

The Gideon Factor

Overcoming Fear through Faith
by Thom Hehl

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Author's Note

I love to use the Message translation of the Bible for its clarity and simplicity; therefore all citations in this book are from the Message Bible unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

A lot of people try to measure themselves up to great people and usually find themselves lacking. This results in a lot of disappointed people.

All people have different levels of giftings as well as different advantages they start with. When “average” people compare themselves with extraordinarily gifted, talented, or advantaged people, this makes them feel inadequate and they say “Why bother? I’ll quit now and save myself some grief. I can’t measure up to these people, so I’ll content myself to live an average life.”

The problem is, there is no such thing as an average life. You were not created to lead an average life. You were custom built for the purpose God intended you with strengths, abilities, talents, and, yes, weaknesses all your own.

As I like to point out, “There is no crescent wrench in God’s toolbox.” You are a custom made tool built to exacting specifications for exactly the purpose God set out for you. The problem is, most people spend so much of their lives selling themselves short that they end up selling God’s purpose short. Their inadequate faith then becomes their inadequate life.

Many people like to use people like Samson or David as prototypes. But Samson was born strong and David born fearless. It’s what they were custom-designed to be. You cannot be Samson or David—that’s not why they’re there. They’re there so you can learn from them.

To “average” people, I like to point out the life of Gideon. Now, here was a guy that wouldn’t make anyone feel inadequate. Yet, in spite of his fear and lack of natural ability, he chose to be obedient to God and, because of his simple obedience, earned a place in the “Faith Hall of Fame” in Hebrews 11.

One of my favorite expressions is “There are no extraordinary people. There are only ordinary people who put their faith in an extraordinary God.” This is truly the life of Gideon, the pattern overcomer for the rest of us.

Chapter One: Understanding the Problem

Yet again the People of Israel went back to doing evil in GOD'S sight. GOD put them under the domination of Midian for seven years. Midian overpowered Israel. Because of Midian, the People of Israel made for themselves hideouts in the mountains—caves and forts. When Israel planted its crops, Midian and Amalek, the easterners, would invade them, camp in their fields, and destroy their crops all the way down to Gaza. They left nothing for them to live on, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. Bringing their cattle and tents, they came in and took over, like an invasion of locusts. And their camels—past counting! They marched in and devastated the country. The People of Israel, reduced to grinding poverty by Midian, cried out to GOD for help.

Judges 6:1-6

Tough spot, huh? The Israelites are backed into a corner and hurting badly. The sad thing is, they don't even really know why.

So many people believe in a God who stands with a whip ready to punish any mistake. They use this scripture and scriptures like this as proof. "Look how God punishes His chosen people for their disobedience," they say.

This is simply not true. With RARE exceptions, God punishes only outright rebellion.

The fact is that most people disobey God out of weakness or stupidity. God loves these people and wants to restore them. Read on.

One time when the People of Israel had cried out to GOD because of Midian, GOD sent them a prophet with this message: "GOD, the God of Israel, says,

I delivered you from Egypt,

I freed you from a life of slavery;

I rescued you from Egypt's brutality and then from every oppressor;

*I pushed them out of your way
and gave you their land.*

And I said to you, "I am GOD, your God. Don't for a minute be afraid of the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living." But you didn't listen to me."

Judges 1:7-10

God is always ready to forgive us. When we disobey his word and set up idols in our lives, God does not punish us unless we are in full-fledged rebellion.

Disobedience, though, places us outside of his protection. "The devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. (I Peter 5:8)" As soon as we step out of God's protection, the devil is always there to pounce and wipe us out.

Lots of us spend our lives feeling sorry for ourselves. We are injured by the devil's attacks and are angry at God for them. The devil loves to catch us up in pity parties.

What we need to realize in these situations is that we are the ones that placed us in a vulnerable situation. God is just waiting to protect us again, but it begins by us beginning to take the idols out of our lives and re-enter God's protection. It is then that we see God show up in his mighty power and deliver us from Satan's power.

This is the story of Gideon. We are about to meet this unlikely hero in unlikely circumstances and see how God uses them to bring about his victory.

Chapter Two: A Hero in Hiding

One day the angel of GOD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, whose son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress, out of sight of the Midianites. The angel of GOD appeared to him and said,

“GOD is with you, O mighty warrior!”

Gideon replied, “With me, my master? If GOD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all the miracle-wonders our parents and grandparents told us about, telling us, ‘Didn’t GOD deliver us from Egypt?’ The fact is, GOD has nothing to do with us—he has turned us over to Midian.”

But GOD faced him directly: “Go in this strength that is yours. Save Israel from Midian. Haven’t I just sent you?”

Gideon said to him, “Me, my master? How and with what could I ever save Israel? Look at me. My clan’s the weakest in Manasseh and I’m the runt of the litter.”

GOD said to him, “I’ll be with you. Believe me, you’ll defeat Midian as one man.”

Judges 6:11-16

The author of Judges is now ready to introduce us to the next great hero. The scene is set to show us the mettle of this man Gideon. The curtain rises and where do we find him?

He’s in hiding. He’s covertly threshing grain in his wine press so the Midianites won’t see, and as he pauses in his work and mops the sweat from his brow, he sees a man standing there watching him. A man he didn’t see or hear approach.

“GOD is with you, O mighty warrior!”

“That’s strange,” thinks Gideon, “I thought I was here by myself,” as he looks around him to figure out who this stranger is speaking to. It begins to dawn on him that he is alone. So the man must be talking to him.

