

How God Develops His Deliverer

Judges 6:25-40

Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941) was a Polish pianist who gained world-wide fame and was very popular in the United States during the turn of the century. There's a popular story about Paderewski that may or may not be true. Experts say the story was probably inspired by a poster for a meeting Paderewski is said to have organized in support of the Polish Relief Fund during World War II. The poster included a sketch of the great pianist next to a boy at the piano.

The story goes like this: Paderewski had been invited to appear at one of the great music centers of New York. It was a very formal evening with everyone wearing tuxedos and evening gowns. In the audience was a lady who brought her little boy along for the concert. She thought that if he could hear Paderewski play the piano, the experience might spur him on to practice piano a little more each day after school.

As they were waiting for the performance to begin, the mother turned to talk to some friends, and the little boy managed to wiggle out of his seat and headed down the aisle. He quietly made his way up the steps and across the stage to the piano stool. He climbed up on the bench and began to play "chopsticks."

The well-starched audience was horrified. As they heard the simple tune, the crowd responded first with stone-cold silence, then murmuring. "Whose kid is that?" "What's the meaning of this?" "I didn't buy a ticket to hear this noise!" "Doesn't that child have parents?"

When Paderewski discovered what was happening, he made his way onto the stage. Paying no mind to the crowd, he moved behind the boy, reached around him and placed his own two hands onto the keys together with the child's. While the boy continued to play, the master built a rich, accompanying melody to embellish the simple tune. All the while, he stooped down to whisper, "Don't stop now son. Keep it up. That's it. Keep playing. You can do it."

What the great pianist did with the little boy, God does every day. God is in the business of taking ordinary people and doing extraordinary things through them. That's what He did with Gideon.

In our last study, we saw that Gideon was the man God chose to deliver Israel from the bondage of their enemies. At first, Gideon does not appear to be a likely candidate to be the deliverer of the nation. Gideon is hiding from the Midianites to prevent them from taking the small amount of grain he possesses. When the Lord comes to Gideon and tells him that he is to be the deliverer of Israel, Gideon questions God and tells Him why He has the wrong man for the job. Though Gideon's initial reaction was one of doubt, the Lord dispelled Gideon's doubts by giving him a demonstration of his presence (16-19), power (20-22), and peace (23-24).

"I will be with you," the Lord told Gideon in verse 16, "and you will strike down all the Midianites together." If you have God you have all it takes to do the will of God.

You say, "I'd love to be used of God. I want my life to count for God. What does it take?" Look at what God did next with Gideon, and you'll find out. The second half of Judges 6 is all about what God did to prepare Gideon for service. In the first half of Judges 6 we see Gideon's call. In chapter 7 we'll see Gideon in the battle. In this connecting section, we see what God did to get His man ready for service.

God brings Gideon along in a series of small, specific steps that will lead to Gideon achieving big things for the glory of God. As we said last time, God wants Gideon to recognize his own inadequacy and to put his confidence in God's presence and power. This requires a process. For Gideon, and for most of us, it doesn't happen all at once.

Step one with Gideon was to:

I. Remove the Rivals (6:25-32)

God is not interested in playing second fiddle to anything in our lives. If we are serious about Him, all rivals must go. In Gideon's case, here's how it happened. The flow of the text involves three scenes.

A. God's Command

25 Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it;

26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down."

When God speaks to Gideon, it is in the same night that He called him. There's no time like the present to get serious about God. And what God asked Gideon to do that night was a real test of just how serious he was.

The Lord's command to Gideon is very specific. He is told to take his father's "**second bull of seven years old.**" Remember it had been seven years that Israel had been oppressed by the Midianites. This bull, then, would symbolize a rededication. In offering this bull, Gideon would be making a statement, "It's time to go back to where we got off track. It's time to renew ourselves to the One we forsook seven years ago."

Gideon is to take that young bull and he is to use it pull down his father's altar to Baal. He is also to cut down the "**grove**" or the "**the wooden image that is beside it.**"

Baal was the Canaanite god of fertility. The Canaanites believed that Baal was responsible for the success or failure of their crops and herds. Asherah was Baal's female consort. Worshipers of Baal and Asherah practiced vile sexual acts that they believed would bring Baal's favor upon them and their families.

God's command was very specific. He was to tear down the altar and then he was to build a new altar on top of the rock mentioned in verses 20-21. Gideon was then to offer the young bull as a burnt offering to the Lord.

