

“Calling and Courage: Gideon” // Judges 6 // *Broken Saviors* #4

The other day I saw an updated list of the most common phobias... (The **American Psychiatric Association** doesn't put it out the list, but it defines what qualifies as a phobia: something that causes such stress that it interrupts normal life function. There are the usuals:

- **Arachnophobia**: fear of spiders
- **Ophidiophobia**: fear of snakes
- **Necrophobia**: Fear of death
- **Glossophobia**: fear of public speaking (Interestingly, people rank fear of public speaking higher than they do the fear of death.
 - As **Jerry Seinfeld** says, that means for most people, if they had to go to a funeral, they'd rather be the guy in the casket than the one giving the eulogy.)
 - Ran across this article the other day about how to **overcome the fear** of public speaking: *“Before you go on stage, stand still and feel the ground beneath your feet. Close your eyes and imagine yourself suspended from the ceiling by a thin thread. Then imagine you're made of rubber. Look into the mirror and make a horse's laugh with your lips. Why not lie on the ground and pretend you're floating? Or, just collapse on the ground like a limp doll.”*¹ So, if you guys ever wonder what I am doing backstage, now you know...

The list I was looking at included more non-traditional fears like:

- **Octophobia** - the fear of the number 8
- **Olfactophobia** - fear of foul smells
- How about this one? **Doraphobia**: the fear of... animal fur. (That's not what you expected, right? As a dad of 3 girls, I developed the other kind of Doraphobia.)
- **Coulrophobia**: fear of clowns

- **Tocophobia**: fear of pregnant women. Jason Gaston, our student pastor, has this.
- Then there is **onphalophobia**: Fear of belly buttons. It did not specify whether innies or outies are more terrifying.
- **Arachibutyrophobia** which is, of course, fear of peanut butter sticking to the roof of your mouth
- **Windbagaphobia**: fear of long sermons (I made that up)
- Interesting one: **Nomophobia**: fear of being without your phone!
 - 50% of people exhibit *extreme* anxiety symptoms if they are placed in a room without their phone
 - *This is those of you who were just like... (looking up from scrolling phone) “What?”*

Fear, of all kinds, is a part of life, and your success in life, in large part, is determined by how well you manage your fears.

C.S. Lewis (channeling Aristotle) said that courage is one of the least talked about Christian virtues, but it is essential to all the others.

- We're going to look at it today: **JUDGES 6**.

As you turn there... I'll tell you, for years I've **struggled with courage**. Sometimes that surprises people because I come off as a guy of such diesel bravado... That's mostly a veneer.

- In **high school I struggled to find the courage** to stand up to friends when they were doing things I knew was wrong.
- Sometimes I've **shrunk back from sharing Christ** with someone, or **speaking truth a friend**, out of fear. I've made **financial decisions** based out of fear, not trust. My “normal life function” of obedience has been disrupted by fear.
- I would guess there are a number of people here this weekend immobilized by some kind of fear.
 - Maybe it is **fear about the future**. You've gotten **medical news** that leaves you really uncertain about what's ahead.
 - Maybe your **marriage** is not going well... You wonder, what is family going to be like in the future? Or your kids seem to be making some really dumb decisions.

¹ <http://www.wikihow.com/Overcome-Your-Fear-of-Public-Speaking>

- Maybe it is the **fear of entering into a new relationship**. I know single people here at the Summit who are hesitant to enter a good relationship because they are scared of commitment...
- For others, fear keeps you **ending a relationship** you know is wrong.
- Maybe it's the **fear of never being in a relationship** that makes you panic and make really poor relationship decisions

Today, in Judges, we're going to see a guy who was *not courageous*, he's not a model, but whom God made into a hero nonetheless.

Here's what you'll see how: God doesn't reward courage with a calling; he creates courage with a calling.

[6:1] (After Deborah, the judge from last week, died) The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midian seven years... [3] Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites... would come up against them, and leave no sustenance in Israel and no sheep or ox or donkey... [4] they would come like locusts in number, so that they laid waste the land as they came in. They devoured everything—like a swarm of locusts. They even devoured the animals and tools they used to produce crops. They were **like the IRS**: *nothing was left* when they got done.

[6] And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD. [7] When the people of Israel cried out to the LORD on account of the Midianites, [8] the LORD sent a prophet to the people of Israel.

And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I led you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of slavery. [9] ...And I drove out your oppressors from before you and gave you their land.

