

PRISCILLA
SHIRER

guidance

Your
weakness.

God's
STRENGTH.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	4
INTRODUCTION	5
VIDEO SESSION 1 HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS	6
WEEK 1 LESSONS	8
DIGGING DEEPER I	15
DIGGING DEEPER II	21
VIDEO SESSION 2 WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING	38
WEEK 2 LESSONS	40
DIGGING DEEPER III	49
VIDEO SESSION 3 A BRAND-NEW IDENTITY	66
WEEK 3 LESSONS	68
VIDEO SESSION 4 THE FLIP SIDE OF GOD'S POWER	92
WEEK 4 LESSONS	94
DIGGING DEEPER IV	104
VIDEO SESSION 5 HOW TO WIN A BATTLE	118
WEEK 5 LESSONS	120
DIGGING DEEPER V	135
VIDEO SESSION 6 WHO IS YOUR KING?	146
WEEK 6 LESSONS	148
VIDEO SESSION 7 JUST YOU AND ME	176
LEADER GUIDE	178

about

PRISCILLA SHIRER is a wife and mom first, but put a Bible in her hand and a message in her heart, and you'll see why thousands meet God in powerful, personal ways at her conferences.



With a master's degree in biblical studies from Dallas Theological Seminary, Priscilla brings the depths of Scripture to life. Her nine Bible studies span such topics as the Exodus, hearing the voice of God, and biblical characters like Jonah and Gideon. She has also written seven books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *The Resolution for Women*.

She and her husband, Jerry, lead Going Beyond Ministries, through which they provide spiritual training, support, and resources to the body of Christ. They count it as their greatest privilege to serve every denomination and culture across the spectrum of the church.

Between writing and studying, you'll probably find her at home cleaning up after (and trying to satisfy the appetites of) her three rapidly growing boys.

www.GoingBeyond.com

A NOTE FROM PRISCILLA

Hey there, my friend, I've been waiting for you. Really, I have.

I've looked forward with great anticipation and much prayer to sharing these weeks of Bible study with you. For two years now, my dining room table has been crowded with Bibles, commentaries, study notes, aged articles—all to help discover what God might teach us through one of Scripture's most intriguing characters. My family has heard me talk about this epic story so much, they're starting to get that glazed look in their eyes as soon as I mention Gideon. They might know more about him now than I do. So they'll be relieved to know that his name and story are now in your hands ... and off the dining room table.

Dinner anyone?

While we're talking about food, I hope you came hungry—starving even. I pray that every time you watch the sessions or sit down for your personal devotions in this workbook, you will voraciously seek a fresh touch from God. We should never approach God's Word *with a casualness or indifference* ... even when we're looking at one character in three little chapters of the Bible.

So if you're feeling a little empty right now, don't despair. Hunger only devastates when we have nothing to satisfy it. But in these pages, you will find a table divinely set for you. We're about to feast on a lavish banquet masterfully arranged by the Lover of our souls. Pull up a chair. I'm convinced this will be a bountiful buffet. *His Word always is*, and, if you're anything like me, turning down good eatin' has never been an option.

I've wondered how you might react to the subtitle on the cover. That first part—*Your Weakness*—can dig up some deep insecurities. We've all felt feeble, limited, and overwhelmed at one point or another.

Good thing you can't simmer too long on the first half of that subtitle, though, without landing victoriously on the last half—*God's Strength*. I orchestrated it that way. I wanted a quick turnaround from you to Him. From weakness to strength. From impossibility to divine possibility.

This is what it's all about. This is how our needs are all met. This is where our victories are achieved. Your weaknesses don't stand a chance in the face of God's overwhelming, almighty power. In fact, you'll soon see from our study together that He is just waiting to demonstrate to you how your weakness is actually a gift—a key of sorts that unlocks and unleashes His power in your life.

Gideon's going to tell us all about it. So don't be shy. Dig in with both hands and with your whole heart ... until your plate is filled to overflowing.