He then does what we do. He immediately argues with the man. “God can’t be with me. God doesn’t show up anymore. He did great works for our ancestors but has abandoned us and left us where we are and to our own devices. God is not with me!”

Again the man speaks. “You have strength in you from God Almighty! You’ve called out to God asking him to deliver Israel, so God has sent you to fulfill your own prayers and the prayers of those around you. God is with you and I’m sending you out. Go on now!”

Once more Gideon argues. With Moses he says “Who am I that you would send me? I’m not good at anything.” But God says, “No, no. It’s not because of who you are, it’s because of who I am that you will destroy the enemies in your life.”

Anyone who’s served God more than a few minutes has had a similar conversation with him. We see ourselves pitiful and weak in our own flesh, and indeed

we are, in our own flesh. Fortunately, though, our power does not come from our flesh. It comes from God Almighty.

What has God sent you to do? I know that in your heart you have heard his voice, his direction to do something. You've probably written it off as some silly fantasy. How could little old me accomplish that by myself.

The thing is, you're right. You can't accomplish it by yourself. This is the first and most important lesson. No one can conquer by themselves. We need God's help always.

The second lesson is not to argue with God. God never told anyone to do a thing that they were not supernaturally enabled to do. If God tells you a thing, it means he's made a way for you to be able to pull it off.

There's a movie called "Heaven Can Wait" with Warren Beatty and James Mason. It's not a great movie, but I love it because James Mason plays a veteran angel on assignment. When Warren Beatty's character is freaked out about what's going on, James Mason shows up to encourage him. "There's always a plan," he says.

Will the Real God Please Stand Up?

As I travel around from city to city and from church to church, I meet with hundreds of bodies and see where they are spiritually. I hear them pray, "God, please move."

This never ceases to make me smile. All these people waiting for God to move. I direct them to Genesis and the story of creation.

In the beginning, there's this plan. God wrote it down from cover to cover. He knows everything and, like a good chess player, he sees the whole game in his head before he moves a single piece. He writes down several thousand years of time and designs an intricate pattern in which threads part from others and join in new groups to form a new pattern.

This is why God says to Jeremiah,
*"Before I shaped you in the womb,
I knew all about you.
Before you saw the light of day,
I had holy plans for you:
A prophet to the nations—
that's what I had in mind for you."*

Jeremiah 1:5

And why he was able to write the Lamb's Book of Life ahead of time.

*Everyone on earth whose name was not written **from the world's foundation** in the slaughtered Lamb's Book of Life will worship the Beast."*

Revelation 13:8

*"The beast you saw once was, is no longer, and is about to ascend from the Abyss and head straight for Hell. Earth dwellers whose names weren't written in the Book of Life **from the foundation of the world** will be dazzled when they see the Beast that once was, is no longer, and is to come."*

Revelation 17:8

God takes six days to create the world. He speaks forth the word and things line up, in order, all according to his plan. He sets everything in motion.

Then, on the seventh day, he rests. Many people don't realize the true meaning of this. After the sixth day, God never goes back to work. It's done, completed, as far as he's concerned.

Where God is, there is no time. He created time for us to live in and he created all of it all at once. This is why prophecy is so easy for God to do. He just flips a few pages forward, like an impatient reader with a mystery novel, to tell us how it ends. And his prophecies are always right on the money.

Once God sat down on his throne on the seventh day to rest, that was it. Every other reference in the Bible to seeing God always sees him resting on his throne. He's done his part. The rest he puts into the hands of his servants.

Right now, God has a plan for your life. The plan for an overcomer. How will you respond? Will you argue with what God says for you to do? Or will you obey, saying, "God says so, so there must be a way."

When I move to a new city, people often ask me, "Why are you here?" I tell them, "I don't know. I just followed the cloud." Like the Israelites, I don't know where the cloud goes next. I'm simply content to follow it and know that when I show up, God's plan will begin unfolding in the new place.

When I counsel people, I hear them sometimes say, "I don't think I can do this." I tell them, "Well, you had the 'don't think' part right anyway." When God speaks to you, don't sit around thinking about what he said. Get up and find a way to begin walking in what he said. It will be hard, but God will make a way where there seems to be none.

Chapter Three: Is that Really you?

Gideon said, "If you're serious about this, do me a favor: Give me a sign to back up what you're telling me. Don't leave until I come back and bring you my gift."

He said, "I'll wait till you get back."

Gideon went and prepared a young goat and a huge amount of unraised bread (he used over half a bushel of flour!). He put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot and took them back under the shade of the oak tree for a sacred meal.

The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and unraised bread, place them on that rock, and pour the broth on them." Gideon did it.

The angel of GOD stretched out the tip of the stick he was holding and touched the meat and the bread. Fire broke out of the rock and burned up the meat and bread while the angel of God slipped away out of sight. And Gideon knew it was the angel of God!

Gideon said, "Oh no! Master, GOD! I have seen the angel of God face to face!"

But GOD reassured him, "Easy now. Don't panic. You won't die."

Then Gideon built an altar there to GOD and named it "GOD'S Peace." It's still called that at Ophrah of Abiezer.

Judges 6:17-24

Gideon said to God, "If this is right, if you are using me to save Israel as you've said, then look: I'm placing a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If dew is on the fleece only, but the floor is dry, then I know that you will use me to save Israel, as you said."

That's what happened. When he got up early the next morning, he wrung out the fleece –enough dew to fill a bowl with water!

