

When Spiritual Leaders Fail

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 00] Well, let's step back for just a moment and, excuse me, let's consider the movement of the text as it relates to Gideon in particular.

And we have to go all the way back to chapter 6 for that. At the beginning of the narrative, more especially chapter 6 verse 11, perhaps you can notate it there.

We are introduced to Gideon as a surprising and, frankly, from a human perspective, unqualified candidate to lead Israel against Midian.

I mean, there is nothing extraordinary about this man when we're introduced to him in chapter 6.

And that's really a big part of the story, a big part of the point that we're drawing from it.

But Gideon was nonetheless God's chosen instrument. And as we read through chapter 6 and chapter 7, we see God doing this amazingly gracious work as he calls Gideon, as he assures Gideon over and over.

[1 : 07] And then as we see him progressively transforming Gideon. All of these things, things that we would equate in gospel language to conversion and sanctification and the work of grace in each of our lives as we come to know God and grow in our walk with God.

And there's no doubt, it's not very hard to see that Gideon wasn't perfect. But he did continually display faithfulness. He was faithful to the call that God gave him.

And God proved himself faithful and patient and merciful in Gideon's many, many moments of weakness, especially his weakness in faith.

But in the end, in the smaller task of destroying the altar of Baal in chapter 6, and the larger task of going up against the Midianites with only 300 men, Gideon demonstrates the kind of faith that is worthy of honor and is commended to us by the author of Hebrews.

In Hebrews chapter 11, when he tells us in verse 32 through 34, Time would not even grant me to be able to tell you all about Gideon and his faith and the way that the Lord used him.

[2 : 30] So that's the movement that we see. There is buildup in this text from chapter 6 and chapter 7 where we see this really weak and insecure and cynical man who is doing everything he can not to obey God.

And yet he's constantly wooed by the grace of God and the power of God at work in his life. And then we see this wonderful victory that he experiences in chapter 7. Now, it would be great if we could move from chapter 7 and verse 25, which is when the victory over Midian is really won.

It would be great if we could just go straight from that verse to the two verses that we just read in chapter 8. That the land had rest. That Midian was, they couldn't stick their heads up even anymore.

The whack-a-mole is finished. It's broken. Right? And Gideon just goes home and he rides out into the sunset until the day he dies and everything's good.

But we can't do that. The problem here is that there's an essential piece of the story that's given for our instruction in chapter 8. And it's a, it's honestly, it's an ugly piece.

[3 : 39] It's a really ugly piece. The fact is that Gideon did not finish well. And the chapter shows us that the deliverers that God used were still sinners who very often reflected the sins of the nation.

They were people of their own times. And they weren't very different from the people that they were tasked with delivering in these moments.

Of course, the best of men are still capable of tremendous spiritual failure. And Gideon's no exception to that. Which reminds us of one of the main points of the book of Judges.

There are no heroes here. There's no heroes in the book of Judges. There are only sinners used by God to show his own love, grace, and mercy towards his people.

These deliverers are meant to point us toward a greater deliverer. And we remember the only hero here is the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 52] But what are we to think about, or what are we to think when our spiritual leaders fail us in the way that Gideon and others failed? How are we supposed to deal with that?

How are we supposed to handle people that are called of God and even used of God tremendously to help us know Christ and grow closer to Christ?

What are we to think, what are we to do when they fall into sin and when they fail to lead as God has called them to lead? What are the signs that someone we trust is drifting toward this devastating kind of sin in their leadership?

What should we be looking for even? And in the end, is there any hope actually of someone who will not fail us? And of course there is. But there's only one.

And we don't read about him until we get to Matthew. That's the Lord Jesus, right? And so I want to work through this chapter and look at some of the notable things that is happening in Gideon's sin.

[5 : 55] And then through that, maybe we can find some instruction and helpful application personally to these things in our lives. Here's the first thing I want you to see. Gideon first pacified his critics with flattery.

He pacified his critics with flattery. Now I admit, this is a very small thing in the text. Most of us would consider this inconsequential to Gideon's larger failures in this passage.

None of us would really consider it disqualifying, especially given the fact that he was successful in this. I'm going to read the first three verses here in just a moment. But here's the point that I want to drive before we read them.