Ready?

Me too!

Priscilla

Session 1

VIEWER GUIDE

Gideon is among a nation of people who have stopped

The best way to study a biblical character or book is to observe the entire _____ in which it is set.

“Then the sons of Israel did _____ in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years.” **Judges 6:1**

NIV includes the word _____

“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his _____.” **Judges 21:25**

God raises up a group of people called _____.

Judges’ role: they were _____ by God and _____ by God to _____ the people of God to _____ the enemies of God.

How and why did God’s people who have the favor of God and are in a covenant relationship with God get to a position of such _____ and _____?

Video sessions are available for download
at www.lifeway.com/women

HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

1. They did not know the Lord: there was a problem with the _____ that was in their _____.

a. Their parents didn't do the _____.

b. The _____ people didn't want to _____.

2. There was a problem also with their hearts: their _____ hadn't been stirred for _____ with Him.

3. As a result: their hands aren't _____ the _____ thing.

DAY 1

GOD'S

PEOPLE IN PARADISE

Welcome, my friend. So glad you are diving into Gideon with me. The waters are deep, but the surprises we'll find as we plunge below the surface of this well-loved story will be worth it.

Gideon surprised me, and I think you'll have a similar experience as we turn these pages together. His encounter with God, his responses to God, and his mission from God have struck me right between my spiritual eyes. Turns out there's a lot more happening here than just the underdog drama with Gideon's 300 soldiers and the fleece he laid out under a night sky in hopes of absorbing the will of God.

Gideon's story is much bigger than ... well ... Gideon. Like everything else in the Bible, his story is actually about God and His people. It tells of His love for them, His enduring and boundless mercy toward them, and His strength operating in spite of—even through—weakness in them. And because God's people include you and me, Gideon's story is also about *us*—our lives, our doubts, our struggles, and our possibilities as believers.

From your study or our video session, see if you can recall the answers to the following questions:

How many Bible chapters tell Gideon's story?

GIDEON

This story is bigger than Gideon.

#LessonsFromGideon

In which book of the Bible are these chapters found?

Since Gideon's story is only a small slice of a 66-book series, what does this tell us about his story?

As I mentioned during our first video session, understanding the greater context of Gideon's story and how we fit into it is critical. Unearthing details about Israel's rich heritage will help us grasp the full weight of his story. Before we can take home Gideon's lessons, we must identify with and learn from his people—God's people, Israel.

So journey with me into ancient Israelite territory for a look at how God sovereignly positioned His man Gideon and what that means for us as He unfolds our part in His story.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

When the curtain opens on Gideon and his countrymen in Judges 6, Israel's brutal 400-year stint of slavery in Egypt is far in the past, as are their years of wandering in the wilderness. Joshua's military conquests from a previous century have nestled them deep in the heart of Canaan, a land "flowing with milk and honey" (a symbolic phrase depicting God's continuous provision and favor). They are right where Yahweh intended them to be all along: poised and positioned for His blessing

This ... was paradise.

But Israel's experience in Gideon's day reveals a stunning reality: *we can spoil paradise and ruin God's abundant blessing*. And the quickest, most surefire way to do it is to forget the One who gave us the blessing and victory in the first place.

Gideon and his people are suffering from this lapse in memory. They have become enthralled with the promised land and have disregarded the Promise Giver—a mind-set clearly seen in their neglect of God's commands.

Based on Deuteronomy 7:1-2, describe the orders God had given them in settling the land.

Read the following verses from Judges 1. Draw a line to connect each verse with the tribe mentioned:

Asher	verse 21
Ephraim	verse 27
Benjamin	verse 29
Naphtali	verse 30
Zebulun	verse 31
Manasseh	verse 33

Turn to the map on page 192 and note the territory in Canaan that remained unclaimed by God's people.

