifications. We often miss an opportunity for God to use us because we think we do not have the qualifications to complete what He's asked us to do. Gideon rose to the occasion because he was willing to trust God more than his personal skills and abilities.

Make It Happen

You might be thinking about something God has called you to do, but don't feel capable because you don't have the experience, education, resources, or know-how. Today, write down what God has asked you to do. Then, write down the steps it will take to achieve that goal. Find one thing that you feel you can do to start the process of obedience. Pray for God to continue to give you the courage to obey the plan, even if you feel unequipped to do so.

More Light on the Text

Judges 6:11-18

11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite: and his son Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.

After confronting the people and convicting them of their sin, the Lord sends an angel to prepare for them a deliverer. The angel arrives and sits under an oak tree in Ophrah belonging to Joash the Abiezrite. There he meets Gideon, the son of Joash, who is secretly threshing wheat by the wine press, hiding it from the Midianites.

The Israelites were in hiding from their enemies and could not fend for themselves. The Midianites invaded their land, destroyed their farms, and took away all their livestock, leaving them helpless ([Judges 6:3–6](#)). Gideon is threshing wheat in a very secluded place, probably for the family to survive on. The fact that Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress expresses the degree of distress and humiliation the people are undergoing. Under normal circumstances, grains were winnowed on a hill or cattle were used to thresh grains on a threshing floor. Gideon is working in an unusual place—in a wine press (Heb. *gath*, **GATH**), which was a circular pit hollowed out of rock—most likely to avoid discovery by the invaders.

Instead of using the winepress for processing wine, Gideon is using it for threshing grain because the Israelites do not have any grapes left to make wine. Their adversaries have taken over all their vineyards. The people were living under great fear.

12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. 13 And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt? but now the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

As Gideon is working in this secret place, the angel appears to him. We are not told how the angel appears—most likely in a human form. After the angel’s disappearance, Gideon realizes he has been talking with the angel of the Lord (vv. 21–22). The angel appears and approaches Gideon and greets him in an unusual manner: “The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.” Although the greeting is standard for the time, the pronouncement appears to be an ironic mockery because the Lord is not with them (see [Deuteronomy 31:17](#)).

The phrase “mighty man of valour” comes from two Hebrew words (*gibbor*, **ghib-BORE**, and *khayil*, **KHAH-yil**) that can be interpreted as “great or powerful warrior; a strong and valiant man.” It also can be translated as “man of standing,” which is surprising considering Gideon’s reasoning in verse 15.

Gideon’s reaction is typical. Given the circumstances of the Children of Israel at this time—defeated, subjected to servitude, in hiding, all their belongings confiscated, and living in fear—it sounds strange for someone to say, “The Lord is with you.” All this appears contrary to their state of affairs. Even more startling is that a man gripped with fear and hiding from his enemies is referred to as “a mighty man of valour.” This does not make sense!

Gideon naturally replies with a series of questions: if God is with us, and in view of what He has done in the past, why are we in such a mess? Why won’t He help us like He did when we were in Egypt? Why has God turned us over to our adversaries? The answer to these questions is obvious—sin. Israel has forsaken their God, and He reciprocates by allowing their enemies to conquer and oppress them in accordance with His covenant and warning (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). He is only fulfilling His part of the covenant just as He has in the past, and on many occasions, He kept the other part of the promise by blessing them when they were obedient to Him.

Through these questions, Gideon is indirectly acknowledging the greatness of the God of Israel and calling to mind stories of His miraculous works in the past. He does not seem to question the

validity of these miracles, but is overwhelmed by the magnitude of their suffering, and the absence of God's intervention. He knows and believes what the Lord is capable of doing, but he cannot imagine the extent of His silence.

14 And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

While Gideon is pondering all his inadequacies and lack of qualifications, and probably doubting his abilities, "the LORD looked upon him" and orders him to go and save his people from the Midianites. We notice that here the angel is referred to as "the LORD," Yahweh Himself speaking. The word "looked" comes from the Hebrew word *panah* (**pah-NAH**), which means "to turn, to face, to look at." That means the Lord turns to look (facing him squarely) and commissions him to action. It is a look of confidence and emphatic assurance.

The Lord tells Gideon to go in the strength he has and rescue the people. In other words, "You have enough power; you don't need more, because the Lord is with you." Here God commissions Gideon in the same way as He did Moses and Joshua ([Exodus 3:10](#), [Joshua 1:5](#)). The rhetorical question, "Have not I sent thee?" ([Judges 6:14](#)), is another way of reconfirming His calling and certifying the mission. In other words, the Lord says, "I am the One sending you; you need not fear or be afraid, for I am with you." Gideon didn't have to worry about being strong enough, because as Paul says, God's strength is perfected in our weakness ([2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#)).

When we depend on ourselves and our own strength or are deterred by our weaknesses, we cannot accomplish the Lord's assignment. But when we faithfully obey and surrender to His will, we can successfully carry out any mission or task the Lord gives to us. When we look at the magnitude of the task, we fail; but when we look at the mightiness of our God, we accomplish all things that come our way. Our success does not depend on us or on who we are, but on whose we are: Almighty God's.

15 And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. 16 And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man.

Gideon gives the excuse that his family is poor and he is the least in his father's house. In saying this, he acknowledges that he has no authority. To call soldiers together was the ability of someone of influence. He had no influence over his own family, nor any other families or tribes.

The Lord gives reassurance that He will be with Gideon. He does not reassure Gideon with anything else but His presence. The Israelites will come together to fight under Gideon's leadership and defeat the Midianites. In other words, Gideon will defeat every single one of the Midianites in one fell swoop (as he does).

17 And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me. 18 Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again.

Gideon wants to confirm this amazing encounter and offer of grace (Heb. *khen*, **KHEN**). This word means a feeling of favorable emotional regard, always given from a person in higher social standing to one of lower rank. Gideon wanted to know for sure whether God would be with him. He asks for a sign, and the angel of the Lord indulges him. He promises to wait for Gideon's present (Heb. *minkhah*, **meen-KHAH**), which is another word for sacrifice, most often a grain offering. Gideon's desire is to truly confirm that the Lord has sent this messenger by giving a worship offering that only the Lord would receive.

What a great turnaround for Gideon, who must have been contemplating his weaknesses, but now would lead an army. How could he be chosen for the enormous assignment of delivering his people from such a powerful and mean people like the Midianites? He could not fathom being the one to lead his people to face such a mighty army.

But the Lord had other plans. Here we learn that God uses not the famous, the strong, or the most eloquent, but rather ordinary people: the weak and the feeble, the less eloquent, and the seemingly insignificant to carry out His purposes.

Say It Correctly

Abiezrite. ah-bee-**EZ**-rite.

Midianites. **MI**-dee-uh-nites.

Mannasseh. muh-**NA**-suh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Oppression Results from Disobedience
([Judges 6:1–10](#))

TUESDAY

May God Judge Enemies Harshly
([Psalm 83:1–12, 18](#))

WEDNESDAY

Gideon Sees the Angel of the Lord
([Judges 6:19–24](#))

THURSDAY

Fleece Confirms Victory Over Midianites
([Judges 6:36–40](#))

FRIDAY

Midianites Defeated Without Weapons
([Judges 7:19–23](#))

SATURDAY

Gideon Dies, Israel Forgets God's Ways
([Judges 8:29–35](#))

SUNDAY

Gideon's Call
([Judges 6:11–18](#))