

## Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/10/2000 Brad Brandt

### Judges 6:25-40 "Getting Serious about God"\*\*\*

Proposition: We learn how to get serious about God by examining Gideon in Judges 6:25-40. Getting serious for God involves two key steps.

#### I. Step #1: Get rid of rivals (25-32).

##### A. Here's what God said to Gideon (25-26).

1. We need to remove what displeases God (25).
2. We need to replace it with what pleases God (26).

##### B. Here's what Gideon did (27).

1. He struggled with fear.
2. He obeyed.

##### C. Here's what happened as a result (28-32).

1. Gideon was attacked (28-30).
2. Gideon was defended (31).
3. Gideon was delivered (32).

#### II. Step #2: Get ready for battle (33-40).

##### A. God allowed an enemy to come (33).

1. Sometimes when we obey, things get better.
2. At other times, they get worse.

##### B. God recruited Gideon for service (34-35).

##### C. God reassured Gideon of His promise (36-40).

1. God may use a fleece.
2. God wants us to live by faith, not by a fleece.

Implications: If we're serious about God...

1. We'll get rid of all rivals to God.
2. We'll get serious about obeying God.
3. We'll realize our desperate need for God.
4. We'll be ready to see God work.

Recently I ran across the following story involving the world famous Polish piano maestro, Ignace Paderewski. Here's the story, as told by Rick Bartosik:

"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-starved audience was horrified. As they heard the simple tune, the crowd responded first with stone-cold silence, then murmuring, and finally a few shouts.

"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?"

The tinkling notes and the commotion reached the ears of Paderewski backstage. When he figured out 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 Paderewski 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.

Last week we began a new series on the life of Gideon, entitled "The Original Ordinary Guy." The story of Gideon is not so much a story about Gideon as it is a story about *God*, and what God can do to accomplish His purposes using ordinary people.

In Judges 6 God chose Gideon to rescue His people from the oppression of the Midianites. Why Gideon? That's what Gideon wanted to know when the angel of the Lord approached him, his first words being, "But sir (13)."

It wasn't because of Gideon's courage that God chose Him. Nor his convictions or connections. Gideon, indeed, was a very ordinary person. Yet he had one thing in his favor that qualified him for the task. *God*. What qualified Gideon for service is the same thing that qualifies unlikely servants like us. It's *God*.

Last time we looked at Gideon's call to the ministry in the first half of Judges 6. 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 the connecting section, we see what God did to get His man ready for service.

And here's the first lesson Gideon needed to learn—and so do we. If we want to be used of God, we need to get *serious about God*. I'm convinced that right here is the number one reason a lot of people feel so stale and weak in their Christian lives. They're not *serious* about God.

Are you serious about God? You say, "I'm not sure. What does it mean to be serious about God? And how can I tell if I am?" We'll find the answers to those questions by looking at what God did next with Gideon in Judges 6:25-40. Getting serious for God involves two key steps.

### I. Step #1: Get rid of rivals (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. Here's what God said to Gideon (25-26). "That same night the LORD said to him, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. 26 Then build a proper kind of altar to the LORD your God on the top of this height. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering.""

The text states that this happened, "That same night." Which night? The night after the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and called Gideon into service. The night after Gideon built an altar to the Lord as an expression of his surrender to the Lord (24). *That* night the Lord spoke to Gideon.

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.

What did the Lord tell Gideon to do? In essence, the same thing we must do if we want to be used of God. First...

1. *We need to remove what displeases God (25).* In Gideon's case what needed to go? God's commands were very specific.

One, take the second bull from your father's herd. Whose bull was it? It was Gideon's father's bull. It was also a seven year old bull. What's significant about the age of the animal? According to verse 1, it was seven years earlier—the year this bull was born—that God gave the Israelites into the hands of 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."

God's second command was very pointed and personal. "Gideon, tear down the altar to Baal, *your father's* altar. Tear it down along with the Asherah pole [KJV "grove"]. Those abominations must go."