Then Gideon said to God, "Don't be impatient with me, but let me say one more thing. I want to try another time with the fleece. But this time let the fleece stay dry, while the dew drenches the ground."

God made it happen that very night. Only the fleece was dry while the ground was wet with dew.

Judges 6:36-40

What's with us, anyway? After we waste time arguing with God about how wrong he is and how we're really useless, we are surprised that he doesn't back down.

"This must not be God," we think, "since God would be smart enough to know how useless I am." We question the word over and over again, doubting that God really spoke it at all.

At first, Gideon doubts that this man is really from the Lord, so the Lord convinces him. He sends fire to burn up the sacrifice.

Today, God's word is always accompanied by fire. A fire that burns in our hearts, like it did in Luke 24:32, "Didn't we feel on fire as he conversed with us on the road, as he opened up the Scriptures for us?"

The word fire here is the Greek word *kaio*, meaning kindle, light, set on fire. This was how they felt on the inside. It also means "consume with fire."

God's word, when spoken, will always bear witness with us on the inside. There will be no doubt in our insides about God's word, because it will bear witness with our hearts. "My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)"

Because of the fire, Gideon knew that God had spoken to him. He panics, thinking he'll die as he's seen God's face, for the Lord appears in his word. ("God continued to show up at Shiloh, revealed through his word to Samuel at Shiloh. (I Sam. 3:21)").

Following this experience, Gideon begins moving out (we'll cover this in the next chapter). Then, before long, he's back. He "puts a fleece before the Lord." He not only asks for another sign from God, but, after that miracle, he asks for yet a third sign.

When you read the account with the angel, do you think there was any doubt in Gideon's mind at the time?

"Oh no! Master, GOD! I have seen the angel of God face to face!"

Do these sound like the words of a man who doesn't believe he's seen the angel of God? Why, then, does he turn around and ask for further signs?

Why indeed? God often speaks to us, but, as we learn from the parable of the sewer, the devil has his birds around waiting to steal the seed from our heart before it has a chance to germinate (see Luke 8).

This really will happen to all of us if we don't carefully guard the word that's been given to us. It's so easy, when all hell breaks loose, to forget that we really knew that we heard from the Lord. We begin to doubt. "I made it up," we think, "a figment of my imagination." Ebenezer Scrooge told the ghost of his former partner, Farley, "There is more of gravy than of grave about you."

If the devil can steal the credibility of the word spoken over us, then he can steal our faith in the word and take the word away from us. We say, "was that man really a prophet?" or "is this scripture really for me?" or "I don't think that was really God speaking to my heart."

God tells Habakkuk, "Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. (Hab. 2:2)" The King James says "tablets of stone" but the point is that, when God speaks to you, write it down. Write down, "I know that I heard from the Lord" on the same sheet of paper. When you begin to doubt, go back and look at this. Remind yourself that you really did know that God spoke to you.

What I also tell people is that, when you hear God speak to you, commit quickly. Make a commitment to God's word before doubt has a chance to creep in. If God tells you you're going to learn to play the piano, go buy one the next day. If you're to have a house, end the lease on your apartment. Move swiftly. God wants you to write it down so that "it can be read on the run."

Some people teach that putting a fleece before the Lord is a bad thing. Well, it does show timidity on the part of the listener and doubt in God. From that perspective, it is a bad thing. God, however, is extremely patient. He only becomes angry over studied and repeated rebellion. This is when you see God punish people in the scriptures, and RARELY any other time. Delayed obedience will only cost you time.

Now, let's look at what Gideon did about this word after he confirmed it.

Chapter Four: Housecleaning

That night this happened. GOD said to him, “Take your father’s best seven-year-old bull, the prime one. Tear down your father’s Baal altar and chop down the Asherah fertility pole beside it. Then build an altar to GOD, your God, on the top of this hill. Take the prime bull and present it as a Whole-Burnt-Offering, using firewood from the Asherah pole that you cut down.”

Gideon selected ten men from his servants and did exactly what GOD had told him. But because of his family and the people in the neighborhood, he was afraid to do it openly, so he did it that night.

Early in the morning, the people in town were shocked to find Baal’s altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it chopped down, and the prime bull burning away on the altar that had been built.

They kept asking, “Who did this?” Questions and more questions, and then the answer: “Gideon son of Joash did it.”

The men of the town demanded of Joash: “Bring out your son! He must die! Why, he tore down the Baal altar and chopped down the Asherah tree!”

But Joash stood up to the crowd pressing in on him, “Are you going to fight Baal’s battles for him? Are you going to save him? Anyone who takes Baal’s side will be dead by morning. If Baal is a god in fact, let him fight his own battles and defend his own altar.”

They nicknamed Gideon that day Jerub-Baal because after he had torn down the Baal altar, he had said, “Let Baal fight his own battles.”

Judges 6:25-32

Typically, whenever God speaks to you to do a big thing, he starts talking to you about the little things that need to be done so you can do the big thing. God spoke to Gideon about the idols that had been in his family’s life. This is where God starts with us as well.

You cannot be an overcomer if you haven’t even overcome the idols in your life. Now people rarely erect a statue of a deity in their home and worship it. In our “enlightened” society this would seem ridiculous. No educated person would do that.

What God said, though, is to “Have no other gods before me.” You see, anything that comes between you and God is an idol, period.

It could be that the idol is the television set. Do you “worship” in front of this idol for hours a day? How much of that time could you use towards making a dent in the kingdom of darkness?

