

*Sunday School Lesson*  
*“Stories of Faith” Series*  
*Lesson 1: Gideon*

Opening Thoughts:

The story of Gideon is well known, commonly told at Vacation Bible School or in times of great difficulty. The story hinges on both the faith of Gideon in God’s deliverance, and on the continuing cycle of faithfulness-forsaking found throughout the book of Judges. Within this story we witness both the human element and difficult nature of discipleship, as well as the power of God’s deliverance in times of difficulty and trouble.

1. Have you ever read the Gideon story before? What about the book of Judges?
2. If so, how will you approach this story as if for the first time?
3. If not, what hope and faith do you hope to find in this story?

*Please open with a time of prayer.*

Background:

As noted above, the Book of Judges contains a cyclical pattern of faithfulness and forsaking, in which the people of Israel wax and wane from following God or following the Canaanite gods. The cycle generally works as follows:

- The people are faithful
- The people rebel against and forsake God
- God removes favor from the people
- An outside group rises and oppresses the Israelites
- The people cry out to God for relief
- God raises a “Judge” or deliverer to free the people
- The people are faithful again

Each “Judge” serves as God’s agent of relief and teaches a different lesson to the reader about how and why the people lost faith and why they should remain faithful to God. For the Gideon section, the people of Israel have once again strayed from God. While the people have now risen to attack the Midianites, God lays out a new plan for the battle that seems radical.

1. How does the cycle of faithfulness-forsaking mirror our own faith life?
2. What does it mean to forsake God? What does it look like?
3. Assuming for a moment that the people will return to God, why do you think they still forsake God?

Main Passage:      **Judges 7:2-8**

<sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Gideon, “The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me.’ <sup>3</sup>Now therefore proclaim this in the hearing of the troops, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.’” Thus Gideon sifted them out; twenty-two thousand returned, and ten thousand remained. <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Gideon, “The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, ‘This one shall go

with you,' he shall go with you; and when I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." <sup>5</sup>So he brought the troops down to the water; and the LORD said to Gideon, "All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths, you shall put to the other side." <sup>6</sup>The number of those that lapped was three hundred; but all the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes." <sup>8</sup>So he took the jars of the troops from their hands, and their trumpets; and he sent all the rest of Israel back to their own tents, but retained the three hundred. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

1. What is the main point of this passage? What stands out?
2. Why do you think the so many soldiers are let go? Why is this surprising?
3. What does this story tell us about the power of God?

### Reflection:

Personally, I have always loved this story. Between the test of faith, preparations, and overwhelming odds, it is a great underdog story that also gives us a great lesson of faith: the impossible is possible with God. Beyond the surface, however, the story points to deeper truths. First, we must see that Gideon has amassed a grand army and would probably win outright. Yet, God tells him to let most of the army go home. Those that are left are in many respects the worst possible soldiers. When drinking, they let their guard down and were not aware of their surroundings. This points to God's use of the least likely and least preferred rather than the best and most powerful. Second, in the ensuing battle, the Israelites do not draw their swords. Instead they create chaos and the army from Midian flees. This points to God's way often being far different than what we would imagine. Human instinct would be to fight, however, God gives Gideon another way that doesn't result in a pitched battle. The story ends with the idols of the Midianites being torn down and the Israelites restored. For now...

1. What do we learn about God from this story?
2. What do we learn about ourselves?
3. How does the Israelite people move forward from this encounter?