

The Lord's Patience Towards Fearful Gideon

by James Jennings

This sermon focuses on the story of Gideon in Judges, highlighting the Lord's remarkable patience towards fearful Gideon. It emphasizes how God's love and assurance strengthen us in times of fear and uncertainty, encouraging us to trust in His promises and take action in faith. The narrative illustrates how the Lord takes initiative to strengthen His children and provide opportunities for them to overcome their fears and obey Him.

Scripture: Judges 6:12, Judges 6:34, Judges 7:15, Hebrews 11:32, Philippians 4:13, 2 Corinthians 12:9, John 20:29, Psalm 18:29, Luke 11:9, Romans 8:31

Topics: "Overcoming Fear", "God's Assurance and Strength"

Description

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Transcript

Go ahead and turn to the book of Judges. This week, I've been in Judges in my morning reading. And something specifically in chapter 7 really stood out that encouraged me about the Lord's patience towards fearful Gideon.

And you know, love is patient. So it's ultimately the Lord's love towards Gideon. And it just really encouraged my heart.

So I want to present this thought to you this morning in the hopes that it will encourage you. Many of us face different fears. We could be a little slow to obey the Lord at times.

We could ask for more assurance that we're in God's will. Will? Maybe you're in a spot like that. Lord, am I really in Your will right now? And you're wanting some more clear assurance from the Lord.

Well, believer, He is incredibly patient as we're going to see here as He deals with Gideon in Judges. Now, I contemplated, should I read Judges 6 and 7? I want you guys to get a good feel of the context. I think what we're going to do is read starting in Judges 6, verse 6. We'll go to 7, verse 11.

And as we're reading these verses, here are some things to ask yourself. One, where do you see fear displayed? Generally, but then specifically with Gideon. Where do you see him afraid? We're also going to think of this.

How many signs or tests is Gideon asking of the Lord? And then, you could ask this question as we read this. Where do you see the Lord, if anywhere, get angry, impatient with Gideon? So let's start in Judges 6. Maybe we'll pray. Let's pray.

Father, Lord, thank You for bringing us here this morning and giving us an opportunity to fellowship with our brothers and sisters. And Lord, we hope an opportunity to be in awe of You. To worship You.

Lord, we want to worship You. You are so worthy of worship. Lord, I don't know what aspects of the love of Christ or what He's going to bring out in the next hour, but Lord, we just want to worship You today.

I pray You'd use the truths here to stir that up in my brothers' and sisters' hearts. Lord, we want to see more of You. And so Lord, would You open our eyes this morning to see wonders out of Your law.

Would You show us great and mighty hidden things that we have not known. In Christ's name, Amen. So, Judges 6. Glance at verse 1. You see, the Lord gave Israel into the hand of Midian.

And verse 6, Israel was brought very low because of Midian. Well, ultimately because of the Lord. The Lord gave them into the hand of Midian.

And it says, the people of Israel cried out for help to the Lord. So the Lord is bringing them low, getting them to a point they're crying for help. Verse 7, when the people cry, if Israel cried out to the Lord on account of the Midianites, who were basically coming in, raiding their land, the Lord sent a prophet to the people of Israel.

He said to them, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I led you up from Egypt. I brought you out of the house of slavery. I delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of all who oppressed you.

I drove them out before you and gave you their land. And I said to you, I am the Lord your God. You shall not fear the gods of the Amorites.

Don't fear. So here we have fear mentioned. In whose land you dwell.

But, here Israel's problem was, they've not obeyed the voice of the Lord. They weren't taking heed to Him. Verse 11, Judges 6, if you just walked in, Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terabinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Absarite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

Now pause, what's a winepress? It tends to be a place in the ground. It has a stone wall around it. You can see here it says the word hide.

They're trying to hide their grain from the Midianites coming in and taking it. So there's fear here of the Midianites. They're wanting to protect their resources.

Verse 12, the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, to Gideon, saying, the Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor. And Gideon said to him, Please, sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this

happened to us? And where are all His wonderful deeds that our fathers recounted to us? So Gideon remembered these wonderful deeds, saying, did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord has forsaken us and given us into the hand of Midian. So Gideon even sees this is the Lord's doing.

And the Lord turned to him and said, Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian. Do not I send you. And he said to him, Please, Lord, how? How? How? Can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.

