*Several years ago, there was a movie called the 300. It was a retelling of the historic account of the Battle of Thermopylae which took place around 480 BC. King Leonides and his 300 Spartan warriors made a last stand against the 400,000 strong Persian army of King Xerxes. When Xerxes ordered Leonides to surrender his weapons he gave the famous reply that has been repeated through the centuries "You want them? - Come and get them!"*

*Though they faced an overwhelming enemy, Greek morale was high. It was written that when one Spartan soldier was informed that the Persian arrows would be so numerous as "to blot out the sun", he responded “So much the better, we shall fight in the shade.” It is estimated that over 20,000 Persians were killed before Leonides was betrayed and he was killed.*

*This story has been told in many different ways over the years, in paintings, books and movies. There is something compelling about it. Bravery in the face of hopelessness. Like Custer’s last stand or “remember the Alamo” we picture ourselves standing strong in the face of an unbeatable foe. The only thing I don’t like about this story is the ending. What if, in true Hollywood fashion, instead of being defeated and dying – they had won! What if the 300 had beaten the 400,000?*

*Centuries before the Battle of Thermopylae there was a similar battle that involved 300 brave men against a seemingly unbeatable foe. However, this time there was a very different outcome, and the outcome was different because God was on their side.*

If you remember from two weeks ago, the Israelites cried out to God because of their oppression by the Midianites, so God sent them a prophet who reminded them of His previous acts of deliverance – but the prophet also pointed out that they had disobeyed God yet again. They were their own worst enemy. They are in the cycle we talked about – disobedience, disaster, deliverance. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, and gave him the overwhelming task of delivering Israel from their enemies. *God was not looking for the bravest man, or the greatest warrior, or the most skilled – God was looking for an ordinary man who would depend upon Him – who would trust Him for guidance and strength.* Gideon protested at first, but after some assurance and a sign, Gideon eventually surrendered to God and to the task given to him. This leads us to **verses 33-35**.

**33Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the sons of the east assembled themselves; and they crossed over and camped in the valley of Jezreel. 34So the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. 35He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, and they also were called together to follow him; and he sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and they came up to meet them.**

It’s that time of the year again, and for the eighth year, the Midianites, the Amalekites, and others have joined in for their yearly jamboree to raid and ravage the land of Canaan, but unbeknownst to them, things are different because the Israelites have cried out to God. So, the Holy Spirit came upon Gideon, and he was compelled to blow the trumpet – probably from the top of Mount Gilboa, summoning his fellow-Israelites to battle.

Well, 32,000 Israelites showed up from far and wide, which is a miracle in itself because who was Gideon that he could muster an army of any size? He’s a nobody, but apparently God was also stirring in other men as well. So, from his elevated mountain top position, Gideon was able to look out upon the Jezreel Valley to see the size of the opposing army. And although it’s not stated here, in **Chapter 8**, the enemy’s numbers were approximately 135,000 strong.

What do you think was going through Gideon’s mind as he looked out at this enormous enemy? He was likely terrified as we would be. The odds were clearly stacked against them, his men were not used to war, they had received no special training, they likely had a shortage of weapons – and oh by the way, Gideon has the added pressure of leading these men. So, if we put ourselves in Gideon’s shoes, it’s not that difficult for us to understand what prompts our next few verses.

**36Then Gideon said to God, “If You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken, 37behold, I will 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 will know that You will deliver Israel through me, as You have spoken.” 38And it was so. When he arose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he drained the dew from the fleece, a bowl full of water. 39Then Gideon said to God, “Do not let Your anger burn against me that I may speak once more; please let me make a test once more with the fleece, let it now be dry only on the fleece, and let there be dew on all the ground.” 40God did so that night; for it was dry only on the fleece, and dew was on all the ground.**

Although God was clearly working in his life, Gideon was still struggling in his faith, and still reluctant to take God at His word. If you recall from the encounter with the angel of the Lord, Gideon was given a clear sign that the One who had given him this task was the One true God. God had told Gideon that he was not alone, and that by God’s power, he would be victorious. Gideon knew *what* was said and he knew *Who* said it; but now, after seeing the enemy, it’s gotten really real. It’s gone beyond a mere discussion to an in-your-face, life and death reality. It’s very serious now. *“Lord, I trust You, but…I just don’t trust you enough.”*

So, Gideon wants another sign and God graciously gives it to him – matching each doubt and fear with reassurance. Placing a fleece of wool on the ground overnight, the next morning the fleece was wet and the ground was dry as Gideon requested. Then Gideon presses his luck and reverses the test asking that the fleece be dry and the ground be covered with dew, and God does so.

