

# “The Underdog’s Secret” // Judges 7–8 // Gideon 2 // *Broken Savivors #5*

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## Introduction

If you have your Bibles... Judges 7. Gideon, week 2.

Americans love a good underdog story... it’s in our blood. I think it’s probably because we see ourselves as the result of a successful underdog operation against Great Britain. I sent out a tweet this week asking for the greatest underdog story of all time, and got back about 3000 responses.

- **Rudy... The Karate Kid...** or the greatest movie franchise of all time... **Rocky Balboa...** until Rocky 5, of course...
- Of course, miracle **US hockey team of the 1980 Olympics that beat the Soviet Union Olympic as a** bunch college students.
- One person even said, “You marrying **Veronica.**”
- **Maybe the greatest sports underdog story of all time was the 1983 National Championship by the Cardiac Wolfpack team,** led by the late Jimmy Valvano. **NOT FROM HERE—NC HISTORY!**
  - NC State went into the ACC tournament ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the ACC... and won their three ACC games by a margin of 11 points, *total*.
    - One was decided in overtime; one was decided by only 1 point.
  - In the NCAA tournament; their very first game, against lowly Pepperdine, they had to go to overtime...**two** overtimes, before they emerged with a win.
  - Two days later, they beat the heavily favored UNLV by a single point scored in the last minute.

- **This is where the name “cardiac pack”** comes in. In 7 of their last 9 games, they trailed going into the final minute.
- Against great odds, they made it to the championship game, where they faced Houston, heavy favorites
  - Called ***Phi Slamma Jamma***.
  - They had **two future NBA Hall of Famers** on that team.
  - They had **steam-rolled everyone else** up to the final game, posting **double-digit wins** every time.
  - **Like Kentucky** this year, whose 2<sup>nd</sup> string, they say, would be ranked in the AP top 10;
- Somehow **NC State stuck around** during the game. They had the ball, tied, for the final 44 seconds, and they ended up forcing up one of the ugliest shots you’ve ever seen. It was so short it airballed, but NC State’s Lorenzo Charles caught it like it was a pass and dunked it as time expired.
- (To **underscore just how big of an upset** this was, when the NCAA selected a tournament MVP that year they selected a *player from Houston*. That’s one of the only times that has ever happened, where they choose an MVP from the losing team.

I share **that for two reasons:** 1. I wanted to give something to you NC State fans... after Thursday. Love from me to you.

- 2. You might be tempted** to see the story this weekend of Gideon going up against the Midianites as an underdog story, but is so far beyond that it’s not even funny. **This is not a lesser team** going up against a better team; this is the story of a powerless people going up against the mightiest force in the region.
- This is not **like Wake Forest** going up against Duke; it would be like **middle school JV boys’ team** taking on Kentucky.

## Review

Last week we saw that God had sent the Midianites into Israel to chasten them... but when Israel cried out in pain God had compassion and raised up a deliverer for them, Gideon.

**Gideon was not, as I explained to you last week, your typical hero.**

When we first encounter him, he is cowering in fear in a hole. But God turns him into a man of bravery by assuring him of his presence with him. (And the most important lesson we learned from that was that **"God doesn't call the brave; he makes brave those he calls."**)

**Well, at the end of chapter 6 God tells Gideon to go mount a resistance against** the massive marauding Midianite militia... and **Gideon, true to form,** demurs, and God reassures him through a couple of special signs—the famous fleece tests—that he will give him the victory.

[7:1] Then Jerubbaal (remember, that is Gideon's nickname; it means **"Baal-tail whooper"**) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them...

[2] The LORD said to Gideon, *"The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"*

- You ought to really **marinate** on that statement... It's one of my favorite OT verses: *"The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.'"*
- (You can learn so much about how God works in your life through that statement.)

[3] Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, *'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'*" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.

- *"Whoever is fearful and trembling..."* I wonder if Gideon tried to go with them? God was like, "Not you, Gideon."
- Now, you **could actually make the argument** that this may have been a **smart move**. 10,000 brave soldiers might be better than 32,000 where 2/3 are wimps.
- But the **next part makes absolutely no sense...**

[4] And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and... Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." [6] And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men... (because, who does that?) [7] And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home."