So there you kind of have some fear again. Gideon feels unworthy. This must be wrong.

You're calling me I'm the weakest in my father's house. Verse 16, And the Lord said to him, and this is what matters, believer, but I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man. And he said to him, and this is Gideon, If I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign.

So this is the first sign Gideon asked for. That it is you who speak with me. Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present.

And set it before you. And he said, the angel of the Lord said, I'll stay until you return. So he's staying until Gideon comes back.

And it's not like this is a quick meal in a microwave. Here he's submitting to Gideon's desire. Verse 19, Gideon went into his house and prepared a young goat and unleavened cakes from an eave half of flour.

The meat he put in a basket and the broth he put in a pot and brought them to him under the terebinth and presented them. And the angel of God said to him, take the meat and the unleavened cakes and put them on this rock and pour the broth over them. And he did so.

Then the angel of the Lord reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and he touched the meat and the unleavened cakes. And fire sprang up from the rock. Consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes and the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight.

Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the Lord. Gideon said, alas, O Lord God, for now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face. But the Lord said to him, peace be to you.

So the angel of the Lord is gone. The Lord says to him, peace be to you. Do not fear.

Don't fear. The Lord's saying, don't fear. He's already said in v. 10, you shouldn't fear the gods of the Amorites.

Here he's saying, do not fear, you shall not die. Then Gideon built an altar, v. 24, there to the Lord and called it, The Lord is Peace. From what I could find, this is the only place the Lord has called The Lord is Peace.

Because v. 23, the Lord said, peace be to you. So he says, the Lord is peace. To this day, it still stands at Ophirah, which belongs to the Abzurites.

That night, the Lord said to him, take your father's bull and the second bull, seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal that your father has. And cut down the Asherah that is beside it. And build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold here, with stones laid in due order.

Then take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah that you shall cut down. So Gideon took men of his servants and did as the Lord had told him. But, because he was too afraid, so here we have fear again.

Gideon is too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do it by day. He did it by night. And one of the other questions we're asking is where does the Lord get angry? Did the Lord get angry at Gideon waiting until the night out of this fear? He did not.

Verse 28, when the men of the town rose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was broken down. And the Asherah beside it was cut down and the second bull was offered on the altar that had been built. They said to one another, who has done this thing? And after they had searched and inquired, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash, has done this thing.

The men of the town said to Joash, bring out your son that he may die. So Gideon had reason to be afraid. For he has broken down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah beside it.

But Joash, his father, said to all who stood against him, will you contend for Baal? Or will you save him? Whoever contends for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself because his altar has been broken down. Therefore, on that day, Gideon was called Jerubabel.

That is to say, let Baal contend against him because he broke down his altar. Now pause for a second as we're reading this. If you remember at the beginning in v. 10, the Lord said, you shall not fear the gods of the Amorites.

But they were. And now as this story is developing, here the father of Gideon has this faith come upon him where he says if he is a god, let him contend for himself. And obviously, the false gods cannot contend for themselves.

We read that in v. 33. Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east came together. They crossed the Jordan and camped in the valley of Jezreel.

But the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon. So here the Lord's clothing Gideon in the Spirit. And He sounded the trumpet and the Abuzrites were called out to follow Him.

And He sent messengers throughout all Manasseh. And they too were called out to follow Him. And He sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali.

And they went up to meet them. V. 36, Then Gideon said to God, if You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said... So the Lord's already said He's going to do this. He's already said that.

And Gideon is asking for another sign. Behold, v. 37, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there's dew on the fleece alone and it is dry on all the ground, then I will know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.

Wait, didn't He already say this? Gideon's wanting a sign. And it was so. When He rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, He run enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water.

V. 39, Then Gideon said to God, let not Your anger burn against me. Let me speak just once more. Please.

Let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only and on all the ground. Let there be dew.

And then does the text then say, and God got angry at Gideon? Here He's already said, don't be angry with me. The Lord doesn't. V. 40, God did so that night.

Didn't wait a week. Did so then. Was patient with Gideon who's weak.

And it was dry on the fleece only and on all the ground there was dew. So, the Lord did it that night. He just said earlier in the morning.

