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The Bronze Serpent

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9

Theme: Look to Jesus and be saved

High School (Ages 15-18)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: Gideon , God Uses the Weak Things (Judges 6:1-7:25) This passage challenges us to confront the cultural and spiritual expectations of strength, heroism, and institutional power, often assumed to be the only means of victory. Gideon's story reveals that true transformation isn't measured by numbers or military prowess but by an audacious willingness to obey God despite fear, uncertainty, and human disdain. Theologically, it intersects with themes of divine sovereignty ("The LORD is the one who fights for you" , Exodus 14:14), humility ("The Lord does not look at the face but at the heart" , 1 Samuel 16:7), and the paradox of weakness as a vessel for God's power (1 Corinthians 1:27). Real-world application demands asking: How do we resist the societal pressure to perform perfection and instead trust that God's strength is found in our vulnerability? The lesson invites students to reflect on how they've been shaped, or reshaped, by their own "weaknesses" and how their willingness to follow God's call, regardless of circumstance, can become a catalyst for change in their own lives and communities.

Bible Story

Gideon: God's Choice of the Weak (Judges 6:1-7:25)

The Israelites were once again trapped in bondage, their land overrun by oppressive Midianite armies. Like a dying tree swayed by storms, the nation had become weak and scattered, unable to stand against their enemies. The prophet Jerubbaal (Gideon's father) had no military prowess, he was the smallest of his family, a man who hid in the winepress at night, afraid of his own shadow. Yet in a world that glorifies strength, God chose him. Gideon's story isn't about physical might but about the radical trust in an unseen power. The Lord often works through the unexpected, those who think themselves unworthy, because their faith is unshaken by human opinion.

When the Israelites' idols led them to despair, God spoke through an angel: "The Lord is with you." His first task? A symbolic demonstration: a fleece left dry while the earth remained wet. Gideon's doubt wasn't faithless, it was human.

"If I'm dreaming, how will I prove this?" God's answer was still: "Go gather the elders." The Lord doesn't demand perfection; He calls those who, like Gideon, are willing to listen. His people had abandoned Him, but His plan was to reclaim them through humble obedience, not conquest, but a renewed covenant. This is a lesson for today: God's work isn't measured by our achievements but by our willingness to follow, even when we're afraid.

When Gideon's army shrank from 32,000 men to just 300, he faced another trial: "Whoever is afraid, let them leave." The others fled, but the Lord hardened their hearts, leaving only those who would fight. The irony? Gideon's team was the least equipped, no weapons, no training, but their commitment was absolute. The real battle wasn't physical; it was spiritual: Will you trust God when the world tells you you're insufficient? For high school students, this mirrors modern struggles: fear of failure, comparison to peers, or doubt in God's plan. Gideon's army proved that uniqueness is power. In a culture that demands conformity, the marginalized become the instruments of God's strength.

The final battle was no grand display, just a night of ambushes, a single strike, and the fall of Midian's stronghold. The Lord worked through the smallest of His people, leaving the credit to Himself. This story challenges us to ask: What does God see in us that we can't see in ourselves? It's not about becoming "stronger" but about recognizing that our worth is found in His grace. In a world obsessed with validation, Gideon's example is a reminder: God's kingdom doesn't depend on our achievements but on our faithfulness.

This story matters because it confronts a timeless question: When God calls us, do we run or respond? For high school students navigating identity crises, academic pressures, or spiritual doubts, Gideon's story offers a path forward, not as a hero, but as a disciple. The Lord doesn't need us to be perfect; He needs us to be truthful. Like Gideon, we're called to trust, even when the world says we're weak. And when we do, we become vessels of His power.

Key Verse

Numbers 21:8-9

Judges 7:2 presents Gideon's humility and theological insight: God doesn't need a massive army to prevail, but faithful, purified leadership, those who fear Him and are willing to suffer for His cause. Real-world application? Even in overwhelming circumstances, the Church must cultivate radical dependence on God, rejecting self-reliance and cultural "armies" of power, prestige, or institutional strength. This verse connects to theological truths like justification by faith (Romans 3:28), God uses imperfect instruments, and our faith must reflect this. Gideon's later trust in divine strategy (Judges 7:19, 22) mirrors Christ's rejection of human might (Isaiah 40:12, 13), urging disciples to engage the world through obedience, not force.