Small matters can be indicators of potential greater sins. And if they're not dealt with the smaller matters in our lives, they're only going to grow.

They're only going to produce greater sin and greater failure. So that reason alone means that these verses are worth considering in terms of Gideon's weakness.

[7 : 06] Now we wouldn't come to the end and say, this thing alone is the reason why Gideon is bad. We wouldn't do that. It's just, he's human, right? This is something that probably all of us could be guilty of in any given context.

But it does speak to the larger picture of what's happening here. Verse 1, the men of Ephraim said to him, what is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian? And they accused him fiercely. That's strong language. And he said to them, what have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer?

In other words, isn't the things that's left over with you, Ephraim, better than what is the very best that we can offer as poor, humble Abiezerites?

God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb, and Zeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you? Then their anger against him subsided when he said this.

[8 : 10] This is kind of an interesting little situation here. The background of it is at the end of chapter 7. The Ephraimites had not initially been summoned to the battle against Midian.

But Gideon did end up calling them to effect a critical victory as the surviving Midianites tried to cross the Jordan River.

So they ultimately, if you remember from last week, the army of Midian, ultimately they destroy one another. But some of them do actually escape. And they're trying to get out of the country.

They're trying to head back east again. They're done with Israel at this point. But they have to cross the Jordan to get there. Well, Gideon strategically sends messengers ahead of them to get the soldiers of Ephraim to cut them off at the waters.

And that's exactly what Ephraim did. They went there and they cut them off. A few of them did get past them. But they helped to bring this victory to a close. Well, once the victory was won, the men of Ephraim fiercely confront Gideon here for not calling them to the fight in the beginning.

[9 : 19] Which is just anecdotally just a reminder that even the greatest victories come with criticism from those who should be celebrating.

Isn't that what Ephraim should have been doing? Should they not have gathered with Gideon's men and the rest of the army and rejoice that God has delivered us from this terrible, terrible enemy?

But that's not what they do. They go to where Gideon is and they complain and criticize. And this word fiercely, that's a strong word here in Hebrew. It's they are so frustrated with Gideon, they

might be on the verge of killing him because he didn't call them in the beginning. And Ephraim was known for this kind of cantankerous attitude. We'll see it again later on in the book of Judges. They were easily offended. They always had some axe to grind. And in fact, in some leaders' lives, the most frequent frustration comes from people who are exactly like this. They're filled with pride. They can never really learn to let things go.

[10:29] They always have some criticism to offer, especially when they weren't consulted in the decision making to begin with. So it's no wonder, it's no surprise that Gideon just wanted to say whatever he could say to pacify them and be able to move on with what he wanted to do.

Many would even say this was prudent. This was extremely diplomatic on Gideon's part to deal with him the way that he did and move on. I think we should have a different perspective.

It's not that what he said to them was necessarily untrue. Technically, as far as honor goes, they won a great victory.

Gideon didn't do anything. Gideon smashed a pot and yelled, lit his torch. God did all the work there. The Ephraimites actually captured two of the princes of Midian and killed them.

They received the honor for that. So it's not exactly that what Gideon says here is untrue, but by resorting to flattery, he missed an opportunity to point the men of Ephraim back to the glory of God.

[11:36] Why did he say nothing about his divine call and enablement to fight against Midian? Why did he not bring that up to Ephraim? According to chapter 6, verses 34 and 35, it was because he was clothed in the spirit of the Lord that Gideon was able to gather the people that he did, which means that the people who were called to the battle were called really by God, not by Gideon.

Gideon wasn't calling the shots in this. God was. He was just along for the ride, so to speak. Well, why does he not say that? Why not correct the Ephraimites by speaking of God's desire to receive glory by defeating Midian with as minimal of a human force as possible?

Some may consider Gideon's response here to be prudent. I think it actually worked against the very purpose of what God had intended the battle to achieve. Rather than giving God glory in this moment, Gideon strokes Ephraim's ego so that they might have some of the glory that they wanted for this battle.

Do you see the problem there? It may be a little thing. We may say, well, we're making too much of this. Maybe I am making too much of this. But we can't just pass this off as if this was a glowing, positive characteristic in Gideon's leadership.

