

Day by Day with God

ROOTING WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE BIBLE

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Celia Bowring and husband Lyndon have three children and work with CARE—a charity that offers Christian insight on public policy issues and practical caring initiatives. Celia is CARE's Prayer Coordinator.

Mary Rimmer is a vicar's wife and mother of four. She is a regular New Wine seminar speaker, loves watching films and, due to a midlife crisis, has taken up windsurfing.

Liz Holden loves discipling younger women in her own church and in her travels with her husband, serving Newfrontiers churches worldwide. She is enjoying life as a grandmother to five girls.

Elaine Pountney trains leaders and teachers in several African countries in 'Reclaiming the wonder of sexuality'. She also speaks at retreats, creates interactive i-chats with her grandchildren, and is wrestling with the intricacies of gluten-free cooking for three family members.

Wendy Bray is a freelance writer and speaker, addressing audiences across the UK. She has a special interest in seeing women grow and live in the true confidence that God offers them.

Sandra Wheatley trained as a nurse and enjoyed every aspect of caring for others. Though no longer able to work, due to MS, she lives a full life through an extensive prayer and email ministry.

▶▶ MAKING LINKS

Our human instinct is to admire strength, power and beauty—attributes that make people and their achievements stand out. God does the opposite. He opts for small beginnings and insignificant status. Then, when he works, it is evident that the glory belongs to God, not to our weak human efforts.

Jean Watson's notes have helped us to consider the storylines running through scripture. One recurring theme in the different types of story is God's habit of using weak and insignificant people to achieve his great and glorious purposes. As the apostle Paul said, 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him' (1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

Over the next two weeks, Anne Coomes turns our attention to Gideon—an example of how God uses weak people to achieve great things. By his own admission, Gideon was the least in his family and his clan was the weakest (Judges 6:15), but he was willing to obey and serve God.

Gideon's strength lay in the fact that God was with him. That same strength is available to us. You may be painfully aware of your weaknesses and limitations, but are you aware of God's strength and power—and his desire to work through you?

As you consider Gideon's life over the next two weeks, ask God to make you aware of the power of his Holy Spirit at work within you, equipping you to do immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine.

Why trouble comes

Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help... [A prophet told them,] ‘I said to you, “I am the Lord your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.” But you have not listened to me.’

Over the next two weeks we will look at Gideon, one of the early leaders or ‘judges’ of Israel. He began life as a nobody in a poor family in a time of great trouble and went on to rescue Israel from disaster. The time was somewhere between 1220 and 1050BC. After 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites had finally settled in their promised land, but soon the scattered tribes of Israel were in big trouble.

Israel’s problem was one of disloyalty. The Lord had offered her something unique in world history—a personal covenant relationship with him, based on the Ten Commandments. Israel was promised God’s protection and blessing in return for her obedience and loyalty.

Soon, though, the Israelites found their God boring. They did not warm to an invisible God ‘out there’ somewhere, whose worship was based on integrity of spirit. Instead, they hankered after the local fertility gods of wood and stone, whose worship included plenty of sex and debauched behaviour. Thus a deadly cycle began, which would last for centuries. Israel would slowly abandon Yahweh for the local gods. Yahweh in turn would slowly abandon her—to the local people. Israel would be oppressed by her neighbours and suffer. Eventually she would cry to God for help and God would send a deliverer.

This is where Gideon comes in. In his time, the attacks were coming from the Midianites, fierce Bedouins who swept through southern Israel each year, burning and stealing. After seven long years of this trouble, Israel cried to God for help. God began by reminding them of a simple truth: whenever we worship a lesser god, we become its servant—but it cannot save us.

‘However deep you fall, you are never out of God’s reach.’ Anon

See Psalm 51 for a model of repentance in prayer.

AC

Take heart

[The angel] said, ‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’ ‘But sir,’ Gideon replied, ‘if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our parents told us about...? But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.’

Back in the mid 1990s, I lost my way in my career. I had had to leave a good job for pressing family reasons and then found myself in a work wilderness. Which way to go? I really floundered, and was reduced to living on scraps of freelance work. At times I felt that God had abandoned me. Then I felt clearly called to found and launch an editorial resource company on the internet.

