



YOU'RE FIGHTING THE WRONG FIGHT | SHAWN JOHNSON

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer these two questions:

What is the best practical joke that someone played on you or that you played on someone else?

SHARE

Welcome to our series "Battle Tested." Throughout this series we are going to take a look at some stories of people in the Bible who were battle-tested. We all go through battles at different times and for different reasons. As we walk through these stories, our hope is that we can learn from each one and gain a better understanding of the wisdom, strength and sustaining power of God.

In the word of God, we find stories where God makes a promise to an individual or to a people, and then many times there is a gap between the time the promise is made and the time it is fulfilled. There were also times when God's people received a promise, yet that was just the beginning of the fight. We can find ourselves fighting battles when times are tough; and also when we are experiencing success, we can be faced with brand new fights and pressures we never imagined.

As we go through this series, allow God to speak to you about your life and the battles you might be facing. What God calls us to is always worth the fight. Maybe your battle is working tirelessly on building a better marriage, struggling to live a life of purity, fighting to be ethical and honest at work, digging deep to forgive someone. Whatever the fight might be, we must always cling to the promises of God and remember that He can lead and sustain us.

This weekend, Shawn brought a timely message about being 'battle tested' in our own backyard. The story of Gideon is a powerful reminder of how God meets us right where we are in life, especially when we don't expect it. God met up with Gideon at a low point in his life, where he was hiding out in the hills from the Midianite people. The Midianites continually raided their cities and stole crops and animals, leaving the Israelites with nothing. God allowed the people of Israel to be oppressed by the Midianites because they continued to do evil. But God had a plan to use a farmer in the land to bring about a change.

When an angel of God visited Gideon, he was a bullied wheat farmer working in a wine press, hiding from the Midianites. Gideon was a farmer who eventually became Israel's fifth judge and a brilliant military strategist; although he continually doubted his own leadership abilities throughout his career.

The story of Gideon resonates with so many of us because we know how it feels to be living less than our full potential and feeling frustrated with God. God however, disrupts Gideon's pity party.

Read Judges 6:1-6

Why did God allow the enemy to oppress his people?

How can God's discipline be more loving than allowing the people to live compromised lives?

Have you ever experienced difficult times because of your own bad choices? What did you learn from it?

G R O W

The Israelite people were in a continual cycle in their relationship with God. When they put God first and lived life his way, life was blessed. It was not always easy; but it was blessed. Times of blessing began to be taken for granted and were then followed by compromise and sin, despite warnings from God. God would then allow his people to experience the hardships of doing life their own way, which always leads to pain and hardship. In their pain, the people would cry out for God to deliver them and to help them. God would call his people to repent and turn from their evil ways and then he would rescue them.

We find the Israelites in the "cry out for God" part of the cycle. The Israelite crops were raided, livestock killed and land decimated because of the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples. The people of God were cowering in the hillside, along with an unlikely leader.

Let's read Judges 6:7-16

D.I. Block, in *Judges, Ruth Vol. 6 Commentary*, helps us better understand the predicament Gideon finds himself in and the excuses he brings up as to why he is not the person God is looking for.

Despite Gideon's protest that his family was the least significant in the entire tribe of Manasseh, the course of subsequent events suggests Joash must have been a man of considerable wealth and standing in the community. Not only does his son Gideon have at least ten servants (v. 27), but he is the sponsor of a significant Baal cult site that includes altar, Asherah image, and temple fortress (cf. vv. 25-26), the desecration of which raises the ire of the entire community. Only by serious argumentation is he able to convince the elders to abandon their demand for punishment of the perpetrator of the crime.

At the time of his encounter with the divine envoy Gideon was beating out grain in a winepress. This was a sign of the uncertainty of the times. In the absence of modern technology, grain was threshed by first beating the heads of the cut stalks with a flail, discarding the straw, and then tossing the mixture of chaff and grain in the air, allowing the wind to blow away the chaff while the heavier kernels of grain fell to the floor. In the present critical circumstances this obviously would have been unwise.

Threshing activity on the hilltops would only have aroused the attention of the marauding Midianites. Therefore Gideon resorts to beating the grain in a sheltered vat used for pressing grapes. Generally winepresses involved two excavated depressions in the rock, one above the other. The grapes would be gathered and trampled in the upper, while a conduit would drain the juices to the lower. The present location would have been satisfactory for beating out the grain, but separating the grain from the chaff in these circumstances would have been more difficult. Either he would have had to wait for a very windy

day or the grain and chaff mixture would have to be carried quickly to an exposed area, tossed in the air, and the grain quickly whisked away to protect it from the Midianites. Suddenly, while he is preoccupied with his threshing activity, a messenger of Yahweh appears, seated under the oak tree that apparently provided shade and shelter for the winepress.

How does the angel of the lord greet Gideon? Why is this so significant?

What is Gideon's response? Can you relate to him?

Gideon was getting accustomed to hiding out and living this compromised life, yet God sought him out. What does this tell you about God's nature?

MOVE

God is reminding Gideon that he is with him and that he is called to save Israel out of the hand of the Midianites. But before this great battle would take place, there was a much more important one that Gideon needed to confront, and it was in his own backyard. Throughout Scripture we always find that before any great battle, God's primary concern is with the hearts of his people, especially those who lead the people. So it is no surprise that God calls Gideon to rid his life of compromising sin and to be a man of integrity.

Many times, it is easier to find a bigger battle somewhere out there to fight than to engage in the harder battle of looking in the mirror and making the serious changes we need to make.

Let's read Judges 6:25-27

In Gideon's time, the people of Israel adopted some of the customs of the people in the land, such as Baal worship and erecting Asherah poles in groves. These were typical in that day, as the people were superstitious and believed that other gods controlled the rain, harvests, fertility, and storms. They falsely believed that Baal was the provider of all things and that Asherah would provide fertility in the land. Gideon knew he had to make a life altering decision to clean up his own backyard. No longer would he worship things, but he needed to turn his worship to God, the maker of all things. Tim Keller, in *Counterfeit Gods*, captures the idea of an idol best...

What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give ... An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, 'If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure.' There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is worship.

In our day and age, we are less likely to come across statue or altar idols, but that doesn't mean our culture doesn't worship them. What are a few idols that today's culture tends to worship?

Gideon didn't have a Midianite problem; he had an idol problem, first and foremost. Do you have an area of your life that you can tend to make into an idol and invest too much time and effort? (Some examples could be: success, money, relationships, power, sex, vanity, promotion, status, significance, comfort, self-medicating behavior)

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO

Mark 8:36

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?