- You say, **"Oooh... what's the symbolism** in keeping the ones who lap like a dog? Does **this prove that God loves dogs** more than cats?"
  - Well, first, that doesn't need proving; it's inherently obvious in nature... but there's no absolutely no symbolism in what happened.
- It was **just a random test** designed to get rid of 97% of the army.

Think about this: **God intentionally weakened Gideon's army.** There is so much to learn from that.

## 1. When God wants to use us, he often will weaken us.

- **God never delights** in hurting us... but **God wants us** to trust him, to depend on him. That's the **most important thing** we can ever learn in life.
  - So **sometimes God reduces** the size of our army so we have no choice but to trust him.
  - You say, **"What do you mean by 'reduce the size of your army'?"**
    - Health;
    - job;

- could even be **your marriage**.
  - I'm not saying God is the one doing any of those things directly; just that God's sovereign purpose behind them might be teaching you to lean into him like never before.
- Here is **another statement** to marinate on (given it before) — ***if dependence is the objective, weakness is an advantage***. Think about that: *How could weakness ever be an advantage? If it makes you lean* into Jesus, where real power is, it's an advantage.
  - If was **when your husband failed** you that you learned you could rely on your heavenly Father.
  - It was **when you got laid off** that you learned that you could trust your heavenly Supplier.
  - **When you were alone**, it was then you learned God would be the FRIEND WHO STICKS CLOSER...
  - **Weakness forces you to lean** into God, and **there and sometimes only there** can you learn the four words that can absolutely transform your life: **GOD IS ALWAYS FAITHFUL**.
    - Sometimes you'll never know he's all you need until he is all you have!
- The Apostle Paul said it this way, ***"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."*** 2 Corinthians 12:9
  - *Brag about your weaknesses?* "Here's another place I'm 'sub-par.' Here's another place I've failed." GLADLY.
    - ***But it was there*** he was able to put on display Christ's power, not his own.
  - You see, **if I brag on my strengths**, you may sit there and say, *"I wish I were more like him, but I can't be."* But if I brag on my weaknesses, and tell you about what Christ's power has done through them, you will say, "Wow, I have access to what he has access to!"
  - **Effective preaching, I HAVE TOLD YOU, is one beggar telling a bunch of other beggars where to find bread.** And maybe **the best thing I can do** to help you toward that is make you understand that I'm a beggar, too.
- Or let me show it to you in another place: **1 Peter 1:7** says that ***your faith (i.e. your confidence in God's goodness and grace) is "more precious than gold."***
  - In whatever "battle" you are in, what is the greatest asset that you have?
  - In the **battle to provide for yourself...** what would be more valuable than GOLD?
    - **According to Peter**, the greatest asset you can have in any situation is faith in God's goodness...
  - **Elyse Fitzpatrick**, who will be speaking here with me on Mother's Day, applies this to parenting. In ***Give them Grace***: how many books on parenting, Christian books, that guarantee success in parenting if you just follow these Biblical points...
    - **However: She points out that God was a perfect father and 1/3 of angels and the two humans he created left...** She's like, "So, you think you'll be able to out-technique God?"
    - **She says the really dangerous problem with thinking there is a foolproof way of parenting is it keeps us from the one thing we most need, to cast ourselves** on the mercy of God to work in our kids' lives, which is the one thing he responds to. Not perfect technique, but hope in his mercy...
- **What keeps us from the riches of God's power is we feel like we have our own riches and don't need God.**
  - This is **one of the most important spiritual** truths you can ever learn: your strengths are more dangerous to you than your weaknesses, because your strengths keep you from hoping in God's mercy.
  - **To be saved means** to come to a point where you know you can't save yourself and you fall on the mercy of God. Utterly unrighteous; utterly hopeless. He does it all.