Baal, of course, was the god of the Canaanites. He was believed to give fertility to the womb, and all sorts of immoral practices accompanied his worship—including prostitution and child sacrifice. God had specifically told His people to get rid of Baal worship when they entered the Promised Land.

But they didn't listen. In fact, the attraction of Baal plagued God's people for centuries (see 2:13). Apparently, even Gideon's own father had succumbed. God told Gideon, "Tear down *your father's altar* to Baal."

Ponder the implication of those words. If we're going to get serious about God, then we must eliminate all rivals to God, even if those rivals are promoted by our family. Please realize that family loyalty is *not* to be our highest loyalty. Loyalty to *God* is.

For some people—including Christians—family becomes god. What family says, in practical terms, is more important than what God says.

Yes, God is pro-family. He designed the family. He wants us to make our families priority over work and recreation and pleasure. But know this. Though God is pro-family, first and foremost He is *pro-God*. That is, He is passionate about His glory. He created us to live for His glory, honor and pleasure.

Should family be a priority to us? Yes, but not our highest priority. "Seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33)." Listen to Jesus' words in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."

Is Jesus saying we should actually *hate* our families? Obviously not. His point is that if we're going to be His disciple, He must be number one. He must have our undivided allegiance. We must get rid of all rivals—including family.

To be straightforward, sometimes our allegiance to God will put a strain on family relationships. If we take God's Word seriously, it may offend those who don't. So what should we do, *not* obey God so we can maintain peace in the family?

Should we miss church when our family schedules a reunion on Sunday, or should we say, "You know how much I love you, but Jesus Christ is my Lord. Sunday is the Lord's Day, and worshiping the Lord is my greatest priority in life. I hope you'll understand, but I'll be a little late getting to the reunion."?

Too often, God takes the back burner in our lives. "Oh, He'll understand," we convince ourselves. Listen. If we're going to put God first, we must begin at home.

For Gideon, getting serious about God involved tearing down his father's altar. It was a matter of pleasing God or pleasing family. He was either going to deal with a sin issue in his family, or overlook it for the sake of peace.

God gave Gideon quite a test, didn't He? But it's no different for us if we really want to be used of God. First, we need to remove what displeases God. Then...

2. *We need to replace it with what pleases God (26)*. In Ephesians 4 terminology, we must "put off" and then "put on." Remove, then replace.

God told Gideon to tear down the Baal altar, but he wasn't to stop there. He told him to build a "proper kind of altar," an altar *to the Lord your God*. And then he was to offer the bull as a burnt offering, using the Asherah poll for firewood.

In so doing, Gideon would make a statement—to his family and his countrymen. No more business as usual. We must take steps to honor and obey God. It's time to start taking God seriously again.

The fact that God told Gideon to offer this sacrifice—though Gideon didn't even belong to the tribe of Levi—shows how abnormal and out of whack things were in Gideon's day.

Notice that God told Gideon to bring a specific kind of offering, a *burnt offering*. That's significant. The Mosaic Law prescribed several types of offerings. Why does God authorize a *burnt* offering here?

Answer this. What had Gideon's people done? According to verse 1, they'd *sinned*. And what do sinners need? They need forgiveness, *God's* forgiveness, don't they? And what is the basis of God's forgiveness?

Don't miss this. The basis of God's forgiveness is *atonement*. One being dies so that another may live. That's the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

Do you remember what did Noah did immediately after he got off the ark? He built an altar to the Lord and

sacrificed *burnt offerings* on it.

You say, "Just what was a *burnt offering*?" God's Word explains in Leviticus 1:3-4, "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. He is to lay 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.

Beloved, this is radical stuff. If we're serious about pleasing God, then everything in our lives that displeases God must go. Everything.

There's no such thing as "easy believism" in the Bible. If you want to be used of God, you must get rid of all sin, of *all rivals* to God. That includes false gods. That includes loyalty to family that supercedes loyalty to God. We need to remove what displeases God and replace it with what pleases Him.

That's what God asked of Gideon. How did he respond? Scene #2...

B. Here's what Gideon did (27). "So Gideon took ten of his servants and did as the LORD told him. But because he was afraid of his family and the men of the town, he did it at night rather than in the daytime."

