

READ Judges 6-7, The Story of Gideon

Do you ever feel like a failure as a Christian? Now that's some way to start a sermon when you've been gone for two weeks, isn't it! Do you ever feel like your faith life isn't going well? I feel like a failure as a Christian occasionally, and you may too. I think Gideon felt disconnected from his faith. Every day it was more bad news. So, what would a modern-day Gideon look like?

Here's this guy, hanging out in the backyard, hoeing his vineyard, having a glass of wine, singing *woe is me!*

- Why's everything going wrong in my life God?
- Why do we have so many problems, Lord? The economy's in the tank; we're on the brink of poverty – we're surrounded by enemies.
- Where are you God? Why are you letting this happen to us? – and especially to me!

Gideon felt like a religious failure. For some reason God had abandoned the nation and Gideon had lost his faith. He wanted help and so did the people. They wanted God to remove their problem. So what did God do? Sent them a preacher.

That's the last thing they wanted.

I understand. Last week a piece of equipment broke and a service man came to fix it. When he heard I was a pastor he wanted to talk about theology – but I wanted my equipment fixed first! Then we'll talk theology.

God turns things around the other way. God deals with faith first. God thinks our pain is secondary to understanding where we need to be with Him.

So the Angel of the Lord graciously said to Gideon, “Yes, I will help you. Go tear down that altar to Baal first, and then we'll talk.

Put first things first because we have a two-way, exclusive relationship here.

That encounter with the Angel of the Lord scared Gideon to death. He feared he would die. Gideon recognized somehow, that this really was God in all God's greatness and holiness, and he'd better take it seriously. And so Gideon moved forward and did exactly as he was instructed.

He didn't argue; even though he knew it would be a tough sell with the neighbors.

He didn't say “no way,” although he anticipated he would decline in popularity with his friends.

Gideon listened to the preacher and put God first. Immediately he tore down the idols and built an altar to God instead. And it worked out. The neighbors didn't kill him. And God became once again the center of religious life for Israel.

God made it possible for the people to get their real need met. That need was to recommit themselves to their first and only source of help. God graciously led them to rid themselves of the hindrance – an idol which could do nothing. That idol prevented them from looking to God.

To whom, or to what do you turn first when you need help? If it is not God, you might consider making some changes. Israel had stepped away from God which caused them to lose God's power and blessing.

God did them a great favor by not relieving their pain. God instead uncovered the deeper problem. When God is not first in our lives, we diminish the opportunity for God's power on our behalf. But when we turn back to God, God begins to work.

But, in order for God to work, Gideon had a lot to learn about how to have faith.

How's your faith? Do you ever feel like a failure in faith? One day I was praying and these words came to me:

“You need more faith.”

Now you'd think someone who does what I do would have tons of faith, but the truth is faith is not something you gain once and for all. It sort of ebbs and flows - whether you are a missionary, or a theologian, or a normal person.

Gideon's story shows God understands; and God works with us.

But there are some things we can do to increase our faith. For one, be honest with God. Gideon prayed again and again, saying, “I'm not sure about this God. Will you help me see it?”

God is into building our faith. With Gideon it was a fleece that helped him sense God was with him, but with you, it might be something very unique to you that shows you God has heard you; that God is there.

One day I was in the office, and after eating my nice healthy salad, I was still a little hungry. I thought, *boy, I'd love to have a cookie*. So I went into the kitchen and looked in all the cabinets, but nothing. No cookies. Bummed, I walked back into my office. A little while later Susan Murphy came in to fold bulletins as she does every Thursday afternoon. She handed Sandy and me each a little brown sack. I looked inside and there was a great big homemade sugar cookie.

God is with us. ☺

God sometimes might meet a simple need or desire simply out of God's own affection for you. Are you talking to Him? Or are you afraid to open up?

God is into building our faith and will do so if you will let Him.

Remember, God wanted Gideon to be a major player in the answer to Israel's prayers. To build our faith, in addition to prayer we must answer God's call by actually doing something. Gideon

had to call an army; then cull the army down. Step by step God said, “do this,” “now do that.” Finally God said, “Attack!” But God added, “If you don’t have the faith, go and listen.” (READ Judges 7:9-14).

This story is about a God of huge goodness and grace. And that grace and love is extended to **you** in the same way.

God has a call for First Presbyterian Church Duncanville and will literally walk us through to accomplish it.

What is the call?

- To share the good news with the community
- To use our unique gifts as we do that
- To teach the neighborhood children about Jesus

While in Kansas City on study leave I went to a World War I museum and was very moved by what I saw. That war began as a result of a single event, the assassination of the archduke of Austria-Hungary while he was on a diplomatic visit to Serbia. When refused opportunity to investigate, Austria-Hungary declared war, and within days alliances joined in until it was a world catastrophe. The globe was at war and it was a terrible war in which civilians and soldiers alike suffered dramatically.

But in the midst of all that, some people with a small, relatively unknown organization in the United States felt called to be God’s agents of healing and help and peace. In 1917, the US National Commander Evangeline Booth, took a risk and borrowed \$25,000 to send six men, three women and a couple to France, and then later another \$100,000 to send more teams.

They went to the battlefields and built a long sectional buildings designed like home. All musicians, the staff of eleven gave concerts, conducted services, taught Bible classes, and operated a canteen. They built restrooms. They mended clothes, baked doughnuts, pies, and home cooked meals. It wasn’t only the delicious food but also the spirit with which it was served that captivated the men. The simple secret was that the Salvationists were serving not only the soldiers but God.

Eventually \$12.5 million was contributed for their work and phenomenally, 400 huts were built over the next fifteen months, some right at the front lines. They were immensely popular and the Salvation Army became known by their work during this war.¹

God is always at work in the world to bring light in the midst of darkness. One day Jesus Christ will be in charge of the whole world. His pain prepared Him. Don’t be afraid of pain, even if it’s your fault. Let God clean it out and point you back to Him.

¹<http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/salvhist.htm>, accessed 8/3/2010.

Gideon and his 300 soldiers won an incredible victory over the Midian army with its camels as far as the eye could see. It was fantastic – like something a child would dream up (READ Judges 7:19-25). Sometimes God does these seemingly crazy things.

People who make God their center, who pray, and are willing to act are never failures to God. As we actively engage, we will also bring God's light to this community in amazing ways, fulfilling our call. Let's let God build our faith, shall we?

AMEN