[10] And I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; you shall not fear... But you have not obeyed my voice.'

Now, stop for a minute—that is odd, isn't it? They cry out to the Lord, and he sends... **a prophet**...? They weren't **asking for teaching**; they were calling for deliverance.

- This would be **like being stranded** on the side of the road and you call AAA for help, but instead of sending a tow truck, they email you a pamphlet on safe driving.

But **Israel's problem**, you see, was not primarily *the Midianites*. **They** were their own problem. They were **asking for deliverance**, but God said, "What you need first is a sermon."

- Some of you are in that category. You are here seeking something from God, *but what God wants to do first is turn the spotlight onto your heart*.
- Let me be very clear: Not every instance of suffering is in response to disobedience. God is not always trying to "teach you something." In fact, *most* instances are not. Believers often suffer, like Jesus did, having done nothing wrong.
- But **sometimes it is...** "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.*" Psalm 119:67
- **And I think it's just worth asking**: Is God possibly trying to get your attention this weekend? You came wanting God to give you help or deliverance or a raise or a new boyfriend, and God is saying, What I need to do in your heart is more important. He hasn't caused hardship to pay you back, but he has done it to *bring you back*.

[11] Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree at Ophrah... and the angel said, "Gideon, look under your seat" (different Oprah!)

- But wait a minute... **How did the people respond to the prophet's sermon?**
- **Before the people responded**, God has already begun their salvation!

- Make sure you get this: We **don't get ourselves into shape** and then God comes for us; he comes to us when we're a mess.

Well, the angel takes a seat by this tree ...while Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

- Now, a winepress is a terrible place to thresh wheat. Let me explain to you a little something about wheat threshing, in case you haven't done it in a while: **the way that they** threshed wheat was they threw it up in the air so that the wind could blow away all the light, useless stuff, and the good stuff, the heavy stuff, falls back down.
 - **A winepress is underground**, which means it is a **terrible place to thresh wheat**, because you'd have to throw it way up to get the wind.
- So why is Gideon doing it there? Because he is *afraid*.
- *The point*: This is **no Jack Bauer** or Chuck Norris or Nicolas Cage...

[12] And the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor."

- **If this were a stage play**, at this point everyone would have laughed. I mean... Gideon is hiding in a hole. This is like going up to a 4'11, 130 lb. man and saying, "What's up, big fella?"
- Mockery? No, and listen... this is maybe the main point today. God doesn't speak to Gideon based on what he is, but based on what God is going to make him into. **Gideon is not called because he is courageous. He's made courageous as a result of his call.**
- **God doesn't call the brave; he makes brave those he calls.**
- You see, when God calls us, he **doesn't see us or define us by the condition we are in**, but by what he is determined to make us into in Christ.
 - Isn't that good news? You were a mess when God came to you. He doesn't reward the righteous and courageous, he makes men righteous and courageous.
 - **So God looks at a man cowering** in a hole and says, "Man of valor! Stand up."

[13] (But) Gideon said to him, (Two questions: 1. "Please, sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"

- Based on what we've just read, this question is totally wrongheaded. **Is it God that has left** the people? No, the people have left God.

The second question is even more confusing: And 2. **where are all his wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us...?"**

- "God, why don't you do great things for us anymore?"
 - Well, Gideon, *an angel is sitting in front of you. I think that would qualify as a wonderful thing.*

But look at God's specific answer: [14] And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

- God's answer to Gideon: "Where are all my wonderful deeds, Gideon? Why, I'm about to do them through you."
- We often look to heaven and ask God, "Where are you?" **We are the work of God in our generation.**

(BTW: **Who is this angel? Vs. 12, he's called an angel**, and he talks about the Lord in the 3rd person. **In vs. 14**, however, he's called "**the Lord**" directly. This happens a lot in the Hebrew Bible, and it's a mystery until the coming of Jesus, and after that, it makes sense. It's what theologians call a "Christophany." **Jesus was both** the messenger of God, in addition to being God himself.)

[15] And Gideon said to (Jesus) him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." "God, I am small; I am a coward. I'm here threshing my wheat underground, for crying out loud."

[16] And the LORD said to him, "But I will be with you, (This is God's one line answer to everything. UNDERLINE IT. Everything you need is in that statement: I will be with you.) **and you shall strike the**

Midianites as one man.” IOW, you will take out the massive Midianite army as if it’s one scrawny little guy.