He's actually robbing God of something here. He should have been leading those men to acknowledge the work of God and the glory of God. Instead, he just flattered them so he could get them out of the way.

[13:13] But why would he want to just get them out of the way? That leads us to the second thing. Gideon pursued his own agenda. Gideon, at this point, pursued his own agenda.

Let's read a large portion of the text here, beginning at verse 4. This is so sad. Gideon came to the Jordan and crossed over, he and the 300 men who were with him, exhausted yet pursuing.

So he said to the men of Succoth, please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted. I'm pursuing after Ziba and Zalmanah, the kings of Midian.

The officers of Succoth said, are the hands of Ziba and Zalmanah already in your hand, that we should give bread to your army? Now, this gets personal for Gideon, verse 7.

So Gideon said, well then, when the Lord has given Ziba and Zalmanah into my hand, I will flail your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars.

[14:18] This is like an extreme way of saying, go out and cut me a switch. You know, you've ever heard that? And from there he went up to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way.

And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. And he said to the men of Penuel, when I come again in peace, I will break down this tower. Now Ziba and Zalmanah were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men.

Now look at this, this shows you the amazing victory God had won for Israel. There's 15,000 men left. These were all who were left of the army of the people of the east.

For there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword. And they fell because 300 men stood around their camp at night and banged some pots and lit some torches and yelled a few things.

That's incredible. Gideon went up by the way of the tent dwellers east of Noba and Jogbeha and attacked the army for the army felt secure.

[15 : 22] Therefore, Ziba and Zalmanah fled and he pursued them and captured the two kings of Midian, Ziba and Zalmanah. And he threw all the army into a panic. Then Gideon, the son of Joash, returned from the battle by the ascent of Heres.

And he captured a young man of Succoth and questioned him. And he wrote down for him the officials and elders of Succoth, 77 men. And he came to the men of Succoth and said, Behold, Ziba and Zalmanah, about whom you taunted me, saying, Are the hands of Ziba and Zalmanah already in your hand, that we should give bread to your men who are exhausted?

And he took the elders of the city and he took thorns of the wilderness and briars and with them taught the men of Succoth a lesson. And he broke down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

Then he said to Ziba and Zalmanah, Where are the men whom you killed at Tabor? Now we're getting some clarity as to why Gideon's doing this. He's not acting on behalf of the Lord.

Notice. They answered, As you are, so were they. Every one of them resembled the son of a king. And he said, They were my brothers, the sons of my mother.

[16 : 36] And as the Lord lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you. So he said to Jeth, or his firstborn, Rise and kill them. But the young man did not draw his sword, for he was afraid because he was still a young man.

And it sounds a lot like his father a little earlier in the text, doesn't it? And Ziba and Zalmanah pick up on that. So they start to ridicule and mock Gideon as a result.

Verse 21, Then Ziba and Zalmanah said, Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength. Well, Gideon can't handle that, right? He's full of pride at this point.

His honor has been brought into question by these kings that he has very clearly defeated. And he can't handle it. So here's what he does. He arose and he killed Ziba and Zalmanah.

And he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels. Now, everything in chapter 7 emphasizes God's plan for saving his people.

[17 : 37] And as long as Gideon trusted and obeyed God, things went better than he could have ever imagined. But it's a different story in chapter 8.

The focus in these verses is on Gideon's pursuit of his own agenda, of his own glory. And stepping outside of God's plan, he shows excessive pride.

He's driven by personal vengeance rather than humility and faithfulness that is required of spiritual leaders. And there's so much in these verses that I'm just going to have to leave to you in your personal study to really dig deep into.

But let's at least hit the highlights here. And here's one of the major highlights. These are Gideon's plans, not God's. These are Gideon's plans. Everything up to this point in the Gideon narrative, I mean everything, has seen the explicit instruction of God.

There's not a single moment in Gideon's life in chapter 6 and chapter 7 where he is doing his own thing or has been given permission to do his own thing. Every single step of the way, he has been tasked with following the exact plan of God.

[18 : 55] Whether it be the altar of Baal, the reduction of the army, the unique action of the 300, we are told that Gideon did what God told him to do. He understood himself in those moments to simply be the instrument of God responsible for trusting and obeying God's plan.