V. 38, the next morning is when He saw the sign. So as we go on, chapter 7, Then Jerubabbel, that is Gideon and all the people who were with him rose early. And I would put forward when they rose early, that's when he saw God had done the sign.

So they see God has done this sign on this day. And they rose and they encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them by the hill of Morah in the valley.

So the Lord has already listened to Gideon. He's given him this third sign. First, he consumed the meat, then the fleece, and then the fleece part two.

Gideon is going. And now, you'd think, okay, we're going to go. We're going to conquer them.

But v. 2, the Lord said to Gideon, there's a problem. The people with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over Me by saying, My own hand has saved Me. Now therefore, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, whoever is fearful and trembling.

Now wait a minute. We've already seen Gideon has been one of the men who's been afraid. He waited until nighttime to do this.

Because he was hiding in the winepress earlier on, beating out the grain. Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead. Then 22,000 of the people returned.

So 22,000 admitted they were fearful and trembling. 10,000 remained. The Lord said to Gideon, the people are still too many.

So this day is continuing on, and it's maybe not changing as Gideon had expected. Take them down to the water. I will test them.

So here the Lord has a test for them. And anyone among you whom I say to you, this one shall go with you, shall go with you. And anyone of you whom I say, this one shall not go with you, shall not.

And Gideon does not question God. Verse 5, so He brought the people down to the water, and the Lord said to Gideon, and everyone who lapped the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, everyone who knelt down to drink, and the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths is 300 men.

But all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. The Lord said to Gideon, with the 300 men who lapped, I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand and let all the others go, every man to his home. So the people took provisions in their hands and their trumpets, and He sent all the rest of Israel,

every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men.

And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley. That same night..." These are the verses that really hit me. That same night... Now, stop there.

Don't read on. That same night, what's just happened? Gideon has had one sign. Meats consumed.

The Lord's already saying, I'm going to give victory. He has another, just to test if the Lord will do as He has said. The Lord's already said.

And then He says, the Lord did not get angry or impatient with Gideon, and He asked for the fleas part two. And the Lord did it that night. He got every reason to believe.

He woke up the next morning. That was the morning that He saw that God answered that sign. Because the first sign, it was early in the morning, He rose and He saw the Lord answer.

So then, they go and they camp for this battle. So He starts the day, He's already been afraid. The Lord's already answered one sign, two signs, and then the third, the second time with the fleas.

Then the Lord weakens Him and takes the 32,000 and gives them 300 men. And now look what the Lord says. The same night.

So after all of this, here is this day building up. The Lord says to him, arise, go down against the camp, and then He gives a reason. For? Because I have given it into your hands.

The Lord is giving absolute assurance. There will be victory. He's already done sign after sign after sign for Gideon.

And you see Gideon being fearful. Waited until the night. Even being fearful of God.

And the Lord says, no, peace be to you. You do not be afraid. And so here they are this day and the Lord says, I have given it into your hands.

Now don't read v. 10 yet. Now, if you're Gideon, and all of this has been happening, and you know, at the start of the day, you had the Lord do the fleas part too. And it's like, yes! I've got faith! I can go! We can go do it! Well, as the day progresses, the army goes from 32,000 to 300.

Oh no, we've got 300 men. Oh no, what do we do? Should I ask the Lord for another sign? I've already asked and had three. I've already said, Lord, don't be angry with me.

And He wasn't angry with me. And the angel of the Lord sat and waited while I made the food. And you could argue, rightly so, that that was a Christophany there.

That it was the pre-incarnate Christ. We look with Judges 13 and later, the angel of the Lord being there. They said they saw God face to face.

All this is happening. And here the Lord says, go. And then watch what happens in v. 10.

Gideon doesn't get to ask for another sign. You know why? Because our personal God who knows our frame and knows our weakness, He knows what we need. And He at times takes initiative to give us what we need.

V. 10, but if you are afraid to go down, Gideon, who's already been afraid, the Lord now is coming to him and saying if you're afraid, Gideon, if you're afraid to go down, go down to the camp with prayer of your servant and you shall hear what they say. And afterward, after I give you this sign, Gideon, your hands shall be strengthened to go down against. Wait a minute.

The Lord already strengthens His hands through multiple signs. He's already shown him consistently I'm going to keep My Word. And yet here, Gideon, who's been fearful, the Lord comes around and takes initiative and gives him an opportunity to be strengthened.