- **To be used by God** means you come to a point where you realize how absolutely impotent you are, and you fall in hope in God's mercy.
- So God sometimes weakens us to bring us to that point. Write this down: **"It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply."** A. W. Tozer<sup>1</sup>
  - **Sometimes to get you to lean into his power**, he has to reduce your army.
  - *So he lets you fail*
    - *(Two of the most growing seasons of my life came through failure: one was a failure in something I was trying to do; the other was a failure in my courage.)*
- **So, listen... I want you to rethink what God might be doing in your life. Maybe you are experiencing an army reduction** right now... and I want you to be open to the essential lesson God is showing you in it.
  - **As I was thinking through this this week, I was reminded of this story I've you the story** of the **LITTLE BIRD flying south** for the winter. But he got a **late start**, so he got caught in a snowstorm. The storm was so bad that ice formed on his wings and he couldn't even fly. He went down for a crash landing, and couldn't get back up. He thought, "Great. Now I'm going to freeze to death." But then suddenly a cow came and drops manure on him. The little bird is like, "Awesome... I am going to freeze here, and now I have manure dumped on me. But then the manure thaws his wings and he can fly again. When he realizes what is happening, he gets so excited that he started to **chirp and sing**. But **this attracts a cat**; who comes and eats him. **We can learn 3 lessons from this story:**
    - **Lesson 1:** *Not everyone who drops manure on you is your enemy.*
    - **Lesson 2:** *Not everyone who digs you out is your friend.*

- **Lesson 3:** *When you're in manure, sometimes its helpful to keep your little chirper shut...*
- **Because God might be doing something amazing.**

"[God] wants you to have something far better than riches and gold, and that is helpless dependence upon him." **Hudson Taylor**

The second thing God is trying to teach us through the reduction of Gideon's army is that... (and this is another common theme in Judges)

## 2. God would send salvation not through human might, but the weakness of humble obedience.

- I explained this before: Not only is each story in Judges teaching us, the book of Judges as a whole has a message for us...
- A rather odd trajectory is established in Judges
  - **The book of Judges opens with Joshua**, who was a mighty general in charge of a strong, Israelite army.
  - But then we have **Ehud, a left-handed, crippled leader...**
  - After that there's **Deborah**, a female judge, who teams up with the other heroin of this story, Jael, a housewife with a frying pan.
  - Now **Gideon**, whose army God has whittled down to 300!
  - In a few chapters, we'll come to **Samson**, who fights all by himself...
  - And **after the book of Judges, we come to David...** a scrawny shepherd boy who writes songs and defeats a giant with a slingshot all alone while all of Israel stands on the sidelines and watches.
- **You see, we are going from strength to weakness.** (**Business mentor: We like graphs** that go up; this one is going down.)
- *This points us toward something really important. God would send salvation into the world not through a King who would conquer the world's armies with a superior army, but by one who would lay down in his life in service and humility and obedience.*
- **Time and time again in Jesus' life** we are confronted with the weakness of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous*, 144.

- **Before his trial, we find him washing** the disciples' feet, the activity of the lowest form of servant there.
- **During his trial**, he is maligned, mocked, and spit upon, unable, it seemed to defend himself
- He's **so weak he can't even carry his cross**... someone has to help him
- He **dies with his hands stretched out**, nailed to a cross, an ultimate picture of weakness.
- But *through that*, God brought a resurrection.
- **This is how it happens.** We humbly obey; God brings power.
- You see, it's the **same for you**. You faithfully obey, in your weakness:
  - You **keep sharing** Christ
  - You keep **patiently parenting** your child
  - You refuse to **give up praying** for lost son
  - You **endure the scorn** and the pain of injustice without getting retribution
  - And God sends a miracle.
- **GOD DOESN'T SEND MIRACLES THROUGH HUMAN MIGHT, BUT THROUGH FAITH AND HUMBLE OBEDIENCE**
- **The Faithful Woodpecker**

Well, God's got Gideon's army down to the size he needs it...

[9] That same night the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand. [10] But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant.

[12] And the Midianites... lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the *sand that is on the seashore* in abundance. [13] When Gideon came, behold, a man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat." [14] And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon... God

has given into his hand Midian and all the camp." Don't miss the humor here. The picture of Gideon is **not of a spear or a hurricane**; he's **not even a hurled rock**; he's a tumbling piece of bread.