But in this episode, there's no mention at all of Gideon following God's instructions. And as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Gideon was most concerned about his own honor now and a vendetta that he had against the Midianite kings.

Now, Barry Webb, I think, helps us here when he writes, God now seems marginal rather than central to what is happening. Gideon refers to God twice, but in both cases, it's to justify his own actions.

That's verse 7 and verse 19. The author himself doesn't attribute anything that happens in this phase of Gideon's life to God. Even at the climax in which Gideon comes upon the remaining enemy unaware, it is he, not God, who throws them into a panic.

In contrast to what happened earlier, this victory is Gideon's own achievement rather than God's gift.

[20 : 25] How terrible to have great success apart from God. That's exactly what Gideon experiences in this moment.

He has great success. God has nothing to do with it. And that's to Gideon's detriment. He's just doing his own thing. Doesn't matter what God wanted or what God said or instructed.

Gideon's got his own glory in mind. And he's got a personal vendetta. And nobody's going to stand in the way of him accomplishing what he wants to accomplish in that moment. There's something to be said here when we get to verse 4 about Gideon only taking 300 with him across the Jordan.

Now think about this for just a second. In chapter 7 and verse 23, we're told that the army that had been sent home has now been called back.

And in their pursuit of Midian, catching up with Ephraim, these other people from Naphtali and from Asher, they have now gathered along with the 300 men.

[21 : 41] Okay? So there's more people than just 300 at this point. We're also just told that the Ephraimites were angry that Gideon didn't include them in the initial battle.

But then when we get to this point where Gideon has to leave the borders of Israel, crossing the Jordan to chase after Midian, it's just the 300 again.

Now why is that? I think there's something for us to take from this. One possibility is that it was clear to everyone involved, victory had been won. Why wouldn't they think that?

They now grossly outnumbered the Midianites. Midianites aren't coming back. God won the victory. They should rejoice. And no doubt, people understood that.

There was no reason for them to leave the land. There was no reason for them to chase after the survivors. It's also possible that Gideon kept his plans a secret for a reason that isn't explained in the text.

[22 : 42] In either case, the indication is that Gideon was pursuing his own plan rather than obeying God here. He's just doing his own thing. Gideon has now gone rogue.

But it's not just that this is Gideon's plan, not God's. The second thing that we find here, a huge part of this passage, is that Gideon's pride turned him against his own people.

Turned him against his own people. How tragic. This episode that unfolds with the people of Succoth and Penuel. It's an interesting one.

On one hand, it makes sense why they didn't want to help Gideon. These two cities or towns, whatever they might have been, were the furthest east. They were the closest to the Midianites and the people of the east at this point.

Which means that if Gideon didn't actually win and the enemy found out that they had assisted Gideon, guess who's first when the enemy comes back?

[23 : 43] It's Penuel and Succoth, who at this point probably had escaped some of the damaging parts of this oppression. So it makes sense, on one hand, why they would be reluctant to help Gideon.

On the other hand, these people of Israel, they should have been able to look at Gideon and his 300 and what God had done and say, God has won a victory here. Of course, we are going to assist our people for the glory of God.

But at the end, this text is not about the people of Succoth or Penuel. That's not the judgment that we're making here. This passage is about Gideon. And what do we find out about Gideon here?

Seeing that there's no explicit instruction for him to pursue Midian, perhaps the resistance of these two towns was God's subtle way of signaling Gideon not to go any further.

We're told in verse 4 that the 300 were exhausted yet pursuing. Now those of us who are manly men say, right on, doesn't matter if you're tired, you keep going.

[24 : 53] Well, we could also look at that phrase and say, this was foolish, his men were not prepared to fight again. He was risking something massive here by continuing on. Maybe these towns was God's subtle way, like God does with us sometimes, where he's signaling to Gideon, you better stop and think before you go any further.

Don't do this, Gideon. You know, God's gracious to do that with us sometimes. We get set in pursuing our own plans. We want to do our thing. And then God steps in the way. And he just says, he sends somebody or something, some obstacle that just says, you better stop and think before you go much further with your plan here.

