

08

JUDGES 6:11-24

HUMILITY AND SUBMISSION

opening ILLUSTRATION

Bring three oversized books (such as large hardcover dictionaries, some old encyclopedias, or an old-school Bible commentary) to your group meeting today. Explain that today's opening challenge calls for some volunteers to hold out books with one hand, arm extended, palm face up. Demonstrate the challenge and point out to the class that this is a tricky task. Then call to the front two of your strongest class members and one (good-natured) member who is not exceptionally strong. If the less-strong classmate asks how he or she is expected to compete against the other two, say something like, "Don't worry; you'll have some help." Give each volunteer a book and start the contest. As the clock starts, put both of your hands alongside the less-strong classmate. If the others protest, assure them that you never expected it to be an equal contest; this was never going to be a fair fight. Thank the contestants for their good attitudes and say, "This contest actually is just to set us up for today's passage."

context

If you've ever thought about how you might respond if you came face to face with an angel of God, you could look at the examples in the Bible to see how people through the centuries have responded. In this week's passage in Judges 6, Gideon doesn't realize at first that the angel is the one before him; after Gideon's offering is consumed, though, he is shocked and fears for his life because he has seen the Lord. This may remind you of Isaiah's response upon seeing God in a vision of God in His throne room (see Isa. 6:1-7) and John's reaction upon seeing the Lord in the book of Revelation (see Rev. 1:17). We all find humility and submission in the presence of the almighty God.

expository OUTLINE

JUDGES 6:11-13 *We don't see ourselves or our situations clearly, but God does.* We're not exactly sure of the details about this angel of the Lord that appeared to Gideon, but evidently he looked somewhat like a human man. An angel of the Lord had appeared to Hagar (see Gen. 16), Abraham (see Gen. 22), Moses (see Ex. 3), and Balaam (see Num. 22), and has already appeared in the book of Judges (see 2:1-4). In every case, the angel speaks on behalf of God to a person. Here, though the angel appears with a word of encouragement and prophecy, Gideon bubbles over with his frustration: Is God really with them? Why, then, hadn't they seen His wonders? Remember from last week's passage: the Israelites had been oppressed by the Midianites for seven years; they were hungry, defeated, and afraid. Gideon voiced his deepest soul cry: he feared that God had abandoned them. The fact that he was threshing wheat in a hiding place shows his fear.

JUDGES 6:14-16 *God's call on our lives sometimes seems overwhelming or unbelievable.* The angel had already called Gideon a "valiant warrior" (v. 12), but we see his situation a little more clearly here: Gideon saw his family as weak, and he saw himself as the weakest in his family. As the story continues, we'll see that his father was influential in their town; Gideon seems to think too lowly of himself or his family. Or perhaps he's simply petrified at God's call: free the Israelites from Midian (v. 14)? The entire nation hadn't been able to keep the Midianites out; how would this one man? Note carefully God's words, spoken through the angel: "Go in the strength you have . . . I am sending you" (v. 14). Gideon felt like he had no strength! We feel that way from time to time: we might sense that God is calling us to share the Gospel, reach out to help, serve, or speak a specific word to someone. Our initial response is like Gideon's: no way I can do that! But God's promise changed everything: He would be with Gideon, and He would be successful.

JUDGES 6:17-24 *There is fear, awe, and peace in the presence of God.* Gideon didn't really know how to respond to this crazy promise from the angel, so he asked for a sign: he wanted to bring the angel a gift. Gift giving and receiving was a solemn occasion at that time, so this would legitimize the angel's visit. After careful preparation, Gideon placed the meal on a rock. The angel touched it with his staff and it all caught on fire, even though it had been doused with the liquid broth. God often makes His presence known with fire, and this revealed to Gideon that the angel was legitimate: this was the power of God right in front of him! With holy reverence, Gideon feared for his life. But God promised that he would live and that he would have peace with the Lord. In response, Gideon built an altar so he would always remember this moment.

group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 6:11-13.

.01 What words would you use to describe Gideon's mindset, attitude, or emotional level at this point? When have you had similar frustrations?

.02 How was Gideon seeing his situation through human eyes and not through God's all-knowing plan?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 6:14-16.

.03 What was God sending Gideon to do? What all might that entail? Has God ever called you to do something that seemed to big for you to accomplish?

.04 In what ways might you consider yourself "weak?" What would God say to those statements, according to verse 16?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 6:17-24.

.05 What stands out to you in Gideon's gift to the angel? Why do you think he wanted to bring it?

.06 Have you ever wanted to offer something to God but didn't really know what to give Him? How might this passage give you some peace and guidance?

session CONNECTION

In Judges 6:11-24 and Mark 10:32-45, we see some questions being asked of God's followers. In the Judges passage, we see Gideon threshing wheat when the angel of the Lord appears to him. When Gideon hears the angel's prophetic greeting, he instantly asks, in essence, "Why is all this happening?" Without even hearing the tone of his voice or seeing his facial expressions, we know Gideon is frustrated and exhausted from living in oppression. In Mark 10:35-40, we are told the story of James and John asking to sit at the right and left of Jesus in His kingdom. If we apply both of these stories to our own lives, perhaps we see our own struggles: sometimes we come to God in our frustration and anger; sometimes we come pridefully. Either way, we must all come in faith and submission.

application

Remind students of the opening illustration, in which a less-strong contestant received help and the contest was, for all intents and purposes, not a contest. Say something like, "The same thing is true when God was fighting for the Israelites; when He was on their side, there was really no contest between them and their enemies. When God is on our side, we are guaranteed His provision, His power, and His peace." Help students see that Gideon was called to obey God in faith to drive out the Midianites. Give each student a note card (and pen, if they need it) and instruct them to write the opening words of verse 16 on it: "But I will be with you." Say, "Gideon's task was impossible unless God was on his side. It is the same for us." Encourage students to listen to God, walk in obedience, and believe that, if He is on their side, they can have victory.

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