

Life Lesson 48  
*Gideon (part 1)*  
Text: Judges 6

Introduction

Have you ever had to do something that was kind of scary? Something that took some courage? It's not always easy to trust God and do the brave thing, is it? The man in our story today wasn't very brave. God taught him to trust Him, though, and Gideon became famous for his great courage

The Story

When we first see Gideon in the scripture, he's doing something not brave at all. He was hiding! The Israelites had again sinned and worshiped idols. Instead of giving praise and glory to the true God, they bowed down and offered sacrifices to statues made of wood and stone. Again God warned them. He sent a prophet to tell them they had better change their ways. When they wouldn't listen, God sent the Midianites to get their attention.

They ignored the prophet, but they couldn't ignore the Midianites! Those vicious people swarmed through the land on their camels, so many that they couldn't be counted. They left a path of destruction everywhere they went. They killed the animals and burned the crops, and took away everything they could carry. They ruled the land with terrible cruelty.

The Israelites had to hide in caves in the mountains. They had to keep the Midianites from seeing their belongings if they wanted to keep them. That's why Gideon was hiding. He was skulking behind a winepress threshing some grain.

He must have been surprised when suddenly he heard a voice speaking to him.

"The Lord, mighty in valor, is with you," the stranger said.

Gideon didn't know it, but the stranger wasn't a man, but an angel.

"If God is with us," Gideon answered, "why are all these terrible things happening to us? What happened to the God who did all the miracles for our forefathers? Why has He deserted us now?"

Gideon surely knew why they were being punished. God had even sent a prophet to tell them plainly so they would have no doubt that their own sin caused their trouble. Yet, Gideon still whined, "Why did God let this happen?"

People today do the very same thing. Often they will live to please only themselves, never giving a thought to God. When God allows things to happen to them, they start crying, "Why did God let this happen?" They never think about it being their sin causing their troubles. Of course, not all bad things are sent as punishments. Some, although they seem hard at the time, are part of God's best plan for our lives. We should remember Gideon, though, when we are tempted to complain about trials in our lives.

God looked at Gideon and answered, "You will set the Israelites free from the Midianites. I've called you to do it."

"Me!" he exclaimed. "How will I save Israel? I come from a poor family and I'm the youngest and least important one in the family."

"I will be with you," the Lord answered. "You will run off the Midianites almost without any help from other people."

After all, if God is with him, helping him, what else does a person need? Gideon still wasn't so sure. He didn't know if it was really the Lord speaking to him. Maybe it was just a man talking, or maybe he was dreaming.

"Show me a sign, if you are really the Lord speaking to me," Gideon said. "Stay here until I come and bring an offering before you."

"I will stay here until you come back," the Lord replied.

Gideon went in and prepared a young goat for an offering and cakes to offer with it. He brought it out and set it down on a rock by the angel. The angel touched the offering with the end of his staff and immediately flames leaped up and consumed the sacrifice. Then the stranger was gone! Gideon knew that he had been standing before an angel of God. Then he was really scared!

"Don't be afraid," the Lord told him. "You won't die."

Gideon believed God. He built an altar and worshiped God. He called his altar "Jehovah Shalom" which means "The Lord, My Peace." Gideon turned from idols and from his own unbelief and bitterness. He surrendered to God, and he found peace, even in a land torn by war.

Gideon still had things to learn about trusting God and about true courage, though. The very next command God gave him was a tough one! God told him to knock down his father's altar to Baal. He was to cut down the grove of trees that was supposed to be sacred to Baal and build an altar to God. Then God told him to take his father's best bullock and offer it to God.

If you think about it for a minutes, you'll see just how frightening that command was. Everyone else in the country, even Gideon's own father, worshiped Baal. Gideon would have to stand entirely alone and have everyone he knew, even his own family, mad at him. Besides that, remember that the Midianites had killed or carried off most of the animals. To kill the bullock for a sacrifice would be killing one of the few remaining sources of food. That by itself would be enough to make everyone furious. Gideon was just learning to trust God, so he did obey, but not in the most courageous way. He went out at night and cut down the trees. He

knocked down the altar and broke up the idol. Then he killed the bullock and offered it as a sacrifice to God. He was right about one thing. Everyone was good and mad the next morning!

"Who did this?" the people cried. They snooped around until they found out who had done it. They went after Gideon, ready to tear him to pieces. They called to Joash, Gideon's father, "Send out your son to us. We'll teach him not to tear down Baal's altar."

But God had told Gideon to do it, and God was ready to protect him. He had changed the heart of Joash. Instead of being angry with his son, he stood up for him.

"If Baal is a god, let him defend himself," Joash told the people. "If Baal is angry, let him take care of Gideon himself."

No one had an answer for that. If Baal was a god, he surely would have stricken Gideon dead for destroying his altar and his statue. Baal didn't do a thing. That proved to everyone that he wasn't a god at all, just a helpless hunk of stone.

Gideon trusted God. As a result he saw God do a wonderful work. It gave him more faith for what came next. Gideon still had more to learn about trusting God and about true courage. We'll learn more about the even harder things Gideon was called to do in our next lesson.

### The Life Lesson

I hope you remember, boys and girls, the lesson Gideon learned in our story today. The first step in gaining true courage is to trust God and surrender to Him. Until we are saved and have made our peace with God, we can't be truly courageous. Then we have to obey, trusting God even though it looks impossible. Because God is all-powerful and because He loves us, we can trust him to take care of us, no matter how difficult the task He gives us is.

## Review Questions

Who was ruling the Israelites at the start of this story?

*The Midianites*

What were the Midianites like?

*They were strong and cruel, killing animals and stealing everything they could.*

What was Gideon doing when we first see him in the Bible?

*He was hiding.*

Who did Gideon meet?

*An Angel*

What did the angel tell Gideon to do?

*To knock down his father's altar to Baal, cut down the trees that were sacred to Baal, and sacrifice his father's bullock to God.*

Why was this scary?

*Because all the people worshiped Baal, and because it would also use up the bullock.*

What sign did the angel give to Gideon that the message was from God?

*He touched the sacrifice Gideon brought with his staff and it immediately caught on fire and was burned up.*

Did Gideon obey?

*Yes*

How did the other people feel about it?

*They were angry and ready to kill him.*

Why didn't they kill Gideon?

*Joash, Gideon's father, said to let Baal defend himself, and, of course, he couldn't.*