



**T**he stories of the great heroes and heroines of the Bible inspire and instruct us in our own lives. Each one has a “who knows?” moment when God’s story seems to break into regular, everyday life—a critical moment offering a sense of calling or purpose. It’s as true for us as it was in ancient days. Who knows? Maybe God has plans to use you for His glory. Who knows? Maybe God put you where you are, with the influence you have, for a reason. Who knows? Maybe the things you suffer today will make sense in time. When God shows up, a sense of mysterious discovery enters our lives. Who knows what God has planned?

## WHO KNOWS? • JUDGES 6:11-18 • Tim McConnell • April 22, 2018

Some of the best stories guys tell begin with someone saying "Watch this." I'll pin this on us, men. Women I'm sure do something similar, but whenever a guy says "watch this" great stuff is about to happen! Years ago my dad came out to visit in Charlottesville and we decided to go mountain biking. Along we went until we saw a fallen tree blocking the trail. My dad turned to me and said, "Watch this." Now, my dad is an extremely capable man—Airborne Ranger, Company Commander in Vietnam, lawyer, mountaineer, rock and ice climber...there's not much he can't do. He said, "Watch this." So I thought, "OK." Off he went and tried to bunny hop the bike over the fallen tree. Tried. The chain rings where the pedals are slammed right into the trunk and stuck there. The bike stopped suddenly, locked into the tree. My dad kept going! Head over heels into the brush! It was all I could do to keep from laughing as I rushed to find him just fine. Then I got us lost, and we had to ride back along the side of a four-lane highway. It was a great day. That's my favorite "watch this" story. Watch this. Watch what I can do in my strength.

There's something in all of us that wants to go through life in our own strength. Independent. Self-sufficient. Pastor Katie talked a few weeks ago about tombstones with the epitaph "Resurgam" on them—"I shall rise again." It made me think of what we sometimes call the obituary exercise, when you take time to think about what you want people to say about you after you've passed. Something in us wants people to talk about all our accomplishments and victories, you know? "He conquered every challenge he met! He couldn't find a way to lose. His strength and resilience and power—unmatched! I heard when he was thirty-three he sat down on a rock and wept for there were no more worlds to conquer!" Like Alexander the Great. But is that what we want on our gravestones? "He did all he could do in his strength." Is that a legacy? You know what I want? I want—well, first of all, a fitting message would be something like "Helpless sinner saved by Jesus"—but you know what I want? I don't want to come to the end of my story and have it read, "Tim did all he could according to his own power." Boo! I want, "God did more things, more amazing, beautiful, eternal things, for His glory through Tim's life..." Isn't that what you want? When your story is only yours, it can only go so long. When your story is God's story; when God's story is your story, you get to be a part of a story that changes the world and rings through eternity! Because his story was God's, because her life belonged to God, Jesus did things through her...you couldn't write enough songs and books and epic poems to begin to tell the tale! I want a story that gives God the glory. Not in my strength, but by His power it was done. A story where God gets the glory.

We look today at Gideon. I only read you that passage as a primer. You can read the story of Gideon in Judges 6-8, and I want us to see his story as a whole as we talk about how God is in our story, our story is in God, and the greatest story is when God gets the glory. So we meet Gideon when he's a frustrated young man threshing wheat in a wine vat. This is not convenient. Ancient wine vats were stone-lined holes in the ground. Threshing is when you beat the grains of wheat and toss them in the air so the chaff, the shell around the grain, blows away in the wind. Gideon's stuck doing it down in a big hole. Why? He's hiding from Midianite raiders. This is 12 century BC when the people of God are struggling to occupy the land God had set aside for them, the time between the Exodus and the Monarchy. The people of God had obedience problems, and every time they turned away from God bad things happened. Because of the disobedience of the people and the worship of idols and false gods, God had allowed the Midianites to take over the land and oppress the Jewish people. Every time they got some wheat together, the Midianites would raid the village and steal it. So here's Gideon down in a hole trying to thresh wheat where he can't be seen. Every tried to hide from your problems? Then an angel of the Lord comes. God shows up.