No one could have been more surprised than me, and yet the call from God was unmistakable. So... I went ahead. It was really scary at times, and I made plenty of mistakes. Looking back, though, the only way in which I can account for my survival and present enjoyment of the work is that God has been with me and that everything—the idea, the people, the opportunities—came only from him in the first place. All I had to be was obedient to his calling.

I was reminded of all this when I read of this first lovely encounter between ‘the angel of the Lord’ and Gideon. The angel appears one day and sits down under an oak tree by Gideon’s family winepress. He assures Gideon that, despite the present misery and isolation, God is with him. Indeed, God has a future planned for him: because God is ‘with him’, even Gideon can become a ‘mighty warrior’. He will accomplish great things, even though his only present aim in life is to hide some wheat from the Midianites. Gideon is startled beyond measure, yet his words reveal that he has been grieving at the thought that the Lord has abandoned his people. He wants the special relationship back and the Lord is going to honour that desire.

The Lord is with us, too. If we stay close to him, we will be free to become what we were born to be.

Read John 15:9–12 for a good description of how we can be guaranteed to grow spiritually.

AC

I'm sending you

The Lord said... 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?' 'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.' The Lord answered, 'I will be with you.'

The Lord's command to Gideon seemed ridiculous: go and save your country from tens of thousands of fierce predatory nomads. Gideon was appalled, and no wonder: he contrasted his present weakness with the strength he would need to succeed. The gap was too wide. How could he possibly do it?

Gideon was not unique: most of us have average backgrounds, average families, education and jobs. We accept that our future seems laid out before us, with no surprises in store, and that may be fine... but suppose it isn't? Suppose that God has given you gifts, as yet unused, and is now calling on you to go ahead and use them?

The story of Gideon makes clear that if God calls us, we needn't worry about our present resources to do the task. The Lord did not ask Gideon to muster a whole army to begin with—just to go in the strength he had then. When God calls us, we can only begin where we are right now. Someone wise has observed, 'God has no larger field for the person who is not faithfully doing the work where they are right now.'

Throughout history, when God has called someone, they have always started small. From Moses to Mother Teresa, they began in the strength that God had already given them. It is when we are faithful in small things that we are given more—and more! God wants every one of us to have fruitful lives. He wants to 'send' each one of us into some situation to do his will there. 'Am I not sending you?' These words are wonderfully personal. When God sends you, he sends you, and no one else, into that precise situation.

'God does not ask about our ability or our inability, but our availability' (Anon). Isaiah described it beautifully: 'Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said: "Here am I. Send me!"' (Isaiah 6:8).

How it all begins

The Lord said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.’ So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it The Lord is Peace.

When our story of Gideon began, he was not seeking the Lord, eager for some big thing to do with his life. He was a frightened young man, wrapped up in immediate concerns—hiding food away from the Midianites, intent only on survival.

Then the angel arrived, touched some food with the tip of his staff and it was consumed by fire (v. 21). This was enough to scare Gideon half to death. He realised that his visitor was divine, and the Israelites believed that if you had an encounter with the divine, then you would die. Instead, though, exactly the opposite happened. The Lord had not come to kill him but to draw nearer to him. He reassured Gideon: ‘Peace! Do not be afraid.’

Gideon immediately responded. Although his family and community were worshipping the gods of the Amorites, he built an altar to the Lord, to worship him instead. There is a vital principle here: the first step for Gideon in doing a great work for God was to deepen his private relationship with his Creator. It began with worship: he built an altar to God in that quiet, hidden place, under an oak tree in the back of beyond. The enemy was riding roughshod over the land, spreading terror and hunger, but Gideon could now see beyond that and say, ‘The Lord is peace.’

When God called Gideon to go to war on behalf of his people, he did not whip Gideon up into a frenzy. Instead, the Lord established him in a place of peace with himself. Out of that silent place of trust and love of God came Gideon’s strength to do battle. When God calls us, he wants us to respond first by realigning our souls before him. He wants the centre of our energy to be his peace, not our frenzy.

‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth’ (Psalm 46:10).

Read Matthew 6:5–14 to see how you can begin to draw closer to God.

AC

Those little gods in your life

That same night the Lord said to him, ‘Take the second bull from your father’s herd... Tear down your father’s altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on the top of this height.’

Joash, Gideon’s father, seems to have been custodian of the Baal sanctuary for the whole local community. Bulls were the sacred animals used in the fertility cults. Tearing down the altar to Baal and the Asherah pole may seem a strange way to begin to fight the Midianites, but actually it was the only way. The real reason why the Israelites were under attack was that they had forsaken their God, who had protected them. So God’s first command to Gideon made perfect sense: set your own house in order; get rid of the idols in your life.

When we live serving lesser gods, our relationship with God will die. Little idols don’t all have names like Baal and Asherah; they are also called ‘Wrong Relationship’, ‘Job First’, ‘Make Money Most of All’. They can be anything that rules our daily lives. Such little idols need uprooting if we are to live the life to which God has really called us. Will it be difficult to get rid of that idol in your life? Gideon knew that cutting down the Asherah pole might get him killed by his own people, but he did it anyway—by night. He was not hiding; he just wanted it done without further delay. If there are things in your life that you know need putting right, there’s little point in hanging around discussing them with the very people who will try to stop you. Just go and do it!

Gideon got rid of Baal and the Asherah pole, but he didn’t stop there: he immediately built a ‘proper altar’. It is a good tip for us today: don’t just tear down the idols in your life. Do you know the old Bob Dylan song, ‘You gotta serve somebody’? Make sure there is an altar in your life—but to the right God.

‘Satan doesn’t care what we worship, as long as we don’t worship God’ (D.L. Moody).

Read Psalm 16 to see the difference between following God and following gods.

AC

So what's Baal going to do about it?

Joash replied... 'Are you going to plead Baal's cause? ... If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar.' So that day they called Gideon 'Jerub-Baal', saying, 'Let Baal contend with him', because he broke down Baal's altar.'

The story of Gideon has several unexpected twists and turns, and this is one of them. The night after Gideon obeyed God and destroyed the altar to Baal and the Asherah pole, the local people were up in arms. No surprise there! They wanted to kill the person responsible. No surprise there, either. When they found out it was Gideon, they accused him in front of his father, Joash, who was in fact the owner of the Baal altar and Asherah pole. His son had done a terrible wrong to Baal and must die. Joash's reaction came as a complete shock to them, for he didn't defend anybody—neither his son Gideon nor his god Baal. Instead, he simply asked the obvious question: why should a god need human help? (v. 31).

Joash, the leader of the local shrine to Baal, was suddenly questioning Baal's very existence. The crisis of seeing his son in danger of dying for his god had awoken him to the question: is Baal really worth it? Down the centuries, the most unlikely of people have suddenly turned from 'false gods' to Yahweh. Sometimes they've seemed an impossible distance away—playboys like Francis of Assisi, slave traders like John Newton or rampant cheats like Chuck Colson (of Watergate fame). When people like these are faced with a crisis, they often respond by questioning the values they have held all their lives. When they discover that those values are false, their disillusionment is complete and they are hungry for something better.

When we stand up for what is right, we may create a path for other people to follow. When we act for what is right, it can open other people's eyes to the same option.

Today it is fashionable to doubt the Christian God. What about gently challenging a friend to doubt their faith in a false god?

Read Jeremiah 10:11–13 for a good contrast between God our maker and the gods that we make.

Battle lines drawn

Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.

The story of Gideon is well paced. No sooner has he survived the incident with the altar to Baal than the next danger arrives. It is the eighth annual invasion of the dreaded nomads, who are out to pillage the land of Israel once again.

Israel is already weak and impoverished; another attack will leave the people facing starvation. Gideon has been caught up in the flow of events; he has to act now! Yet the Bible is quite clear about the sequence of events. It tells us that the enemy made the first move, entering the country, intending evil. They set up camp in the Valley of Jezreel, creating an enemy stronghold. This would have taken several days at least, and still Gideon did nothing.

