Intro
...you’re seated in the theatre – maybe you’ve got your popcorn, settle into your seat, the previews are over and you take a breath as the movie begins...the logos of who produces, music is building and then this sweeping scene begins to fade into view... cinematography – and instantly you’re mind is beginning to build a backdrop to how this story will unfold as its setting is being described with no words, but through a beautiful, bold moving scenery

T If you were to have the picture fade in on the movie of the era of the Judges…(not Judge Judy/Alex from TV land – these are leaders God has raised up among His people – who are calling them back to Him, rescuing from the oppression they’re under) -- we’d see the glimpses of the Dark Ages of Israel’s history after what seemed like an epic beginning…taken out of slavery, brought into a land flowing with milk/honey – richness…and now these very people are scattered, disorganized, being oppressed, wandering and floundering in their existence.

*as I read – allow your mind to create the opening scenes, create cinematography of this story and diagnose the condition of the peoples’ heart…

Judges 6:1-10

*Idol worship was has eroded the peoples heart of devotion for Yahweh (God)
→ Glenn said: “The great offense is that idol worship is always a shortcut around faith” – a trust relationship with the LORD / it’s a relational violation
*so we see the people in disarray, darkness, chaos desperation …

Summary the Judges era: (most scholars believe these stories/books of Ruth/Judges being recorded early on in the monarchy of King David – to record the history of God’s people)

There is a total of 12 judges (6 minor/6 major) representative of the 12 tribes of Israel.
The purpose of the listing of 12 judges, representative of the various parts of Canaan and Transjordan, is to demonstrate that all tribes throughout the conquered territories experienced grave difficulties from a variety of enemies:

T So for our time today, we’ll look in on the snapshot of one of the major judges – Gideon, I want to look at the UPS and DOWNS of Gideon’s faith journey – we know about the Battle Scene/The Victory – but I want to unfold and lean into some lessons from his life-cycle of faith.

Example: Life cycle of Ladybugs (Cali’s project) – many things have a life-cycle to them… (humans, plastics it’s why recycling is so big – sarcasm has a life-cycle in my home, etc)

LIFE-CYCLE to Gideon’s faith? (3 phases: fragile faith, forging faith, fractures in his faith) (maybe in need of reinforcement and repair)

So the camera pans over to a young farmer who’s hiding out in winepress…

Judges 6:11-12
Gideon was hiding out – DOWN IN A WELL – not just down in a well – he was Down …he was despondent, depressed, dejected and discouraged…that was the condition of his heart, his people as their circumstances had so overwhelmed them.

The angel of the LORD shows up – calls out Gideon for this incredible task/adventure – chooses him and Gideon’s very first response is a… ?Question? (insecurity arises)
*The Author wants us to see the hesitation of Gideon…

“IF” (100 verses on Gideon - 3 times in his conversations with God – chapter 6)

**Judges 6:13**

T Compare that to another (minor judge) in chapter 3 – Shamgar… The Lord calls out, we don’t know the full extent of how all that happened – but his first response is ACTION…

⇒ Indiana Jones scene // how many of you have an oxgoad in your shed? (sharp stick)

**Judges 3:31** (5:6) – only 2 verses describe Shamgar – who we might categorize as “Chuck Shamgar Norris” or “Israel’s Rambo” or “Shamgar The Rock Johnson” – he takes action and single handedly takes out 600 Philistines (military marines of their day) over in the Coastal region and God uses him to save Israel and stir the people’s hearts back to Him.

Shamgar is a man of action – initiative...
⇒ we might have Shamgar moments – but truth is: we’re a lot like Gideon…
Gideon on the other hand…initiative is overshadowed by insecurity, uncertainty --- and I think a lot more of us are like Gideon when it comes to God asking us to step out in obedience…

**Judges 6:15-16**

We see Gideon – challenged and called – and what bubbles up, isn’t courage, but fear…
⇒ his faith begins very fragile...
*(under stress) Insecurities have a tendency to rise to the top of our lives:
Gideon had 2 main insecurities...

