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## GOD CHOOSES AND EMPOWERS

We have heard the expression, "When it rains, it pours." There are times when things seem to go from bad to worse. You can imagine a farmer putting up hay. He would arrange for some hired help to come in on the day he plans to bale the hay. There might be rain in the forecast for the next day, so he really has to get the job done. What can he do if all the helpers get sick and can't come and on top of that the baler breaks and his tractor won't run? It's an impossible situation.

I'm sure that each of you has had situations in life in which you had limited resources to do an important job. You have experienced the frustration of seeing even the little help that you had dwindle to almost nothing. How do you handle such situations? Some of us would get mad and some of us would just sit down and cry.

Many people see a need to do worthwhile things in life and do not have the means to get the job done. Sometimes when they start worthwhile projects they will run into difficulties that seem to be impossible to overcome. They may lose all their money and all their friends in the process. Some will press on and eventually be successful and others will give up. Many examples are given to us in the Bible about people who were called by God to carry out what seem to be impossible tasks. The role call of the faithful of such people as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, and Daniel finds people who found that only God is able to accomplish what He calls us to work on. In our situations, we fail to realize that the things that go wrong -- the farm workers who can't come, the tractor that won't run, the extra bills that come in -- are opportunities for us to put our confidence in God and Him only.

Gideon was one of life's most unlikely heroes. In our way of looking at things, we would probably have characterized him as "a loser." He was a poor and fearful person who was hiding from the Midianites lest they steal the little grain he had. But God chose Gideon and worked through Him to accomplish His purposes. We are familiar with the situation in Israel during the time of Gideon. The people of Israel had drifted away from God and as result, they experienced economic problems and oppression at the hands of their enemies. It is difficult for us to think in those terms. Most Americans see no relationship to the economic difficulties, the rise in strange diseases, the break up of families, the rise in crime, the devastating earthquakes and the terrible floods to the fact that we have abandoned our reliance on God. God used the oppression of Israel's enemies as a means to bring them back to Him. When they realized they needed God, then God would intervene on their behalf by raising up and working through a person such as Gideon.

When a person agrees to work with God to accomplish what God is doing, then there will be risk. The first thing God told Gideon to do was to pull down the idols to Baal and Asherah. Today, this would be like defying the government or saying that evolution is a hoax or saying the homosexuality is a sin. The act of Gideon placed him in great danger. Most of the time, there is a price to pay for following God. Gideon was faithful and when God delivered him from his neighbors who wanted to kill him he was encouraged and set out to call the people of Israel to fight against the Midianites. Many (32,000) responded to the call that went out.

**JUDGES 7:2-3** The Midianites, the Amalekites, and other tribes from the east had come to Israel to steal and take whatever they could from the people and the land. The number of camels was said to be like the sand on the seashore. So, to Gideon, the 32,000 men seemed to be too few. It probably was too few if they were going to fight the battle in their own strength. However, God was going to fight the battle for them. In that case, it was too many. If they had entered the battle and had won, then they would have been sure that they were really good warriors. Such pride is typical of all people after they experience any kind of success.

God wanted to teach them a lesson about reliance on Him and keeping up their relationship with Him in the future. With that objective in mind, He started to trim down the forces by having Gideon send home all those who were afraid. After that, there were only 10,000 men remaining with Gideon. They started out outnumbered four to one and now they were outnumbered thirteen to one. I would think those who were left might have had second thoughts about whether or not they were afraid after seeing so many of their countrymen leave.

**JUDGES 7:4-7** When God does a miracle to demonstrate His power, then there should be no doubt that a miracle had occurred. It might be possible that 10,000 could defeat more than a 100,000 and then people might question whether the victory was because of their ability or because of what God had done. With only 300 men to fight the battle, there would be no doubt that God had gotten the victory for them.

Much has been written about the way the 300 were separated from the 9,700 others. The 300 brought water to their mouth and lapped it as a dog would. The rest knelt down and drank directly from the stream. Commentaries have interpreted the actions of the first group as meaning they were more alert and watchful and the others were interested only in quenching their thirst. I'm not sure that was part of the consideration. Think about it. Do you think it really matter how brave and alert the 300 were when compared to the 130,000 men the enemy had? We want to try to find something of merit in our humanity that justifies why God chose those particular men. One could make the argument that they were the "most afraid" of the remaining 10,000. I could argue they were afraid to even look down to take a drink of water. After all, God didn't choose Gideon because he was so courageous. The victory was not going to happen because they were so good, it was going to happen because God is so great!

**JUDGES 7:19-21** Gideon divided the men into three companies of 100 each and gave each of them clay jars, a torch, and a trumpet. They gathered around the camp of the Midianites and after the changing of the guard they followed Gideon's lead and broke the jars to reveal the lighted torches, blew the trumpets and shouted. The Midianites were panic stricken and fled. They assumed they were surrounded by thousands of people and had no idea there was only one person for each light that was shining. Trumpets were usually sounded when an attack was beginning and the large army camped in the valley thought they were in great danger. The Bible tells us they got up and cried out in fear and ran away.

When evil is confronted and done so in the name of the Lord, they do not expect the challenge and it throws those who practice it into disarray. If we would listen to God and follow what He wants us to do, we could see our land cleaned up of the vice and immorality that are camping out in our land. Gideon had to take a first step of obedience in doing what God told him. He started by pulling down the idols that people were trusting. That would be a good starting place for us. There are many idols in our land in which many people trust rather than trusting in the God of all creation.