

Feel Like a Spiritual Wimp? Let Holy Spirit Make You a Warrior

The Midianites invaded Israel like a swarm of grasshoppers. God let them oppress His backslidden people for seven years and chastise them for their chronic idolatry. The Israelites survived by hiding in caves during the invasion. The enemy swooped in at harvest time and destroyed their crops causing a dire food shortage. On the brink of starvation, Israel desperately cried out to God in repentance. Mercifully, He raised up an unlikely hero to deliver them—Gideon, God's reluctant general. Hungry and scared, Gideon was hiding behind a wine press threshing wheat to gather enough grain to make bread. Suddenly, an angelic encounter rocked his world and launched him into spiritual leadership.

The angel declared, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor" (Judges 6:12). The NLT calls him a "mighty hero" while the NET says, "courageous warrior." Even though his name means "great warrior," Gideon didn't look like a hero as he cowered in fear, hiding from the enemy. He acted more like a cowardly wimp than a courageous warrior. Who could blame him, with assassins lurking around every corner?

But God saw his potential and overlooked his present state. God doesn't see us as we are; He sees us as we can be if we yield to His will. God turned this whiner into a winner and changed Gideon's perspective. He accused God of forsaking Israel when it was actually the other way around (Judg. 6:13).

When God chose Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites, he made excuses—"Oh my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house" (Judg. 6:15). Manasseh was the smallest of

Israel's 12 tribes, and Gideon had a serious inferiority complex. He complained, "I am a nobody going nowhere." Remember, God likes to take nobodies and make somebodies out of them so He can get all the glory. Gideon asked for a sign to confirm God was truly calling him to lead Israel. The angel caused supernatural fire to flare out of a rock and consume his sacrifice (Judg. 6:17-22). Confirmation granted.

Then Gideon built an altar and named it Jehovah-Shalom, which means, "the Lord is (my) peace." Ironically, it was a time of war, but God's peace can prevail even in chaos. "Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of God no matter what the conflict." Gideon's first assignment was to remove the idol and altar of Baal at his own father's house and replace it with an altar to Yahweh. He and 10 friends did this at night, earning him the nickname "Jerubbaal," meaning "striver against Baal."

Notice, Gideon didn't let the fact that his father worshipped idols prevent him from serving the one true God. If our family serves God with us, fine. If they don't, we must decide to follow Christ no matter what (Matt. 10:34-38). A martyred missionary who was forced to witness his own family murdered said, "I have decided to follow Jesus, and there is no turning back . . . Though no one is here to go with me, still I will follow Jesus." Instead of tolerating evil in our homes and families, let's do what Gideon did—remove the idols and reclaim our families for God.

Question: Is it wrong to ask God for a sign? Answer: It depends on our motive. If we are sincere about finding God's will, He often confirms it with signs. Skeptics who asked Jesus for miracles on demand for show were denied (Matt. 12:38-41). Gideon put out a fleece (a literal piece of wool) and asked God to let dew fall on it but keep the ground around it dry. God obliged. Then, Gideon asked God to let dew wet the ground but keep the fleece dry.

There is an interesting spiritual parallel here. In the Old Covenant, God poured out His blessing mostly upon Israel (the fleece, His sheep), excluding the Gentiles. In the New Covenant, God poured out His Spirit mainly on the Gentiles (the ground, the unclean) while Israel stayed spiritually dry. Now, in the latter rain, God is pouring out His Spirit on all flesh and making "one new man" of both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 2:16-18; Eph. 2:11-22).

God moved on Gideon; he blew a trumpet and rallied 32,000 troops for war. However, the Midianites outnumbered them 4 to 1 (135,000-32,000: Judges 7:3, 8:10). Then God said, "There are too many men." The fearful (22,000) were sent home. Gulp! Gideon's army shrank by 2/3 instantly. With only 10,000 men left, they were outnumbered 13-1. Then God said, "The people are still too many." Seriously? So, God led them down to the water to test them. Out of habit, the Baal worshippers hit their knees and drank the water without watching for the enemy. The minority lifted the water to their mouths and lapped it like a dog but stayed alert. This simple test separated the idolaters from the true Israelites. God sent the idolaters home, leaving Gideon with a puny 300-man army. They were now outnumbered 450-1. But, if God be for you, who can be against you?

Gideon, on a recon mission, overheard a Midianite tell his nightmare about a giant loaf of barley bread crushing his tent. (Barley, an inferior grain, was a poor man's bread often fed to livestock. Remember Gideon's excuse? "My family is poor ... and I am the youngest in my father's house"). His comrades interpreted the dream and prophesied their own doom, "This is none other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash the Israelite. God has given Midian and the whole camp into his hands" (Judg. 7:14).

Gideon's confidence soared. The strategy was strange, but God's ways are mysterious. Gideon's men sneaked into the Midianite camp at night and followed this sequence

simultaneously: 1. They all blew trumpets. 2. They all broke clay pitchers on the ground. 3. They all waved torches. 4. They all yelled "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." The Midianites woke up terrified and panicked. In the chaos, they scattered and killed each other. The Israelites ran from them for seven years on defense, now they chased the enemy on offense. God and Gideon defeated the Midianite masses with only 300 men. What a miracle!

Israel tried to crown Gideon king, but he refused, and they enjoyed 40 years of peace under his steady leadership (Judg. 8:22-23, 28). He built a golden monument in his hometown to celebrate their victory which, sadly, later became an idol (Judg. 8:24-27). This modest man who was once ashamed of his poverty and pedigree is forever honored among the heroes of faith in God's hall of fame (Heb. 11:32).

So the next time you feel like a wimp when facing the enemy, remember, God sees you as a warrior. He can turn whiners into winners and cowards into champions!

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