

Aim of lesson

To see that God can choose a man who doubts and can gently build up his faith.

Bible background

Judges 6-88.

Outline of lesson

Background

You may need to fill in a little of the background between the previous lesson and this one, in particular if the class did not have time to think about the conquest of the land in 'Digging deeper'.

Think about the plight of the Israelites described in Judges 6:1-6. The reason for their hopeless situation was that they had turned their backs on God, but their suffering would have been terrible. It may be relevant to remind the class of the situation of people in places such as Africa, where tribal conflicts can create similar situations.

God appears to Gideon

Read together Judges 6:11-24, having different members of the class read the parts of the narrator, Gideon, and the angel of the Lord. Go through questions 1-4 in the workbook looking just at the first column, about Gideon. Use the questions to clarify the narrative and to bring out God's development of Gideon's faith. The space in the workbook will only be enough for a few words in summary. A large sheet or blackboard may be useful in collecting all the ideas during discussion.

Gideon's faith develops

Use questions 5 – 10 as a Bible search. Allow the class time to look up the references and to discuss fully what is going on in the story of Gideon. Bring out the development of Gideon's faith and what we learn of God himself.

God first (Question 5) tells Gideon to pull down his father's altar devoted to Baal. In doing so Gideon is having to make a choice between the true God and an idol, and to show his commitment in a public way. He acted at night, out of fear (just as Nicodemus came to Jesus), but he could hardly have imagined he would not be found out.

The next time Gideon is given a mission there is no secrecy (Question 6), and in Question 7, with the miracles of the fleece, God gives a proof that Gideon will be the means of saving Israel. Depending on the age and interests of the class – and somewhere waterproof! – you may like to give them some 'fleece' (wool or cotton wool) and a watering can. Ask them to get just the 'fleece' wet and then only wet the ground. This is not easy with the watering can but requires a miracle when moistened by dew. This is what Gideon asked God to do in order to prove that He was with him.

Question 8 is intended to bring out the point that the Lord does not need a large army in order to win. One person with God is a majority against any number. Bring out how hard it would have been to see your army reduced from 32,000 to 300 before a battle against a much larger enemy.

In question 9, try to bring out the fact that God is not angry with Gideon for his fears and doubts (Judges 7:9-10). God does not wait for Gideon to ask for reassurance, but encourages him by the account of the dream that he overhears. Having reassured him, God then expects Gideon to act! This is what God counts as real faith, doing what you know God wants even if you are afraid or unsure.

In question 10, when showing that the land had peace, go back to show from chapter 6:1-6 the terrible oppression that the Israelites were suffering because of the wanton destruction by the Midianites of their crops and livestock. It was from this terror, poverty and slavery, that Gideon freed his people.

Encouragement for us

Use the second set of questions to discuss the class' relationship with God. Encourage the class to see:

1. That by reading God's word and learning about him, God is showing himself to them, and that he wants them to know him.
2. That God does not expect us to be good, clever or strong enough on our own. In fact he can't use us until we realise that we need him.
3. God and his Son Jesus do promise to be with us (John 14:23).
4. The class will obviously give different answers. Although probably, for many, the death and resurrection of Jesus will be the most impressive.
5. If you thought of Gideon standing up for the true God and against false gods, there could be a useful parallel in our standing up for God and not for other things that are worshipped such as money, importance, clothes, etc.
6. Try to bring home for them the idea that God values their doing what he asks even if they are still afraid or unsure.
7. The class will come up with different answers. The lessons from the Bible about how he has helped others; prophecy which is coming true today; the wonder of his creation; and answers to prayers, are all a form of reassurance of his power and trustworthy character.
8. Use examples in a school setting of how the person who doesn't have the backing of the majority but who goes God's way is the one on the winning side.
9. It is often easier for us to believe that God loves someone else than to believe God loves us. Help the class to see that God, by being God, is always the same and will show them the same kindness and patience.
10. 1 Corinthians 15:57 speaks of the victory. The context is of a victory over sin and death. Romans 8:2 says that this victory is achieved by Jesus Christ for us whilst Romans 8:37-39 describes the effect as our being 'more than conquerors'. Encourage the class to see the effect of freedom from fear and slavery to sin which being a child of God brings and how this is similar to the experience of Israel.

Digging deeper

Judges

This exercise fills in the background to the period of the Judges. Only Gideon and Samson are covered in these lessons and you might like to sketch in the background to the 400 years of the judges, and mention those that were before Gideon, and those who came after.

Relevance to our lives

This is a lesson about standing on the Lord's side. Gideon and his 300 men were prepared to stand defenceless against the vast army of the Midianites, trusting that God would win the battle. Ask the class if they will pray each morning for a week that when someone is unkind to them, in what they say or what they do, they will not hit back in words or actions but leave it with God to bring that person to say sorry. Discuss what situations might arise and how they would handle them. Join in this yourself and discuss next week how you all got on both in prayer and in action.

Prayer

Dear Lord, there are times when we need proof that you are near to us; please build our faith patiently and gently as you built up Gideon.

Other suggestions for activities

- Take one of the men who made the attack on the Midianites and interview him for a news item.
- Through the eyes of Gideon's father, as he writes his diary, write down the changes he saw in his son as he developed as God's leader.
- Plan a dialogue between Gideon and one of the three hundred men before going to attack the Midianites. Note that, with a trumpet in one hand and a torch in a jar in the other, no one would be holding a sword. The cry of 'The sword of the LORD and of Gideon,' was a cry of faith. That was the only sword they were trusting in.