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Scripture Meditation (3 min):
2. Distribute the Judges 6 passage. Ask students: "Why does Gideon 'fear the army of Midian' (v.3)?" Pause for 1, 2 minutes of silent reflection.
3. "How does God respond to Gideon's fear?" (v.13, 14) Write key phrases on the board.
4. Creative Writing (5 min):
5. Split into small groups (3, 5 students). Assign each group one of the following prompts (pick 2, 3 to rotate):
6. "Write Gideon's prayer of doubt as if he were speaking to his friends."
7. "Gideon's sister (Judges 6:33) says, 'Isn't it true that the Lord is with us because He delivered us from the Egyptians?' How would she argue for divine strength today?"
8. "Draft a modern 'scare tactic' (like Midian's raids) that could make a student feel inadequate. How would Gideon's encounter with God's 'angels' (v.21, 24) change their perspective?"
9. Students draft 1, 2 paragraphs per prompt, then share with the group.

10. Debate & Real-World Connection (5, 7 min):
11. Pick 1, 2 responses to read aloud. Ask: "How does this story challenge or affirm modern skepticism (e.g., self-doubt, 'not good enough' culture)?"
12. End with: "Where in your life do you see God 'using the weak things' (1 Cor. 1:27) like Gideon?" Pause for personal reflections.
13. Theological Tie-In:
14. Gideon's story is a crisis of self-identity (weakness God's strength). The activity forces students to ask: Does God's power require human effort, or is it a gift to those who trust Him?
15. Connect to corporate prayer (Judges 6:27, 32): "How can we 'fight back' against doubt in community?"
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Activity 2:

Supplies needed:

- *Uses common materials while maximizing engagement.*
1. Theological Grounding (3 min):
 2. Distribute Judges 6:6, 7. Ask: "What did the Midianites 'armor' (v.6) look like? How does Gideon's lack of it contrast with their confidence?"
 3. Write: "God's strength works in through weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)."
 4. Armor Dissection (6 min):
 5. Step 1: In groups, cut a paper plate into 4 sections:
 6. Section 1: Label "Midianite Armor" (e.g., "confidence in self," "overwhelmed by problems").
 7. Section 2: Label "Gideon's Armor" (e.g., "God's promise," "trust in the unseen").
 8. Step 2: Glue images/objects to represent each section (e.g., glue a toy sword on "Midianite Armor," a Bible verse on "Gideon's Armor").
 9. Step 3: Write a 3-sentence summary of how each section contrasts.
 10. Role-Play Debate (5, 7 min):
 11. Divide into 2 groups:
 12. Group A (Midianite perspective): Argue that Gideon's "weakness" was a flaw.
 13. Group B (Gideon's perspective): Argue that God used his doubt to empower him.
 14. After each group speaks, ask: "How does this play reflect how God works in unexpected people?"
 15. Real-World Application: "Where have you seen God move in someone 'unlike you'? How could Gideon's story inspire you to trust God in your 'Midianite moments'?"
 16. Theological Tie-In:
 17. Judges 7's "Reduction Method": Gideon's victory came from trusting God's plan, not his own strategy. The activity mirrors how God often uses messy, imperfect people.
 18. Cultural Relevance: Many teens feel "armored" by perfectionism, social media, or academic pressure, this activity invites them to see their "weaknesses" as places God can act.
 19. Why These Work for High Schoolers:
 20. Intellectual Honesty: Both activities avoid simplifying Gideon's story; they push students to engage with doubt, community, and agency (e.g., Judges 6:33's sister's role).
 21. Real-World Links: Connects to modern struggles like imposter syndrome, anxiety, or systemic injustice.

