

STRENGTH PERFECTED IN WEAKNESS

Judges 7:1-16

Paradox—a true statement that unites two apparently conflicting ideas, or that seems to deny the fact by the very terms in which it is asserted. A number of these statements are found in Scripture:

Only God's slaves enjoy true freedom. We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake

God exalts those who are humble. Those who let go of their possessions possess all things.

Another biblical paradox: ***God's strength is revealed in our weakness.***

It's not when God's people are strong that God's power is seen.

It's when our abilities are exhausted, that God's strength is made perfect.

One example of God's plan working this way is **Gideon**

During the next few weeks we're going to consider several

very human people that God chose to use: #1 = GIDEON

—one of the great people of faith, lined up in that "*great cloud of witnesses*" in Heb. 11.

He's included in the list in verse 32: *And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about **Gideon**, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets,*

Gideon demonstrates how

a coward becomes strong by trusting God in the midst of adversity.

LIBERATION FROM MIDIAN Judges 6-8

Condition described 6:1-10

Cycle: Prosperity → Disobedience → Discipline → Dependence → Deliverance → Prosperity

Israel *again* does evil and suffers from Midianites for 7 years. **6:1-10**

The Midianites ravage the land, destroy their crops and their cattle, until Israel finally calls out to God for help.

God calls Gideon to lead His people out of oppression **6:11-24**

Gideon is a frightened young man, threshing wheat in a winepress to keep Midianites from spotting him and stealing his wheat. **6:11, 12**

Gideon struggles with the plight of his people. *"How can God be with us when everything is going wrong around us?"* **6:13**

God tells Gideon that HE's the one who will change things—who will show them that God is still with them—"YOU deliver them!" **6:14**

Gideon feels totally inadequate for the job! **6:15**

He's from Manasseh—not especially noted for fighting ability.

He's from the weakest clan in Manasseh.

He's the weakest among those of his clan! *This is a hopeless case!*

Gideon will never accomplish God's mission if he focuses on the odds against him! NEVER!

God's response: **6:16**

God doesn't assure him that **Gideon** is adequate!

God assures him that **HE** will be with him.

HE is the One who is Adequate!

God is there. "Focus on ME!"

Gideon seeks evidence that God is really in this! 6:17-24

He doesn't trust himself! Maybe this is wishful thinking! **6:17, 20-21**

God clearly demonstrates that HE is in this. 6:22-24

Gideon is convinced that he has just met face to face with God!

Gideon destroys Baal's altar in Israel 6:25-32

Now God has a little test for Gideon! **6:25-26**

Tear down your father's altar to the Baals.

Build a proper altar to Yahweh.

Gideon does what he's told—but he does it at night! **6:27** He's still afraid!

When the men of the town try to take action, Gideon's father comes to his senses! **6:30-32**

God's army selected 6:33-7:8

Gideon, controlled by the Spirit, summons troops to follow him. **6:33-35**

Before he's willing to move, he checks in with God one more time.

He wants to be sure! "Give me a sign!" (2X) 6:36-40 **6:36**

To demonstrate that GOD has given them victory, and not Israel's army, the army has to be cut down to such a small size that they could NEVER beat the enemy militarily. **7:2**

32,000 respond to first call (odds are only **4 to 1** against them—that isn't a great enough disadvantage to make clear to them that God has done it!). **7:3**

Those who are afraid are sent home (22,000, leaving only 10,000)

Imagine Gideon's reaction when he looks up and 2/3 of his army is leaving! *"Wait a minute, Lord! I think we blew it!"*

10,000 (vs. 135,000+ now it's a **14:1** edge against them) GOD says it's *still* too many. **7:4**

They still might think they were that much superior!

So another test was imposed, reducing them to 300. **7:5-6**

300 *would be small enough to make the point that God did it! (450:1!!)*
7:7

Side issue: this small army was *TOTALLY COMMITTED!*

300 would *never* take on 135,000 unless they *knew* GOD's on their side.

"Give me 300 committed people before 32,000 uncommitted, frightened people anytime!"

That's true of the church as well!

God isn't into the numbers game. He doesn't suffer from the "success syndrome."

We don't need a mega-church of 5,000 people to make a difference for God.

Gideon's army was pared down from 32,000 to 300 before they were ready to take on the enemy! —then they defeated 135,000 trained soldiers!

That's what we need to make a difference in our community!

Not a church of 32,000 trembling bodies, 300 will do—if we're totally committed to making a difference for God in our city!

God's army victorious 7:9-22

One final proof for Gideon—*In case you're still afraid! [He was!]* **7:9-15**

Gideon wins with 300 men, trumpets, jars, and torches! **7:16, 22**

They turned on each other with their swords!

Midianite army pursued 7:23-8:3

Gideon then calls other Israelites to pursue the fleeing Midianites.

In spite of petty intertribal feuding, the people complete the job.

Results: 8:10-12 8:12

GIDEON'S PROMINENT QUALITIES

1. Gideon has a balanced perspective.

He's conscious of the disastrous situation

He understands the reality

He's conscious of God's power available to resolve the problem.

