



## **Daring to Dream Again - Let God Heal Your Painful Past**

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### **Introduction:**

Have you ever had a dream for your life? If you're a believer in Christ, I believe the Holy Spirit longs to give you a dream of a better future. Perhaps your dream involves using your God-given gifts to serve Christ and others in a passionate way. Perhaps your dream involves sharing Christ in the marketplace, seeing people you love coming to know Christ, or rearing godly children. Perhaps your dream involves serving the poor or sharing Christ with lost people in a different part of the world. Most of us have had times when we've sensed God planting dreams within us.

But many who have had God-given dreams of a better future have seen their dreams fade or even die. Some have experienced the pain of a dream never realized. That pain may have crushed all hope of a better future.

Some of our God-given dreams may have dissipated because of lack of faith or an unforeseen tragedy. Who could begin to imagine how many people and families had their dreams dashed after the tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001?

Most of us can identify with having dreams that were never realized. As a result, some of us have become resistant to the idea of allowing ourselves the luxury of dreaming again. We don't want to be set up for another disappointment. Sometimes former dreams must be allowed to die so that new dreams can be birthed. But it is possible to dream new dreams.

This morning we're beginning our adventure by looking at Gideon. Gideon lived during a very difficult era of Israel's history. It was the time of Israel's history prior to the days when kings ruled. It was a chaotic time, when "everyone did that which was right in their own eyes." But during this time, people began to seek God. And when they did, God raised up judges, local leaders who helped God's people out of political and spiritual turmoil. In the book of Judges, we see a spiritual cycle repeated over and over again.

- a. The cycle started with **sin**, as people forgot God and carried out their own agenda. "Everyone did that which was right in their own eyes" is a phrase repeated in the book of Judges.
- b. Sin was followed by **servitude** (bondage, really): As a consequence of sin, Israel experienced political oppression from neighboring nations.
- c. Servitude was followed by **supplication** (prayer). As the people experienced political oppression, they turned to God in prayer and asked for His help.
- d. In response to Israel's prayers, God brought **salvation** through a leader or Judge who helped Israel win freedom from their enemies.

The story of Gideon begins in Judges Chapter 6. Like many of us, Gideon had an obstacle to dreaming again. Gideon had to overcome a painful past.

Israel begins a new cycle of sin in Judges 6:1. “Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord.” And for seven years they were oppressed from three nations: the Midianites, the Amalekites and “other eastern people.” This coalition would come and raid the Israelites after planting season. They would destroy Israel’s crops and kill all of their livestock. Because of the oppression, the Israelites prayed (supplication). God first sent them a prophet who reminded them of God’s faithfulness and their own disobedience. And following the announcement by the prophet, the angel of the Lord called Gideon to a new dream. Let’s read the text and see how Gideon overcomes the obstacle of a painful past.

**I. Gideon overcame his painful past by an awareness of his God-given identity - Judges 6:11-12, 15**

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

“But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

When the angel of the Lord encounters Gideon under the oak in Ophrah (Ophrah, not Oprah), Gideon is threshing wheat in a winepress. Now, a winepress is not where one would normally thresh wheat. But the Bible says Gideon choose this particular location “to keep it from the Midianites.” Earlier in the chapter, we learn that the people of Israel “prepared shelters for themselves in the mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.” Fear of foreign invaders left the people of Israel hiding and cowering. Fear permeated their lives, even causing them to harvest their crops in secret. So the angel of the Lord came to Gideon to call him to a new dream of living in freedom from Midianite oppression.

- A. *Gideon was paralyzed by fear.* Fear kept Gideon and his people from experiencing the reality of God’s power. Look how Gideon responds to the angel of the Lord. “If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, ‘Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the Lord has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian.” While God was challenging Gideon to a new dream, Gideon focused on the past pain of Midianite oppression. His painful past blinded him from living in light of God’s faithfulness and power.

Focusing on the painful past can blind us to dreaming the new dreams. Has that happened to you? It’s happened to me. Don’t allow your past to script your future. Don’t listen to the negative messages from those who would rob you of a future dream. We don’t have to be stuck in the past!

- B. *Seeing from God’s perspective:* God saw Gideon differently than Gideon saw himself. The angel of the Lord greeted Gideon this way, “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.” Do you see the irony here? Gideon is secretly threshing his wheat so the enemy won’t see him. He is hiding behind bushes and around corners. Nevertheless, God calls him “mighty warrior.”

It is as though where God sees Superman, Gideon sees only Clark Kent.

Whose identity have you embraced for your life? Do you embrace the identity from a painful past or God’s identity for you? If you are a believer in Christ, God sees you in Christ as His sons and daughters. He sees you as a mighty warrior, a soldier of the cross.

In his book *No More Mr. Nice Guy*, Stephen Brown tells the story of an eagle egg that somehow got into a chicken coop. The mother hen realized the egg was somewhat larger than the other eggs, but after all, she was a mother, so she sat on it. The eagle hatched and for weeks played the chicken game. The eagle knew he was different; he knew that the other chickens thought he was different and they only tolerated him. He tried to eat off the floor of the chicken coop like the other chickens, but it never felt right. He tried to walk like a chicken and talk like a chicken and squawk like a chicken, but he could never quite pull it off.

