

FBS “Heroes: Man’s Rebellion & Repentance, God’s Provision & Peace— 10-9-16  
Joel Breidenbaugh Gideon & the Challenges of Growing in Faith” (Judges 6-8)

**Intro. Begin by playing John Adams as Professor X video.** That’s pretty incredible how Professor X can read minds. You don’t have to read minds to know I’m dealing with a series in Judges entitled “Heroes: Man’s Rebellion & Repentance, God’s Provision & Peace.” If I could read your mind, I would guess just about everyone in this room has struggled in their faith journey at different times. We will look at that issue today from Judges 6-8 on “Gideon & the Challenges of Growing in Faith.”

Theme: Faith & obedience

Background: The Book of Judges presents us with a cycle of Apostasy—Oppression—Repentance—Deliverance—Peace. During the Deliverance phase, the Lord raised up 12 judges, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. Even though God brought deliverance from each tribe, each tribe also failed the Lord in carrying out His will.

- Right after we learn of another one of these cycles experienced by Israel by doing evil in the sight of the Lord & the Midianites coming from the east to plunder Israel’s crops & goods, we are introduced to God’s call on Gideon’s life. Gideon was hiding his food by threshing wheat at a winepress as opposed to out in the open on a hillside where the Midianites could see him & plunder his food

➤ **Lessons to Learn from Gideon & the Challenges of Growing in Faith:**

**1. Don’t doubt the Lord’s presence with you as a child of God (6:11-24)**

- When the Angel of Yahweh (more on Him in a few weeks) appeared to Gideon, He assured him 3x that the Lord was with him & was sending him (6:12, 14, 16)
- Gideon doubted the Lord’s presence & expressed frustration (“excuse me, my Lord?!”), because of what was happening to Israel by the hands of Midian (6:13). He is like most people—instead of blaming themselves & their sins, they blame God for their predicament.
- Gideon then wondered why Yahweh would send him, from the weakest clan in Manasseh & the youngest in his house (6:15)—do you think God needs the strongest, brightest & best?
- Finally, he wanted to see what this Messenger would do with a gift of food (6:18ff)

Illus: Have you ever doubted the Lord’s presence with you? Every time I back down from sharing the gospel to someone, it’s because I forget the Lord’s presence with me. When I rely on His presence, talking about Him becomes much easier—Jesus Himself said when we make disciples of all nations, “behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). The once-crucified-yet-risen Lord Jesus Christ is with you as a child of God!

➤ Thank a local hero: Police officers (a word of thanks, a card, a small gift)—brag on Jesus & your church & if you use social media, #Heroes #FirstBaptistSweetwater

- Gideon prepared food for a God (a young goat & bread from 22 liters of flour) & the Messenger treated it like an offering instead of a meal by sending it up in flames & vanishing (6:21). Even when He wasn’t present, He could still talk with Gideon (6:23)
- Once Gideon realized he had seen the Lord & lived, he named the place Yahweh-Shalom (the Lord is peace) as an act of faith, believing the Lord would somehow bring peace to Israel from the hands of Midian (6:24)

**2. Follow the Lord’s call on your life, even if it means doing the hard things (6:25-35)**

- Like the Lord’s call to Moses from the burning bush, He backed Gideon into a corner so that he could no longer make excuses for why he couldn’t serve the Lord

- It was extremely difficult for Gideon to tear down the false idols in his father's house (6:25-30), for in that setting, he risked disinheritance, shame & even death for dishonoring your parents. Although Gideon wasn't sure how his father would respond, had he not destroyed the idols, he would have been hypocritical to call others to do what he wasn't doing at home
- Joash stood by his son & influenced the people & they called him Jerubbaal—fighter against Baal (6:31-32)
- That was part of the difficulty, but then he had to actually fight against the enemy who continually wreaked havoc on Israel, plundering their food supply in the richest part of their land (the Jezreel Valley), but the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon for the task (6:33-35)

Illus: Following the Lord may mean leaving your home for a distant land, like the call of a missionary. It may mean breaking off a relationship or engagement of someone not supportive of God's call on your life (like Lottie Moon remaining single & dedicated as a missionary to China when she broke off an engagement with Crawford Toy because he succumbed to higher critical views of the Bible, distrusting its message, though he was a leading OT scholar & he slipped off into apostasy). Do the hard things to follow the Lord, because of who He is!