Maybe your idol is a piece of glass and steel in the garage. Maybe it’s a relationship with parents or children that is not in the right perspective. Maybe it’s a job or a hobby that takes the place of God in your life. Believe it or not, it can even be church and your commitments there.

Understand, there is nothing intrinsically evil about any of these things. Golf and football are not sin, nor is television or anything else.

“...say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.”

Rom. 14:5

What is important is the attitude of your heart. Anything that stands between you and your God is idolatry. Anything! As with most things with God, there is no black or white answer. Paul says, “each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.”

The only way to tell if a thing is an idol is to ask yourself, “Does this interfere with your relationship with the most high God.” Does it take priority in your life—time away from being with your God?

Paul tells us to pray without ceasing. What he’s talking about is that, as you go about your daily life, your heart should be in continual fellowship with God. This is not difficult, although it takes some practice.

“God’s kingdom isn’t a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness’ sake. It’s what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy (Romans 14:17).” The kingdom is something you take around with you.

Paul calls us “Christ’s Ambassadors.” To understand this, we need to go back to the day before satellite phones and global communications.

In the nineteenth century, an ambassador spoke on behalf of his government. There was no way for a ruler of a government to be in all of the places he needed to be, so he would send an ambassador in his stead.

An ambassador is not subject to the laws in whatever country he is in, but represents the laws of the government he is from. A German ambassador here in the states would only walk on German soil even though he was here in the states. He walks in an envelope of his government wherever he goes. If he were to murder someone, he would have diplomatic immunity here because, in effect, the murder happened on German soil. He could only be deported for the German government to deal with him.

Also, the ambassador is given large amounts of authority to speak on behalf of his government. He can sign treaties and commit his government to all kinds of legally binding agreements. He can even declare war on behalf of his government.

From this picture, then, it is clear what Paul is talking about. In effect, you walk around in an envelope of the kingdom of Heaven wherever you go. People talk about going in and out of the Lord’s presence, but this is a concept left over from the Old Testament.

“I’ll make each conqueror a pillar in the sanctuary of my God, a permanent position of honor...”

Rev 3:12

God desires us to be a fixture in his house. We are made to dwell in God’s presence in everything we do, not to be caught up in the time stream of past, present and future of our everyday lives, but to be caught up in God’s essence and live on the plane of existence he does.

We live in God's presence by keeping our lives in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The devil doesn't want you to be here and will continually assault you to pull you out of one of these three virtues and catch you up in what is going on around you.

You can live in righteousness, peace, and joy while watching television. If while watching television, though, something you see begins to remove one of these elements from your life, or, rather, pull you away from these elements, then it instantly becomes an idol. This is because it is coming between you and the presence of God.

When seen from this perspective, all of us have idols all over the place. If you were to be away from your spouse to play golf all of the time, your spouse would begin to get angry. The same holds true for God and spending time with him. The scriptures say over and over again that God is a jealous God. He doesn't like for his people to spend time with other gods.

Unfortunately, it seems that there is always something in our lives that robs our ability to be in God's presence. The problem is, that, the moment this happens, we become ineffective. To be an overcomer, we must remove these things from our lives permanently.

"How?" you might ask?

Well, the first step is to recognize that the idol is there. Then, if you ask God, he will give you a detailed plan for how to remove this idol from your life. You see the plan he gave Gideon included how many men and how many oxen and the exact order to perform it. He'll do the same for you.

The first step, then, is to turn to God and say, "This thing is in my life and has become sin to me. It has consumed me and I don't know how to get out. Help me to walk away from this."

Then do it. Start walking away from the idol and God will be there to help. Just don't forget that God waits for you to take the first step. He will not show up and grab you out of where you are. You must face up to your problem and start walking. Then, the instant you do, God will show up and make a way where before you could see none. Take the step you can see and then you'll be able to see the next step. Then, instead of not being able to see a way out, you will be out before you realize it.

Fear Not

We see Gideon's fear and how he really is dreading the coming reaction from removing these idols from his life. He knows the groundswell of opposition he will face.

What I really like about Gideon is that he is so timid. He doesn't do these things because he's brave and strong, for, as he points out, there were many braver and stronger than he in Israel. So why did God choose him?

God chose him because he knew that Gideon would obey. It doesn't take bravery or strength to do these things. It simply takes a willingness to do what God said. When we obey, God is our strength and our bravery. This is why Gideon was the overcomer he was.

More than Conquerors

You see, Paul says “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us Romans 8:37 [KJV].” What does it mean to be more than an conqueror?

“I’ve told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I’ve conquered the world.”

John 16:33

Christ says he is a conqueror. He has already fought the battle and won the victory for us. It has already been accomplished.

We are more than conquerors. This is because the battle has already been won.

George Foreman is a professional heavyweight boxer and has been champion of the world. He is also a VERY large man.

He stated in an interview that he understood what it was to be more than a conqueror. After one of his title fights for the championship, he came home with a check for several million dollars. He had successfully conquered his adversary.

His wife met him at the door with her hand out. He quickly handed over the check for his part of the fight.

You see, his wife was more than a conqueror because she didn’t even have to fight the fight. The rewards were hers simply because of her relationship with the conqueror.

In the same way, our relationship with Christ makes us a victor over our adversary. We don’t even have to fight, because Christ has already won the battle.

Now, when it comes time for Gideon to do this, he decides he’s going to do this at night so that he can tear down the idols in his life with no one knowing. This never works. You may as well know going in that there’s going to be trouble the minute you begin to walk away from the traps the devil has laid for you. Since you won’t be able to keep it a secret anyway, you may as well do it in the light of day. It will be hard, but it will be hard anyway, and you may as well score points for bravery.