**2. Gideon knows that victory
Doesn't depend on *his ability*,
Does depend on *God's ability*.**

The battle belongs to the Lord.

It isn't dependent on HIS strength or HIS abilities.

It isn't dependent on how many people are in his army,
or how strong or how skilled they are.

His strength is made perfect in our *weakness*—it's when we're *weak*
that God can show how strong HE is!

3. Gideon *trusts God*—no matter how great the odds against him.

People criticize Gideon for his demand for proof of God's direction.

G. Campbell Morgan warns us not to criticize Gideon "for demanding proof on proof.

He was a man so afraid of himself, that he must have proof on proof; but so sure of God that he was content with 300 men . . . to lead an attack on a great host."

Gideon didn't doubt *God*. He doubted *himself*. *Was he really in tune with God's will?*

That's an important question to answer before you face an army 400 X bigger than yours!

God is big enough to deal with it, but you better be sure that's His plan!

HOW DOES GIDEON'S STORY RELATE TO LIFE IN THE 21ST C.?

Gideon provides a graphic demonstration of the truth Paul presents:

2 Cor. 12:9-10: *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

When our resources are adequate to face our problems, we get the glory.

When we're out of gas, God supplies what we lack—and *HE gets the glory!*

We see this principle applied in many areas of our lives.

1. Our worship

Obvious demonstration to those involved in leading worship—we've learned to joke about.

When we walk into a service feeling we are totally ready—We've done everything right and we're all ready to go, count on a humdrum morning in which God does very little.

I've learned by experience that when everything seems under our control, I get nervous.

God works when everything seems to be *falling apart*; we're in a panic and nothing is coming together.

In our prayer time we turn to God and say "**HELP!**"

THEN, count on *His* work to be accomplished. We sit back and watch HIM do HIS thing!

God's strength is made perfect in weakness!

2. Similarly, the Sunday sermon

When I walk in here on Sunday morning thinking what a great sermon!—nothing happens

It's when I walk in thinking, "what good will ever come out of *this* sermon?" God says, just let me have it and YOU watch ME work! Then,

God's strength is made perfect in my weakness!

3. Church finances

In SLC, God clearly instructed us to build a 46,000 sq. ft. building.

When we were considering how we could afford it, some applied parable of the builder who didn't assess cost and left work unfinished, to warn us of foolishness of starting to build without knowing how we could finish it. We were convinced God had spoken!

The way the illustration is applied contradicts Gideon's story. One resource was God's strength.

We need to know He is with us, that we are walking in His way—then we can count on His strength being made perfect in our weakness.

At the time of building, one of our leaders spoke up: "*I'm glad we can't see any human way to resolve this! We have no other choice but to call out to God and watch Him do it for us! If we could do it ourselves, we wouldn't need GOD!*"

That's His strength made perfect in weakness!

We watched Him provide over a million dollars in giving from within the church.

He increased maximum loan by \$600,000 just for us, and our people gave us another 600,000.

The building stands as a testimony that **God's strength is made perfect in weakness.**

When it came time to move in, we were behind schedule—God worked it out for us to be able to move **the exact day** we had to be out of old building.

We ran out of resources and God provided **\$300,000** in eight weeks.

Later He provided another **\$200,000** we hadn't expected to need in about 6 weeks.

His strength was made perfect in our weakness.

God's strength is *always* made perfect in our weakness—whatever crisis we face, if we recognize our inability and call out to Him

[Main area I want us to look at in Gideon's life is a personal one.

Because what is true in our worship and preaching, what is true in the military realm, what is true in the financial realm, is also true in the *PERSONAL* realm.]

4. Our personal affairs

We tend to think that if God is going to be glorified in our lives, we have to get *our* act together.

We have to be successful in our work. Our family has to turn out all right.

Our children have to look good. Our finances have to be in order.

Our spiritual lives have to be successful—no sin, no failures.

Have we not gotten the point yet?!!!

It's in our *weakness* that God's strength can be seen!

God is glorified when our life is falling apart.

It's when we hit bottom, with no way out that we cry out to Him.

We've seen churches disintegrate—proud about how great we are. God has to wipe out our success to get us to cry out to Him and trust Him to straighten out the mess!

So many people come to me frustrated because they don't have it all together.

"Everyone else looks so good and my life is such a mess!"

A member of a former church often reminded me, it's when people see that we have failed, that we become approachable. Then people turn to us for help.

As long as they think we have our act all together, they will never turn to us, because they can't identify with perfect people. That's not what

their world looks like!

It's when we're trying to pick up the pieces of a ruined mess that we cry out to Him in desperation.

There's no where else to turn.

That's when God says, ***now stand back and watch ME work!***

That's when ***GOD'S STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN OUR WEAKNESS!***

Have YOU learned that lesson yet?

Or are you still trying to be strong?

Are we still trying to make it on our own?

God wants to bring us to the point of weakness, where we realize how much we need Him, so we'll cry out to Him, and stand back and watch HIM work!

=> **"I Need Thee Every Hour"**