

Lesson 2: Idols

JUDGES PROFILE



Genre: Narrative History

Author: Traditionally, the prophet Samuel

Passage: Judges 6:15-18; 8:22-27

Where Is It: The seventh book of the Old Testament: Joshua, **Judges**, Ruth

Key Characters: Gideon, God

Main Plot: God takes sin very seriously, and God's people disobey him to follow other gods. God is still faithful to Israel.



THE WORD

Judges 6:15-18; 8:22-27



ENGAGE THE WORD

Lesson Overview: Cultural Dimension

Our students live in a world of media saturation and narcissism. As we do our best to guide our students, it is important to understand what impact media saturation has had on our students' worldviews. While we know that media and information aren't inherently bad, we must teach them to use technology and its many advantages while also helping them understand how to discern and disconnect.

Much like our students today, Gideon and the people in this week's study are self-obsessed. Gideon wants to trust God, but he can't help but worry about what others think, and in the end, he creates an idol for the people. Even when Gideon tries to fight it, he can't. In this lesson, we will teach our students that we must always be looking in the mirror and asking ourselves, *Who am I? Am I living as the person I want to be?*



Wesleyan Snapshot On Idolatry

"Today, humans practice idolatry in many ways. Pseudo-gods and their images are still worshiped throughout the world in various religious contexts. But if idols are essentially what we trust in and serve instead of the living God, then idolatry is prevalent in all societies. In the modern world, idolatry can take such forms as consumerism, nationalism, civil religion, or the veneration of science, celebrity, sex, or sports."

—Dean Flemming,
Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology

Biblical Commentary

Gideon is one of the six major judges in the Bible. In the beginning of his story, we see him as a normal man, being chosen by God to become a judge: "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14b). Even though God has chosen Gideon, Gideon still shows doubt and uncertainty, which is what we see in Moses in his encounter with God at the burning bush. Gideon fails to see that God is bigger than himself. He needs proof.

Gideon finally concedes that he is to follow through with God's will—but only after he is satisfied with the proof provided. His first task is to take down the family altar,



THE MAIN IDEA

STUDENTS WILL LEARN TO TURN TO GOD INSTEAD OF THINGS OF THIS WORLD.

which is used not for Yahweh's worship but for the gods Baal and Asherah. While he is faithful in his mission, we see Gideon as a timid, scared man again: "But because he was afraid of his family and the townspeople, he did it at night rather than in the daytime" (6:27). Once again, as in other stories of the Bible, we see that God doesn't always choose the strong and powerful to do his work. God can choose and use any one of us for his glory.

Gideon's story continues with the fight against the Midianites and Amalekites. Before the battle, God shaves down the number of people in Gideon's army. When the army is small enough, God instructs Gideon, "Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands" (7:9b). It is not because of any man that the army is defeated but because of God. Gideon is merely an instrument to carry out God's plan.

During his encounter with God, Gideon is slow to trust that he will follow through. Again, we see Gideon's fear. God tells him that if he is afraid, he can go down and listen to words being spoken by the enemy camp. Of course, we see Gideon follow through with this. God knows Gideon is fearful, and he gives him more reassurance that he will be there. After he is assured, Gideon worships God and follows the plan.

Despite his success, we see Gideon fall at the end of his story. At first, we see his strength in God. When the people want to make him ruler, he refuses, saying, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you" (8:23). However, then he goes on to create an *ephod*, a device that was probably used for guidance from an oracle or deity. The ephod becomes an idol, an image of God that Gideon controls. Israel begins to worship this physical image rather than the one true God.

It's ironic that at the beginning of his story, we see Gideon knocking down an idol, but at the end, we see him crafting one, leading Israel astray. As a religious leader, he fails, even though as a military leader, he succeeds. However, God works with Gideon throughout his entire life.

Repentance

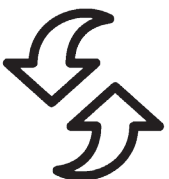
To repent is to "change one's mind." It is to turn away from something and toward something else. Repentance is a "reformation of character."

—Thomas C. Oden,
Classic Christianity

"Sin has been so ingrained into our minds that we are unable to repent and have to repent even of the kind of repentance we bring before God. But Jesus Christ laid hold of us even there in our sinful repentance and turned everything round through his holy vicarious repentance."

—Thomas F. Torrance,
The Mediation of Christ

REFLECT ON THESE THEMES:



What are some things we worship over God? Why is worshipping other things bad?

Gideon needed reassurance again and again from God before he did what God asked of him. Do you doubt God? Where do you see your doubt surface the most?

REFLECT ON YOUR STUDENTS:

God is faithful to his people throughout this story, and yet the people cannot recognize his faithfulness. They still turn toward a human—Gideon—for reassurance. To whom are your students turning for comfort? Do they recognize God as their one true safety net?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

**LESSON
OUTLINE**



Main Idea: Students will learn to turn to God instead of things of this world.

Resources: Bibles, copies of handout, writing utensils, images of popular things in our culture, small glass rocks (found at local craft store), pieces of paper with words on them, tape

Connect to My Experience:
Welcome and Prayer
Gifted Hands Discussion

Connect to the Word:
Read and Reflect on Judges
What Do You Idolize? Activity

Connect to My Life and the World: *Meditative Prayer Exercise*

Closing: *Prayer for Reorientation to God's Will*



CONNECT TO MY EXPERIENCE

Student Goal: Youth will reflect on their faith in God.

Welcome your students and open in prayer.