[17] And Gideon said to him, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, (pedantic) then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. So the angel tells Gideon to **prepare some food**, and when Gideon puts it on the table the angel touches the food with his staff and the flames spring up out of the rock and consume the food, and then **the angel disappears**, and Gideon is convinced God is behind it.

[25] That night the LORD said to him, “Pull down the altar of Baal that your father has... (we have to start in your house, Gideon)

[26] and build an altar to the LORD your God on the top of the stronghold there...

[27] So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day, he did it by night. Again, this is **no William Wallace!** But God doesn’t criticize Gideon for this, *because obedience is more important to God than bravado.*

Well, the next morning everyone gets up and says, “*What happened to our god?*” Someone says, “Gideon did this!” and they say, “Let’s kill Gideon.” [31] But Joash (Gideon’s father) said to all who stood against him, “If Baal really is a god, let him contend for himself.”

[32] Therefore on that day Gideon was called Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal defend himself,” because Gideon had broken down his altar. Again, don’t miss the humor. This **small, cowardly guy** gets the nickname “*Baal-tail-whooper.*”

Well, after this... vs. 33, the Midianites launch a massive assault on Israel, at which point the angel of God appears to Gideon again, and tells him to mount a resistance...

Gideon says again, “OK, God, again, **how can I be sure** you’re going to do this?” And **then Gideon comes up with his own idea:** “*I’m going to*

put this animal skin, this fleece, out on the ground. If you are really with me, in the morning let the ground around it be dry and the fleece be wet.”

[38] And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.

Then Gideon said, “Wait a minute, that was too easy. God, what I meant to say was, ‘Let the fleece be dry, and the ground around it be wet.’ That would be a real miracle.”

[40] And God did so that night; and only the fleece was dry, and on all the ground there was dew.

Ahh... the famous fleece test. This concept has been **more abused** than just about any other thing in the Bible. **Including by me.** People come up with these **litmus tests to determine** if God is really in something. That’s not really the point. We’ll come to that.

What can we learn about courage and calling from this story?

1. God doesn’t call the brave; he makes brave the called.

- When God comes to you, he never starts with what you are; he starts with what he intends to make you in Christ. So he looks at a man cowering in a hole and says, “Man of valor!”
 - “**Moses, you will be a great orator.**” “But God, I can’t speak. I will be your mouth.
 - Maybe even clearer example of this: **Abraham:** Sterile. Old. Father of many nations? Laughable.
 - **Romans 4:17** says that faith is believing God when he calls into existence the things that do not yet exist.
- **God does that with you;** he speaks to you, dead in your sin, and calls you alive based on the resurrection.

- **The question is, “Will you believe him?” Satan is the one who starts with who you are and what you’ve done and defines you by that.**
 - He whispers, “You’re a **failure... Coward. Reject.** He is usually substantiating that by *true* facts. He’s called the ***accuser of the brethren: day an dnight.***
 - God says, “My beloved. Righteous. Saint. Mighty man of valor.” You say, “But God, I am none of those things.” He says, “You will be.”
 - Here’s **how you tell the difference** between the Holy Spirit’s voice and Satan’s. Both will talk about your sin, and it’s easy to confuse their voice. But here’s how you tell: Satan starts with who you are and what you’ve done and beats you up for it. The Holy Spirit starts with a declaration of what he’s making you in Christ and grows you up into it.
 - **K and A**
 - *God starts with what he has declared you to be...*
 - **God doesn’t call the bold; he emboldens the called.**
 - Or here is another way of saying that: **“God doesn’t call the equipped; he equips the called.”**
 - **If you are waiting on God to give you** all you need before you obey, you’ll never get there.
 - **We say, “God, show me the provision,** and I’ll obey.” God says, doesn’t work that way. “You obey, and I’ll show you the provision.”
 - **We have people** waiting to obey God—to go and speak, to go on a mission, to make a sacrifice, saying, “God, show me how this will work and I will do it.” God says, “Wrong order. You step out of the boat, and then you’ll walk on water.”
- ## 2. We are the activity of God in our generation
- God answers Gideon’s question, “*God, why don’t do awesome things for us like you used to do for our grandparents?*” with the statement, “Gideon, I’m here to use you.”
 - We are the activity of God in our generation.
 - Jesus, Continued... The whole idea is that Jesus has not ceased to work...
 - He’s the one at work in us preaching. Why I take my gift so seriously.
 - Each of you has a spiritual gift. Those are not “cool talents.” Acts of mercy. Prayers of healing. Faith.
 - A verse I often use with our staff: ***“Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: “Do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal; or cross over to Beersheba... Seek the Lord and live!” Amos 5:4–6***
 - Why the 3 random cities? **Bethel** is where Jacob had his life-changing encounter with God, a place that symbolized for Israelites awakening and renewal.
 - **Gilgal** was where the children of Israel finally emerged from their 40 year wandering in the wilderness, believed God, and took possession of the Promised Land. God miraculously parted the Jordan at Gilgal he *“rolled away their reproach”* (Joshua 5:9).
 - At **Beerhseba**, God delivered by Abraham by giving him a treaty with Abimelech that became instrumental in his possession of the new land. His son Isaac would make an altar there.
 - Each of these represents a **place of incredible spiritual power.** But evidently by the time of **Israel they were sitting around the campfire talking about the good old days. God, “will you shut up about the good old days? “My saving acts are not simply a thing of the past; seek them in the present.”**
 - Summit, I think we weary God talking about the days of the Great Awakening... even early church.
 - The greatest days of spiritual outpouring are ahead of us.
 - **Why do I think this?** I have **kids** who will one day have kids. I want them to experience a move of God. *And, there are still 6400 UPG’s in the world yet to hear about Jesus. i*
 - **Are you asking, ‘God, why aren’t you active** in my family? On my campus? In our community?’
 - **Maybe God is saying to you,** ‘You are my answer to that prayer... be the conduit of my power.’”