One reason the Israelites disobeyed God's command was their fear of the "iron chariots" employed by some of their enemies (Judg. 1:19). The Israelites' military prowess was primitive compared to the Canaanites', who had mastered and kept secret the art of iron production.

With no sophisticated weaponry to match that of the opposing nations, Israel had fared well only when fighting by infantry on foot, especially in the hill country where the terrain kept the enemy's chariots from functioning effectively. Yet God had called them to claim every portion of the land—even the flatland—not just the mountainous territory where victory would come more easily.

Israel was making decisions based on their limited supplies instead of on the boundless resources of their God. If God had commanded their enemies' destruction, He had also taken into account their iron chariots and had planned to equip His people for victory regardless. No weapon could stand against the power of Yahweh. If only Israel had believed that and lived according to it.

If only you and I would do the same.

What, if any, are the "iron chariots" of intimidation that keep you from moving forward in complete obedience to God's Word?

It can be difficult to make sense of Yahweh's command to annihilate an entire people group. Yet He had delayed justice for their rebellion for centuries before sovereignly deeming their cup of iniquity full (Gen. 15:16) and releasing a divine judgment of extermination. The conservation of His people and His redemptive plan was a sign of His desire to show mercy.

GIDEON

Read Psalm 20:7 in the margin and rewrite it in your words and in light of your circumstances.

Some boast in chariots
and some in horses,
but we will boast in
the name of the LORD,
our God.

Psalm 20:7

SETTLING TOO SOON

The Israelites thought having access to *some* of the promised land was better than having to fight for *all* of it. So, comfortable and complacent, they chose to enjoy the relative quiet rather than risk upsetting their equilibrium by obeying God completely. They had every right to all of the land—in fact, they already owned it—but since they chose not to possess it, they weren't able to enjoy it.

They chose comfort instead of commitment to the One who had rescued and sustained them—and had promised to continue doing so if they would actively trust Him for total victory. Consider the Deliverance Principle described in the margin. This standard is not specific only to ancient Israel; it's true of us today as we relate to God.

The Deliverance Principle: the one who delivers people from injustice reserves the right to rule over the delivered. The delivered ones become “vassals” and the deliverer is the “suzerain.” See Digging Deeper I on page 15.

Describe what the Deliverance Principle should look like in your life. Use Digging Deeper I on page 15 and Deuteronomy 10:12-13 to help.

Partial obedience is always a temptation. Our shortsightedness often makes partial obedience appear to be the best, safest, most reasonable choice, but it always leads to future hardship, eventually making our lives more difficult than they need to be.

Israel's lack of trust in Yahweh and disobedience to His commands brought the dire consequences chronicled in the book of the Bible we will study during these seven weeks.

Use this workbook as an honest journal between you and God. Are you partially obeying God in any area? If so, record the details.

What comforts or perceived sense of security would you need to abandon to fully obey God's instructions?

PARTIALLY IN PARADISE

One of the most prominent effects of Israel's refusal to fully obey was its continuing spiritual decline. Because of the idolatrous influences of its neighbors, Israel found it increasingly difficult to commit to worshipping God. Spiritually, they slipped into the religious patterns of their neighbors, specifically Baal worship. Militarily, they were constantly threatened by surrounding enemies. Between the moral decay and military danger, God's people were weakening spiritually and physically.

From the previous paragraph, list two of the effects of Israel's disobedience.

- 1.
- 2.

Can you point to two areas where disobedience might be having a negative, weakening effect on your life? If so, label and describe them.

- 1.
- 2.

Had Israel destroyed Canaan's inhabitants as instructed, the ungodly influence and infiltration of idolatry would have all but evaporated. Had there been no enemies left in their territory, the Israelites could have settled into the enjoyment of God's promised land instead of facing extended struggle and oppression from their neighbors.

GIDEON

Are you facing any battles today due to something you didn't destroy earlier?

When God's Spirit asks us to eliminate something from our lives, we shouldn't play around with His direction. He sees the future effects of leftover enemies. Take Him seriously. Fully engage in the task at hand.