The next important thing to see is that, when the people came to lynch him, his father stands up and backs him up. Your father, the Lord God Almighty, is on your side. You are no good to him dead, so, when you make your stand and start pitching out idols, God himself will show up and back you up.

My friend Charles points out that, when we were younger, we’d go out for a walk with our mother. At some point, we’d come across a large dog barking fiercely at us, which caused us to be afraid.

Is the normal reaction of a small child to attack the dog? No, the normal child will turn immediately and bury their face in their mother’s skirts and let her deal with the dog.

When we begin to tear down the idols in our lives, the devil will always come at us snarling, trying to scare us off our path. Just remember to turn to the Lord and he will always take your side. The devil will never be able to touch you.

Once we've purged the idols, it's time to begin the big walk.

Chapter Five: Steps of Faith

All the Midianites and Amalekites (the easterners) got together, crossed the river, and made camp in the Valley of Jezreel. GOD'S Spirit came over Gideon. He blew his ram's horn trumpet and the Abiezrites came out, ready to follow him. He dispatched messengers all through Manasseh, calling them to the battle; also to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. They all came.

Jerub-Baal (Gideon) got up early the next morning, all his troops right there with him. They set up camp at Harod's Spring. The camp of Midian was in the plain, north of them near the Hill of Moreh.

GOD said to Gideon, "You have too large an army with you. I can't turn Midian over to them like this—they'll take all the credit, saying, 'I did it all myself,' and forget about me. Make a public announcement: 'Anyone afraid, anyone who has any qualms at all, may leave Mount Gilead now and go home.'" Twenty-two companies headed for home. Ten companies were left.

GOD said to Gideon: "There are still too many. Take them down to the stream and I'll make a final cut. When I say, 'This one goes with you, he'll go. When I say, 'This one doesn't go, he won't go.'" So Gideon took the troops down to the stream.

GOD said to Gideon: "Everyone who laps with his tongue, the way a dog laps, set on one side. And everyone who kneels to drink, drinking with his face to the water, set to the other side." Three hundred lapped with their tongues from their cupped hands. All the rest knelt to drink.

GOD said to Gideon: "I'll use the three hundred men who lapped at the stream to save you and give Midian into your hands. All the rest may go home."

After Gideon took all their provisions and trumpets, he sent all the Israelites home. He took up his position with the three hundred. The camp of Midian stretched out below him in the valley.

Judges 6:33-35, 7:1-8

OK, so we now know that we've heard from God. We've gotten rid of the idols in our lives, we're ready to hit it, right? The army shows up and we're ready to go.

Not so fast!

There's lots of people who take up their gifts and callings and begin to pound after the works of Satan. Soon, they fall into a trap, either sin infiltrates their lives, or they become so arrogant that they are of no use to God.

One of the biggest mistakes made in the church today is to set people in a position based solely on their gifting. As good an idea as this seems, it leads nowhere but to trouble. That's because when people step out in their own talents and natural abilities, they don't see God's hand in it. Soon, they begin talking about *their* ministry and *their* church and *their* dominion. This is why Jesus said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. (Matthew 16:24)"

Before we can walk in our giftings, we have to learn how to not walk in them. Gideon's army was outnumbered over five times, but in God's eyes, they were still too close. They would have said, "Wow! How about that! We beat an enemy five times the size. Aren't we really cool?"

You see, God loves to surprise people. This is what Paul was talking about:

Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies?" That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything that we have—right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. That's why we have the saying, "If you're going to blow a horn, blow a trumpet for God."

I Corinthians 1:26-31

God doesn't need your gifts and talents. He can give gifts and talents to anyone. As John the Baptizer told the Pharisees,

And do not think you can say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Matthew 3:9 [NIV]

In fact, our natural talents and abilities usually form the greatest obstacle to the service of the Lord. The pride that comes out of them prevents God's ability to work in lives.

When Jesus called the disciples, he picked from the fisherman and tax collectors—the lower class. Jesus loves the underdog for, when they become overcomers, God is the one that gets the glory. God loves to stack the deck against us to show us how powerful he is.

This is what's going on with Gideon. God makes the battle as one-sided as possible to demonstrate his power instead of ours. This way no one can possibly glory in themselves for only God can do the impossible.

Let this be a lesson to us. The more unlikely we are to be God's tool in a situation in our own eyes, the more likely we are to be that tool in God's eyes. The very weaknesses you think make you unworthy are the very things God put in your life to show forth his glory.

*Because of the extravagance of those revelations and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given **the gift of a handicap** to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me,*

*“My grace is enough; it’s all you need.
My strength comes into its own in your weakness.”*

Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ’s strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Chris take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.

I Corinthians 12:7-9

Every obstacle you see in your path was put there for your own humility. Most of them, God will take away. Some of them he may not just to keep you humble. These are the things that teach you to be an overcomer and make you the person God wants you to be! Praise God for them!

Once you do this, you’re truly ready for the next level.

Chapter Six: High Gear

That night, GOD told Gideon: “Get up and go down to the camp. I’ve given it to you. If you have any doubts about going down, go down with Purah your armor bearer; when you hear what they’re saying, you’ll be bold and confident.” He and his armor bearer Purah went down near the place where sentries were posted. Midian and Amalek, all the easterners, were spread out on the plain like a swarm of locusts. And their camels! Past counting, like grains of sand on the seashore!