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended, intellectually engaging discussion questions that encourage deep reflection on Gideon's story, theological themes, and real-world application while fostering intellectual honesty:

- 1. Human Strength vs. Divine Weakness: What Does It Mean to Trust God When Our Fears Are Overwhelming?
- Gideon's people were afraid of God's presence, and he himself questioned his own worthiness ("I am the least of all my family"). The passage suggests that God often works through those who feel inadequate. How might this challenge traditional notions of leadership or success? Consider:
 - How does faith in God's sovereignty (that He chooses the weak for a purpose) affect how you respond to your own failures or perceived limitations?
 - If you were to meet someone who doubts their abilities like Gideon did, how would you encourage them to trust God's plan rather than their own expectations?
- 2. The Paradox of Defeating God's Enemies Through Weakness: What Does This Say About the Nature of Warfare?
- Gideon's strategy was unconventional: he chose only the weakest, youngest, and least impressive warriors to fight the Midianites. This seems counterintuitive in a world where military might usually wins. How does this passage force us to reconsider:
 - What does "winning" even mean in spiritual or moral struggles? Are victories always about strength, or can they emerge from humility and trust?
 - If God uses weakness to accomplish something (e.g., turning fear into courage, fear of failure into boldness), what real-world contexts (e.g., social justice, personal relationships, faith-based movements) could this apply to?
- 3. Divine Delays and Human Doubt: How Does Gideon's Story Challenge Our Understanding of Divine Timing?
- Gideon was repeatedly told to "go" (Judges 6:34, 7:9, 7:16), yet he spent years in hiding, questioning God's plan. The story suggests that God's timing isn't always aligned with human convenience. How might this apply to:
 - Your own experiences of waiting or delayed answers to prayer. Did Gideon's doubt stem from frustration with God's timing, or was it part of a larger narrative about learning faith?
 - Modern Christian theology: Are there theological debates (e.g., on providence, free will, or the nature of God's will) where this story could serve as a point of reflection or critique? For example, how does it relate to discussions on whether God's plans are always "good" or if we sometimes need to accept uncertainty?
- 4. Theological Implications: Why Does God Choose the Weak? What Does This Say About Our Identity in Christ?
- This passage is often cited as an example of God's preference for the lowly, the overlooked, and the unassuming. How might we explore this through a theological lens:
 - What historical, cultural, or biblical themes (e.g., the "poor in spirit," the "last shall be first") does Gideon's story intersect with? How does this align or contrast with other biblical narratives of God's favoritism (e.g., David vs. Saul, the Prodigal Son)?
 - In a world where success is often measured by external validation (e.g., fame, wealth, power), how does the idea that God uses the "weak" challenge our self-worth? How might this apply to identity in Christ today? For instance, how do marginalized groups (e.g., in society, faith communities) experience this principle in their lives?
 - What real-world consequences might arise if we take Gideon's story too literally (e.g., discouraging ambition) or too figuratively (e.g., ignoring structural oppression)? How can we balance this principle with the need for justice and action?
- Suggestions for Facilitating Discussion:
 - Encourage students to share personal stories or examples where they've felt weak, uncertain, or "unworthy" of God's favor, and how that experience shaped their faith.
 - Pair these questions with Scripture passages that explore similar themes (e.g., Isaiah 40:11, 17, Philippians 4:12, or Romans 12:3, 8).

- Invite students to write a short reflection or journal entry on one of the questions, focusing on how the passage challenges or deepens their understanding of God's character or their own faith.

Prayer Focus

"Lord, You reveal Your strength in the weaknesses of those who trust in You, not in their own might, but in Your promise of grace (2 Corinthians 12:9). In Gideon's life, You shaped the frail warrior's faith into an instrument of Your deliverance (Judges 6, 7), challenging us to surrender our pride and embrace the paradox of strength found in vulnerability. Teach us, as we study these stories, to see ourselves as You see us, neither unworthy nor beyond use, but called into a purpose that transcends our own limited understanding." (Optional addition for reflection: "May we, like Gideon's followers, learn to trust You in the midst of uncertainty, trusting that Your justice is deeper than our human judgments.")

>> Missions Spotlight

The churches in rural Mozambique are often tiny, sometimes just 10-15 believers meeting under a tree. Yet these small congregations are transforming their communities. Gideon's story reminds them that God doesn't need big numbers to do big things.

-> To the Cross

Gideon went from hiding in a winepress to leading an army, but God reduced the army from 32,000 to 300 so that no one could boast. God delights in using weak things to show His strength. Jesus Himself was born in a manger, not a palace.