On the same night, this whole day, you think of this whole day, it's played out like this. You wake up. You see the sign of the fleece.

Your army goes from 32,000 to 300. The Lord again gives assurance, I will give them into your hand. And He says to go.

And then the Lord is the one who adds this little clause. But Gideon, but brother or sister, if you're afraid, the Lord is saying to you, here, I want to strengthen you. I know your frame that you are but dust.

I want to make a way to strengthen you who are fearful. I am a patient God. I am not quick to anger.

I have not been angry at Gideon. I know the task I've called him to is great. And it takes faith.

And obviously, Gideon was afraid because he does go down and take this opportunity. He does go down to the camp. The Lord said if you're afraid, go down.

He went down. He was afraid. He was afraid to go destroy the altar of Baal.

He did it at night. Here, he's afraid to go down to the camp with the 300. But he doesn't have to ask for a sign because the Lord takes initiative to make a way for his child to be strengthened.

So, let's think about this. When I read this, I saw in it the Lord's remarkable patience towards fearful Gideon. If your thought of God is that right there, He would chew Gideon out for delaying, that doesn't happen.

And if your thought of the Lord is, well, I've already done these things, my love will extend no further, you're wrong. Because the Lord's love and patience continues to manifest itself. The Lord's already assured victory, and yet here the Lord does this.

So, sometimes we think like this. Well, what would I do in Gideon's situation when I asked for another sign? You know a better way to think about it? What will the Lord do when I'm in a fearful situation? Not necessarily what will I do. How will the Lord treat me? You know how the Lord will treat you? He will look for a way for you to be strengthened in the midst of your fears.

He's taking initiative. You're prone to fear. God is patient.

So, the Lord gives Gideon an option for Gideon to get more strength and more assurance. And that's how it is with us. So often, it's like we have assurance, but then it's like I want more.

And the Lord is meeting Gideon and giving him more without him asking. And Gideon was afraid because he took up the offer. Here, the Lord graciously accommodated Himself to Gideon's request.

And yet, what happens? The Lord then accommodates Gideon's weakness by giving him a way to be strengthened in the midst of his fears. And what's amazing to me in v. 9 is the same night the Lord said. The Lord is the One who took initiative with this strengthening.

Because if you're Gideon, you're probably sitting there thinking, probably too many times I've asked. Probably can't ask for another sign. Well, you know what? If you're afraid of offending God like that, He'll come and strengthen you and show you you don't have a reason to be afraid.

The Lord took initiative. The Lord knew Gideon was afraid. And He made a way for him to be strengthened.

And you know, another thought here is it's not like anything in the verse says one route is sinful or more spiritual than the other. It's not like the Lord says you have to take the route where you don't first get strengthened. The Lord does not do that.

It doesn't paint one as more spiritual than the other. Now I know, when you say that, you kind of think of, rightly so, of Jesus' patience towards Thomas and how Thomas wanted to put the fingers in the hands of the Lord to believe. And Jesus says in John 20, He says, have you believed because you've seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

So yes, blessed is the man who goes down to the battle without the sign because he takes God at His Word. But the Lord doesn't here condemn the man who has the signs. He actually accommodates the man's weakness to give him another sign in order to strengthen him.

And Gideon does what matters in the end and that is he goes down to war and the Midianites die. He does eventually obey the Lord. Though it took strengthening four times, he eventually went down and had victory.

He got the job done. That would have been disobedience if he would have not got the job done. Another thing here when you think about it, Judges 6.34 says, the Spirit of the Lord clothed Gideon.

He's been clothed with the Spirit. And this happens after that where he's afraid with the 300 men to go down and the Lord gives another opportunity to be strengthened. You've already been clothed with the Spirit of God, and yet you need more strengthening? Yes! Father, give me more of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 11. We're asking. We want more of the Lord.

We are utterly weak. We need strengthening one time after another after another. Now, I want to consider the way the Lord strengthened Gideon.

I mean, this in itself is amazing. It's not like this is just some little thing and okay, we'll have some little thing over here you can read and you'll be strengthened. Let's think of what the Lord does here.

Verse 11, Judges 7. So He says, if you're afraid to go down, go down to the camp with prayer of your servant. Wait, if you're afraid to go down, go down? If you're afraid to go down, go down. So he has to go down to the camp.