Then, the Bible tells us, ‘*Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.*’ This is one of the earliest accounts in the Bible of the Holy Spirit ‘coming upon’ someone. The Hebrew verb translated ‘came upon’ really means ‘to clothe’, so the verse literally reads, ‘The Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon’. Gideon was not left alone to fight the enemy by himself. God kept his promise and was indeed with him.

It is only when Gideon has the Spirit of God upon him that he begins to act, and, because of this, his actions are effective and powerful. The Bible makes clear that the Holy Spirit wants to indwell each one of us, to help us fulfil God’s plan for our lives. We too will face enemies and we too will need to fight, but we need never do it alone. His Spirit is as with us today as he was with Gideon.

Jesus gave his disciples a lovely promise: ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and... to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).

Wet fleece, dry fleece

Gideon said to God, ‘If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand.’

The story of how Gideon used a sheep’s fleece to ask God for final confirmation of his will is one of the best-known stories of a person seeking guidance in the Old Testament. For two nights Gideon laid out a fleece on the threshing floor. The first night he prayed for the fleece to be wet with dew and the ground to be dry, and the next night he prayed for the fleece to be dry and the ground to be wet with dew. In both cases, God answered his prayer, so Gideon was given reassurance that he was to lead Israel to battle.

Gideon was not asking God to perform ‘tricks’ for his amusement. He was desperately asking for help in the only way he knew how. His heart’s desire was just to know God’s will. God honoured Gideon’s humble, obedient spirit and answered his prayer. Gideon needed guidance, but so do we. Marriage partners, children, jobs, homes—every aspect of our lives is based on a decision we have made at some point. Did we choose right? If the decision is still before us, how can we make sure that we choose God’s will for us now?

The Bible makes it clear that if we seek God’s will for our lives, he will show us the path we are meant to take. Over the years, God has spoken to me in a variety of ways. Sometimes there is an inner ‘prompting’—a feeling that will not go away. Sometimes sets of circumstances have either ‘opened’ easily or slammed shut in my face. At other times, a Bible verse has almost leapt off the page at me, giving me discernment about a situation. Other people received God’s guidance through dreams. Whatever the method, God is the great communicator—and if you seek him, he is sure to answer you.

Sometimes, ‘a glimpse of the next three feet of road is more important than a view of the horizon’ (C.S. Lewis).

AC

Only 300 left

The Lord said to Gideon, ‘You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her... take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there.’

Gideon and his Israelite army gathered by the spring of Harod, below Mount Gilboa. The Midianites were less than five miles away and battle was imminent. Now Gideon really needed his deep faith and conviction that he was doing God’s will. Why? Because God was about to knock away every other prop he had.

Gideon had summoned every Israelite soldier that he could find to help him. They numbered only 32,000, but Gideon hoped that God could use them. Instead, the Lord proceeded to send most of them home and Gideon was left with 300 men—300 against tens of thousands of the enemy. The situation had been desperate; now it was suicidal. Gideon’s faith had never been in the army, though. So when the Lord took most of the army away, Gideon did not have a heart attack. He just obeyed and kept going.

Sometimes in life, it can seem that even God is against us. We are given a great opportunity, but then we lose someone or something—or even our health—which we desperately need in order to do the job. Why does God open the door and then tie us down? A friend of mine became minister of a large, lively church; then his wife was diagnosed with dementia. So there he is, with huge opportunities but facing the extra difficulties involved in the care of his wife.

Paul met the same puzzle and found his answer: ‘There was given me a thorn in my flesh... But [the Lord] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” ... That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses... in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Corinthians 12:7–10).

‘The Lord doesn’t take us into deep water to drown us but to develop us’ (Irv Hedstrom).

AC

Unexpected encouragement

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. During that night the Lord said to Gideon, ‘... If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp... and listen... Afterwards, you will be encouraged.’

