

I. Introduction

- A. This week, on July 4, the United States of America celebrated its 243rd birthday. Independence Day marks the day the signing of the Declaration of Independence.
- B. And it marked the first time in world history that a nation was founded liberty at its core, and God-given inalienable rights as its foundation. Our rights do not come from Government. The government does not “allow” us to be free.
- C. Our rights come from God. We are made in his image... designed to be free... and so life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — and all other rights embedded in human nature — are inseparable from our nature as God-created beings.
- D. No other government had ever said that before. The Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, which enshrines the consent of the governed, make our country unparalleled and exceptional among the nations of world history.
- E. Are we a perfect country? No. Do we always live up to our ideals? No.
- F. But I thank God for the brave men and women who fought to make us and keep us free. And there is no place I'd rather be, than the United States of America.
- G. I thank God for our country, our President, our Legislators, our Judges, and everyone in government need our prayers.

II. Gideon's Victory

- A. There is a powerful force that runs through you all the time. Sometimes you're aware of this force. Sometimes, you're not.
- B. The force is the power of the stories you are telling yourself.
 - 1. You tell yourself a story about YOU.
 - 2. You tell yourself a story about GOD.
 - 3. You tell yourself a story about the WORLD.
- C. These three stories shape your life. They define your life. They alter your perception. They shape your interpretations.
- D. Let's see how this plays out in the Summertime Scripture Story that I'm calling Gideon's Victory.

III. *Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the oak tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash had been threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!” (Judges 6:11, 12, NLT)*

- A. Let's start with Gideon. He is married. He has kids. He's a decent guy, eking out a living. He lives in Israel. There are two things to know about Israel at this time.
 - 1. The people have turned their backs on God. They are worshipping idols, and especially a false God called Baal. So spiritually, the nation is at a low.
 - 2. It's also at a low militarily. That's the second factoid to know. There were these warrior tribes called the Midianites. The Midianites were oppressing the Israelites. They keep sweeping in, killing people, stealing the grain, the livestock, the food. The Midianites are the original tribe of lunchroom bullies. A bunch of thugs.
- B. Things were so bad, God's people were hiding out, living in caves and holes in the ground. And when we first meet Gideon, he's doing the same. He's processing grain in the bottom of a winepress — meaning in the bottom of a ditch. Gideon is processing grain this way because he didn't want the Midianites to see him and steal his milk money.
- C. So here's Gideon, getting some flour, so they can bake some bread and feed the kids. And this thing happens.
- D. The Angel of the Lord appeared to him.
- E. This is how the Bible describes it when God appears in human form before the days of Jesus.
- F. It's called a *Theophany* — a *pre-incarnate appearance of God in human form*.
- G. But Gideon doesn't realize it yet. To Gideon, he's just some guy.
 - 1. *Lesson 1: There are a lot of times in our lives when God is working, and we don't even notice.*
- H. So God comes to Gideon, look at how he greets him. Mighty Hero, the Lord is with you!
- I. Gideon's looking around. Who me? You talking to me? Mighty Hero? The Lord is with *me*?
- J. To Gideon, this is just some strange guy who showed up. But God is doing something really profound.
- K. What is God doing? God is feeding a new story into his brain. This is the real story of you.
 - 1. You are a hero.
 - 2. You are a mighty person of valor.
 - 3. You are the master and commander of your destiny.
 - 4. You are built for significance and designed for glory.
 - 5. The Lord is with you, and with him you are invincible.