Now, Gideon clearly doesn't know this is an angel because instead of throwing himself down on the ground in fear, Gideon mouths off like a teenager. After a nice greeting, "Lord be with you," here's Gideon: "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, 'Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian" (Judges 6:13). Excuse me, but everything stinks, and it's God's fault. This is not the most famous part of Gideon's story, but this is the beginning. Here's a young man frustrated with God. Here's a young man who says, "If I could just pile up some wheat, if I could just amass some resources, if I could just get enough money together, then I'd have power to change things, then I'd have agency, potential, a future. But darn it! God won't let me have two nickels to rub together." I have no strength, so I have no story. But God moves in when we have no strength to write a story that gives Him the glory.

The angel tells Gideon he's the one to save Israel. Gideon's a reluctant savior-redeemer. He thinks little of himself. "I'm the least of the sons of the least of the families of the least of the tribes. You've got the wrong guy." Gideon needs reassurance. He lays out a fleece of wool and says, "I'll only know if you make the fleece wet with dew and everything else dry." It happens. He lays it out again (this is all in Judges 6:36-40).

"I'll only be sure if you make everything else wet and the fleece stays dry." God does it. So he's reluctant, but Gideon puts himself in God's hands. God tells him to tear down the village idols, the Asherah poles. He does it at great risk. God makes it clear with the fleece thing, and Gideon goes. He goes through a few towns and calls together a makeshift army. Thirty-two thousand recruits actually. Not bad! And that brings us to the most famous part of Gideon's story. Thirty-two thousand isn't bad, but we can estimate the Midianites were over 120,000 strong. Gideon's army was about to fight a battle outnumbered by four to one. Then God subtracts strength.

Judges 7:2, "The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, 'My own strength has saved me.'" We want to write a story that leaves us the glory. When God writes a story, He gets the glory. Don't you want to be a part of something in your life that is so incredible, so awesome, only God can get the glory? It could only happen if God showed up. If God did it. No credit can go anywhere else. Don't you want to be a part of that? It's a little scary going in. God reduced Gideon's army from 32,000 to 10,000 just by asking "So, who's scared?" 22,000 left. Judges 7:4, "But the Lord said to Gideon, "There are still too many men." (What? This is twelve to one now! God says, "still too many men; you might still think you did this!") "Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go.'" Just do what I say. God trims it down to 300 that lapped water from their hands. Verse 7, "The Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home." With this amount, I will save you. I will save you. Hey, do you want to live in your strength? Or do you want to see what God can do by His might in your weakness?

Here's what happened. God sent dreams into the Midianite army to unsettle them. They were all talking about these weird, similar dreams they had and they started thinking they had underestimated the Hebrews, and maybe there were more of them than they thought. So the three hundred following Gideon went into the camp the next night with a trumpet in one hand and a torch inside a clay pot in the other. Armies would have trumpeters and torch-bearers, you know, one for a platoon of soldiers or something. In this story, everyone carried each. In they went, without even a hand free to grasp their sword. See that? Soldiers entering the combat zone and they don't even have a free hand for their weapon. At exactly the same time, they smash the pots, releasing a flood of light, and

they blow their trumpets, and the light and sound and the fear God had instilled in the hearts of the enemy all sent the Midianite army running for the hills scared to death. Don't underestimate the power of what God can do when His people are willing to move in one accord, in a single action. I heard the other day that Barcelona suffers a minor earthquake when Lionel Messi scores a goal; the whole city jumps up and down at once and it actually shows up as seismic activity. Off the Midianites go. It's not Gideon's glory. In this story God gets the glory. God is in Gideon's story. Gideon's story, because he is obedient to God, is in God's story. And God writes a story where God gets the glory.