What do you mean? If you're afraid to go down, you've got to go down to get strengthened. So it took some faith for him and his servant to go by themselves. I don't know.

I can't see in the text. Did they have a disguise on? Did they blend in? Were they supernaturally invisible? I don't know. I don't know how both sides dressed, if it was easy to tell the difference or not.

But they go down. He's got to go down to the camp. Verse 11, and you shall hear... so they're going to hear something what they say.

So you know, you hear that. If you're getting it, you're probably thinking, I wonder what I'm going to hear. Israel's going to have victory.

Who knows? Maybe something like that. Kind of vague. Kind of broad.

No, it's pretty specific, brethren. You shall hear what they say. Afterward, your hand shall be strengthened to go down against the camp.

Then he went down with prayer of his servant to the outpost. How many outposts are there? The outposts. There's plural.

This camp is so big, they have camels without number. And he goes down to the outposts of the armed men who were in the camp. And the Midianites and the Malachites and all the people of the east lay along the valley like locusts in abundance.

And their camels were without number as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance. There might be a million men. When Gideon came, when he came, behold, behold, he gets there down to the camp.

Multiple outposts. He gets to the right outpost. And behold, they get there.

Look what's happening. A man was telling a dream to his comrade. Wait a minute.

Wait a minute. When did this guy even have the dream? Didn't this just happen and the Lord says go down and he goes down? It doesn't appear like another night has happened. And yet this guy's already had a dream.

This guy could have had the dream the day prior before the Lord even talked to Gideon. A man was telling a dream to his comrade. And he said, behold, I dreamed a dream.

And behold, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came to the tent and struck it so that it fell and turned it upside down so that the tent lay flat. Now, I don't know about you, but if I heard that, I wouldn't know how to interpret that. Who is the barley bread? And it says tumbled.

That doesn't sound too elegant. Into the camp. And it struck it down.

Verse 14, and his comrade answered, how's this guy going to interpret this? This is none other than the sword of Gideon. Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

Okay. What major exploits has Gideon had up to this point? David slew his 10,000's. People knew David.

He was famous. What's Gideon done? He's destroyed the altar that was among his own people. I don't necessarily think that his people went and spread that and somehow it got among the Midianites.

How does this man even know Gideon's name? He's not some famous war hero. We hear Gideon and we know who he is. The battle hasn't happened yet.

Obviously, the Lord. The Lord did not have Gideon here. Israel will have victory.

The Lord had the person who interpreted the dream use Gideon's name. That's amazing! You want to have no reason to doubt that there will be victory? God used his name. There's no other sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel.

Remember, he's the weakest of the weakest of the least. God has given into his hand Midian and all the camp. And as soon as Gideon heard the telling of the dream and his interpretation, it says he worshiped.

The idea is he fell on his face in reverence before God. Amazed! You've got to be kidding me! The Lord took initiative to strengthen me who is afraid. He's been patient with me.

He's not been angry with me. And He's worked all of this sovereignly out for me to go down to the right outpost at the exact time behold when they're saying a dream. And then your comrade there interprets the dream and says my name and that there will be victory.

The Lord did all of that for me, one of His children, in order to strengthen me that I would not fear, even though He's already done one, two, three signs, and here the fourth is. That's amazing. They go to the right outpost.

They don't get noticed. Perfect timing. Behold.

When did the guy even have the dream? Maybe it was the days prior. Who knows? Or the night prior. Maybe he was asleep and they got into the camp and he had just woken up.

The interpreter says Gideon's name. The interpreter, get this, he says, verse 14, and his comrade answered, there's no other than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel. Now look what it says next.

God has given into his hand. The interpreter gives glory to God. That God's the one who's given.

He honors the Lord. It's not like Gideon comes away puffed up in pride. He realizes God is the one who's going to give victory.

God's already said that. He's already given me these different signs. He's not been angry with me.

He's been patient with me. And there, Gideon worships, falls on his knees, you could say, touches the ground with his forehead in expression of profound reverence. He saw how worthy God is to be followed.

You see, when we get a glimpse of the Lord's loving patience towards us who are fearful, it should cause us to see the worth and value of God and worship Him. And say, Lord, I don't deserve this. And my slowness to obey You when You've already said, Lord, You are so worthy.