3. Revival starts at home

- **Gideon's 1st assignment** was to get rid of the idol in his father's house.
 - Before you can do battle with the enemies around you, you need to throw off the enemies *within* you. These idols weaken you; make you ineffective in what God has for you.
- **You say, "I don't have any idols."** Maybe you don't understand what they are. For Gideon's family, these idols weren't things *instead* of God; they worshipped them *in addition to* God.
 - They had never rejected God: they had just substantiated him with idols that guaranteed other things: rain, fertility, etc.
 - They **weren't idols in the place of God**; but idols in addition to God.
- Now, we may hear that and say, "That's silly ancient superstition. Statues?"
 - But where do you have places that you aren't sure you can trust God, so you have other things that act as backup?
- Let me give you **two sure signs** of an idol: Disobedience and anxiety. (**smoke from a fire**)
 - **For many people, they don't feel like** they can trust God in the area of **relationships**... God, **you're good and all**, but I've also got to be happily married if I'm going to be happy, and I don't like the speed at which you are taking care of this—so that's an area I'll take into my own hands... and so they compromise in relationships—girls that are sleeping with boyfriends, not because they think it is right or even that they want to—they are just afraid to be single and they don't trust God with this so they take it into their own hands; or they are with people they shouldn't be with; or they walk out on their marriage in hopes of a better one;
 - **Other people feel like they couldn't be happy without a certain income**, so they cheat (business or taxes); or harm

their family working all the time; or they refuse to obey God financially.

- **Disobedience is a sure sign of an idol.** If you don't tithe; that indicates that money is an idol for you.
 - **Disobedience is always accompanied by anxiety**... you are worried about your ability to hold onto these things.
 - Maybe you **worry about your kids all the time** because you feel like you can't trust God with them.
- Before God uses you in the mission, he has to go to war against your idols. You can't do battle with the enemies outside you until you have gone to war with the enemies within you.

4. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is following God in the midst of fear

- God's one line answer to Gideon's fear, his sense of inadequacy: "*I am with you.*" That is God's one line answer to every feeling of fear and inadequacy.
- **Question:** What would life be like, in any situation, if you knew God was with you?
 - Going into **surgery**: "*I am with you*"
 - Going into a **new job**, a new relationship: "*I am with you*"
 - Going into a **new ministry**: "*I am with you*"
 - Going to **talk to someone** about the gospel: "*I am with you*"
 - Dealing with a problem **in your home**: "*I am with you*"
- **If you read just about any secular article about overcoming your fears**, it will almost always talk about banishing whatever thoughts cause fear: "Control your thoughts... *don't think* about the things that scare you." God's peace comes a different way; it is not closing your eyes to the things that make you afraid, but opening your eyes to the presence of God beside you.

