

Blinded By Fear Judges 6-7

Slide 1

What comes to mind when you hear the term blind spots? Think about learning to drive.

One of the first things you learn when you begin to drive is to turn your head and check your blind spot - that area where a car may be hiding just out of sight.

Which brings me to a subject we're going to address these next few weeks: emotional blind spots in our lives.

These are areas we overlook, try to hide, or maybe have buried so deeply we're not even aware of them.

Today, we're going to talk about fear. Fears people might have like fear of God, death, or being left out at the Second Coming.

Or, it may be fears about the current political climate of our nation, wondering what, if anything, will be left for our children or grandchildren.

Many people are bothered by the constant barrage of bad news in the media.

Others have expressed a fear of financial struggles, marital conflicts, medical diagnoses, or just the hustle and bustle of life in general.

If we're not careful, these fears can overwhelm us and maybe even take control our life choices. They become the first thing on our mind when we wake up and our last thought as we go to sleep.

Slide 2

This is where we find Israel in Judges 6. They had abandoned God for false idols, so God had given them over to the Midianites for seven years.

It's during this time that an Angel of the Lord appeared and took a seat under a terebinth tree on the land that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite (a-be-es-rite), Gideon's father.

Nearby, Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press which was an odd place to be threshing wheat. Usually, people would gather the wheat stalks on a blanket and toss them up in the air.

The wind would catch the lighter chaff and blow it away as the grain fell to the ground, but a wine press is typically in a pit.

There would be little or no wind to blow the chaff away. I've always preferred to work smarter, not harder, so choosing a wine press doesn't make much sense.

Gideon, however, was operating out of fear. The Israelites had been oppressed for seven years and, being harvest time, they knew the Midianites would soon be coming to reap the benefits of their hard work.

Gideon was hoping to thresh his wheat without being spotted, so he could preserve some for his family.

We haven't had to live through real oppression like the Great Depression or the rationing during World War II, so it's hard for us to imagine what it'd be like to fear someone from taking away our basic needs.

There's an animated movie called, *A Bug's Life*, that illustrates this same problem. In the beginning, the ants are gathering seeds to store for winter.

However, the grasshoppers were oppressing the ants and required they prepare an offering of food before gathering their own food.

The queen ant told a well-meaning Flick, *"It's the same year after year, they come, they eat, they leave. That's our lot in life. It's not a lot, but it's our life."*

Moments later, an alarm sounds signaling that the grasshoppers were approaching. They immediately rushed to hide in their anthill so the grasshoppers could collect their food.

In the scramble to hide, Flick knocks the entire collection of food into the river and it's washed away. Hopper, the leader of the grasshoppers, was irate as he confronted the ants in their home.

Most of the ants didn't realize the food was gone and the princess tried to assure Hopper they had done their part and now needed to collect food for their colony.

Hopper informed the princess, *"It's a bug eat bug world, now let me tell you how things are supposed to work. The sun grows the food, the ants get the food, the grasshoppers eat the food."*

He then "graciously" gives the ants one more chance to gather food for the grasshoppers before the rainy season begins.

Because the ants didn't realize the strength they had in their numbers, they were living in fear. That was how Gideon and all of Israel had been living for seven years!

They had turned to false idols. They had forgotten that God was their source of strength, so they lived in fear of Midianite oppression.

Slide 3

It's in that circumstance that the Angel of the Lord revealed Himself to Gideon.

Judges 6:12, *"When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, 'The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.'"*

Who was this Angel? Some look at this text and believe He may have been a pre-incarnate Christ.

To me, I'm not concerned if this angel was Jesus or whether this angel was simply an angel, what gets my attention is that he chose to come to Gideon.

Bring human, I view people differently than God and that's what amazes me... how God views people.

Time after time, God has demonstrated that while man looks at outward appearances, He looks at the heart.

Noah was a drunk, but God saw the man who would keep the world afloat. Abraham was an old man with a barren wife, but God saw the father of many nations. Moses had a speech impediment, but God saw the deliverer of His people.

David was a murderous adulterer, but God saw a man after His own heart - a king even. Gideon was living in fear, but God saw a mighty man of valor.

God doesn't just look at what an individual has done, He sees what they could be. This is why this angel assured Gideon that God was with him, but Gideon wasn't buying it.

Judges 6:13, *“Then Gideon said, “Sir, if the Lord is with us, why are we having so much trouble? Where are the miracles our ancestors told us he did when the Lord brought them out of Egypt? But now he has left us and has handed us over to the Midianites.”*

Gideon was caught up in his circumstances. Looking around at the wheat he was trying to hide in his wine press, he just couldn't see it.

In so many words, Gideon was saying, *“Look around, do you see where we are? I've heard all the wonderful stories of what God has done to save His people, but look at us now, where has He gone?”*

We see this cycle throughout the book of Judges. Israel gets caught up in sin, pursues false gods then God sends an oppressor. Once the people could stand no more, they turn back to God for help.

He then sends a judge to deliver His people, and they find themselves in a time of peace until they again pursue false gods, starting the cycle all over.

The angel continues as if Gideon hadn't said a word.

Judges 6:14, *“The Lord turned to Gideon and said, “Go with your strength and save Israel from the Midianites. I am the one who is sending you.”*

God is saying, *“Do you not hear the words that are coming out of my mouth? I AM WITH YOU. I am God. I'm telling you to go to battle and save your nation. You will succeed because you'll be following My orders.”*

But Gideon is still not convinced, as he lists reasons for God to choose someone else. In fact, he sounds like Moses when God first called him.