Many years ago, I sat in Nairobi airport feeling exhausted and rather desperate. I had spent weeks researching a book and my head was spinning. Now it was time to go home to Macclesfield and begin writing, but the research had overwhelmed me. How could those hundreds of pages of notes ever be untangled and woven into a story?

I boarded the plane. As I struggled to heave my case up into the locker, the young man behind me put down his book and stood up to help. I glanced down at the book he was reading and froze in complete amazement. He was reading the book that I had written after my last bout of research—in Uganda. We got chatting and his enthusiasm for my book was the best, if least expected, encouragement I have ever had in my life. So someone out there really did read my books. Amazing! I landed in England with renewed enthusiasm.

Gideon must have felt something similar to that. He was in fear and bemusement at the enormity of what lay ahead when suddenly, out of the blue, the Lord sent him some most unexpected encouragement. He descended to the enemy’s camp and overheard them talking about him (of all people!) winning the war. Gideon had presumed that they saw him as a loser, but discovered that they saw him as a powerful warrior for the God of the Israelites.

Sometimes discouragement can overwhelm us. A vicious little voice in our heads assures us that we are weak, useless and unwanted; but if we are living in obedience to God’s will for our lives, that is simply not true. If we abide in Christ, we will be fruitful, and sometimes the Lord will let us discover that we can refresh other people.

The Lord uses people to encourage us. Is there someone you know who could do with a bit of encouragement?

Read Ephesians 1:15–17 to see how Paul was encouraged.

AC

The swords that were not swords

Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, 'A sword for the lord and for Gideon!' While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

A couple of years ago now, some Christian meetings in Florida suddenly 'took off'. People spoke of revival. The meetings were based on the healing ministry of one man, and, thanks to TV, soon millions were looking up to him. When, a few months later, he left his wife for another woman, there was a lot of hurt.

That is a modern-day example of people's trust in spiritual leadership going badly wrong, but this part of the story of Gideon tells of a trust that was proved amazingly right. I am filled with admiration for those 300 men. Their faith seems even greater to me than Gideon's.

Consider this: most of them hadn't even heard of Gideon before they were called up into his army. They had not seen the angel that visited him or the wet and dry fleeces. All they had seen was that most of their forces (31,700 out of 32,000 men) had been sent home without fighting anybody. By that night, just 300 of them remained. Then Gideon handed out trumpets, jugs and torches—no swords—and told them they were ready to go into battle against the Midianites.

The 300 men should have responded with a 'What?!?!' but instead they displayed a staggering level of trust in Gideon and, through that, a deep trust in the God of their ancestors, Yahweh. They believed that Gideon was listening to God and that, however crazy his actions, he was getting it right.

What trust and responsibility Gideon held before God and those soldiers! If he had got it wrong, they would have gone to their deaths.

Are you in any form of leadership? You have a great responsibility to make sure you are listening to God. Whom do you look to for leadership? Why not pray for those people, that they will stand firm?

AC

Sensitive egos

Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, ‘... Why didn’t you call us when you went to fight Midian?’ And they criticised him sharply. But he answered them, ‘... God gave Oreb and Zeeb, the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you?’ At this, their resentment against him subsided.

Have you ever noticed that life is full of powerful people with the most sensitive of egos? They are not your enemies but, if you offend them in any way, they soon will be. How can such tough people have such fragile feelings? Gideon had this same problem with the Ephraimites, it seems. After the battle of the torches and trumpets, the 300 Israelites began to chase the scattered surviving Midianites throughout the hill country of Israel. Soon the Ephraimites got involved, intercepting the remnants of the fleeing enemy army.

The Ephraimites made up one of the strongest tribes at the time and, although they caught and dispatched two Midianite kings, they were left seething with fury. For some reason, Gideon had not called on them for the first battle and now they took grave offence. Perhaps they resented the loss of the chance of booty and the spoils of battle.

Gideon’s answer is an excellent illustration of Proverbs 15:1: ‘A gentle answer turns away wrath.’ He did not react with impatience or irritation. He made no mention of how he had just routed an entire army and how he could do without their complaining. Instead, he praised Ephraim’s contribution, which was the capture of the two princes. Mollified, Ephraim calmed down and Israel retained its unity.