And what does Gideon do? Well, he's offended and he blows right through the obstacle. The problem is that when we're intent on pursuing our own agendas above God's, we will allow no one to stand in our way.

Not even God. Gideon's prideful pursuit potentially caused him to ignore a warning from God, if that's what this was about.

But it definitely led him to turn against the very people he was supposed to be serving. After he captures Ziba and Zalmanah, he returns to the two cities.

[26 : 13] And guess who he has with him? Ziba and Zalmanah. He keeps them alive on purpose. Why? Because he wants to go back to those two towns. And he wants to show them, look what I did.

I won the victory that you didn't think I could win. Here they are. Now tell me, is that about God's glory? Or is that about Gideon's glory?

It's not about God's. He doesn't even mention the Lord at this point. It's all about Gideon. He boasts of his success, then he humiliated and murdered the people who had early defied him.

Now, this is a problem with spiritual leadership that goes rogue. We get set on our own way.

We stop doing the things that God has told us to do. We're not going to let anybody stand in our way. And when somebody tries to stand in our way, we resort to humiliation and destruction.

[27 : 22] Destroy them rather than serve them and help them. And that's what's happening with Gideon, I believe. Spiritual failure always has some component of spiritual pride at its heart.

And when we stop submitting to God's plan, pursue our own glory, the results are devastating. This is a sad part of this story.

Whether it be through the leadership of your home, leadership in our church, some other relationship that you have, pride will ultimately lead you to hurt the very people you're responsible to love and to serve.

Number three, it gets worse, believe it or not. Gideon positioned himself as God's priest and king. Gideon positioned himself as God's priest and king. Verse 22, then the men of Israel said to Gideon, rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also.

[28 : 33] For you, Gideon, have saved us from the hand of Midian. Wow. So in response to Gideon's actions, the men of Israel declare that they want Gideon to be their king.

And this was more than just a season of leadership. This was clearly a royal structure involving authority and the throne being passed down from generation to generation.

They say, we want you and then we want it to be set up in such a way that when you're dead, Gideon, it's your sons and when your sons are dead, it's your grandson. And so they want a king and they want Gideon to be that king.

Now, their desire for a king wasn't the problem. In fact, that's one of the major points of the book. Israel needs a king. They need a king who will unite the nation.

They need a king who will rule in righteousness. But they don't just need any king. They need God's king. And that's eventually going to come in David. And David is going to point them forward to Jesus.

[29 : 35] But right now, they're only concerned about their king, not God's king. The whole scene is a travesty, really.

Because it's exactly what God's actions were intended to prevent in chapter 6 and 7. God comes to Gideon.

He takes the weakest one. He whittles his army down to 300 people. He gives them a victory that didn't even involve them using a sword. Why?

He needed Israel to see his glory, his love, his salvation, so that they would turn away from idolatry, so that they would turn away from their sin and turn back to him for their good, for their blessing.

But that's the opposite of what's happening here. They're not actually turning to God. They're turning to Gideon instead. It's the opposite of what occurred in the earlier story with Barak and Deborah.

[30 : 36] There, the Lord had been praised. Here, only Gideon is praised. A man who has become a God-like figure in the eyes of his followers.

And Gideon went along with it. Look with me at 23 to 27. Gideon said to them, I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you. The Lord will rule over you.

Sounds great until you see what he actually meant. Verse 24. And Gideon said, Let me request of you. Every one of you give me the earrings from his spoil. For they had golden earrings because they were Ishmaelites.

And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a cloak. Every man threw in it the earrings of his spoil. The weight of the golden earrings that he requested was 1,700 shekels of gold. Besides, that's in addition to the crescent ornaments and the pendants and the purple garments worn by the kings of Midian. And besides the collars that were around the necks of their camels, Gideon made an ephod of it.

[31 : 42] Put it in his city in Ophrah. And all Israel whored after it there. Became a snare to Gideon. To his family. At first, it seems like Gideon was wise enough to see the problem and to point people back to God.

But a closer look reveals that what Gideon was actually doing was positioning himself as Israel's ruler. Now we know this is what he's doing.

Later on in the passage, if you look at verses 30 and 31, now Gideon had 70 sons, his own offspring, for he had many wives. And he had this concubine who was in Shechem.