Gideon arrived just in time to hear a man tell his friend a dream. He said, “I had this dream—A loaf of barley bread tumbled into the Midianite camp. It came to the tent and hit it so hard it collapsed. The tent fell!”

His friend said, “This has to be the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite! God has turned Midian—the whole camp!—over to him.”

When Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, he went to his knees before God in prayer. Then he went back to the Israelite camp and said, “Get up and get going! GOD has just given us the Midianite army!”

He divided the three hundred men into three companies. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar, with a torch in the jar. He said, “Watch me and do what I do. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly what I do. When I and those with me blow the trumpets, you also, all around the camp, blow your trumpets and shout, ‘For GOD and for Gideon!’”

Gideon and his hundred men got to the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after the sentries had been posted. They blew the trumpets, at the same time smashing the jars they carried. All three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, ready to blow, and shouted, “A sword for GOD and for Gideon!” They were stationed all around the camp, each man at his post. The whole Midianite camp jumped to its feet. They yelled and fled. When the three hundred blew the trumpets, GOD aimed each Midianite’s sword against his companion, all over the camp. They ran for their lives—to Beth Shittah; toward Zererah, to the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.

Israelites rallied from Naphtali, from Asher, and from all over Manasseh. They had Midian on the run.

Gideon then sent messengers through all the hill country of Ephraim, urging them, “Come down against Midian! Capture the fords of the Jordan at Beth Barah.”

So all the men of Ephraim rallied and captured the fords of the Jordan at Beth Barah. They also captured the two Midianite commanders, Oreb (Raven) and Zeeb (Wolf). They killed Oreb at Raven Rock; Zeeb they killed at Wolf Winepress. And they pressed the pursuit of Midian. They brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon across the Jordan.

Judges 7:9-25

God is indeed merciful and patient! Yet again he gives our timid Gideon a sign: this one from the mouths of the enemy!

I'm certain that Gideon nearly shouted when he heard the dream of the Midianite. Fortunately, he appears to have prayed quietly to keep from bringing the troops down on him. He then heads off to the camp to get his little army together for the attack.

The last of Gideon's fear drains away. He's ready to go after these guys and take them out, but notice how he goes about it.

Gideon's obviously gotten instructions from God on this because none of his soldiers is holding a sword. They have a trumpet in one hand and a pitcher in the other. No room for a weapon or a shield.

Who would go to war like this? Only someone completely trusting in the hand of the Lord for his protection.

Gideon knew going in that he was badly outnumbered and that if he tried to win the battle in his own strength that it was going to end not only badly but swiftly. He so realizes the futility of this that he doesn't even have his men draw weapons or bring shields.

God is really the only weapon we'll ever need. I'm sure God uses swords and indeed, in the book of Judges alone, we find God's salvation through weapons over and over again; however, God is the only weapon we ever really need.

When David went up against Goliath, he carried in a slingshot, then used Goliath's sword to finish him off. When he gets older though and Absalom steals his kingdom, David has learned that he doesn't even need to fight. He gathers his people together and turns the city over to the rebel forces led by his son. Off he goes into the wilderness knowing that God gave him this kingdom and if he wants him to keep it, God can work it out himself.

Of course, God restored David's kingdom to him, just as God handed Gideon the Midianites here in Judges. Gideon knew that fighting them with weapons was useless, so he didn't bother. He trusted in God and God won the victory without the Israelites picking up a sword.

So often in our lives we want to help God out. We want to go part of the way to make it easier for God to show up, because we **know** that God's not really strong enough to do it himself and really needs our help.

The fact is that this will work. God gave us strength to accomplish things and, when he's with us, we can do mighty things in his name. God will let you work just as hard as you want.

It's better, though, to let God show up in a situation. Easier on the back.

When the Israelites go into the wilderness, they needed water. In Exodus 17 we read how God commands Moses to strike the rock at Horeb. Moses does this and water flows from the rock to provide for the Israelites.

As Moses reaches the end of his journey in the wilderness, the Israelites once again need water. In Numbers 20. This time, the Lord tells Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth water.

Moses thinks, “Hey, this looks familiar.” He reproaches Israel and then strikes the rock—twice. The water comes out, but Moses can no longer enter the promised land.

You see, you can work as hard as you want. When we first start walking with the Lord, God has us walk out some in our own strength. You see this over and over again in the Bible: God had Naaman wash in the river, Jesus told the man by the pool to stand up and the man with the withered hand to stretch it out, etc.

Once we’ve been walking with the Lord for a while, we begin to realize who we are in the Lord, or more importantly, who God is in us. At this point all this work isn’t necessary. We can just speak and it happens.

Moses, though, had to work twice as hard at the end of his ministry as he did at the beginning because he didn’t believe that God would show up in this new way. As a result, he lost his promise of the Lord because of his disobedience.

Gideon learned early that God would do what he said and left his sword in the sheath. Now, notice, if Gideon had been discovered early, he would have been killed with no chance to draw his sword. He committed to what God told him completely with no fallback position.

As such, God gave him an excellent victory. His enemy awakens and begins to slay themselves. Gideon starts to chase them and they run home with Gideon in hot pursuit.

At this point, the re-enforcements show up. They show up now because they’re needed since the enemy is scattered throughout the countryside. Before, God cut down Gideon’s army because Gideon didn’t need them. Now that he needs the help, the help appears and assists in finishing off this foe.

