

## Gideon: When It Gets In the Way

Judges 7:1-8a  
1 Samuel 17:32-40

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Faith Community

There are a number of things in the story of Gideon that seem to go against common sense.

For example, when they first met, God said to Gideon,

***The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.*** (Judges 6:7, NRSV)

Mighty warrior! God said this to a guy who was hiding out for his life, and had more complaints than anything else. Remember, though, God sees us not just as we are, but also as we shall be.

God then tells Gideon to go in the strength that he has, and he'll defeat the Midianites who've overrun his country. Gideon's only guarantee: God will be with him. It looks like we've got a pattern going here.

Now the Israelite army apparently isn't down for the count just yet. Gideon musters the troops and comes up with 32,000. Not too shabby. This, however, is where it gets even weirder. Gideon hears God say that his army is too big. Now if you want to win a war you'd marshal everything you've got. After all, with a big army against you, you want as many guys as possible in your corner, but here that's apparently not the case. God tells Gideon to whittle them down. So there's a first cut, after which 10,000 soldiers remain. Gideon started with 32,000, now he has 10,000. Not good enough, God says. So Gideon moves to cut #2, and ends up with 300. That's it! From 32,000 to 300. God says, Bingo! With this 300 I'll save you and get rid of the Midianites.

That makes no sense until you see the logic behind it, then it's a stroke of genius. The goal here is to make it clear that when victory comes, the people will see it was a God thing. Pitting 300 against a well trained army of thousands is a disaster in the making, until you bring in the God factor. The people had cried out to God for help, and they got it in a way they never would've guessed. Peter Marshall, the great Presbyterian preacher of an earlier day, loved to say, "Be careful what you pray for. You just might get it!"

Here's the theme for the day: God does his best work through people who are out of their league.

Our other Scripture is part of the David and Goliath story. Here's puny David, stepping up to fight the giant who'd intimidated the entire Israel army. To help out, King Saul gives him his own personal armor

David tries it out, sees it's not going to work, and ends up saying,

***I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.***  
(1 Samuel 17:39) He puts them aside, and approaches the well-armed giant with a slingshot and a few stones.

God does his best work through people who are out of their league.

Sometimes the very things we strive to accumulate actually keep us from growing into the person God wants us to be. This is so very counterintuitive, but it's a key component of discipleship nonetheless.

A big army would've gotten in Gideon's way.

A full set of armor and battle gear would've gotten in David's way.

And sometimes it happens that the very thing we think of as a strength needs to be taken away or we ourselves be personally broken so that we can become not the person of our dreams but the person of God's dreams.

"In an emotionally charged courtroom, a South African woman stood listening to white police officers acknowledge their atrocities.

"Officer van de Broek admitted that along with others he had murdered her 18 year old son and then partied while they burned his body.

"Eight years later, Mr. van de Broek and others came back and did the same thing to her husband. The last words she heard her husband say were, 'forgive them.'

"Now, Mr. van de Broek awaited judgment. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked the woman what she wanted.

"I want three things,' she said calmly. 'I want Mr. van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my

husband's body. I would like to gather up the dust and give him a decent burial.'

"Second, Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him.'

"Third, I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.'

"As the elderly woman was led across the courtroom, Mr. van de Broek was so overwhelmed that he fainted. Someone began singing 'Amazing Grace,' and gradually everyone joined in."<sup>1</sup>

God does his best work through people who are out of their league and know it. Sometimes you have to be personally broken to catch on.

What is it that you cling to so tightly but is actually a roadblock to your health and well being as a mature Christ follower? Conversely, what is it that has you in its grasp, that you'd give anything to be rid of, that's actually an expression of severe mercy designed to make you become more like Christ?

Deacons, Elders, vulnerability like this is a big part of spiritual leadership. Here's your chance to show us how it's done.

Don't get lost in religious routine of committees, policies, rules; you'll dry up that way. Instead, show us how to be real. Watch Gideon. Watch David. As you become more like Jesus, we will too.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley W. Green, The Canadian Mennonite (9/4/00), as cited in Leadership, vol. 23, no. 2, spring, 2001, p. 71.