### **3. Don't test the Lord, for it is sinful & could lead to judgment (6:36-40; cf. Deuteronomy 6:16)**

- With all the Lord has done for Gideon already, how could he question God at this point? Well, he had experienced 7 years of raids by the Midians, who quickly moved in with camels & left Israel with little to no food, sheep and donkeys. Thus, Gideon was afraid at the daunting task of leading Israel to overthrow this group of terrorists.

Illus: I've known people try to mimic Gideon's fleece test & put the Lord to the test (6:36-40)—just because something occurs in the narrative of Scripture doesn't mean God approves of it—He has commanded us “not to put Him to the test” (Deuteronomy 6:16), for it is sinful (trying to put yourself over God & make Him answer you) & could lead to judgment

### **4. Trust in the Lord for His provisions concerning His call on your life (7:1-25)**

- As Gideon got ready to fight, the Lord said he had too many soldiers & didn't want Israel to boast in herself but glory in the Lord. So whoever was too fearful to fight could go home & nearly 70% of his army left—22,000 out of 32,000 (7:2-3)!
- But even 10,000 was still too many, so the Lord told Gideon to make them drink. All those who got down on hands & knees were too foolish & sent home, leaving Gideon but 300. These 300 were courageous & careful (drawing water to their mouths, so they could still be on the lookout for approaching enemies) (7:4-8)
- Though it was ludicrous (to man) to fight thousands of Midianites with only 300, Gideon was encouraged by the news in the camp & led his warriors to make the noise of a massive army (300 clay pitchers breaking), bringing chaos & confusion in the camp so they fled & Israel pursued them & killed them, even their princes (7:9-25)—the Lord fought for Israel (7:7, 18, 20, 22)

Illus: During the American Revolution, George Rogers Clark led 170 Canadian & Kentucky militia to march west from the Mississippi at Kaskaskia in southern Illinois & cross east 180 miles in 13 days in February 1779 to Vincennes, Indiana to capture Fort Sackville (a strategic post on the Wabash River, which was a major supply line from the Great Lakes by Detroit in the North down to the Ohio River before going Eastward toward the colonies) in the cold of winter, when the British would never expect an attack. Dividing his few men into 2 groups, Clark had them carry enough flags beyond a hilltop to appear like a group of

1,000. After a few days of fights, the British assumed they were heavily outnumbered, so they surrendered. They couldn't believe their eyes when they saw less than 200 men worn out & sick, but Clark had learned to trust the Lord. His victory regained Illinois & kept Kentucky in the hands of the Americans. It also paved the way to secure the western frontier from British efforts

#### **5. Beware of pride & the real threats of apostasy & adultery (8:1-35)**

- As Gideon pursued the kings of Midian to keep them from returning to attack in the future, he turned against a couple of Israelite towns for failing to support his men & their campaign, taking personal vengeance & ruling like a king (8:1-21)
- Israel liked the idea of Gideon & his descendants being their king, but Gideon deflected the praise to Yahweh (8:22-23)—this deflection may have been insincere, because he gathered 43 pounds of gold & had a golden ephod (priestly breastplate) fashioned & people began treating it as an idol (8:24-28)
- As Gideon passed from the scene, we get to see a note about his multiple wives & concubines—not only was it a sign of adultery, but it led to family problems among his sons & greater apostasy (8:29-35)
- Even if the threats of apostasy & adultery aren't real to you, it can be real to your children or grandchildren, who are tempted to grow up & walk away from the faith or become enticed by other men or women instead of staying faithful to their spouse

Illus: I cannot tell you the number of pastors & other Christians I've known who have let pride make them think they were indestructible only to see them succumb to adultery or even apostasy—don't let that be you! Guard yourself & your family!

**Conc.** All of these lessons are important to learn, because we all face “The Challenges of Growing in Faith,” but one I learned years ago was not to put the Lord to the test, because that's what I did as a teenager during my junior year of high school. I had this strange burden that the Lord was calling me to give up basketball & I didn't know why. Basketball players in Indiana are treated like demigods & we got away with more than we should have (I got away with at least 3 tickets from police officers because they knew I was on the basketball team). I thought the Lord's call for me to give up basketball was mistaken, so I put Him to the test & said, “Lord, if you want me to give up basketball. Have us lose the sectional.” It was a safe prayer because we had won 15 in a row & were guaranteed to win our 16th. But in the championship game against my former team, we lost by 4 points & I had my answer. I discovered a few months later the Lord was calling me into vocational ministry & had I kept playing basketball, I would have missed out & put His call off a few years. God didn't have to answer my test & He taught me never to test Him again. I also learned to trust the Lord & follow Him. How about you? Will you trust Jesus & follow Him no matter what comes your way?