

{un}faithful - 5
Week of March 5, 2017
Bay Park Life Groups – Leader’s Guide

We, as humans, are driven by the pursuit of success. This is as hardwired into us as our desire to seek out community or our fear of death. It’s why many people have made careers out of being motivational speakers, trying to inspire people to be the best versions of themselves for the sake of glory, self-worth, and success. The tension for Christians, then, is the struggle between giving God the glory and accepting the glory as our own. In today’s study we’re going to take a closer look at some of the pitfalls of success and why the story of Gideon serves as a reminder that God deserves all the glory.

1. What are some of the dangers of success?

Read Judges 6:1-24

2. Think back to the first couple of studies where we referenced the cycle the Israelites find themselves in. How is the cycle different in this week’s passage with regards to the oppression (verses 1-6)? What about with how God responds to the Israelites crying out to Him (verse 7-10)?

Oppression: This is the worst yet – the Israelites are forced to leave their homes and prepare shelters for themselves” in the inaccessible mountains (verse 2). The Midianites were after economic exploitation, plunder crops (verse 3). They “did not spare a living thing” (verse 4), the people were starving (verse 5).

With how God responds: When they cried to the Lord we expect God to raise up a deliverer, a judge. Instead, “he sent them a prophet” (verse 8). God’s first response to the people’s cry is not to send a savior, but a sermon! He reminds them of two things: what he has done (rescued them, freed them, given them a land [verse 8-9]), and what they have done (not listened to Him, and worshiped other gods [verse 10]).

3. What does this suggest about the type of “crying” Israel is doing? Why do the people need a prophet before they have a rescuer?

They are not really sorry. They are regretful, they don’t like being oppressed by the Midian. They aren’t repentant, they aren’t sorry for disobeying God. They are upset about what their sin has caused – oppression – rather than about their sin itself.

Before they can appreciate the rescue that will come, the people need to understand why they need rescuing. The prophet comes and helps them to understand why they are in the trouble they are in. He wants them to understand where their idolatry – their sin – has led them.

4. Who speaks in verses 12 and 20? Who speaks in verses 14, 16, and 18? What is strange about this? How does Gideon react when he realizes who he has been speaking to in verse 22?

Read Judges 7:1-23

5. What does God do to Gideon's army? What lesson does God want to teach him, and Israel?

"In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her." God wants Gideon and Israel to praise Him for this victory, not themselves. Human nature is such that, if there is the tiniest opportunity to boast in our own work, we will. We will see ourselves as our own saviors. But this is to take glory that God deserves and give it to ourselves. By reducing the army to 300, God is helping Israel to say: We could not possibly have done this ourselves. It was all God's doing.

6. God reassures Gideon of victory in verse 9. How should the manner of the victory in verses 16-23 help Gideon and Israel to trust in God and not boast in themselves?

The battle is won without Gideon or his men doing any actual fighting! They hold their positions (verse 21), and the Midianites flee, killing each other (verses 22-23). God gives them victory without them doing anything.

Read Judges 7:24-8:31

7. Israel has not learned "the lesson of the triumph of the 300". How do we see that here with the tribe of Ephraim? With the inhabitants of Succoth and Peniel? With Gideon?

Tribe of Ephraim: They are annoyed they missed out on the glory of being part of the victory (verse 1). But the 300 did not gain honour for themselves; all that went to God. Ephraim has not realized who won the victory, nor who should get the praise.

Inhabitants of Succoth and Peniel: These Israelites refuse to help Gideon (8:6,8) because Gideon has not yet destroyed the kings of Midian. They know that if he can't, the Midianites will regroup, return, and destroy any towns who helped Gideon. They haven't learned to trust God to keep His promises, however against-the-odds they are.

Gideon: His dealings with Succoth and Peniel (verse 6-9, 16-17) show that he wants respect and honour for his victory. He does not say to them, when they refuse to help him: "I know it's hard to believe we can beat them. But it's God who wins for us, so don't trust my strength, trust His". What he says instead is: "You dare to doubt me? I'll show you my power – you'll learn to respect me."

8. What do we learn from Gideon about the dangers of God-given success? How is it possible to make the same mistakes today? When do you most need to remember the “lesson of the 300”?