I once heard someone say that to make peace between people, you have to be willing to be a bridge—which sometimes means getting walked on. Gideon learned it that day: his humility and wisdom prevented a great rift in Israel. Dealing with undeserved criticism is one of the hardest things to do.

Jesus urged us to be ‘as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves’ in dealing with people (Matthew 10:16), and Ecclesiastes observes, ‘Patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools’ (Ecclesiastes 7:8–9).

Why should we?

Gideon and his three hundred men... came to the Jordan and crossed it. He said to the men of Succoth, 'Give my troops some bread; they are worn out, and I am still pursuing...' But the officials of Succoth said, '... Why should we give bread to your troops?'

When I was growing up near New York, there was a girl on our block who made the rest of us little kids nervous. Much of the time, she'd play like everyone else, but then without warning she would turn really mean. She'd ask to hold your Barbie doll and refuse to return it, or she'd hide your coat and mock you. Once, she tricked a five-year-old into going into her garage and wouldn't let her out again, despite her frantic screams. When she was in this mood, she would taunt us in exactly the same way that the men of Succoth did. 'Why should I? Huh? Why should I give anything to you?' More than 40 years later, I can still hear the sneer in her voice. She relished her power to withhold help from those who had trusted her. She was one creepy kid.

Such malice is sickening, whether you live near New York in the 1960s or in Israel around 1100BC. Whereas the Ephraimites had not hesitated to help Gideon, even though they moaned at him later, the men of Succoth were, in effect, siding with the Midianites against Gideon. Where Gideon had been tactful in his dealing with the prickly but loyal Ephraimites, he was harsh with the treacherous men of Succoth: he recognised them as enemies and punished them later (v. 16).

I wish my childhood experiences had taught me to beware of manipulative people, for manipulation is part and parcel of treachery and dominance. Anyone who acts in these ways is not worthy of our friendship. They are not honest: when they ask for 'forgiveness', it is often so that their abuse can continue. If you are involved with such people, detach yourself as quickly as you can and leave them to God. You will not win with them.

Consider the main relationships in your life. Is your trust in anyone being abused? If so, pray about taking firm action to end the abuse.

AC

Epilogue

The Israelites said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us—you, your son and your grandson—because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian.’ But Gideon told them, ‘I will not rule over you... The Lord will rule over you.’ And he said, ‘I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring.’

God uses fallible human beings, not superheroes, and these closing lines on the life of Gideon are a poignant reminder of the fact. Gideon had led Israel to victory. He was the only ‘leader’ that Israel had. No wonder the Israelites clung to him. In gratitude, they offered him control of the country. They offered him anything he wanted. So Gideon was faced with two temptations: great power and great wealth.

Faced with the temptation of great power, Gideon’s reply was a model of discernment. He reminded the people that they already had a king, the Lord. He urged them to recognise God’s divine rule over them. Israel had been founded as a theocracy, not a monarchy.

At the temptation of great wealth, though, Gideon faltered. Perhaps it was the memory of all those years of poverty. Whatever the reason, Gideon accepted a great quantity of gold. He made an ‘ephod’, a beautiful object of some sort. This was dangerous: its beauty became ‘a snare’ to both him and the people (v. 27). The Israelites began to worship it. If that seems daft, remember that they were only one step away from the polytheism of their neighbours. Anyway, the worship of man-made objects is very common nowadays, too.

Our lives are full of ups and downs. Often our priorities get mixed up, but we can’t ‘right’ our lives by worshipping the wrong things. What we worship becomes what we serve. Sadly, Gideon did not end his life as well as he began it. Yet, in the time of crisis he had shown outstanding faith in God. God blessed him greatly for this: ‘During Gideon’s lifetime the land enjoyed peace for forty years’ (v. 28).

Is there anything in your life that is taking more room than it should? It will drive out a lot of goodness in your life. Jonah put it this way: ‘Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs’ (2:8).

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