Lesson 5: Gideon’s Call

Teaching Outline — Grace for a Weak Servant
Passage: Judges 6 (KJV) | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes
Key verse: “And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?” (Judges 6:14)

Lesson objective

- Class will see that God:
  - Graciously confronts sin
  - Meets weak servants
  - Calls His people to obedient faith

Opening and introduction (0-4 minutes)

More than a fleece

- Gideon is often remembered for a fleece
- Judges 6 begins with a people in sin and a gracious God who speaks
- Ends with a fearful man taking a costly first step of obedience
- Not permission to delay every duty until repeated private signs arrive
- A record of God’s extraordinary patience with a particular servant in Israel’s history

Our aim

- God meets weak servants graciously and calls them to obedient faith
- Weakness isn’t a credential for pride
- Fear isn’t an excuse for disobedience
- The God who knows His servant’s weakness doesn’t discard him
  - Supplies His presence, His word, and His strength

Three guiding phrases

1. Israel’s [BLANK: sin] — where the crisis began

2. Gideon’s [BLANK: weakness] — which did not cancel God’s call
3. God’s [BLANK: presence] — His answer to Gideon’s inadequacy

Read carefully

- This is God’s dealing with Israel in the days of the judges
- The church learns from God’s character and the call to faith
- Israel’s national deliverance isn’t automatically transferred to the church

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Background: A cry answered by a prophet (4-9 minutes)

Midian’s oppression (6:1-6)

- “And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.”
- Midian, Amalek, and the children of the east came up like locusts
  - Destroyed the increase
  - Left neither sustenance, sheep, ox, nor ass
  - Israel greatly impoverished
- God’s people hid in dens, caves, and strong holds

Why Gideon’s fear wasn’t imaginary

- Not one battle and a tax
- At harvest they came in force
  - Consumed the produce
  - Stripped the land of animals needed for ordinary life
- People driven into caves and makeshift shelters
- A farmer could work for months only to watch others take the result
- The winepress: a small picture of a nation living under pressure

The first answer: a prophet, not a warrior (6:7-10)

- “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt… And I said unto you, I am the LORD your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites… but ye have not obeyed my voice.”
- God named the spiritual cause before sending relief from the consequence
- The crisis wasn’t merely raids — it was covenant disobedience and false worship

This is grace

- God doesn't flatter sinners; He tells the truth
- A physician who hides a diagnosis isn't kind
- Neither is a teacher who comforts without calling sin sin
- [BLANK: repentance] begins by agreeing with God about our rebellion

Suffering isn't Israel's only story

- The prophet begins with the exodus
  - Reminds them of redemption, protection, promise before naming disobedience
  - Delivered from slavery to belong to Him
- Pattern of covenant instruction: God declares what He has done, then confronts the response
- Israel couldn't claim ignorance
  - Heard "fear not the gods of the Amorites"
  - "have not obeyed my voice"

Counsel for our own hearts

- Don't casually assume trouble is direct punishment for a particular sin (Job)
- Let hardship search us
  - Are we listening to God, or only demanding relief?
  - Do we remember His mercy, or hold Him responsible for comfort while neglecting His commands?
- No quick technique — the prophet calls them back to the LORD Himself

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Exposition: The LORD calls Gideon (9-19 minutes)

The winepress and the greeting

- Gideon threshing wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites
  - Normally threshed in an exposed place where wind separated chaff
  - The location displays oppression and his fear
- "there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah"
- "The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour."

- Striking precisely because Gideon is hiding
  - Not flattery based on how Gideon feels
  - The LORD knows the fearful farmer and the servant He will send
  - God often speaks in light of His purpose, not our present self-assessment
  - Believers can't claim any imagined destiny
  - When God assigns a clear duty, our weakness doesn't define the limits of His faithfulness

Gideon's confused question

- "Oh my Lord, if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of…?"
- Honest confusion of a suffering Israelite
- Mixes pain with failure to reckon with the prophet's explanation
- Still, the LORD didn't crush him
  - "And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might… have not I sent thee?"
- Deserves patient hearing
  - He knows the exodus stories; his circumstances seem to contradict them
  - Many believers know truth and still ask in pain where God's help is
  - The chapter doesn't shame every anguished question
  - It gently corrects Gideon's interpretation — the LORD hadn't abandoned Israel without explanation
  - His question opens a larger answer: God will act, and will deal with the idolatry that brought Israel low

Gideon's protest and God's answer

- "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."
- Not a revised assessment of Gideon's ability
  - "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."
- God calls and supplies what He commands
- [BLANK: God] is Gideon's sufficiency
- Not "You're more important than you think" — a correction to both pride and despair
  - **Pride:** "I can do this because I am sufficient."
  - **Despair:** "I cannot do this because I am insufficient."
  - **Faith:** "I am not sufficient, but God has spoken and He is with me."
- Moses heard the same: "Certainly I will be with thee" (Exod 3:12)

- God's presence isn't a vague feeling — it's the ground of obedient service

The sign at the rock

- Gideon asks for a sign; prepares a kid and unleavened cakes
- The angel directs him to lay them on a rock
- "Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes."
- Gideon: "Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face."
- The LORD: "Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die."
- Altar named [BLANK: Jehovah-shalom], "The LORD is peace"

Who is "the angel of the LORD"?