1) Gideon was afraid God wasn’t /wouldn’t be faithful (that His word would / could not be trusted and true) * Gideon is questioning the character / faithfulness of God

2) Gideon was also afraid that he wasn’t good enough (how can I save Israel, our clan is the weakest, and I’m the least) – maybe you can relate – that you have the insignificant resume compared to others….

**Q) have you ever been there?**

Has fear and insecurity ever risen up from within you to keep you down, hiding, out of the game?

Often our insecurities can feel insurmountable… our uncertainties, immovable…fears paralyzing

Gideon wasn’t the only guy in the Bible who wrestled with fear. Pretty much all the giants did--Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Peter, all the disciples--everybody did. In fact, the single most common command in the Bible is, “Fear not.” Don’t be afraid. Why? Because “I am with you,” God says. God is a big God. He doesn’t want us to handle things on our own.

*we hear that – but the truth is: we still wrestle with worry (why do you think God has to give that command over and over? – brokenness of humanity feeds insecurity and fears…
Q) Does anybody here ever wrestle with worry? Does anybody ever get anxious?

Fear is a universal experience.

Some scientists working on the human genome project have identified what they call “the worry gene.” It’s the SLC 684 gene on chromosome 17q12. People who have the short version of that gene, they say, are especially prone to worry.

Now that I’m telling you this, how many of you are worried you have the short version of that gene? -- Worry just gets in our hearts, doesn’t it? It then begins to shade how we see everything..

When we wake up in the morning, we can be tempted to be overwhelmed by all the stuff we think we’ve got to do.

We can become lost behind a desk, or behind the wheel – consumed with thinking about all the problems I don’t know how to solve and all of the really important outcomes I cannot ultimately control—my kids, my family, my relationships, my career, the ministry I’m a part of – and sometimes, what we need in that moment is to hear the whispers of God’s presence and perspective.

➔ that’s what Gideon is receiving – God’s whispers of:

(presence) Gideon – I’m with you (I haven’t given up on you), I’m here…

(perspective) Gideon - you are far more than a farmer hiding down in a winepress. Because I’m with you – you ARE a mighty warrior. You may only see your fears and your own insecurities and disqualifications, but I see MORE… than you see.

As we listen to those whispers – His presence and perspective can grow our faith and bring a sense of peace – strength of resolve…

Things around you can be swirling out of your control, but there’s this inner peace:
➔ God with you - is enough.

Philippians 4:13

I think this is why the Apostle Paul said: I can do all things. I can sit in a prison cell and face anything life has to throw at me through him who gives me strength—through Jesus. Nobody else can give this sort of peace to you. Your natural abilities cannot produce this kind of peace when the circumstances change out of your favor.

This peace comes from God. If you’re here / investigating Jesus, then this is his word for you:

➔ Come live life WITH ME, because I’m WITH YOU – because that life is now available…

Only Jesus makes this possible because it’s on the cross that we see the God who is bigger than our sin and guilt and regret, aloneness and it’s in his empty tomb that we see the God who is bigger than death itself.
Friends, God knows about the Midianites that are in your life. He knows about your worries. He knows what you’ve lost and He knows your pain. He knows…

*And He’s continually announcing/assuring - “I’m with you”… (his presence/perspective) and as I’m with you – YOU are MORE than what you see…

So Gideon has this encounter with God – and his faith is beginning to take shape, it’s still fragile but it’s beginning to be bolstered. → moving into this phase of being forged/formed

Judges 6:25-27

Every mature faith expression had a faith infancy decision = it started somewhere…

*Gideon is going to have this incredible victory – incredible faith put on display, but that faith had a fragile beginning and the forging process of faith is made in small steps and obedient decisions over time…

→ the forging of faith can only develop during footsteps of obedience…Gideon’s walking

His started with getting rid of the Baal alter and the Asherah Pole and replacing that with an altar unto the LORD…

UNPACK MORE OF THIS MOMENT

- So he musters his courage (does this act with some friends – big project)
- Does it under the cover of night – but still takes a step
- Comes under scrutiny, ridicule – (but his dad steps up)
- Let Baal contend with him (If Baal really is a god, let him take care of taking him out)
- Name changed: Jerub-Baal (forever known now as the guy who stood up to Baal)
  ○ But it’s also this strife that follows him

Gideon’s faith is growing, developing – being forged, he’s not perfect, but his fragile faith is being forged and formed stronger and stronger…

The goal of spiritual growth isn't about my ultimate perfection (I’ll never attain that this side of heaven) - it's about growing in an intimate trust/relationship with the Ultimate God.