* I do want to say something before we go any further. Most of us have probably tested God like this in some form or fashion – I know I have, but this should not be considered the norm for us as believers.

Although God can do what He wants and He can reveal His will in any way He chooses, we shouldn’t routinely depend on these types of experiences for guidance in our lives. As believers, we have the written word of God to help us to discern God’s will, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us, and we have godly people to counsel us. And when it comes to Gideon, I want to point out that he was not seeking guidance here. He was already given clear guidance. Gideon was looking for faith to confirm that God would do what He said He would do.

Now on a positive note, Gideon is not proud, or arrogant, or over confident in his own abilities. Gideon is scared to death and clinging desperately to God – and although it can very unnerving and stressful, that’s not a bad place to be.

Let’s move into **Chapter 7**.

**1Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley. 2The Lord said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’ 3Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.’” So, 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained.**

While Gideon was worrying about being overmatched by 135,000 enemy warriors, God knew the true battle was not with these enemy warriors – but with Israel’s attitude. God could give His people instant victory with the snap of His finger, but that wouldn’t change the hearts of His people. God knew their hearts were far from Him – that was their real problem. God knew His people weren’t dependent upon Him, they weren’t trusting Him, and He knew their prideful hearts would take credit for any victory they experienced, so God commanded Gideon to invite all who were afraid to go home, and 2/3rds took Gideon up on his offer.

Gideon’s army has now been whittled down to 10,000 men, 10,000 lean-mean-fighting-machines who are ready to rumble, but there is a slight problem – there are still too many of them.

**4Then the Lord said to Gideon, “The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore, it shall be that he of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go with you; but every one of whom I say to you, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.” 5So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, “You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink.” 6Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people kneeled to drink water. 7The Lord said to Gideon, “I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home.” 8So the 300 men took the people’s provisions and their trumpets into their hands. And Gideon sent all the other men of Israel, each to his tent, but retained the 300 men; and the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.**

So, in **verse 4**, a second test was given. God tells Gideon to take his men down to the water and let them drink. He was to weed out any man who stuck his face down into the water to drink; but to keep the ones who ladle the water to their mouths with their hands. Gideon must have gulped hard when he counted how many were disqualified: 9700 were out, leaving only 300 men.

Can you imagine how Gideon felt? Gideon was now down to 300 men who just so happened to drink properly – and for you math wizards, that is a 450 to 1 ratio of warriors. God created this impossible situation where the odds were so stacked against them that Gideon and his 300 had no other choice but to trust and depend upon God for victory. That’s where God wanted Gideon and his 300 to be, and that’s where God wants us as well. But let’s be very honest, we do not like these situations – at all, not a single one of us – but this is where we learn to trust God, this is where are faith is strengthened, and this is where the victories are won.

**9Now the same night it came about that the Lord said to him, “Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hands. 10But if you are afraid to go down, go with Purah your servant down to the camp, 11and you will hear what they say; and afterward your hands will be strengthened that you may go down against the camp.” So, he went with Purah his servant down to the outposts of the army that was in the camp.**

The Lord wanted Gideon and his 300 men to attack the enemy camp at night, but first God had to deal with the fear that still persisted in Gideon’s heart. Once again, we see a Heavenly Father still reassuring Gideon, but in no way does God minimize the danger or weaken the opposition they will face. So, God tells Gideon to take his servant with him and sneak down to the enemy’s camp and just listen.

**12Now the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the sons of the east were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. 13When Gideon came, behold, a man was relating a dream to his friend. And he said, “Behold, I had a dream; a loaf of barley bread was tumbling into the camp of Midian, and it came to the tent and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat.” 14His friend replied, “This is nothing less than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; God has given Midian and all the camp into his hand.” 15When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he bowed in worship. He returned to the camp of Israel and said, “Arise, for the Lord has given the camp of Midian into your hands.”**

It was no accident that the man dreamed the dream that night; no accident that he told his friend about it at just that moment; and it was no accident that Gideon came to the exact place where he overheard the man telling the dream.

In the dream, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian. Only the very poor and animals ate barley bread. The dream meant that the camp of the Midianites would be knocked over by a humble nobody – and that nobody was mentioned by name – Gideon, and let’s consider the humor of their dream. What destroys the tent of Midian? Not a hurricane, a cyclone, an earthquake, a tornado, a brush fire, a plague, a rockslide, a bolt of lightning, a tidal wave, or an avalanche. No, it is a barley bun – and not a big, oversized bun, either. Think of a bagel.