You're so personal even to me. I was afraid. I had been fearful.

And You knew that. If you're afraid, go this way. I'll strengthen you.

I have prepared a dream and an interpreter, and I'll get you to the right outpost. They won't see you. And they'll actually mention your name specifically even though your name is not spread among the land.

And obviously, Gideon, he hears all of this and he doesn't sit around. That would absolutely be sin. And I would say that would righteously make the Lord angry if you did not obey.

And he returned, verse 15, the second half, he returned to the camp of Israel and he said, Arise, for the Lord has given the host of Midian into Your hand. And He divided the 300 men into the three companies, put trumpets into the hands of all of them and empty jars with torches inside the jars. He said to them, Look at Me and do likewise.

When I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with Me, then blow the trumpets also on every side of all the camp and shout for the Lord and for Gideon. So Gideon and the 100 men who were with him came to the outskirts of the camp, the beginning of the middle of the watch.

When they had just set the watch and they blew the trumpets, smashed the jars that were in their hand, then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands and torches and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, a sword for the Lord and for Gideon.

Every man stood in his place around the camp and all the army ran. Now who's afraid? This army that you cannot number. They ran.

They cried out. This started out with Israel crying out to God for help. Now the enemies are crying out and their false god's not going to hear them and He's not going to deliver them.

When they blew the 300 trumpets, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord set every man's sword against his comrade and against all the army. And there is victory. Incredible victory that God gets the glory by strengthening His weak people.

Brethren, this should be true of you in your fight against sin and your wrestling against demonic oppression and these principalities and powers that we wrestle against. The Lord has given you a promise that there's victory over whatever that sin is or that oppression that's weighing down. The Lord is patiently loving you in the midst of your fears.

He's given you verse after verse after verse and yes, maybe even at times, something subjective. And He's showing, I keep My Word. Remember, Gideon is mentioned in Hebrews 11 in the Hall of Faith.

And one way to look at the Hall of Faith, it's a hall of people who found God to be faithful and to be trusted. And they took Him at His Word. But you see, so much of Gideon taking God at His Word was because of God's patient love towards Gideon.

Gideon did not have it all together. He was afraid. Go destroy the altar and Gideon waited until night.

He was afraid. Go down to the camp. Gideon was afraid to go down, but the Lord gave this opportunity to be strengthened.

There is victory. The Lord can take all of your fear completely away. And He can make your enemies be the ones who are afraid and trembling.

Now, this reminded me of something Steve Saint wrote. Steve Saint was the son of Nate Saint, who was martyred with Jim Elliot in the jungles of Ecuador. And I thought this example, like with Gideon, it shows the loving patience of our Lord to strengthen one of His children's faith.

It shows the Lord taking initiative to do this. So Steve Saint was on a fact-finding trip for Mission Aviation Fellowship in West Africa in Timbuktu. You guys heard of Timbuktu? It's a real place, as Steve Saint mentioned.

He didn't even know it was real. Initially, he did this in 1986. He thought he was stranded with no flight out of the barren city.

He wrote, Suddenly, I had a powerful desire to talk to my father. Certainly, he had known what it was like to be a foreigner in a strange land. But my father, Nate Saint, was dead.

He was one of the five missionary men killed by Bakua Indians in the jungles of Ecuador in 1956. I was a month shy of my fifth birthday at the time. And my memories of him were almost like movie clips.

A lanky, intense man with a serious goal and a quick wit. He was a dedicated jungle pilot flying missionaries and medical personnel in his Piper family cruiser. I'd felt the need to talk with my father before.

But in recent weeks, this need had become urgent. For one thing, I was new to relief work, but it was more than that. I needed Dad to help answer my new questions of faith." So he's having a struggle with his faith.

He needs strengthening. God has said this. Can I trust God? He said, in Mali, for the first time in my life, I was surrounded by people who didn't share my faith who were in fact hostile to the Christian faith.

Locals and Western relief workers alike. In a way, it was parallel to the situation Dad had faced in Ecuador. How often I'd said the same thing Dad would have said among the Indians who killed him.

My God is real. He's a personal God who lives inside of me with whom I have a very special one-on-one relationship. And yet the questions lingered in my mind.