He also bore him a son and called his name Abimelech. That's foreshadowing something that's going to get even really bad in chapter 9. But what is that? Gideon has accumulated a harem of women.

This is consistent with the kings of his day. They had a harem of women that they had lots of kids with. That was a sign of honor. It was a sign of royalty. He takes all of the garments of these kings that he had just killed.

[32 : 47] Their crescent ornaments, their purple garments, all the things. He takes that for himself. And when we get into chapter 9, we find that the expectation around Gideon and the people of Israel is that his 70 sons would continue his reign.

So what Gideon says on the surface and what Gideon does in practice are at war with one another here. But the heart behind Gideon's actions revolves around this issue of the ephod.

If you don't know what an ephod is, it's very simply it was a vesture that the high priest wore when fulfilling his duties in the tabernacle. There was only one ephod in Israel and God made very clear instructions on how it was to be used and where it was to be used and who was to use it.

This ephod represented by the high priest or worn by the high priest represented God's channel of communication and communion with his people in the tabernacle.

Gideon knows that. What Gideon does in essence is he takes this ephod to position himself as the primary channel through which God would now communicate to the people of Israel.

[34 : 12] Do you see what he's doing? The Lord will rule over you through me. So let me gather all my kingly things. Let me get it set up here in Ophrah.

But we need a priest and a prophet as well. You know what? Better for that to be me. Let me take the spoil of our war and let's make an ephod. Forget the tabernacle. Forget what God has said in the law.

This is the new ephod now. You want to hear from God? Come to me now. You want judgment from God? Don't worry about the other stuff. Come to me in Ophrah now.

So when Gideon tells the people that the Lord will rule over him, he really meant that God would rule only through him. And he was setting himself up supposedly under God's authority to be Israel's prophet, priest, and king.

But he had to go outside of God's channels to do that. It's a tragic sin in this narrative. And it's going to have enormous consequences for Gideon's family and for the nation.

[35 : 17] Now, it is not difficult to see how spiritual leaders can easily fall into the trap described here. When we fall, when we pursue our agenda above the Lord's, we will find it easier to circumvent God's ordained methods to establish our own power.

And in the worst cases, we'll convince the people under our authority that we are the channel for God's communication.

And in the end, God's word is diminished. God's people are deceived. And sin reigns in the place of righteousness. And where does it start?

With a man's desire for his own glory rather than God's glory. And when that continues unimpeded, it becomes disastrous for God's people.

Number four, Gideon promoted improper worship. It's the final step really, isn't it? Improper worship. Verse 27, Gideon made an ephod of it and put it in his city in Ophrah and all Israel hoored after it there and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.

[36 : 37] Do you remember Gideon's nickname through this story? We see it once in a while. Jerob Bell. Let Bell contend against him.

It identified him as the one who was willing to attack the nation's idolatry in order to glorify the Lord instead. The author sprinkles the name throughout the narrative as a reminder that all of this was ultimately about God confronting the idolatry of his people, calling them back to faithfulness.

But because of Gideon's sin, he promoted improper worship that just produced a different form of idolatry. Again, says Barry Webb, the man who began his career in Ophrah by leading Israel out of idolatry ends his career by leading them back into it.

the ephod becomes Israel's new object of worship and it became a snare even to Gideon and his family. The one who on multiple occasions had direct encounters with God.

The one who witnessed God's power at work on behalf of his people. The one who intimately knew God's peace and mercy in relationship with him in the end is still ensnared by improper worship.

[38 : 12] Tremendous sin. Now to be clear, there's no indication that Gideon stopped worshipping Yahweh in favor of a false deity.

Remember what we talked about earlier this morning with the graven image and what that commandment is all about. He failed to worship the way God had commanded him to worship. He's doing worship his way now. And what that does is it introduces improper forms of worship that led Israel into full out idolatry.

glory. What a heartbreaking end to an otherwise glorious story of God's grace in the life of his servant.

We come to it and we think, how does this happen? How is it possible for someone to have experienced all that Gideon experience, to have known God in the way that Gideon knew God, to see all of these things, to still fail in such an extreme way?