As you might imagine, this encouraged Gideon to know that his enemies were afraid of *him –* a nobody. God used this situation to build the faith of Gideon, and it worked so well that all Gideon could do was to bow in worship of God.

Okay, now it’s time to hear God’s battle plan for the first time.

**16He divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers. 17He said to them, “Look at me and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 18When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp and say, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’”**

Okay, finally God explains the plan to Gideon. Gideon finally gets the details, and now he has to go back and tell his men what they are going to do.

*“OK, guys. Here's the plan. It’s going to be a night raid. We're all going to take a trumpet in one hand and a torch with a jar over it in the other hand. We're going to split up into three groups of a hundred and surround 135,000 soldiers. When I give you the signal, blow the trumpet, break the jar, wave the torch, and shout, 'Victory for God and for Gideon!' as loud as you can. And why mention my name you ask? Because they are already terrified of me. Okay, let’s go. It’s going to be fun!*

**19So Gideon and the hundred men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, when they had just posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and smashed the pitchers that were in their hands. 20When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!” 21Each stood in his place around the camp; and all the army ran, crying out as they fled. 22When they blew 300 trumpets, the Lord set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-meholah, by Tabbath. 23The men of Israel were summoned from Naphtali and Asher and all Manasseh, and they pursued Midian.**

The attack commenced with the blowing of the trumpets – all 300 of them. Now that would have been some wakeup call! Looking out beyond their campfires into the darkness, the sentries would have seen nothing. Then, suddenly, 300 torches would have appeared all around the camp and there was only one conclusion the enemy could reach: “*We’re surrounded!”* And indeed, they were surrounded. But what they could not see is that there was no great army, there was no one standing behind the torch-bearers, ready to attack. And due to their fear and panic, the enemy assumed that Gideon’s army (whom they could not see) was among them, and so they began wildly fighting each other.

Now while this was happening, the 300 just stayed put in their surrounding circle and allowed God to destroy the enemy. At some point in time, the terrified enemy, those who were still alive, fled and the 300 attacked from the rear, chasing down the enemy with the help of the other Israelites who were previously let go.

It’s a great story, and I want draw some thoughts from it. Does God test our faith? Absolutely – but why? Does God test us so He can learn if our faith in Him is real or not? No, He already knows. God tests our faith so we will know if our faith in Him is real or we are just playing games. Do I really trust Him? I need to know. I like what Warren Wiersbe says. He says, *“A faith that can’t be tested – can’t be trusted.”*

And as I have said before, we don’t place our faith in faith. I have heard people say, *“If I just had faith. If I just had more faith,”* but it’s not so much about our faith as it is about who our faith is in. It’s about the object of our faith, and our faith has to be in God. This is what Gideon and the 300 had to learn. This is what we have to learn and this is why we are tested by Him, to deliberately bring us to the point where we know we can trust Him and obey Him without reservation and without hesitation.

We face many challenges and hardships in this life, and some of you are up to your neck in them – but when we come to that place where we really trust that God is on our side, as Gideon and his 300 had to learn, life’s challenges and hardships can be seen in an entirely different light.

*A son is telling his mother how everything is going wrong, he's struggling with algebra, his girlfriend broke up with him, and his best friend is moving away.*

*Meanwhile, his mother is baking a cake and asks her son if he would like a snack, and the son says, "Sweet, I love your cake Mom."*

*"Here honey, have some cooking oil," his mother offers.*

*"Gross" says her son.*

*"How about a couple raw eggs?"*

*"That’s nasty, Mom!"*

*"Would you like some flour then? Or maybe baking soda?"*

*"Mom, those are all horrible!"*

*To which the mother replies: "Yes, all those things seem bad all by themselves. But when they are put together in the right way at the right time, they make a wonderfully delicious cake!*

In some respects, Gideon was given cooking oil, and raw eggs, and baking soda, which made no sense and caused doubts in Gideon, but God knew what He was doing and baked a cake. That’s how God works. Many times, we wonder why He would let us go through such challenging and difficult hardships, but God knows that when He puts these things together – in His order and in His timing and according to His purposes, they always work for the greater good.

Does this make the challenges and hardships any easier? Not necessarily, it didn’t for Gideon – but there is this quiet confidence and a peace that passes all understanding that can be had in the midst of our circumstances when we come to *know* Him more, when we come to *trust* that God is really in on our side, and when we wholeheartedly *obey* what He has clearly told us to do.

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