Did my father have to die? All my life, people had spoken of Dad with respect. He was a man willing to die for his faith. But at the time, I couldn't help but think the murderers, it was just an accident of bad timing.

Dad and his colleagues landed, just a small band of Akua men who were in a bad mood for reasons they had nothing to do with the faith of the Americans. So these were the doubts he's having. If Dad's plane had landed one day later, the massacre might not have happened.

Couldn't there have been another way that made little impact on the Akua's that I could see? To them, it was just one more killing in a history of killings. So here's wrestling with these things in the middle of Timbuktu, West Africa. 30 years later, it still had an impact on me.

And now for the first time, I felt threatened because of who I was and what I believed. God, I find myself praying as I looked around the marketplace. I'm in trouble here.

Please keep me safe. And show me a way to get back. Please reveal Yourself and Your love to me the way You did to my father.

So here's in Timbuktu, it looks like the flight won't have room, so he's stuck. And he's asking, Lord, reveal Your love to me the way You did to my father. In divine providence, he ended up meeting a believer named Nua.

And they went to a compound on the edge of town where an American missionary lived who translated their conversation. Steve asked the native, how did you come to have faith? He said, this missionary compound has always had a beautiful garden. One day when I was a small boy, a friend and I decided to steal some carrots.

It was a dangerous task. We'd been told that white men eat nomadic children. Despite our agility and considerable expertise, I was caught by the foreign missionary here.

Mr. Marshall didn't eat me. Instead, he gave me the carrots that I'd stolen and the cards that had God's promises from the Bible written on them. When Nua's parents found that he had portions of such a despised book defiling their house, they threw them out and forbade anyone to take him in.

Nor was he allowed in school. But something happened. Nua had come to believe what the Bible said was true.

Nua's mother became desperate. Finally, she decided to kill her son. She obtained poison from a sorcerer and poisoned Nua's food.

At a family feast, Nua ate the food and wasn't affected. His brother, who unwittingly stole the morsel of the meat from the deadly dish, became violently ill and remains partially paralyzed. Seeing God's intervention, the family and the townspeople were afraid to make further attempts on his life, but condemned him as an outcast." Bear with me, we're getting somewhere.

After sitting a moment, I asked Nua the question that hours earlier I'd wanted to ask my father. This is in 1986. There's not really internet back then.

I was born and there was no internet. Why is your faith so important to you that you're willing to give your life? He said. And Nua said, I know God loves me and I'll live with Him forever.

I know it. Now I have peace where I used to be full of fear and uncertainty, full of fear. Who wouldn't give up everything for this peace and security? Steve Saints said, it can't be easy for you as a teenager to take a stand that made you despised by the whole community.

Steve said, where did your courage come from? Mr. Marshall couldn't take me in without putting my life in jeopardy, so he gave me some books about other Christians who had suffered for their faith. Now, just in case you got lost in that. Here he's stranded in Timbuktu.

He's having questions about his own faith. He's wanting to be strengthened. He's having doubts about was the cause my dad died for worth it? Or was it just some accident? And this guy had been converted, kicked out of his home, poisoned and not affected.

He couldn't be around the missionary. They gave him books and he says this. So he gave me some books about other Christians who had suffered for their faith.

My favorite was about five young men who willingly risked their lives to take God's good news to the Stone Age Indians in the jungles of South America. The book said these men let themselves be speared to death, even though they had guns and could have killed their attackers. The missionary who was translating said, yeah, I remember the story.

As a matter of fact, one of those men had your last name. Yes, I said quietly. The pilot was my father.

Your father? Noah cried. The story is true? Yes, I said, it's true. The missionary and Noah and I talked through the afternoon.

When they accompanied me back to the airfield that night, we found that there was room for me on the plane. As Noah and I hugged each other, it seemed incredible. It seemed incredible that God loved us so much that He arranged for us to meet at the ends of the earth.

Noah and I had gifts for each other that no one else could give. I gave him the assurance that the story had given him courage was true. It gave me assurance that God had used my dad's death for good.

So I thought of that. What divine providence for Steve Sain to end up in Timbuktu having these doubts, these questions. And here he finds a native convert whose family was trying to kill him and that native was strengthened by the very true book about his own dad's death.