- L. Greetings, Mighty Hero, the Lord is with you.
- M. I can just picture Gideon rolling his eyes. Yeah right. I'm a mighty hero, that's a joke. The Lord is with me, that's another joke.
- N. So he sets down his pitchfork. "Oh yeah, buddy, you want to go there?" This is what he says.
- IV. "Sir," Gideon replied, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn't they say, 'The LORD brought us up out of Egypt'? But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites." (Judges 6:13, NLT).
- A. That's his story about God.
 - 1. God has forsaken us. God doesn't keep his Word. God doesn't take care of us. God has handed us over to the Midianites.
- B. And that's his story about the world.
 - 1. Why has all this happened to us?
- C. And this is the story he tells himself about himself.
- V. Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go with the strength you have and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!" "But Lord," Gideon replied, "how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!" (Judges 6:14, 15, NLT)
- A. I'm a nobody. I'm a loser from a long line of losers.
- B. Your pains. Your trials. Your loves. Your joys. Your successes. Your failures. Everything you experience run through grid of running commentary your soul keeps making about yourself, your God, and your world.
- C. You have constructed a narrative. You are interpreting your life through that narrative. It's a super powerful force in your life.
- D. Where did it come from?
- E. It came from a lot of sources. It comes from your parents, and it's fed by your culture and your peers.
- F. Your parents give you a shove in a certain direction. For some people that direction is wholesome. For other people, sad to say, that shove is sick and maybe even evil.
- G. You can't help that. That's not your fault.
- H. But there comes a time when you can change direction.
 - 1. Lesson 2: The momentum of your childhood wasn't your choice. But the direction of your adulthood is.
- I. This is Gideon. This is me. This is you. So far, so good?
- J. The problem comes in when the stories you tell yourself aren't true. They become a compass that doesn't point north, a meat thermometer that tells you the turkey is finished when it's got at least another hour to go — don't ask I how know that one.
- K. When you are telling yourself the wrong stories... you are lying to yourself.
- L. That creates all kinds of weirdness. Your soul was made for truth, and when you live on illusions and lies, you malfunction. Your world malfunctions. And in your mind, God malfunctions.
 - 1. Lesson 3: When your mental Narrator speaks a pack of lies, you become a pack of dysfunction, depression, and despair.
- M. That is the situation in Judges chapter 6. So what does God do? God does for you what he does for Gideon.
- N. God works overtime to construct new narratives in your heart.
 - 1. He is doing everything he possibly can to accomplish this.
 - 2. He is doing all he can to redirect the stream of narratives running through your mind.
 - 3. He wants that stream to be life-giving and true.
 - 4. Positive and full of grace.
- O. That's what he is about to do for an unlikely hero named Gideon. He is going to give them new stories to tell.
- P. This process, the Bible calls *repentance*.
 - 1. Lesson 4: Repentance is the process of God replacing your old death-dealing stories with new stories of life and grace. This is often a slow process.
- Q. And that's what God does for Gideon.
- R. "Go with the strength you have and rescue Israel from the Midianites."
 - 1. Um, God, don't I need to bulk up first? Don't I need some training?
 - 2. Shouldn't I at least watch a few YouTube videos?
- S. No. Go with the strength you have.
 - 1. But God, the strength I have isn't enough.

