

God Is Calling All Gideons Out of Hiding!

During one of the darkest times in ancient Israel, Midianite invaders began a campaign of terror. Everybody was hiding in caves and mountain strongholds. They had seen the Lord do miracles in the past to deliver Israel, but this time, they lost all faith.

But then the angel of the Lord visited a frightened young man named Gideon who was hiding in a winepress. Gideon assumed God had given up on Israel. I'm sure he was shocked when the angel greeted him by saying, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor" (Judg. 6:12b). He thought the angel was talking to the wrong person.

Warrior? Gideon felt like a wimp. Yet the angel announced that God had recruited Gideon to be a deliverer for the nation—and Gideon wasn't having it! He gave the angel several reasons why he wasn't qualified. "How shall I deliver Israel?" Gideon asked. "Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house" (Judg. 6:15b, NASB).

Gideon was trying to become history's first draft dodger. But the Lord ignored each of his lame excuses. Finally, after a series of dramatic confirmations—including fire from heaven—Gideon suited up and headed to the battle. And he and his small band of 300 soldiers supernaturally defeated the Midianite hordes. The story proves that one person who trusts God is more powerful than the majority.

Wherever I go these days, I find that many Christians are in hiding. They may attend church. They listen to sermons. They sing worship songs along with everyone else in the congregation. But in their hearts, they have gone AWOL when it comes to actively engaging in ministry.

They are timid spectators, waiting for someone else to act. They have disengaged. They don't believe God can use them. Like Gideon, they have a list of excuses: I've made too many mistakes. I'm too old. I'm too young. My family is a mess. I'm divorced. I don't have any training. I struggle with addictions. I have too many doubts and hang-ups. I think God is disappointed with me.

This past weekend while I was preaching in a church in Georgia, I heard the Holy Spirit say, "I am calling all Gideons out of their hiding places!" This is the time for the weak to say I am strong. This is the time for spectators to get back in the game. We are heading into a fierce spiritual conflict, and we need all hands on deck!

Gideon's story is in the Bible because every one of us is like him. All of us struggle to believe that God wants to use us to carry His message and His power to a broken world. All of us are tempted to hide in our caves.

Yet God puts His Holy Spirit in imperfect vessels! The apostle Paul told the Corinthians: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4:7). If you have been in hiding, crawl out of your cave and take these important steps:

1. Let go of your shame. Many Christians don't believe Jesus has forgiven them fully for their past sins. The devil loves to replay our sins over and over so we will wallow in condemnation. You must believe God's Word and renounce the devil's lies. Your sins have been washed away, and you have been made righteous.

2. Swallow your fears. Fear can paralyze. It will stop you from every taking a risk. Yet the Bible promises: "God has not given us the spirit of fear" (2 Tim. 1:7a, MEV). Gideon started out as a fearful man, but in the end, he became a

champion. You can experience the same transformation.

3. Stop disqualifying yourself. I have met so many followers of Christ who think they are not really on the team. They hide in the shadows, take the back seats in church and never volunteer to do anything because they see themselves as misfits. Don't you realize God loves to take failures and make them successful? If He can restore Peter—who denied Him three times—and make him an apostle, can't He redeem your past mistakes?

4. Tear off every label. So many of us were programmed for defeat by our past experiences. Friends, teachers, bosses or family members may have belittled you. Bullies may have told you that you are stupid, ugly, irresponsible or useless. But those people do not have the ultimate power to define you. Let God heal you of those wounds.

5. Embrace your new identity. When Gideon had his encounter with the angel, he received a new name. He was called "Jerubbaal," which means, "Let Baal contend against him" (Judg. 6:32b, NASB). The name clearly meant that Gideon became a serious threat after he struck down the false god Baal. The wimp had become a warrior!

Please stop hiding in the shadows. The alarm has sounded. We need you to suit up and run to the battle.