At this point you may be thinking, "Wow, if that's what it takes to be used of God, I'm not sure I have what it takes. Maybe you have to be a super-saint to qualify for God's service."

This is what I love about the story of Gideon. God used Gideon, but he was no "super-saint." He was just like us in so many ways, and the Bible doesn't hide his weaknesses. How did Gideon respond to God's command? I see two responses in verse 27.

1. *He struggled with fear.* Fear of whom? The text says he was afraid of his family and of the men of the town. Right here is perhaps the #1 factor that keeps people from obeying God often. The fear of man. For Gideon, it was the fear of family and the fear of community. That's another way of saying Gideon struggled with peer pressure.

Dear friend, it's okay to struggle. Gideon struggled. But he didn't collapse in the struggle. Rather...

2. *He obeyed.* He recruited ten men and did exactly what the Lord asked him to do. Granted he struggled with fear, and granted he did it at night, *but he did it!* He obeyed. And why did he obey? Because he wanted to please God.

Do you have to be a super-saint to be used of God? No. You just have to be *obedient*.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Way to go, Gideon! Good job for obeying God rather than yielding to your fears! Most of our fears don't materialize anyway."

They did for Gideon! What Gideon feared actually happened. Don't get the idea that the obedient life is the problem-free life. No way. We've seen what God said to Gideon, and what Gideon did. Now scene #3...

C. Here's what happened as a result (28-32). Three things happened to Gideon.

1. *Gideon was attacked (28-30)*. "In the morning when the men of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar! 29 They asked each other, "Who did this?" When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it." 30 The men of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

So the next morning came, and Gideon's nighttime deed was discovered. The townspeople saw the destroyed altar of Baal and the newly built altar, and they were hot!

"Who did this?" they wanted to know. They conducted an investigation and soon found the answer. As commentator Arthur Cundall observes, "A secret known to ten men is no secret."

It's interesting that though Gideon committed the deed, the men of the town demanded an accounting from Joash, Gideon's father (30). Why? Because for starters, the "crime" involved Joash's bull and Joash's altar. And furthermore, in the Bible a man is responsible for what happens in his home.

The crowd demanded Joash bring out his son for execution. That was the first thing that happened to Gideon. He was attacked—by the way, just like we may be if we get serious about obeying God. Don't expect the world to applaud godliness! Secondly...

2. *Gideon was defended (31)*. "But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar."

Joash had a mob on his hands. The NIV says a "hostile crowd" was "around him." The KJV says he spoke to the people that "stood against him."

I'm impressed by Joash's response. Apparently, the Lord used Gideon's obedience to jolt his father out of spiritual lethargy. In fact, Gideon's actions had the opposite effect on his dad than what he had feared.

Joash responded to the crowd with two questions and two statements. The questions—are you going to stand up for Baal? Are you going to try and save Baal? And the statements—whoever fights for Baal is the one that's going to die, not my son! And if Baal really is a god, let him defend himself.

Joash has a point, doesn't he? Why be loyal to a dead god? It's not a crime to eliminate vain religion. The person who's committing the crime is the person who wants to defend a dead, empty piece of wood called a "god."

In essence, Joash is saying to his people, "Look at the facts! We're in trouble. We've been living in caves and cowering in fear for seven years. Yet here you are wanting to maintain business as usual. No! It's time to change! Baal hasn't been helping us, and indeed, he can't even help himself!

Cundall's insight is worth pondering, "If this advice had been followed by the devotees of the world's religions, not excepting many who claimed to be Christians, the world would have been spared a great deal of torture, bloodshed, and untold misery."

It's sad, isn't it? People are loyal to their religion even if it's vain and empty. Thirdly...

3. *Gideon was delivered (32)*. "So that day they called Gideon "Jerub-Baal," saying, "Let Baal contend with him," because he broke down Baal's altar."

The people call Gideon, "Jerub-Baal," which means, "Let Baal contend." And so the life of Gideon became a living challenge to Baal.