Judges 6:15, *“But Gideon answered, “Lord, how can I save Israel? My family group is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least important member of my family.”*

Who am I that you’d send me? I’m the least of a small family of the smallest clan of the smallest tribe, Manasseh (really it’s a half-tribe, if you want to get technical).

Gideon could only see what was in front of him. He was thinking or hoping, surely there’s somebody better suited for this job, maybe a military leader with plenty of experience who knows how to plan for battle.

God’s answer was simple. Judges 6:16, *“The Lord answered him, “I will be with you. It will seem as if the Midianites you are fighting are only one man.”*

Slide 4

“I will be with you.” You see, God chose Gideon to command the Israelite army because, by choosing such a “small” man, when victory happened, the people of Israel would recognize how big their God is.

Gideon continued to put forth tests to be reassured that this plan really was of God. He brought food to the angel who told Gideon to set it out like an offering. The angel consumed the food with fire and then vanished.

Then Gideon sets out a fleece and asked God to cause the morning dew to make the fleece wet and the ground dry. God did exactly that.

Gideon then set the fleece back out and asked God to make the fleece dry and the ground wet. God did.

Having run out of tests, Gideon reluctantly gathered an army of over 32,000 men. God told him, *“That’s too many,”* instructing Gideon to send home any soldier who had the slightest twinge of fear.

Only 10,000 men remained after those soldiers left, but God told Gideon, *“That’s still too many. Send the men to the river for a water break.”*

As the men were drinking from the river, God told Gideon to send home the men who stuck their heads down to the water and keep only the men who scooped the water up and lapped it from their hands. This left Gideon with 300 men!

Following God’s strategy, Gideon led this army of 300 men to victory over the Midianite army of 135,000.

In fact, this man, who was found hiding in a wine press because of fear, is later listed in Hebrews 11’s Hall of Faith.

Hebrews 11:32-34, *“Do I need to give more examples? I do not have time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through their faith they defeated kingdoms. They did what was right, received God’s promises, and shut the mouths of lions. They stopped great fires and were saved from being killed with swords. They were weak, and yet were made strong. They were powerful in battle and defeated other armies.”*

Now, you may be thinking, *“That’s great for Gideon, it worked well for him, but what about me? I’ve been going through various struggles, met with failures, prayed for healing and I’m done trying. Just leave me alone in my wine press!”*

In fact, I’m amazed at how many people believe in God without ever actually seeing Him. What we need to understand is that God gave us the Bible so we can know Him without having to see Him.

Slide 5

There's a song called *"How Can You Not"* and at the end it concludes like this:

*Oh, how can you not see God
In every little thing, in every little moment?
How can you not feel loved?
How can you not? How can you not?*

*'Cause He's in the middle of
Every little thing and every little moment
How can you not see God?
How can you not? How can you not?*

It worked out for Gideon, but what about us? When we're faced with fear, how should we respond?

What we need to understand is that having to deal with fear in and of itself is not a sin, but our response might be. In other words, do we allow it to consume us or do we use our fear as a way to draw closer to God?

Think of it this way - which would be the greater definition of failure?

- To step out in faith and have things not play out as you hoped, or
- To miss an opportunity to step into a deeper union with God due to your fear.

In Psalm 23, David gave us three steps for dealing with our fear.

Psalm 23:1-3, *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake."*

The first step is to recognize God's presence. He cares for us like a shepherd. Frankly, sheep are rather dumb animals; they need a shepherd.

That's why God made him to lie down in green pastures, by still waters. Knowing God was with him, David could relax in times of trouble.

The second step is to depend on God's provision. Verse 4, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."*

Even when David walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he didn't have to fear evil. Why? God's rod and staff comforted him. He knew God was protecting him.

The third step is to enter into God's peace. Verses 5, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over."*

God prepared a table for David in the presence of his enemies. Can you imagine feeling secure enough to sit and eat in front of your enemies? Even better, knowing that goodness and mercy followed.

The best line in Psalm 23 is, *"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* We don't have to fear because we know the end of the story.

Are you ready to set aside your fear and take a step forward in faith? You need to continually put your trust in God.

Slide 6

Conclusion

I came across the story of a couple who was invited for a weekend getaway with the husband's boss and his wife. The wife was excited at the thought of a luxurious weekend with no worries.

As they were walking into a 5-star restaurant, she noticed the boss stopped and picked up a penny off the sidewalk, looked at it for a minute, then put it in his pocket.

This man was well off, why would he, of all people, need to pick up a penny? The thought nagged at her throughout the meal, and she could contain herself no longer as they were eating dessert.

She asked the boss, *"You're obviously very well off, a man who can afford the finer things in life. Yet, I noticed you stopped to pick up a penny as we were walking in. Why?"*

The boss smiled at her and handed her the penny. *"What does it say on the penny?" "United States of America." "No, no, further down." "1985." "Look to the left." "In God we trust."*

"Exactly. Every time I see a penny, I stop to pick it up and take a minute to pause and think, 'Am I trusting God?' and then I say a short prayer asking God to help me trust Him more. I believe it's a reminder that God left in my path, so I don't forget."

Where do you put your trust? Is your trust in God? Maybe today you can pray the same prayer as that boss and ask God to help you trust Him more.

Maybe today you've realized you've not put your trust in God and it's time. If that's you, it's time you put your trust in God.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."