Since altars to Baal were built on top of prominent hills, this was an act that could not be hidden. Everyone would know what Gideon had done. God us to be unashamed in our worship of Him.

God accomplished three purposes in issuing this command to Gideon. First, God demonstrated His superiority over Baal. Gideon would topple Baal's altar and Baal would be powerless to stop it from happening. Second, God wanted Gideon to know that God would be with him, regardless of the opposition he faced. This was a small step for Gideon, but it proved to him that God would never forsake him when he was doing the Lord's will.

But the main reason that altar had to be torn down was that it was a hindrance to God's work being done in Gideon's family, in his community and in his life. Until that pagan altar was destroyed and the people delivered from the power of Baal, God could not and would not move in power and glory.

Gideon was to offer a burnt sacrifice. "Just what was a burnt sacrifice for?" God's Word explains in Leviticus 1:3-4, **"If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him."**

What did Gideon's people need? They needed atonement so they could be forgiven, and God raised up a judge, a deliverer named Gideon to provide it for them.

That's what He did for us, too, isn't it? In the book of Judges, God provided "deliverers" who foreshadowed the coming of the Ultimate Deliverer. Do we need to kill bulls and offer burnt offerings in order to be right with God today? No. Why not? Because the Final Deliverer has come, and the final sacrifice made. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain on the Cross to rescue all who will place their faith in Him.

If we're going to be greatly used by God, then we must eliminate all rivals to God, even if those rivals are promoted by our family. Family loyalty is not to be our highest loyalty. Loyalty to God is.

Loyalty to God is demonstrated by obedience. Look at:

B. Gideon's Obedience (6:27)

27 So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night.

Without hesitation, Gideon did just as he was told to do. He got ten of his servants to help him and he tore down the altar to Baal and he cut down the grove. It was swift and complete obedience to the command of the Lord.

But Gideon's obedience wasn't easy. Gideon knew that his father, his brothers and the rest of the village would be angry with him for tearing down the altar to Baal. He knew they would probably try to kill him for it. He was afraid. He demonstrated faith in doing what the Lord commanded; he demonstrated fear in that he did what he did at night. He tried to hide his obedience to the Lord under the cover of darkness.

I am sure that most of us would be honest enough to say that we serve the Lord out of fear too. We fear our own failures. We fear the consequences of our decisions. We fear the people who know us and live around us. We fear our own inabilities. I've been preaching for 25 years and I still get fearful when it comes time to preach. I am not capable of doing this thing He has called me to do, but if I will yield to Him and rest in His power, God does the ministry of preaching through me. I think this was what Paul was talking about in **Gal. 2:20**, when he said, ***"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."***

C. The Opposition (6:28-32).

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar which had been built.

29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing."

30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that was beside it."

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!"

32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

Gideon's actions caused uproar in the community. When the men of the village saw that the altar had been destroyed, they demanded to know who had done it. It wasn't long until they knew that Gideon had destroyed the altar and the grove. When they found out that Gideon had done this, they went to Gideon's father and demanded that Gideon be put to death for daring to defy Baal. Don't expect the world to applaud godliness!

I love Gideon's father's response to these men. He basically says, "*Will you intercede for Baal? Will you be his savior? If Baal is really a god, let him come to his own defense.*"

The people call Gideon, "Jerub-Baal," which means, "Let Baal contend." And so the life of Gideon became a living challenge to Baal. It seems that when Joash saw the faith of his own son, and the inability of Baal to protect himself, he was changed. When Gideon took his obedient stand and honored the Lord's will in his life, God used it to touch his family.

I have seen the salvation of one person in a family change that entire family. I have witnessed as one after another of the members in that family came to faith in Jesus. Who knows what He might do if you and I would simply obey the Lord!

Gideon learned on that day that God was able. He learned that God was more powerful than the false gods of the pagans. He learned that God was greater than the enemy. He learned that God would keep His Word and that He would protect His servants. That prepared Gideon for what was coming next, the call to the battle.

II. Get Ready for the Battle (6:33-40).

How does God prepare His servants for battle? In Gideon's situation the preparation involved three phases.

A. God Allowed the Enemy to Come (6:33)

33 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.