- Understood in more than one way
- The text moves between "the angel of the LORD" and "the LORD"; the visitor acts with divine authority
- Many conservative teachers: a manifestation of the LORD
  - Some: a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ
- Others urge reserve about identifying every occurrence
- What's certain from Judges 6:
  - Gideon encountered the holy LORD's authoritative messenger
  - The LORD spoke peace
  - The revelation wasn't casual
- Don't build doctrine on speculation where the text doesn't fully explain its terminology
- Jehovah-shalom names the peace God gave Gideon in His presence

Peace in the presence of holiness

- Offering and fire show the meeting is holy — not coaching from a friendly stranger
- Gideon recognizes divine holiness and fears judgment
- "Peace be unto thee" is undeserved reassurance
- Jehovah-shalom ≠ circumstances immediately quiet
  - Midian still occupies the land
  - A dangerous assignment follows that very night
- God gives peace to a sinner He has met and spared

- Biblical peace begins with God, not the removal of every difficulty

> **Teacher note — the altar:** Don't treat Gideon's altar as a charm or slogan promising a trouble-free life.
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> - It memorializes God's word of peace in a moment of holy fear
> - It points to the need to be reconciled to God, finally answered in the work of Christ

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Exposition: First obedience begins at home (19-28 minutes)

Baal before Midian (6:25-26)

- That same night the LORD commanded Gideon to:
  - Throw down his father's altar of Baal
  - Cut down the grove by it
  - Build an altar to the LORD
  - Offer the second bullock
- Before confronting Midian in the valley, confront Baal at home
- Deliverance from outward enemies without repentance from inward idolatry isn't true restoration

Deliberately close to home

- His father's altar; a community that knows his name
- Tempting to think the great work lies beyond the horizon
- God begins by exposing false worship at home
- Not a command to police everyone else aggressively
- A call to begin repentance where our compromises are most concrete
- Before speaking boldly about distant evils, ask what allegiance in our life or household contradicts the Lord we profess

Afraid, yet obedient (v. 27)

- "Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the LORD had said unto him: and so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night."

- Wonderfully honest
- The text doesn't praise fear as faith
  - It shows God's servant moving forward despite fear
- Don't wait until obedience feels safe
- [BLANK: obedience] often leads to courage
- Neither idealized nor dismissed
  - Courage in Scripture isn't theater
  - Afraid, yet taking the next obedient step
  - Fear often decreases after obedience rather than before it
  - The chapter moves Gideon toward stronger, more public faith — fear shouldn't become a permanent refuge

Baal exposed (vv. 28-32)

- The men of the city demand Gideon's death
- Joash, whose altar was destroyed, exposes Baal's emptiness
  - "Will ye plead for Baal? will ye save him? … if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar."
- Gideon called Jerubbaal: "Let Baal plead against him"
- The false god couldn't defend his altar
- The living God needed no defense from Baal; Baal stood exposed as nothing

Idols must be defended by their worshipers

- Joash makes Baal's power look absurd
- An idol can't speak, see, save, or judge
- Ps 115:4-8 — mouths but speak not, eyes but see not
- Modern idols are no less helpless
  - Career, image, romance, money, partisan power
  - Can't forgive sin, give life, or stand in judgment
  - They demand service but can't bear the weight of worship

The Spirit clothes Gideon (vv. 33-35)

- Midian, Amalek, and the children of the east gather in the valley of Jezreel
- "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon" — literally, the Spirit clothed Gideon
- He blows a trumpet; men come from Abiezer, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali

- God uses real human action
- The source of effective service: not personality or force, but the Spirit's enabling

Private repentance to public service

- Gideon blows the trumpet; messengers go; tribes respond
- Don't set personal holiness against public usefulness
- The God who calls him to tear down an idol equips him to summon others
- New Testament believers
  - Not promised Gideon's precise military empowerment
  - Commanded to be filled with the Spirit and serve in the strength God supplies
- Private obedience and public ministry belong together

Exposition: The fleece and the Word of God (28-33 minutes)

The signs (6:36-40)

- "If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said"
- First: fleece wet, ground dry
- Then, after asking God not to be angry: fleece dry, ground wet
- God bore patiently with him

Admire God's patience; don't require Gideon's method

- Gideon already had:
  - God's explicit word
  - A confirming sign at the rock
  - The altar's name
  - The Spirit's empowering
- The fleece shows divine condescension to weakness
  - Not a command to create tests whenever Scripture speaks clearly
- We're guided by the completed Word, prayerful wisdom, godly counsel, and providence
- No subjective impression may contradict Scripture
- [BLANK: Scripture] is the sufficient rule for the church's faith and obedience

The revealing wording

- “as thou hast said” — God had said it
- Gideon isn’t seeking new information
  - He’s seeking reassurance because he struggles to rest in what was given
- Be grateful for God’s gentleness with frail servants
- Narrative patience ≠ a standing procedure
- Make the fleece normative → obedience becomes an endless search for private certainty