As we begin our journey into the life of Gideon, we meet a nation marked by weakness and decline, living in a time described in one simple yet powerful way: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

Maybe this study meets you in the same place: emotionally weakened, physically exhausted, and spiritually deflated. Maybe you are all too familiar with the results of a life lived by standards out of alignment with God's. Don't despair. Good news awaits ahead.

An unsuspecting hero is coming to Israel ... and to you.

At the end of each lesson, I want you to record any "hashtag" statements that will help you easily recall what God is teaching you. Remember, you don't have to be brilliant and incisive; just be led by God's Spirit on how the lessons apply to you. If you're up for it, I'd love to see your notes on Twitter followed by the #LessonsFromGideon label.

Today my #LessonsFromGideon are:

THE DELIVERANCE PRINCIPLE

In the ancient Near East, people sealed relationships between individuals or nations by covenant. When larger, powerful nations and smaller, weaker ones made a covenant, the entities operated like father and son or master and servant. Each had a distinct role to perform.

The more powerful kingdom (called the suzerain) would adopt the smaller one (the vassal). In exchange for the vassal's allegiance, the suzerain would provide military protection and financial provision in times of need. The suzerain had authority over the vassal. It might allow the vassal to maintain its own government and traditions, but it maintained legal ownership of the vassal's land and agricultural harvest.

The vassal was expected to operate in submission to its suzerain. In addition giving a percentage of its annual production, the vassal was expected to be completely loyal. A vassal could only have one suzerain. Making a covenant with another suzerain was high treason and would incur horrendous consequences. The vassal's loyalty was pledged to the suzerain and could not be shared with another.

The Bible translates this kind of loyalty using the Hebrew word *hesed*. It means love, faithfulness, or covenantal faithfulness. A vassal's faithfulness was described as love expressed to his suzerain. Rebellion was to hate the suzerain.

When Yahweh made Israel a nation through Abraham, He used a means people in that era would understand. He cut a covenant. Yahweh became their Suzerain, offering them His unfailing protection and ongoing provision in exchange for the *hesed* of the vassal. They were to have no other suzerains.

God demanded they love the Lord their God "with all their heart, soul, and strength" (Deut. 6:5) not as a passive emotion but as an active condition of their covenant. They were to submit in loyalty to the covenant they had established with Yahweh.

In Gideon's story, Yahweh reminds His vassal of their agreement—He had delivered them from Egypt (Judg. 6:9-10). He provided them with protection and provision as His vassal nation. Israel had failed to fulfill their part of the bargain. They turned to idols and cut covenant with foreign gods, splitting their allegiance when it should have been solely focused on Him. They had committed divine treason against their faithful suzerain.

Treason demanded dire consequences for a vassal, including destruction of his family, land, and even his own life. Yahweh breaks the pattern and extends mercy to Israel despite their failure to remain committed to Him. This mercy was in stark contrast to their cultural experiences. It presented an intriguing lesson to them about their God.

GIDEON

Choosing to do our primary work in the smaller, less noticeable spheres and devote our best gifts there is often a foreign thought to us. We usually want to jump from the center directly to the perimeter of impact, skipping over the areas most closely connected to us. The result? A life and calling that eventually implode, caving in upon their shoddy, unstable structure.

God had strategically set Gideon in this family, in this tribe, and in this valley for a reason. He fully intended to call and equip Gideon to affect his closest relationships before moving on to something and someone else.

The priority and preeminence of serving those in the sphere closest to us is seen throughout Scripture. When Abraham was chosen by God to be the father of Israel, he was given instructions for what his first tasks should be.

Turn to Genesis 18:19. In your own words, what did God tell Abraham to concentrate on prior to experiencing the fulfillment of His promises?