- T. I know. That's why I'm sending you.
 - 1. Have you ever been in a position where you just don't feel adequate to the task?
 - 2. You are Gideon today. The bullies are swarming you. Financial. Medical. Relational. School. Work. Family. Mental. Spiritual. Physical.
 - 3. You are living in defeat, and you accept this as your new normal.
 - a) *Even if defeat enters your life, it doesn't have to define your mentality.*
 - 4. Gideon... Go with the strength you have... because...
- VI. *The LORD said to him, "I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man." (Judges 6:16, NLT)*
 - A. Let's see what happens. Let me summarize the next section.
 - B. It begins to dawn on Gideon that he is actually dealing with God. So, he asks God to prove it. This will be Test #1.
 - C. In Test #1, Gideon runs home, finds a goat and some scraps of food, runs back to the Angel of the Lord, and lays it all out on a little stone altar.
 - D. Verse 21 says the Angel of the Lord touched the offering, and it flamed up and was consumed.
 - E. What is God doing? God is rewiring the circuits in Gideon's brain. God is taking baby steps with him.
 - 1. Baby steps to a new story about yourself.
 - 2. Baby steps to a new story about your world.
 - 3. Baby steps to a new story about your God.
 - 4. Skip down to verse 33.
- VII. *Soon afterward the armies of Midian, Amalek, and the people of the east formed an alliance against Israel and crossed the Jordan, camping in the valley of Jezreel. (Judges 6:33, NLT)*
 - A. This is a nightmare. Now, it's not just the Midianites, it's the Amalekites, and all the —ites.
 - B. They are camped out on the hillsides like a swarm of locusts. Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide.
 - C. I want to go back up to verse one, and to see why all this is happening to God's people.
- VIII. *Again the Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. So the LORD handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. (Judges 6:1, NLT).*
 - A. I know what some of you are thinking. See! I told you so! I told you God just throws us away.
 - B. Is that what the text is saying? No.
 - C. The people cry out to God, and God sends a prophet. Here's the deal.
- IX. *When they cried out to the LORD because of Midian, the LORD sent a prophet to the Israelites. He said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of slavery in Egypt and rescued you from the Egyptians and from all who oppressed you. I drove out your enemies and gave you their land. I told you, 'I am the LORD your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you now live.' But you have not listened to me." (Judges 6:7-10, NLT).*
 - A. God says, "I showered you with all the grace, and you threw it all away to worship other gods. Okay, let the gods of the Midianites bless you. Give that a try for a while — let's say seven years. And give me a call when you're ready."
 - B. I was listening to a young man talk about how miserable they were, and how unhappy they were, and how much God didn't care about them, and how they couldn't trust him.
 - C. And I knew perfectly well that this guy was disobeying God every chance they got.
 - 1. So I finally said, listen, if God says the place to actually enjoy my grace is over here, but then you set your life over there, how can you blame God for that?
 - a) He was telling himself the story that he was all good, and God was bad, and God wasn't fair, and life has no hope.
 - D. Why do bad things happen in our lives?
 - E. There are two reasons, and the relative size of the slices is different for every single person. But we all have two slices. Why does bad stuff happen?
 - 1. *Reason 1: This fallen world is a morally broken Pain Machine...*
 - a) So pain happens. Bullies happen. Crime happens. Abuse. Other people's craziness. Sickness, death, demons, the devil... It's a really tough world.
 - b) The pain machine means you reap what other people sow. This is not your fault.
 - 2. *Reason 2: The fallen human heart is a morally broken Sin Machine...*
 - a) A lot of the bad stuff in your life happens because of your own dumb choices.
 - b) The awesome news is that when you receive Jesus as your Savior, God gives you a new heart. You have a new name, a new identity, and new power you never had before.

- c) You have the power, by God to change direction. You can spin the flywheel the opposite direction. Grace gives you new stories based on new truths along with the power to tell yourself those stories.

(1) *Lesson 5: When the voice of grace drowns out the other voices in your heart, you can live a God-blessed life in any situation or circumstance.*

3. You can live a God-blessed life no matter how bad you've sinned.
4. You can live a God-blessed life no matter how much you've failed.
5. You can live a God-blessed life no matter your health.
6. You can live a God-blessed life no matter your money.
7. You can live a God-blessed life regardless of success, or fame, or popularity, or status, or looks, or complexion, or location, or language, or race, or any other factor the world deems important.
- a) If you are saved, you have been plunged into Jesus. He is the fully-blessed Son of God.
- b) How can you be in Christ, and not be blessed? It's inconceivable.

(1) Years ago, I took some kids from Camp Awana to downtown Chicago. These kids actually lived in farmland a long way from the city. We went up to the top of the Sears Tower, where there's an awesome observation deck on what was the tallest building in the world at that time.

(2) You can see Soldier Field, where the Bears play. You can see Wrigley Field. You can see Lake Michigan. It's awesome.

(3) The kids were blown away.

(4) After a while running around and seeing all the sites, one of the kids ran up to me. He said, "Hey Bill, where's Chicago?"

(5) Chicago was everywhere he looked. He just didn't know it.

(6) Same thing with the grace of God in your life.

(a) *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12, NKJV)*

(7) This is the most important thing.

(a) *Lesson 6: As a child of God, his grace is always there for you.*

(b) *Lesson 7: Your job is to grow in the knowledge of God's Word and in faith, that you might tell yourself the story of things that have been freely given to you by God.*

F. This is what God is doing for Gideon. It is what God is doing for the whole nation. It is what God is doing for you and me today.

G. So, it's game time. The bad guys are there, too many to count.

H. So in verse 34 and 35, Gideon summons an army. Thirty-two thousand Israelites take up arms and respond. It's awesome.

I. Gideon is still afraid. He proposes test number 2 and test number 3.

X. *Then Gideon said to God, "If you are truly going to use me to rescue Israel as you promised, prove it to me in this way. I will put some wool on the threshing floor tonight. If the fleece is wet with dew in the morning but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to help me rescue Israel as you promised." And it happened just that way. When Gideon got up the next morning, he squeezed the fleece and wrung out a whole bowlful of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Please don't be angry with me, but let me make one more request. This time let the fleece remain dry while the ground around it is wet with dew." So that night God did as Gideon asked. The fleece was dry in the morning, but the ground was covered with dew. (Judges 6:36-40, NLT)*

A. If you've ever heard a saying about putting out a fleece, this is where it comes from.

B. I love this, because it shows how patient God is.

C. I've always thought, if it's okay for Gideon to put out a fleece, why can't I? Hey God, if I should do buy the NFL Sunday ticket, make this paper towel wet in the morning.