Sometimes the eagle would look up in the sky and wonder what was on the other side of the clouds. He would say to his fellow chickens, “Don’t you ever wonder what’s up there in the sky, or what’s on the

other side of the mountains?” The other chickens would look at him like the elevator didn’t go up to the top floor. But he never stopped wondering and asking questions. Then one day the eagle looked up in the sky and saw a speck. The speck grew larger and larger until the eagle realized that it was a creature like himself, an eagle. He heard the creature call loudly, and the call echoed against the chicken coop.

At that moment, the eagle knew he wasn’t a chicken. He knew he was an eagle. He flapped his wings and began to fly, and soon he was soaring above the clouds.

The problem with the eagle wasn’t just that everyone thought he was a chicken. His real problem was that **he** thought he was a chicken. Something like that has happened to Christians.

Look at yourself through God’s lens.

## II. **Gideon overcame a painful past by acting on the basis of his God-given identity (v. 14).**

The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

After Gideon’s objections, God moves from reminding Gideon of his new identity to directly challenging Gideon to “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?” It is like God is saying to Gideon, “Stop the objections. I see you differently, so you can act on the basis of your new identity, not on negative past experiences. You may feel afraid and inadequate, but you don’t have to allow those feelings to paralyze you. Your identity in me means that you have spiritual reserves that you have yet to experience. You will not fully experience your God-given power until you act in faith and move forward on the basis of your true identity. If you act in obedience to me, you will experience your strength in ways you never could experience it before. Just be obedient to me.”

There are times God shows us his strength and power and then calls us to action. God sometimes opens a door for us and then tells us to walk through that door. Then there are other times when God calls us to action and only then moves on our behalf.

God was calling on Gideon to act in a way that was contrary to his feelings and past experience. We

need to act! Sometimes we don’t act until the pain of the past has brought us to desperation.

Are you willing to take responsibility for your life? Are you willing to stop looking at others and the past and live out the identity God has given to you? You may just have to take the first steps of obedience and then trust God for the results. Sharing Christ with others; doing the daily devotions; applying to school; beginning to pray again. Act on the basis of who you are!

## III. **Gideon moved beyond his painful past with an awareness of God’s presence (vv. 15–24).**

### [Judges 6:15-24](#)

“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, and you will strike down all the Midianites together.”

Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”

Gideon went in, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, “Ah, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!”

But 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. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Once again, Gideon offers the angel of the Lord an excuse. This time it's his heritage and his own place in his family.

“But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (v. 15). Gideon is telling the Lord that he doesn't have the right pedigree to be an instrument in God's hand. He is from an unimpressive tribe, Manasseh. And his clan is the weakest of all the clans in the lot. Not only that, but Gideon is the least in his family. It seems that Gideon was the one in his family that didn't have a great deal of respect from others, and he lacked confidence.

It seems Gideon was probably the one in his family that was on the lowest rung of the ladder. People no doubt regarded him as the weakest link. So now God again gives him encouragement to proceed. This time the Lord tells Gideon what he has had to tell so many other reluctant servants, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together” (v. 16).

It is reassuring that when we face new challenges or stages of growth and development that we don't have to face those alone. So often children are encouraged to ride a bike, sleep at night in a dark room, ride the school bus or get a job. It becomes easier to do when they know they are not alone. It should be the same with a believer. When we know that God is with us and we are not alone, it should give us courage to let go of the past and face the future, with the awareness of God's presence.

**Application:** Lift your eyes to the heavens and let God touch you in a manner that will leave you forever changed. If you have your adventure journal with you this morning, turn to page 12.

Gideon certainly never pictured himself as a mighty hero. He had heard accounts of God's working in earlier generations, but negative experiences had become a barrier to Gideon's ever dreaming such dreams for his day. Taking on a healthy new identity required some healing and some getting used to, but

### **Conclusion:**

Shattered dreams are never random. They are always a piece in a larger puzzle, a chapter in a larger story. The Holy Spirit uses the pain of shattered dreams to help us discover our desire for God, to help us begin dreaming the highest dream. They are ordained opportunities for the Spirit first to awaken, then to satisfy our highest dream.

in the end, he performed his role admirably. What negative experiences have brought you pain or shame and prompted you to shelve the spiritual desires you once had? Whether the problem was of your own making or the fault of others, it's time to let God heal those wounds. The following steps give you a good start.

1. Put a name to the way you have been living. Is it Fearful Gideon, Resentful Mary, Wounded Curtis, Angry Sally, Disillusioned (So-and-so), Negative (So-and-so), or (Something So-and-so)? Don't move on to step 2 until you have identified the false name under which you have been living.
2. Now ask the Holy Spirit to show you the new name he wants you to embrace. “Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!” is the healthy new identity the angel asked Gideon to accept. What new identity might God want you to receive?

Also let me encourage you to begin working on memorizing Philippians 3:12–14. Included in that passage are these words, “But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.” I'm quoting from the New Living Translation. This is a great passage to memorize.

And of course I'm expecting that this week you will go through the journal pages, which will remind you of the truths I have underscored this morning.

What is in your past that you believe disqualifies you from dreaming a new dream? Is it because of a painful divorce? Were you rejected for being the wrong gender, the wrong race, from the wrong family? Are you recovering from a past sin or ministry failure? Are you willing to give up the pain of your past?

In a Peanuts comic strip Linus says to Charlie Brown, “I guess it's wrong to always worry about tomorrow.” Charlie Brown replies, “No, that's giving up. I'm hoping that yesterday will get better.” Give up your hope of a better yesterday for a better tomorrow. God wants you to dream again!