GIFTED HANDS DISCUSSION

SAY: I'd like to show you a clip from a movie called *Gifted Hands*. This movie is about a man who grows up in poverty and doesn't have much of a chance to make something of himself. Against the odds, he becomes a brain surgeon. In this clip, he has a difficult surgery to perform: his mom is telling him he doesn't need to doubt himself but needs to have faith. You can find the clip here:
<http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/gifted-hands/you-can-do-this>.

ASK: What does Ben's mother mean when she tells him, "You have to see beyond what you can see?" How do you think we can do that—see beyond what we can see?

What was Ben holding onto that was keeping him from having faith? Is there something in your life that keeps you from having faith that God will prevail?

Further Explanation

Teenagers are inundated with messages from movies, TV shows, video games, and social media; therefore, we believe it is important to be relevant to teens while communicating a counter-cultural message to them at the same time. Technology can be used for God's glory.



CONNECT TO THE WORD

Student Goal: Youth will learn that Gideon's story can relate to their lives.

SAY: Gideon was just an individual who worked the wheat. There wasn't anything special about him, but God chose him to help the Israelites. However, Gideon had doubts that God would deliver—he was timid and afraid to do what God asked.

Revelation

We might define revelation as the ability "to see beyond what we can see." God makes it possible for us to see beyond our natural sight, namely, God's very life and nature. We can see God because of the face of Jesus Christ.

READ Judges 6:15-18.

ASK: Why do you think Gideon needed to test God? Is there an area where you continuously test God in your life?

SAY: After testing God several times, Gideon is finally convinced that he can do what God is asking of him. His first assignment is to tear down the idol of Baal (the Canaanite god).

READ Judges 6:25-28.

SAY: This story kind of makes you want to stand up and cheer for Gideon, doesn't it? But before you do that, remember that he isn't perfect. Gideon sneaks off in the night and does what the Lord asks of him. He is afraid of what might happen if people were to see him, and he is afraid of his father seeing him.

ASK: Can you relate to Gideon? When have you been afraid to stand up for something that you believed in because you thought someone would think less of you or make fun of you?

Have you ever hidden your faith in God so no one would know? Why?

SAY: Acting on faith takes courage. When we doubt God, we are telling him we can do something better on our own. We are putting our faith in ourselves or in things other than God. Gideon wasn't a man of courage. Don't get me wrong: he was a good military leader, but he lacked true courage. In fact, most people stop at the success he had in defeating the Midianites. Gideon's story takes a turn at the end, and I think it is important to talk about it. Let's read this together.

READ Judges 8:22-27.

SAY: Gideon has just conquered the Midianites and honored his people, and his people want him to rule over them. This is when he says, "No, the *LORD* will rule over you." But then, he makes an *ephod* out of the gold of their earrings. An ephod was used as a way to communicate with a deity. Gideon makes this as a way to communicate between God and Israel. Here is where everything goes wrong; instead of communicating directly with God, the people begin to worship the ephod instead.

ASK: What does it mean to idolize something?

SAY: To idolize something means you adore it, worship it, want to be it, or have it.

WHAT DO YOU IDOLIZE? ACTIVITY

Show pictures of popular things in our culture (such as iPads and iPhones, the latest gaming systems, clothes, popular celebrities, athletes).



Facilitator Note:

Before you attempt to do this with your students, practice this form of prayer by yourself. What did you discover? How can you help students discover the significance of other forms of prayer? Make these words and practices your own by practicing them in silence and solitude.

Exodus 20:2-3

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."

When you hold up each image, **ASK:** How many of you want this?

How many of you would like to be like this person?

To what extent would you go to get it?

Upon completion of the exercise, **ASK:** Think about this for a minute—why?

What would you gain by having this item or being this person?

How would it make you better?

SAY: Gideon doubted God a lot. He needed tangible evidence that God would make him succeed in his missions. In the end, he and his people worshiped a human-made creation rather than God himself. I think doubt and idolatry go hand in hand. When we worship things other than God, we are saying that we doubt God—that we have no faith that he will pull us through.

ASK: Do you agree with this?

What do you hold above God?

CREATIVE OPTION: IDOL VS. TRUE LOVE

Print out pictures of things we may turn to as idols. Tape them on the wall in a large collage. Give the students sheets of paper and ask them to write words that describe Jesus on their papers. Paste them over the images of idols in the shape of a cross. Leave the collage up as a reminder of the one true God, who is worthy of worship.



CONNECT TO MY LIFE AND THE WORLD

Student Goal: Youth will listen for God in a new way.

MEDITATIVE PRAYER EXERCISE

Do a meditative prayer exercise. Take some time to focus on releasing the material possessions we hold dear and focus on what God may be trying to speak to us.

Pass out little glass rocks with words on them. (You can write out the words beforehand or ask students to write the words themselves and then place the rocks back in the middle so you can distribute them. Whatever you choose, you will probably need to double up on words, depending on the size of your group.) Words should include: *release; reassurance; doubt; possessions; courage; timidity; boldness; honor; character; faith; truth.*

SAY: Each of you has a rock with a word on it. I didn't pick who got which word—I believe God will speak to you during this time. We are going to take a few minutes in a centering prayer. Focus on the word on your rock. Pray to God about whatever comes to your mind about that word. If you start to drift, focus again on your word. Spread out. See what God has to say to you.

At the end, **ASK:** Would anyone like to share about their experience?

Distribute this week's student handout. If you have time, ask the students to spend some time reflecting on the lesson. Give them five to ten minutes to fill in their answers before you close. If you don't have time, ask them to take the handout home with them and spend some time in reflection this week.

CREATIVE OPTION: WELCOME HOME

Play the Dutton song, "Welcome Home." You can find it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4XGWddr6NI>.



CLOSING

In closing, pray that God will help us release the things of this world that take over our lives. Pray that God will re-center us to focus on his will for our lives.