- What **team chooses this** as its mascot? **We're the "biscuits."**
- **But this biscuit flattens a might tent.** Now, I'm **not much of a camper**, and if you threw a piece of bread at a tent I set up, it just might fall over. But that wouldn't happen to a normal tent.

Gideon recognizes in this that God is reassuring him: [15] **As soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped. And he returned to the camp of Israel and said, "Arise, for the LORD has given the host of Midian into your hand."**

The third thing we learn from this story is

### 3. God patiently deals with faltering faith

- **I find it really comforting in this story how God takes such time and patience to reassure Gideon.** We picture God as this one up in heaven saying, "If you don't have absolute confidence in me all the time, I will reject you." But that's not what we see here, is it?
  - **Mark 9:22**, a **man with a sick son** came to Jesus and says, "Jesus, if you are able to do something, have pity." I would expect Jesus to respond with an "If...? What's wrong with you? Don't you know who I am?" Instead he says, "Everything is possible for those who believe." **The man's response:** "I believe, help my unbelief." Now, at this point, if I were Jesus, I would have said "Well, a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Go memorize some Scripture and come back when you're ready to go all-in." Jesus' response: he healed the boy.
- **Do you doubt?** It's ok. Ask your questions. Ask God to reveal his faithfulness to you.
- *But also consider #4...*

### 4. At some point, you have to take the risk

- **Think about what is going on in this scene.** Gideon is **afraid**, and God is **trying to reassure** him. **So God tells him** to go deep into

the Midianite camp, close enough to overhear a conversation in a Midianite tent...

- **If I were Gideon**, I would have said, “Hey, God, maybe you could give me that assurance *out here*? I’ve got that **fleece right here... I’ll close my eyes and count to 10**, and when I open them maybe you could have folded it up into an origami structure of some kind.... **I don’t know if you get this or not**, but I’m afraid, so the last thing I want to be doing is sneaking alone into the Midianite camp at night.”
- What the lesson? God will patiently develop your faith, but it requires you from time to time to take steps of faith of your own.
- **Here’s how faith works: God *reveals a little***, you take a step. God reveals ***a little more***; you take a step. Scripture says, **“Draw near to God, he will draw near to you.”** (TWO MEN ON A STAGE)
- **If you are waiting on God to answer *all your questions*** before you’ll believe, you’ll never get there. Take that **first step**, and he’ll explain more as you go. LAMP UNTO MY FEET. WE USUALLY WANT A SPOTLIGHT, SHOWING US THE END. GOD SAYS, ‘ONLY ENOUGH FOR THE NEXT STEP.’
- **GOD DEVELOPS OUR FAITH BY INVITING US TO TAKE OUR OWN STEPS OF FAITH.**
  - We’ve all heard of **birds that teach their young to fly** by pushing them out of the nest. (Think of that **from the perspective of the little bird!** *WHAT ARE YOU DOING...*) The mother bird knows the little bird is ready to fly

**So Gideon divides the men into 3 companies of 100 each**, and gives each one a trumpet, a jar and a torch. NO SWORDS He tells them, “Light your torch and put it in the jar. Then we’re going to line the valley wall, and when I blow my trumpet, each of you are going to blow yours and then smash your jar and raise your torch.”

They waited until, vs. [19]... at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just set the watch. [20] Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they

cried out, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” [21] Every man stood in his place around the camp, and all the army ran. They cried out and fled. [22] ...the LORD set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army.

**So here’s how this worked.** Usually, a **torch and a trumpet signified** a whole battalion. HE PLACES THEM AROUND THE VALLEY...

And the **smashing of the jars** would have sound like hundreds of thousands of swords being raised. So, **in the dark, this wouldn’t have seemed like 300** men, it would have seemed like tens of thousands.