D. But those fleeces don't work today. Wanna know why?

E. Me too. I'm not sure, but I think it has something to do with the fact that a) God has already proven himself enough, and b) we have a completed Bible,

1. *Lesson 8: God loves faith in his Word more than any of us realizes.*

F. So, no more fleeces, usually.

XI. *The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength. Therefore, tell the people, 'Whoever is timid or afraid may leave and go home.'" Twenty-two thousand of them went home, leaving only ten thousand who were willing to fight. (Judges 7:2, 3, NLT)*

A. Nooooooooooooo!!! Don't you hate when God does that? Ten thousand against a multitude. But it gets worse.

XII. *But the LORD told Gideon, "There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will sort out who will go with you and who will not." When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the LORD told him, "Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream." (Judges 7:4, 5, NLT)*

XIII. *Only three hundred of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream. The LORD told Gideon, "With these three hundred men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home." (Judges 7:6, 7, NLT)*

- A. If you were in Gideon's sandals...
 - 1. What story would you tell yourself about yourself?
 - 2. What story would you tell yourself about God?
 - 3. What story would you tell yourself about that world?
- B. You've got to get to the point where you quit caring what other people think. You quit questioning God's love. You quit doubting the power of the resurrected Savior.
 - 1. *Lesson 9: If Jesus can die on the cross and rise from the dead for you, there's nothing in your life too big for him to handle.*
- C. Even if the numbers look bad.
- D. Even if the evidence is hopeless.
- E. Even if the news is bleak.
- F. Even if your friends say you're nuts.
- G. Even if your own heart beats you up.
- H. Even if anything.
 - 1. If God says, "Go on in this strength of yours," it's enough.

XIV. *He divided the three hundred men into three groups and gave each man a ram's horn and a clay jar with a torch in it. Then he said to them, "Keep your eyes on me. When I come to the edge of the camp, do just as I do. As soon as my group blows the rams' horns, those of you on the other sides of the camp blow your horns and shout, 'For the LORD and for Gideon!'" (Judges 7:16-18, NLT)*

XV. *It was just after midnight, after the changing of the guard, when Gideon and the one hundred men with him reached the outer edge of the Midianite camp. Suddenly, they blew the horns and broke their clay jars. Then all three groups blew their horns and broke their jars. They held the blazing torches in their left hands and the horns in their right hands and shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" (Judges 7:19, 20, NLT)*

XVI. *Each man stood at his position around the camp and watched as all the Midianites rushed around in a panic, shouting as they ran. When the three hundred Israelites blew their horns, the LORD caused the warriors in the camp to fight against each other with their swords. Those who were not killed fled to places as far away as... (Judges 7:21, 22, NLT)*

- A. Let's just say it was a blowout victory.
- B. What was Gideon's victory? That he defeated the Midianites?
- C. No. Not really. Relatively speaking that was easy.
- D. You know what the hard part was?
- E. Believing in the grace of God so much he could go to war with 300 men against 100,000.
 - 1. *Lesson 10: The real victory is changing the story you tell yourself... about yourself, about your world, and about your God.*
- F. The real victory was changing his story.
 - 1. His story about himself.
 - a) No I'm not a loser. I am a mighty hero in the halls of heaven. A saint. A glorious child of a great king.
 - 2. His story about his world.
 - a) No, I am not a victim of the pain machine or the sin machine, because God's Grace machine is greater than all.
 - 3. His story about God.
 - a) No, God is not a bully, or an absentee landlord, or a demanding boss. He a father in the best sense, and his grace for me never fails.
- G. The reason we make a big deal about the Bible is simple.
- H. It's how you tell yourself true and life-giving stories about yourself, your God, and your world.
- I. And that is my ongoing prayer for all of us.