--it’s about faith maturing in my walk of trust in Him…(the footsteps of obedience)
--God doesn't ask us to trust him just for kicks. He's asking us to walk with him. He has deeper reasons for our heart and soul transformation. → molding us to be useful…

In this life-cycle of faith: we get it right sometimes and wrong sometimes. Sometimes boldness marks our choices, and other times hesitation expresses itself…

Gideon was working within tension of fear and faith - they coexist; not mutually exclusive…he’s moving forward…

Judges 6:33

(sum up v. 34-35)
Then the time comes – God comes upon Gideon, rallies the troops for battle (32,000) show up (which is a big army – some scholars suggest that was similar to the size of Alexander the Great’s army)

Great turn-out for a people living in such terror…but the battle that lies before them is a giant task/challenge.

And then this hesitation…

Judges 6:36-40

Now, there are some scholars who look at this ‘fleece’ example as a grave sin – we should never ‘test’ God (referring to Jesus’ comments to Satan in the tempting he endured Matthew 4)

But if you look at the text – that’s not what Gideon is doing. We see these insecurities maybe begin to arise again within Gideon… Maybe this is partly about Gideon asking God to reassure some men who aren’t battle ready soldiers because the task seems too great.

Gideon was not using the fleece to discover God’s will, for he already knew from divine revelation what God wanted him to do (v. 14). This was about confirmation / assurance of God’s presence or empowerment for the task at hand.

The fleece (6:36–40). Some commentators take Gideon’s request for two additional signs as evidence of a “weak faith” (cf. Matt. 12:38; 1 Cor. 1:22–23). But note that before Gideon asked for a sign, he had obeyed God’s commands to tear down the altar of Baal, and call out the Israelites to war. Gideon had demonstrated his faith by obedience, and God honored that faith by giving him a reassuring sign. We too may have doubts and fears at times. But as long as we faithfully obey God, we can hardly be charged with “weak faith.”

**And don’t you just love the tenderness of God in this moment… God isn’t treating Gideon with frustration and providing what he wants because He’s so mad…

Example: the other morning – my child has asked for juice, I have given – then they have changed their mind and now want milk. They are whining about wanting to switch to the point that all nerves are being stretched thin… I answer the request, not because I’m happy to do it, but out of frustration.

But that is not what God is doing… God is bringing confirmation. Confirmation of what?

Confirmation of His presence – and that his presence will be enough… he’s bolstering / forging / reassuring Gideon’s faith again.

Have you ever had God do this for you?

**God has a habit of confirming things with those, who make a habit of confiding and looking to Him

? has God ever just give you blessings out of the blue or worked in such a way to assure you he’s taking thought of you? He’s with you?...

The confirmation of God’s presence, that’s he’s aware, dialed in and attuned to you is a comforting and incredibly empowering thing. That he’s taking thought of you, reassuring you.

NOW – this is not license for us to do what Jesus said we shouldn’t do – we shouldn’t test God and give ultimatums that he must meet for us to move forward.