Centuries later, as Jesus' disciples were ushered into the age of the church, God gave them a unique power to function on His behalf, and then clearly outlined the course their ministry was to follow.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
Acts 1:8

From Acts 1:8 in the margin, underline the three spheres of influence mentioned, and then record them in order below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The disciples were in Jerusalem when they received these instructions from Jesus. They were to focus on the ministry to be done where they were standing even as they began moving outward on mission. Start inward, move outward.

First things first. Both for Gideon and for us.

IT'S HARDER AT HOME

Gideon had been reared in an idol-worshipping family. His own father was the keeper of the Baal altar in their town of Ophrah.

Answer the following questions, using Judges 6:27 as a guide:

1. Did Gideon do what God asked him to?
2. How did he do it?
3. Why did he do it this way?
4. What do you think caused him to feel this way?

Often, like in Gideon's case, our smaller spheres of influence are not easier to contend with just because they are smaller. On the contrary, some of the most difficult and intimidating opportunities to walk in God's calling come when we are staring in the faces of those who know us best and whom we love the most.

Consider how Gideon must have felt tearing down what his father had spent his lifetime building, teaching, and defending. With each stone that he and his servants dismantled, another layer of the ideology that had overrun his family came unglued. This overnight idol-demolishing wasn't affecting some random town and family he would never see again. This was a task he'd feel, see, and endure the consequences of every day from that point on.

- When the Christian daughter chooses to evangelize her non-Christian parents ...
- When the godly wife chooses to set an example for her unsaved spouse ...
- When the teenager seeks to impact his pagan school environment ...
- When the coworker tries to influence her friends on the job ...

The stakes are often much higher when the mission field is so personal.

I've darkened the outlying circle in the earlier diagram, because what lies ahead in your journey is not nearly as critical as where you are right now. Wherever you are now is where you are meant to serve now. These innermost circles are often the ones that offer the least amount of recognition. This is why so many people try to circumvent them. And yet your greatest impact will be done here—in the ordinary rhythms of your daily living.

A Baal altar was found at Megiddo that measured some twenty-six feet across and four and a half feet high. Made of many stones, cemented together by mud, such an altar would constitute an immense task to destroy and carry away.³

GIDEON

What are the two hardest things you'd likely face in serving those in the first two circles of your diagram?

Following God wholeheartedly within these up-close loops of faith will often cause you an internal uneasiness and daily faithfulness that cannot be escaped just because it's 5 p.m. and the workday is over. It's easier to stand on a platform and teach people we may never see again than to walk with our own children, friends, and loved ones in accountability and discipleship. But these spheres encompass the heart of true ministry.

Begin to clarify who the people in your primary sphere of influence should be. Refuse to search for significance in another place if you've bypassed any near and necessary steps in the journey God has for you.

Pray for a courageous faith and holy boldness to start where you are. He'll give it to you.

In the week ahead, we'll see Gideon's trust stretched to the max. For now, take a moment to soak in what God has taught you so far. How have you been challenged? How have you been encouraged? Journal your thoughts and spend some time talking to God as you close this week of our study.

Today my #LessonsFromGideon are:

GOD CAN USE YOUR WEAKNESS

Do you feel overwhelmed? Inexperienced? Intimidated? Insufficient? Too old? Too young? Too invisible? Too afraid?

Gideon's story involves far more than a wet fleece and a battle won with 300 soldiers. His epic victory actually tells of one man's struggle with his own weakness—and the One True God who transformed it into triumph.

So if you've ever struggled with insecurity or had trouble accepting your limitations, this study will help you see how God can use your weakness to unlock His strength. Yes, Gideon can attest—weakness is a gift. Join Priscilla for a Bible study that will open your eyes to a brand new perspective on yourself, your God, and ...

GIDEON.

ALSO AVAILABLE

GIDEON LEADER KIT — includes one member book and two DVDs of Priscilla's seven teaching sessions. Item 005538484

DOWNLOADS — Video sessions available at lifeway.com/priscillashirer

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