[39 : 23] How is that possible? And yet if we read our Bibles carefully, we find that it happens again, and again, and again, and again.

And if we pay attention to the Christian world in which we live, you'll see it happens over, and over, and over. And we say, what are we supposed to do with this?

How are we to understand this? I get to this point in the Gideon narrative, and I'm nearly crushed by it. Like, how does this happen?

I mentioned to you when we first started several weeks ago thinking about Gideon, reading about Gideon here, that he's one of the most relatable people in the scriptures, believers, and he is.

We know Gideon's fear because we feel that fear. Personally, we know what it's like to feel that way. We know Gideon's weakness because we too are weak.

[40 : 30] We know, we understand Gideon's constant need for reassurance from God because we need that constant reassurance from God. We understand the fleece because in our own way, we lay out fleeces all the time.

And we love to relate to Gideon in that way because we love to see the victory that God brings despite all of those weaknesses. But how many of us have ever spent much time in chapter 8? Maybe not many of us at all.

You know why? Because chapter 8 is hard to read. Because just like we see Gideon's fear in ourselves, we see our fear in Gideon's fear, we also see our pride in Gideon's pride.

We understand what Gideon is doing in chapter 8 because we do the same thing. We get in our minds that we have an agenda to pursue for our lives and nobody's going to stand in the way of that.

Our spouse isn't going to stand in the way of that. Our church isn't going to stand in the way of that. Our kids aren't going to stand in the way of that. No one's going to stand in the way. Not even God is going to stand in the way of what I want to do with my life.

[41 : 41] Doesn't matter what God says related to how we should give. It's my money. It's my resources. I've got an agenda for it and I'm going to use it the way that I want to.

Doesn't matter what God says about the way that I'm supposed to serve and disciple others and give up my life in order to serve the ministry of Christ. That doesn't matter because it's my time and it's my life and I've got a plan for the way that I want to use it.

And it starts in us as kids and as young people. We get all of these dreams about what we want our life to be like and we write them out and we put them on our wall and we dream every night about how we want our lives to be and we get in our head this is what I want out of my life and nobody's

[47 : 13] So how are we supposed to, is that really the right response? Well, if we understand that our hope is in Jesus and not in those leaders that he's gifted to us or given to us, then our faith can stand even when the faith of others around us falls.

And there's an interesting thing happening with Gideon in the larger context of the Bible. On the one hand, when we get to Hebrews chapter 11, Gideon is not condemned, he's praised.

He's commended, actually, for his faith. Now we get to that and we think, now wait a minute. How can the author say anything good about Gideon after what he did?

And the fact is, Gideon's a human. Christ has delivered us from the ultimate penalty of sin, but we still have this issue of indwelling sin, the presence of sin in our lives.

And we need to be careful that we don't have an expectation of other people that only Jesus can live up to. There is a reality here that Gideon was just a man who sinned.

[48 : 25] And that doesn't mean that everything that he did well should be ignored or denied. And I think the Bible teaches us that. Of course, the church must also be concerned to holding their spiritual leaders accountable to the word, even removing them if they disqualify themselves through gross and unrepented sin.

So I think what we learn here in regards to spiritual leadership is that there is a tension in the Bible that we have to hold on to, a tension that honors those whom the Lord puts in our way as leaders, but not idolize them in such a way that when they fail, our faith is the one that's crushed because our faith isn't ultimately in them.

The third thing, and we've talked about it already, so we'll just finish here. The third thing that I think is a helpful takeaway is just seeing Gideon's failures as a warning of the dangers of not finishing well ourselves.

I quoted the verse to you already. Gideon says, therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Gideon's sins are not limited to spiritual leaders. They're just magnified when they exist in people who have particular authority in our lives.

Everything that Gideon did, we are capable of doing and often do. None of us are above these sins. So we need to approach these texts with great humility, praying, asking for the Lord's grace to deliver us from temptation, to help us acknowledge and see the way of escape that he makes for us so that we are able to endure the temptation and the test that we face by his grace.

[50 : 24] But ultimately, we need to live our lives in light of the fact that we're sinners too. And but for the grace of God, we will fall in the same ways that these men fail.

So heed the warnings and be faithful. Be faithful.