Two kinds of decisions

- **Direct command:** delay disguised as discernment is disobedience
  - No sign needed to tell the truth, forgive, flee immorality, pray, or gather with the church
- **Wise principles, no named outcome:** seek wisdom
  - Pray
  - Search Scripture for governing principles
  - Seek mature counsel
  - Consider responsibilities
  - Decide in faith
- Providence may clarify a path, but it’s not an infallible code to decipher
- The Word remains the standard by which every impression and opportunity is tested

This protects

- The tender conscience — one missed coincidence hasn’t ruined God’s plan
- The church — needn’t follow the strongest personality’s claim to a private sign
- God has spoken sufficiently; He gives wisdom generously to those who ask
- His patience leads toward settled trust, not perpetual hesitation

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Application (33-38 minutes)

1. **Receive God’s diagnosis**
   - Is there a Baal altar in the house of the heart?
   - May be respectable: achievement, comfort, a relationship, a political identity, religious activity without submission to Christ
   - Don’t call it a weakness when God calls it idolatry

2. **Do the next clear thing**
    - Gideon began by obeying at home, not defeating Midian
    - For some: confession, reconciliation, disposing of corrupting media, ending deceit, establishing prayer and Scripture in the home
    - [BLANK: faith] acts on God's word
3. **Distinguish humility from unbelief**
    - "I am the least" may be true, but can't cancel God's command
    - Not "Am I enough?" but "Has God spoken, and will He be with me?"
4. **Do not turn signs into a substitute for obedience**
    - One who knows Christ's command to forgive doesn't need a fleece
    - A church that knows the command to preach the gospel doesn't need a fleece
    - God is patient, but His patience leads us forward
    - We obey **to** receive and follow our Lord's instruction, not **for** acceptance with God
        - Acceptance rests in Christ's finished work; obedient faith is its grateful fruit
        - Guards a weak servant from trying to earn the presence God gives by grace
5. **Speak honestly to God without making confusion the final authority**
    - Gideon brought his questions; the LORD answered
    - Prayer isn't pretending pain is painless
    - God's answer must correct our interpretation
    - Bring sorrow, uncertainty, and fear; then submit them to His Word
6. **Remember idols often demand a first act of costly repentance**
    - Gideon's altar was visible to household and town
    - True repentance may require:
        - An uncomfortable conversation
        - A changed practice
        - Restitution
        - A decisive break with a pattern others accept
    - We can't save ourselves by such acts
    - Grace doesn't leave us at peace with the altar that competes with God

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Christ and the gospel (38-42 minutes)

Peace requires God's provision

- Gideon needed peace — sinful man can't stand casually before a holy God
- Altar, offering, and fire remind us peace with God requires His provision
- "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1)

Not merely another judge

- The eternal Son who became man, lived without sin, died for our sins, rose again
- Doesn't simply improve weak self-confidence — He reconciles rebels to God
- "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21)
- [BLANK: peace] with God is found in Christ alone

More than a motivational lesson

- Tells guilty people how peace with the holy God is possible
- Jesus bore the judgment sinners deserve
- His resurrection: sacrifice accepted, death defeated
- Assurance rests not on feeling, a clear sign, or brave service
    - On Christ's finished work received by faith

Assurance for weak servants

- If acceptance rose and fell with our courage, no one could stand
- In Christ, the believer is received by grace
- From that secure place we can:
    - Confess fear without surrendering to it
    - Receive correction without despair
    - Take the next obedient step
- The gospel that humbles us frees us to serve

Keep redemptive history in view

- Israel's crisis and deliverance belong to its place in redemptive history

- The church doesn't inherit a mandate to wage Israel's wars
- Don't treat every hardship as a Midianite invasion
- The God who confronts idolatry and grants peace reveals our deepest need
- Through Christ, former rebels are brought near and sent to obey in ordinary, costly duties

Not a call to trust ourselves more

- Gideon's problem wasn't merely low confidence; Israel's problem was sin
- Gideon needed the LORD's word, presence, peace, and power
- The answer to fearful unbelief isn't looking inward for hidden strength
  - Look to the God who acted in Christ
  - Take seriously the duty He made clear
- A weak believer depending on Christ is safer than a confident believer depending on self

Repentance and faith belong together

- Repentance turns from idols that promise safety but cannot save
- Faith rests on the God who speaks truth and supplies what He commands
- Neither is a work that purchases grace
  - Both are the response God graciously produces, bringing sinners from darkness into His Son's peace
- When fear returns, return to His Word — don't construct a new test for Him to pass

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Discussion and closing prayer (42-45 minutes)

Discussion questions

1. Why did the LORD send a prophet before sending Gideon?
2. What does God's answer to Gideon's inadequacy teach about calling?
3. Why should Christians be cautious about treating the fleece as a decision-making formula?
4. What is one clear act of obedience that should begin close to home?

> **Closing prayer:** "Father, expose every idol we protect and grant true repentance. Thank Thee that Thou meetest needy people with Thy word and Thy grace. Give us faith to obey what Thou hast plainly said, even when we feel weak and afraid. Thank Thee for peace with Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ. In His name, Amen."