That's quite a change, isn't it? One minute the people are calling for Gideon's execution. The next they're giving him a new name, in essence, treating him like a hero of sorts. Can't you hear them? "Yea, Joash is right. Way to go Gideon!" Crowds are fickle.

I'm intrigued by Gideon's silence here. The book of Judges doesn't present him as a courageous, mighty hero. He's like most of us. Ordinary. But he belonged to an extraordinary God who fought his battles for him.

It's the "ADD" principle. Gideon was attacked, defended, and then delivered—because God was taking care of Him.

If you want to see God do that in your life, you must choose, as Gideon did, to take God seriously. How? Start with step #1—Get rid of all rivals to God. Then...

## II. Step #2: Get ready for battle (33-40).

Or to put it another way, getting serious about God involves *purity*—getting rid of rivals, and *preparation*—getting ready for battle. Both are needed. Purity—A holy God will not bless and use an unholy vessel. And preparation.

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

A. God allowed an enemy to come (33). "Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel."

The enemy has arrived just as it had for the previous seven years—to rob the Israelites of their crops. And not just the Midianites. This time the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples have joined forces.

What's happening? You say, "Things aren't looking too good for Gideon and his people." But that's a matter of perspective, isn't it? The fact is, things are happening right according to plan, God's plan. God allowed this enemy to come.

Have you noticed this? Sometimes...

1. *Sometimes when we obey, things get better. But...*

2. *At other times, they get worse.* In fact, sometimes when we obey God He allows things to get a whole lot worse before they get better.

In Gideon's case, 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 recruited Gideon for service (34-35). Here's how. "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. 35 He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them."

Now that Gideon has removed the rival gods, he and his people are ready to experience the real thing—God Himself. *The Spirit of the Lord* came upon Gideon.

In Old Testament times, when the Spirit of God came upon people, it was usually in preparation for a special act of service. So here.

Notice that God took the initiative. He allowed the enemy to come, and then He sent His Spirit to "come upon" Gideon. The Hebrew literally means that the Spirit of the Lord "put Gideon on" like a garment. C. J. Goslinga explains, "In the Hebrew phrase...the man is conceived as the garment in which the Spirit envelops Himself, the instrument that He makes use of." In other words, 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?

After the Spirit came upon Gideon, what did he do? First, he blew a trumpet to summon the Abiezrites. Who were they? Gideon's own clan—he was an Abiezrite (11).

Then he broadened his invitation, sending messengers to these four tribes—Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. Why these tribes? Because these four northern tribes were the ones affected by the Midianite invasion.

And 32,000 men responded to the call (see 7:3). Then came phase 3...

C. God reassured Gideon of His promise (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: "Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised."

Stop there. Please notice that Gideon knew what God promised. He says so. "If you will save Israel by my hand *as you have promised*." Gideon didn't lack information—he knew what God said. He lacked assurance. So he devised a test for God.

Verse 37, "Look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said." 38 And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew -- a bowlful of water."

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

Verses 39-40, "Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew." 40 That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew."

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?" Some say we should.

Recently I heard a missionary candidate talk about how they determined their field of service. The person shared, "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!"

Shortly after that testimony I heard another missionary candidate share about his search for God's will. He said, "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. They seek a sign, and there shall no sign be given it, but 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 mention two considerations.

1. *God may use a fleece.* In his patience He did with Gideon. But even that doesn't condone such a practice for us.

In fact, by Gideon's own admission the fleece was his 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 longsuffering, He may use a fleece—indeed, He can do whatever He wants to do.

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. Bargain with God. Ask God for signs." No, this is the point. God is a great God! He's so great He can use unlikely candidates (like us) 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?

My challenge is this. Take God at His Word. Live by faith, not by a fleece.

Back to our original question. Are you serious about God? We've looked at Gideon today, but now let's make it personal. Here are four evidences of a person who *is* serious about God.

Implications: If we're serious about God...

1. *We'll get rid of all rivals to God.* What are the rivals to God, the idols, in your life? 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.

Your rival may be a sinful thing—an ungodly habit, or attitude, or aspiration. Will you forsake it today? If we're serious about God, we must. Secondly, if we're serious about God...

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!