When Corrie Ten Boom asked her father about faith, her father said “Do you buy a train ticket weeks in advance? No, you buy it when you get to the station.” God sees to it that re-enforcements don’t show up before you need them. He even makes sure that they don’t show up when you think you need them. The re-enforcements show up when you really do need them.

If Gideon had said, “I don’t have enough men to pursue this enemy. Now’s a good time to quit,” the enemy would have re-grouped and come back to destroy him. Instead, Gideon chose to continue pursuit of the enemy. As he did so, re-enforcements came and finished off the enemy forever.

When you start on a task for the Lord, keep it up! Don’t stop until the works done. Believe that the tools will show up along the way as you need them. Because of his persistence the heads of the enemy (pardon the pun) are delivered to Gideon. He has defeated this foe.

Chapter Seven: Keep it up!

Then the Ephraimites said to Gideon, “Why did you leave us out of this, not calling us when you went to fight Midian?” They were indignant and let him know it.

But Gideon replied, “What have I done compared to you? Why, even the gleanings of Ephraim are superior to the vintage of Abiezer. God gave you Midian’s commanders, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I done compared with you?”

When they heard this, they calmed down and cooled off.

Gideon and his three hundred arrived at the Jordan and crossed over. They were bone-tired but still pressing the pursuit. He asked the men of Succoth, “Please, give me some loaves of bread for my troops I have with me. They’re worn out, and I’m hot on the trail of Zebah and Zalmunna, the Midianite kings.”

But the leaders in Succoth said, “You’re on a wild goose chase; why should we help you on a fool’s errand?”

Gideon said, “If you say so. But when GOD gives me Zebah and Zalmunna, I’ll give you a thrashing, whip your bare flesh with desert thorns and thistles!”

He went from there to Peniel and made the same request. The men of Peniel, like the men of Succoth, also refused. Gideon told them, “When I return safe and sound, I’ll demolish this tower.”

Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with an army of about fifteen companies, all that was left of the fighting force of the eastemers -they had lost 120 companies of soldiers.

Gideon went up the caravan trail east of Nobah and Jogbehah, found and attacked the undefended camp. Zebah and Zalmunna fled, but he chased and captured the two kings of Midian. The whole camp had panicked.

Gideon son of Joash returned from the battle by way of the Heres Pass. He captured a young man from Succoth and asked some questions. The young man wrote down the names of the officials and leaders of Succoth, seventy-seven men. Then Gideon went to the men of Succoth and said, “Here are the wild geese, Zebah and Zalmunna, you said I’d never catch. You would not give so much as a scrap of bread to my wornout men; you taunted us, saying that we were on a fool’s errand.”

Then he took the seventy-seven leaders of Succoth and thrashed them with desert thorns and thistles. And he demolished the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the city.

He then addressed Zebah and Zalmunna: “Tell me about the men you killed at Tabor.”

“They were men much like you,” they said, “each one like a king’s son.”

Gideon said, “They were my brothers, my mother’s sons. As GOD lives, if you had let them live, I would let you live.”

Then he spoke to Jether, his firstborn: "Get up and kill them." But he couldn't do it, couldn't draw his sword. He was afraid—he was still just a boy.

Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Do it yourself—if you're man enough!" And Gideon did it. He stepped up and killed Zebah and Zalmunna. Then he took the crescents that hung on the necks of their camels.

Judges 8:1-21

I love this part of the story because any timidity that Gideon had has now vanished. When Gideon requests help from two cities that refuse he now states "when I'm done with these guys I'll come back and finish you off." Keep in mind, this is a man who, just a few days ago, was hiding in a wine press.

When Gideon heard the dream of the Midianite, it forever changed his perspective on the world around him. He no longer believed in what he saw with his physical senses, but instead believed the word he heard from God about his situation.

One of the most common things in the world is the one-hit wonder. These are music groups who have one great number-one song, then are broken up by the stresses of sudden fame and riches. They vanish into oblivion while their song plays on for years.

This is a common story in the church as well. I've been to many churches that were started when God moved mightily. Perhaps there were miracles and signs and people came hungry to be filled by what God was doing. Then, for the next 50 years, people sit around remembering how great it was when God moved 50 years ago and wasn't that nice.

The fact of the matter is that you're either growing or dying with God. Either you're moving on to the next level, from glory to glory, or else you're dying where you are. When the Israelites were living in the wilderness, the Lord provided manna for them to eat every day. If they kept the manna overnight it would be full of worms. The manna had to be gathered fresh daily.

The manna we live on as believers must be gotten fresh daily through our prayer life, reading the word, and meditating on the things of the Lord. We can't live on yesterday's revival or anointing or giftings or anything else.

When you overcome something in your life, you've shown yourself to be a threat to the devil. He will then work double-overtime to make sure it never happens again. He will sing you to sleep with complacency and lead you to sit back on your laurels impressed with what you did for God and never accomplishing anything else ever again.

You must be on your guard. Once you step out in faith to believe that God is going to move in your presence, you are making a commitment for the rest of your life. You must continue to make progress towards serving the Lord God Almighty, or have everything you fought so hard for come to naught.

Gideon takes this thing all the way, finishing what he started. He doesn't quit until the leaders of the enemy camp are dead as well as those who refused to help him along the way. All of Israel knows that Gideon is the man God sent to this situation to remove the power of the enemy. This, however, becomes Gideon's downfall as we'll see in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: Dangers of Pride

The Israelites said, “Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson. You have saved us from Midian’s tyranny.”

Gideon said, “I most certainly will not rule over you, nor will my son. GOD will reign over you.”