**They did it at the beginning of the middle watch**, which means that 1/3 of the Midianite army was returning into the camp from being on guard duty; 1/3 were getting up to go out on duty; and 1/3 were still fast asleep. Well, just at the moment the Israelites blow their trumpets, smash their jars and all these torches appear. Everyone is groggy, it’s dark, and you have what seems like thousands of soldiers lining the canyon above you. And a bunch of soldiers are coming abck into the camp, **so you assume that these people coming back into the camp are attacking you, and, in the dark, they all kill each other.**

**THE END.** And they all live **happily ever after...** except for the Midianites, of course. But not a single Israelite casualty. WHICH LEADS ME TO LESON 5

## 5. God can turn weakness itself into strength

Now, let me point out **something cool** here... God **never explained** to Gideon how to conduct this battle. Gideon seems to come up with this on his own out of his own **cowardly noggin’**.

**God’s reduction of Gideon’s army forced him to come up with a new plan**, and it was a better plan—because it resulted in a victory that didn’t cause a single Israelite casualty. So Gideon’s weakness actually became the source of his strength.

Often, in weakness, God can reorganize your whole life, for the better! "TELL A BETTER STORY." What he wanted was a fix for this...

## 6. Join Jesus wherever he is

- **Gideon's whole life can be summarized**, to me, as "Join Jesus where he is." IT'S BETTER TO BE WITH JESUS BEFORE THE MOST IMPOSSIBLE ARMY ALL BY YOURSELF THAN TO HAVE THAT MASSIVE ARMY ON YOUR SIDE WITHOUT JESUS.
- **Christian maturity is when you learn to say:** I'll go anywhere with Jesus and wouldn't want to be anywhere without him.
- The mature Christian know **Jesus + nothing = everything.**
- They say, "In Christ, I can give up all that I have because in Christ, I already have all that I need." So the question, God, is where do you want me? I want to be with you.
- "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on God being with them." **Hudson Taylor**
  - **3 stages** to every one of God's work: impossible; difficult; done.
  - **THAT'S WHERE SOME OF YOU ARE. IMPOSSIBLE.**

Well... I'D LOVE to put a period right there and end Gideon's life. Unfortunately, I can't. Gideon's story doesn't end well. At the end of his life, he seems to **get proud**... his power and success go to his head—he starts reading his own press releases.

He starts using his position for personal vendettas.

He makes an idol commemorating his victories and the Israelites start worshipping it too.

## MUSIC

You'll have to **come back for that** next week, but **for right now** I just want to say... the **greatest danger you will ever face** is getting out of a posture of weakness.

- Christians more often than not will pass the test of adversity; it is the **test of prosperity** that they fail.

When you get strong, and think to yourself, "I have all that I need," that's when you fall apart. Never forget where you were when God found you; or the grace he showed to you and how much you owe to that grace...

Beware that **after the greatest spiritual victories you can slide right back down into the hole** from whence you came.

## Conclusion:

**Christianity begins with**, "I'm not righteous enough to save myself." It **continues every day for the rest of your life with**, "I need God's power for every good thing in my life."

**Could I ask you to spend a few moments in the presence of the Holy Spirit? BOW YOUR HEADS**

- Maybe God has been bringing you to a **moment of weakness** and maybe you sense some of what he's been trying to teach you?
  - I'll be your security. I'll be your ever-faithful companion. I'll be your justification and your righteousness. Your glory, the lifter of your head.
- Or **maybe God has delivered you from weakness in the past**, but you realize you've slipped back into a sense of **independence** from God! God is telling you **WAKE UP!** Don't make me do **something drastic**.
- Or **maybe you've never begun** that journey... you've never realized **how hopeless you are** without God.
  - The **two things you can never overcome** on your own are sin and death. You can't release yourself from the curse of sin or deliver yourself from the power of death.
  - Jesus **did both of those for you**. He died in your place suffering the curse for your sin and overcame death for you in his resurrection.

- You have to receive that, **confessing your weakness** and **acknowledging that Jesus** did for you what you couldn't do for yourself and receiving it from as a gift.
- Have you ever done that? *Would you like to?*

Pray a **prayer like this**: *“Jesus, I confess I cannot save myself and you must do that. I give my whole life to you.”*