And like he said, in the end, it seemed incredible. God loved us so much that He arranged. Brethren, God loved Gideon so much that He arranged a way for Gideon to be strengthened in order to overcome his fears and obey God.

And He'll do the same for you. If you're fearful, don't fear God. He is the Lord of peace.

Yes, fear God in one way. But in another way, we should revere God and worship Him, but in another way, we should realize the Lord is patient. His love is everlasting from everlasting.

This in no way is an excuse to be slow and delay obedience. It's not that you can't take this and say, alright, that means I can just put off obeying. Did Gideon want to put off obeying? No.

His heart was, Lord, I want to obey. I need help. Strengthen.

And the Lord took initiative and gave Gideon a way to be strengthened. And here, in 1986, the Lord arranged for Steve Saint to meet a guy in the middle of Timbuktu who had read his father's biography in order to be strengthened. And the Lord arranged that.

And if you just step back at your life, Christian, there are things God has arranged in His providence for you to find specific strength in the moment of a trial in which you are fearful, which you are afraid. And that's His love for us. If He did not spare His own Son, whom He gave up for us all, how much more will He not graciously with Him give us all things? I always have strength through Christ who strengthens me.

Christ's strength is available for you in every single trial and circumstance. There's never going to be a trial where Christ is not willing to strengthen you and empower you and encourage your heart and work in you faith to take Him at His Word. This is the love of our God.

This is the love of the Lord who let Thomas fill the holes in his hands. We should all the more read the Bible for promises and take God at His Word. And don't misunderstand me and say that this passage encourages you just to run out there and ask for God to do subjective things.

But brethren, in another way, the Lord, I believe, will do things like that. And we should expect that God is able to do far beyond what we can even ask or think. What can we say? There's too much that could be said.

And you know, the Lord gave Gideon strength so that afterward, he would go and take out the enemy. God has a reason for strengthening you and taking away your fears and giving you confidence in Him. It's so that you will act and obey Him.

He doesn't strengthen you to sit still. Another closing thought. We should be like Gideon.

Take all the help you can get. If the Lord gives you an opportunity to avail yourself to be strengthened, take it. I mean, look, you could try to say it's more spiritual if Gideon just would have obeyed.

I don't know about you, but I'd love to look back and see the Lord taking me down to a camp, hearing all these things, and there on my face worshiping God in the midst of my utter weakness and seeing Him for how strong He is. The Lord took Gideon, a weak man, and He sustained him. In the moment you think that maybe Gideon's getting too strong with the 32,000 men, the Lord weakens them again.

But right when the Lord weakens, isn't it so much like our Lord to come along and strengthen right away? He weakens you. He strengthens. He weakens you.

He strengthens. He's always making sure that we're reliant on Him. And you might be like Paul in despair of life itself, but the Lord Jesus said, this is so you no longer rely on yourself, but rely on Him.

So I guess my hope in this, what it did for me this week as I was looking at this, it just encouraged me. The Lord has remarkable patience towards His children who are fearful. We need more patience in how we love our wives.

We need more patience in how we treat our children. And you want a good place to look for patience, look at the living God. And here is an example.

So let's read it one more time. Verse 9, the same night the Lord said to him, Arise, go down against the camp. Why? Because I've given it into your hand.

Absolute assurance already. But, but, if you are afraid to go down, if you are afraid, go down to the camp with prayer of your servant, and you shall hear what they say. And afterward, your hands shall be strengthened to go down.

Let's pray. Father, Lord, we are a weak people and You've designed that. But Lord, at the same time, You've designed us to be strong through Your strength.

That is, the psalmist said we could even jump over a wall, a troop. Lord, that we could go in Your power, our small group, and take out such a large army, and You get the glory. Lord, thank You for Your patience.

Lord, thank You that You are slow to anger. Lord, thank You, thank You, Father, for taking initiative to make ways for us to be strengthened in the midst of our weakness. Lord, I pray for those here today who have fears, who lack assurance, maybe that they're Christians, maybe they lack assurance they're in Your will right now.

Lord, I pray, would You do things, would You give them promises to strengthen them? That afterward, they could move on in faith knowing that You will do as You have said You will do. Lord, help us increase our faith. Lord, allow us to worship You all the more.

You are so worthy. In Christ's name, Amen.

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