Have you ever had your resources subtracted from you? Have you ever been at the end of your rope? Have you ever known the limits of your agency and power and strength? God, if you don't show up.... I was talking to an elder here at First Pres, Gary Shugart. Gary knew Jesus as a child, wandered away from Jesus as a young man, but then had a moment. Running hard at a career in the Air Force, young marriage, pregnant wife, Gary had a premonition a challenge was coming. His son was born blind. Then his wife was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Then his second son was diagnosed with diabetes. Subtraction. Strength reduced. Resources tapped. Agency limited. Where was God? Gary said, "While I didn't attend church on a regular basis, I now realize God never stopped trying to have a relationship with me. And then there was the day in the 1990s when I was trying to keep three balls in the air at the same time with my wife an inpatient at Penrose Hospital getting chemotherapy for her ovarian cancer, my youngest son hospitalized at the Air Force Academy as a newly diagnosed Type 1 diabetic and my oldest son trying to deal with all the turmoil with his normal support network fractured. My drive home from the hospital that day started my realization that as much as I wanted to be in control, I needed to let God be in control. I had allowed my faith to fade by trying to be in control of the events of my life." Hey, do you want to know what you can do in your strength? Or do you want to know what God can do in you by His strength, by His power? Gary lost his wife to cancer in 1997, but renewed his faith in Christ and eventually met and married Harriett, whom many of you know. His children are fine. In fact, his son who can't see now works with Microsoft's accessibility programs in Seattle, is married and loves the Lord. Gary serves as an elder and trustee helping us continue to pursue the will of the Lord. What do you want? Do you want to see what you can do in your strength or what God can do in His? What do you want for your church? Want us to only do what First Pres can do in our strength? I can't

wait to see what God wants to do through us when our strength is way too little to get it done.

So, quickly, how do we live with our story in God's story? Let me say four things, maybe as the series goes on these four things will pop up again and we can say more. Four ways to put your story in God's story: **(1) Worship.** Worship is a thousand cures. This is our time to see that the glory of God is beautiful. This is the training of your soul, your body, mind and spirit to bring glory to God, to love God. When we worship we say again, "Lord, you are God and I am not. My story in Your story, O Lord. Your will, not mine, O Lord." **(2) Prayer.** Again, daily, constant turning to the Lord. Not my strength, Your strength. **(3) Generous giving.** Are you afraid to honor God with a tithe because it will reduce? Yes, it will reduce. Your checking account goes down when you give the work of the Lord. But every gift is an investment in God's work, and the *discipline* of giving generously, the discipline of it sets your monetary resources before the Lord again and again in a way that says, "God, I don't want to be tempted to rely on my own resources and strength. And I recognize, by the way, that all of this came from You in the first place. But I'm tempted to rely on it as though the money I have amassed grants me agency, power, strength, security. Lord, I give it to You." Reduce. You may just be reducing right into the strength of the Lord. **(4) Generous living.** Time is the most precious resource you have. "I don't have time to serve in the parking ministry at First Pres on Sunday. I don't have time to invest in kids in the Connection. I don't have time to build into lives of teenagers in Weber Street Center. If I lose that time, I can't watch that Netflix series I've wanted to binge!" Time. Generous living. I've never had anyone tell me they regretted a dollar they devoted to the Lord. I'm telling you too, you will not get to the end of your life and regret the time you gave to serve Him.

Imagine us all reduced like Gideon. Imagine us all reduced into the strength of God. Do you want to see what you can do on your power? Or do you want to see what God can do through you by His power? Worship the Lord. Pray to the Lord. Give generously. Live generously. What you fear will reduce your resources will put you right into the hands of the Father, the One from Whom all blessings flow, the Limitless One, the Almighty One. When you feel weak, you fall into the arms of Jesus. In Him, your story is His story—and His glory.

## STUDY GUIDE

### WHO KNOWS? • JUDGES 6:11-18

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Judges 6:11-18. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note words or phrases that seem meaningful. Read it one more time together. Pray for your study of God's Word.

- What stood out to you in our passage? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- Where is Gideon when the angel of the Lord appears to him? Why is this significant?
- What do you discover in verse 13 about Gideon's relationship with God at that point? Discuss how you have experienced similar conversations with God and what brought about those conversations in your life.
- In your own words, how does God respond to Gideon in verse 14? How do you see God's gentle understanding of Gideon's condition?
- In verse 16, God promises to be with Gideon in the enormous task that lies ahead. Share a time that you felt "in over your head." How did God meet you in that? How has God's "with-ness" been a reality in your life?

Going Deeper: What word, phrase or thought from today's passage or from our time together is God lifting up as significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

As you think about what God is doing in you and around you, what encouragement do you find from Gideon's story?

Look around you this week for a person who seems to be "in over her/his head" in a particular task. Pray for and encourage that person.

#### **IN:** Connect With the Family of God

Read 2 Corinthians 12:9. Is there an area in your life right now where you are tempted to fall back on your own strength instead of trusting God and His power? Share with your group.

Spend some time praying for each other. Pray that you will rest in the sufficiency of Christ.