But that leads to this question... How do we know he is with us? How do we *know* we have found favor? **That was Gideon's question.**

5. The cross is our wet fleece

- **Gideon asked God to prove he was with him** by making a fleece wet when the ground was dry... **I mentioned a moment ago that this concept of the fleece had been abused...** We give God these *random litmus tests* to prove he wants us to do something.
 - **Illus.** Me with **basketball** and asking a girl out... One time I really wanted to ask a girl out... but never she would shoot me down, so I wanted some kind of divine confirmation I was supposed to... Kept shooting
 - **I'm not saying** it's *always* wrong to ask for confirmation... (though if you do, it should be 1 of 1000 pieces in the decision making process—the bulk of which should be **Scripture and good counsel**)
- **But I can tell you that's not the main point being made here.**
 - In fact, Gideon **knew what he was doing** was unwise. Did you see in **vs. 39** where Gideon tells God not to be angry at him for asking? He knows this is testing God's patience.
 - And **Gideon's main question** was not **whether** God wanted him to do this, but *"God, how do I know you're really on my side? How do I know you're really in control?"*
- We have something much better that shows us that God is in control and that God is on our side: **the cross**
 - **In control:** took the worst action of men and turned it for his plan and our side. We therefore know he can do it in the dark times in our lives, too.
 - **On our side:** Rom 5:8
- That is what gives us courage.
- One of my favorite verses on fear: **1 John 4:18**, *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts* (drives out) *out fear.* Look

at the next phrase: *For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love."*

- Love this phrase: **"fear has to do with punishment."** We see something that makes us afraid and we feel **vulnerable...**
 - Goes back to Garden: The first effect of the fall was a **sense of nakedness...** we feel vulnerable... so we put on clothes or good job; good reputation, good relationships... At any point the clothes might be ripped away.
- **But in the cross**, we are clothed with the irrevocable garment of the perfect love of God.
- Think about all the ways **God's love is perfect.** **God's love is perfect in:** (a) **its intensity** toward us... God couldn't love us any more... (b) it is perfect in **its constancy** with us (In Christ, God says he will never leave us); (c) it is perfect in **its sufficiency** (we were created for the love of the eternal God; in being loved and possessed by him our thirst is quenched); and (d) it is perfect in **its sovereignty** of all things in our lives (he commandeers every molecule in the universe to work out his good and perfect plan for our lives).
- **Intensity; constancy; sufficiency; sovereignty...With God's perfect love, what else is there to be afraid of?**
 - **Numbers 23:23**, *"There is no sorcery that can succeed against Jacob."* When the children of Israel went into the Promised Land, the spies had told them that there were powerful people there with powerful magic. They feared, "What if their power is stronger than ours? What if they have Lord Voldemort on their side?" He who cannot be named? God says, "Who cares what his name is? My name is bigger."
 - **Psalm 56:11**, *"...in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?"* Answer: nothing! Do you know this love?

If you are experiencing *any* kind of fear, it is because you have lost touch with one of those aspects of God's perfect love:
Intensity; constancy; sufficiency; sovereignty

So **don't look to your courage to give you an identity in Christ**; look to your identity in Christ to give you courage.

Conclusion:

True courage comes from the **presence and the promises of God**, and those are given to us irrevocably in the gospel.

When Jesus sent out his disciples in the **Great Commission**, he said this, "And I am with you always, to the ends of the age. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations." The Great Commission begins with the **Great Announcement**, and the power to go far and do much in the Great Commission comes from confidence in the Great Announcement.

- **That's what God says you:** *"Go mighty man or woman of valor: I am with you."*

Is he calling you to be his instrument? To obey him in some way... I can tell you what he says (hear his voice in mine):

- You are a **saint**, highly beloved in Christ (Col 1:2). *"But God, I don't feel like saint." "That's what I've made you in Christ."*
- You are my **ambassador**—2 Cor 5:19. That means you are on a mission from me, I'll **supply whatever** provisions you need.)
- He says, You are my **son/daughter**, I will **never leave** nor forsake you. (Romans 8:15; Heb 13:5)
- **So be strong** and very courageous, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (John 1:9). "You are a **mighty man of valor**" (Judges 6:12).

We **don't work up courage**... it doesn't come from **our personality**; it comes from embracing our identity in Christ. It is received as a gift, not worked out.

Virtues like courage (all Christian virtues) don't lead us to salvation; they **flow from** our salvation.