Right after Gideon rededicates his life to the Lord, and right after he takes steps to remove Baal worship, the enemy coalition arrives. Not very good timing, is it? Actually,

it's perfect timing! Why? Because this time God Himself is going to take care of the enemy.

Are you facing any enemies in your life? Know this. They're not there by accident. In phase one of the preparation, God allowed an enemy to come. In phase two...

B. God Empowered Gideon (6:34-35).

34 But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him.

35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

When the enemy comes, Gideon has the courage to do what no man has done in over seven years. He places his hand on the trumpet, licks his lips and calls Israel to gather for battle. Where did he get this kind of courage? We are told that "***the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon***". The Spirit entered Gideon, filled him, and prepared him for action.

Know this. God does not send His people into battle alone, but accompanies and enables them. Aren't you glad?

When the Spirit of God is in control of our lives, we are changed inwardly first. This inward change manifests itself outwardly in godly living and good works.

C. God Reassured Gideon (6:36-40).

Do you ever need reassurance? Gideon did. He saw the enemy, and he saw his troops, and then he began to have second thoughts. So he prayed and asked God for reassurance—verses 36-38:

36 So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said--

37 look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said."

38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.

So Gideon was convinced, right? Wrong. He needed more assurance so he requested a second sign.

39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew."

40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

What's happening here? God is preparing Gideon for battle. He's reassuring him.

You say, "Should we do what Gideon did? Should we 'throw out the fleece' when we're unsure of God's will?"

I heard how one missionary candidate determined his field of service. He said, "I said to God, 'If you want me to go to such-and-such a country, then send me an email from that country today.' And lo and behold, that very day I got an email from that country! I knew it was God's will for me to be a missionary there!"

Another missionary candidate said this about his calling: "I was driving along in my car and asked God, 'Do you want me to go to France to serve You? If so, would You give me a sign?' And almost instantly God brought to mind the words of Jesus, **"This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet"** (Luke 11:29). And I knew I didn't need a sign. I just needed to obey God and go!"

So what about the "fleece" approach to God's will? I'll just mention two things to think about.

1. God may use a fleece. In his patience He did with Gideon. But doesn't necessarily condone such a practice for us. In fact, the fleece was Gideon's admission that the promise of God was not enough for him. "I know what You promised me, God, but I need reassurance." Because God is patient with our faltering faith, He may use a fleece—but I wouldn't depend on it.

But God has a higher goal for His people. It's this:

2. God wants us to live by faith, not by a fleece. God has given us His promises, His Word. His Word is sufficient. The spiritually mature are those who have learned to take God at His Word. They live by faith, not by a fleece.

The point of the story is not, "Go and do what Gideon did. Test God. Ask God for signs." No, this is the point: God is a great God! He's so great He can use even the faltering faith of a man like Gideon to accomplish His purposes. And He's so gracious that He patiently brings us along, enabling us to trust Him more and more.

Perhaps you're struggling with a decision and thinking, "I'm waiting for a feeling. I'll know it's God's will when I get a feeling. God gave so-and-so a feeling, and that's what I want." Or maybe you're thinking, "I want a sign. Send me a sign, God, and then I'll know what You want me to do."

I'm not going to tell you that God can't give you a "feeling" or a "sign." He can do whatever He wants. But I do know this. He's already given you His Word. And He's verified His Word for you by raising His Son from the dead. What more could we possibly need? I challenge you, take God at His Word. Live by faith, not by a fleece.

Do you want to be used greatly by God? We've looked at Gideon today, but now let's make it personal.

If we want to be used greatly by God ...

1. We'll get rid of all rivals to God. What are the rivals to God, the idols, in your life? Your rival may be a sinful thing—an ungodly habit, or attitude, or aspiration. Will you forsake it today? It may even be a good thing—a person, or a job, or a hobby. But that good thing has taken the wrong place in your life, God's place.

2. We'll get serious about obeying God. We'll obey Him even if we don't understand the potential fallout. Like Gideon did—he didn't understand what would happen next. He just determined to obey God wholeheartedly. Will you?

3. We'll realize our desperate need for God. That's really what Gideon's fleece was all about. "God, I can't do anything without you. Not a thing. I need You." That was Gideon's admission. Is it yours? Will you submit your life to God's Son, Jesus Christ, today? And finally, if we're serious about God, then...

4. We'll be ready to see God work. God loves to work in the lives of people who take Him seriously. Just ask Gideon!