Then Gideon said, “But I do have one request. Give me, each of you, an earring that you took as plunder.” Ishmaelites wore gold earrings, and the men all had their pockets full of them.

They said, “Of course. They’re yours!”

They spread out a blanket and each man threw his plundered earrings on it. The gold earrings that Gideon had asked for weighed about forty-three pounds—and that didn’t include the crescents and pendants, the purple robes worn by the Midianite kings, and the ornaments hung around the necks of their camels.

Gideon made the gold into a sacred ephod and put it on display in his hometown, Ophrah. All Israel prostituted itself there. Gideon and his family, too, were seduced by it.

Midian’s tyranny was broken by the Israelites; nothing more was heard from them. The land was quiet for forty years in Gideon’s time.

Jerub-Baal son of Joash went home and lived in his house. Gideon had seventy sons. He fathered them all—he had a lot of wives! His concubine, the one at Shechem, also bore him a son. He named him Abimelech.

Gideon son of Joash died at a good old age. He was buried in the tomb of his father Joash at Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Judges 8:22-35

And so, the story of Gideon ends as it began. God had delivered the Israelites into the hands of the Midianites and the Amalekites because of their idolatry. God then sends them Gideon to deliver them from the hands of their enemies who takes the plunder from this war and leads the Israelites right back into idolatry.

How did this happen? Wasn’t Gideon sent of God? How can he be the one that leads them back into idolatry?

The beginning of the answer lies in Judges 7:20, “They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, ready to blow, and shouted, ‘A sword for GOD and for Gideon!’” Where did God say to include the name of Gideon in the shout for victory? Nowhere.

Gideon saw himself as the deliverer of Israel, and indeed he was. The danger of all of our situations is to get our eyes off the Lord and onto ourselves. Gideon had seen what he was going to do for the Lord and pride rose up in him that he would be so obedient to God that God was going to use him to deliver Israel.

There is such a danger that, as we begin overcoming and God blesses us for our obedience, we begin to see ourselves as the hand of the Lord. At that point, pride sneaks in and wreaks havoc on what we've accomplished.

Gideon says the right things, "I most certainly will not rule over you, nor will my son. GOD will reign over you," but in his heart, pride lurks. Even as he makes this statement he's planning the monument he will build to forever commemorate his success.

It is a rare thing that people become overcomers. The few that do, though, are almost always led astray almost immediately by pride and skid off into darkness forever.

The only way we can prevent slipping into pride is by making sure that our eyes never leave the Lord. By keeping our eyes on him, pride will never have room to work in our lives.

Chapter Nine: What do we Overcome?

When he got there, he crawled into a cave and went to sleep.

Then the word of God came to him: "So Elijah, what are you doing here?"

"I've been working my heart out for the God-of-the-Angel-Armies," said Elijah. "The people of Israel have abandoned your covenant, destroyed the places of worship, and murdered your prophets. I'm the only one left, and now they're trying to kill me."

Then he was told, "Go, stand on the mountain at attention before God. God will pass by."

A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.

1 Kings 19:9-12

One of the most common questions I hear is "I've done all of these good things for the Lord. Why has this happened to me?"

The fact of the matter is that suffering is an integral part of the Christian life.

This is the kind of life you've been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step.

1 Peter 2:21

Hebrews 5:8 says, "Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do" and Jesus himself said, "I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world (John 16:33)."

The fact of the matter is that the word *Christian* means Christ-like. Peter says we're invited to live "the kind of life Christ lived." Christ suffered as much as, if not more than, any person that ever walked the earth. Fortunately, the vast majority of us are not called to suffer as much as he did.

The first thing to learn about being an overcomer is that there will be things for you to overcome. Perhaps you're reading this because you're face-to-face with one of these obstacles in your life right now, but as we face these obstacles, just remember that Jesus said he had already conquered them.

I work out with weights (well, sometimes). When I started lifting, I thought that a certain amount of weight was heavy. Then, as I progressed, that weight was no longer a workout and this new weight was heavy. Each time I go up a weight, it hurts. It burns to do the exercises and it hurts the next day. But this is what it takes to grow stronger.

As we come up against hardships and tribulations in our lives, just think of them as weights you're lifting to build up huge, bulging, faith muscles. Every time we

overcome a hardship, our faith gets stronger. Eventually, we get so strong that we can move mountains.

It's easy to watch the World's Strongest Man competition on ESPN and be impressed by the feats of strength we see and forget the pain and suffering these guys have gone through to get where they are. In the same way, it's easy to read about Paul and Peter and Smith Wigglesworth and the impressive works of faith they're capable of and forgetting the suffering it took for them to get there.

For Elijah to hear God's voice, he had to stand quietly a wind, a fire, and an earthquake. Because he listened carefully through all of these trials, God showed up, speaking quietly to him.

You are capable of all of these things as well. You too can be a Gideon or Paul. Your destiny is already established and waiting for you to walk in it.

People spend their lives making excuses for why they can't be an overcomer. They say they're too weak, short, fat, dumb or that they can't speak or write or even work with people well enough to be effective.

The fact is that God makes a way where there seems to be none. If he instructs you to do something, he will give you the tools to accomplish it. It simply waits for you to get moving and begin walking in faith instead of fear.

This book was written simply to show you that Gideon had nothing on you. You, too, are a Gideon that can change the world you live in simply by obeying what God says to you. Listen and move and you will earn yourself a place in the faith hall of fame.

God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son and our Master Jesus. He will never give up on you. Never forget that.

1 Corinthians 1:9