I’m a BIG believer that as we seek to live in attunement and obedience with God, that we can ask for confirmation that we’re going the right way, that He is with us. I believe God loves to provide that encouragement. Is it always so obvious and tangible as this ‘fleece’ example is – maybe not. But we see all throughout scripture a God who loves to surprise people with his love, support and meeting them where they are at – for those who look toward him…

God’s greatest confirmation – we live in the reality of: it’s Christ. His confirmation that is for you, with you and loves you – confirmation indeed…

**HEBREWS 1:1-2**

*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.*

T  Gideon is so encouraged in this moment, that he can than act in the faith necessary for God’s next request. And it’s a BIG request – a HUGE step of faith (I’m not sure I could have)

**Judges 7**

- This is where God asked Gideon to take another step of obedience (and God is forging his faith stronger)
- 32,000 is too many – ask those who are afraid to go (22,000 men go home)
- Then he widles it down to 300
- Sounds like another movie doesn’t it – he’s going to battle with 300, but these aren’t special trained Navy Seals or elite gladiators
- God provides another confirmation of His presence and that victory will be theirs (and I’ve taught on that before)
- Gideon with his faith fully forged – moves forward – the battle is won by God’s power and the people are freed from oppression (so much so that they live in peace another 40 yrs and God’s people are stirred to refocus and worship – God has rescued them again)

T  But if you know the Book of Judges, you’ll recognize this pattern emerging. People wander away/forget God, he allows them to suffer consequences, they cry out, he rescues, they pledge allegiance/worship, then soon wandering ways begin to emerge again…

T  So Gideon has this fragile faith – that becomes forged in his footsteps of obedience – then I want us to look at the last part of his life, because I believe it give us a glimpse into a 3rd facet of this life-cycle of his faith, **and it’s a caution to us.**

The battle is over – they’ve won…

**Judges 8:22-23**

- Seems good in first pass – but the author of this text continues that we might peek further v. 24-28
  *we see something else going on…maybe some of this forged faith is beginning to have some fractures running through it…*
*Fractures can occur and go unnoticed for a while, but all fractures are discovered.

Ex: Bridges – build them slowly, solidly – open for awhile, but if not cared for, fractures occur

Illust: MN bridge in 2008 that collapsed…

Gideon’s successes did corrupt him, fractures in 2 ways. Gets sideways a bit…

1) he made a golden ephod. In Israel an ephod was a priestly garment associated with worship. This act of Gideon suggests that he might have taken for himself a priestly role which was to be limited to the family of Aaron. And he left his ephod in Ophrah, -- not at the tabernacle where alone God was to be worshiped. We read that, “all Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it [the ephod] there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.”

2) while Gideon refused the title of king, he seems to have perhaps viewed himself as such a ruler. How do we know? Gideon named one of his sons Abimelech.
*additional Info: Abimelech = “Melek is father” or “my father is king”.

With great faith expressions and growth and usage -- comes the risks of fractures…

→ now, when faith gets fractured – it becomes fragile – and we know God can work and forge a fragile faith…

Psalm 139:23-24 --- the psalmist calls us to have God examine us – maybe our faith is need of repair from time to time.

*asking God to search us – living with humility/dependency – when faith shows fractures – it becomes fragile (and God knows how to work with fragile faith – as we’ve seen…) God can build with it, forge it strong → this cycle is a part of our journey…

Conclusion:

The story of Gideon is an amazing story to encourage us, challenge us – perhaps cause us to ponder, consider

So here’s some take-away’s that we talked about:

God can build with a hesitant, but obedient heart ➔ God’s always announcing His presence and His perspective

➔ the forging of faith can only develop during footsteps of obedience…keep walking frwrd

*When you fall down, get back up and take another step. It’s in those steps of obedience that God can forge your faith stronger.

God has a habit of confirming things to those who make it a habit of confiding/looking to Him

When you succeed, don’t build an ephod. Don’t let things get you sideways, begin to fracture your faith. Stay humble and dependent upon God in the successes and set backs of life…

(Gabe comes out and begins to strum)

• The lifecycle of Gideon’s faith gives us some great insights and lessons.

Reflection through Psalm 139:23-24:

Q) which one stands out to you this day? Why? Why might God be bringing that to the forefront for you?

Take a moment and pray and I’ll close us – ask him to encourage you, maybe confirm his presence to you in a fresh way – ask Him to forge your faith stronger, reveal any fractures you might need to patch up…

(give them sacred space to contemplate and pray a bit – 1 min or so)

Closing Prayer: