

The Decision to Step Up to the Plate

1. Warm up: Sunday's sermon began with a scene from *The Andy Griffith Show* where Barney and Gomer stumble across a bank robbery in progress, duck behind a vehicle, and Gomer says, "Shazam! We should call the police!" Barney rolls his eyes and says, "Oh, Gomer, we *are* the police." Have you ever had to call the police? If so, what happened?
2. Fate often thrusts us into situations where *we* are the police, *i.e.*, moments where instead of calling somebody else, or waiting for somebody else to do something, God calls us to summon the courage to step up and act. What we do (and don't do) in those moments will go a long way toward determining the legacy of our lives. Let begin by re-reading Sunday's Bible story about an obscure Israelite farmer who was called by God to step up to the plate in a bold, scary way. Read Judges 6:2-16, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. How would you describe Gideon's state of mind while he was in the winepress threshing his wheat, hiding from the Midianites?
 - b. How would you describe Gideon's state of mind when the angel of the Lord greeted him with the words, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!"
 - c. Gideon tells the angel, "If the Lord is with us, why are all these things happening to us." Have you ever asked yourself that question? If so, what prompted it?
 - d. When the angel insists on commissioning Gideon to lead the resistance struggle against the Midianites, he responds by saying, "How can *I* deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." Gideon feels completely inadequate to lead the resistance. In your life right now, what's something God's asking you to do that you feel ill equipped to accomplish?
3. Gideon ultimately embraced his call to lead the resistance movement, recruited a ragtag crew of 300 fighters, and led a surprise attack that sent 30,000 Midianite soldiers fleeing for their lives. Again and again in the Bible, God calls ordinary people to step up to the plate to do extraordinary things. On Sunday, Jeff also mentioned the little boy who gave Jesus his five barley loaves and two fish so Jesus could feed thousands, as well as Esther who rose from obscurity to become queen of Persia, then risked her life to save her people, the Jews, from extermination.
 - a. When Esther was struggling with whether to risk saving her people, her uncle said to her, "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Esther 4:14. What do you think we're supposed to learn from this oft-quoted verse? What does it mean for our lives?
 - b. In the movie *We Bought a Zoo*, Benjamine Mee says, "Sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it." Tell us about a time you did something that, for you, took insane courage. What came of it?

- c. On Sunday Jeff told about a time when, at his niece's wedding reception, he noticed a little girl who had no one to dance with and was sadly watching everyone else. Jeff got a powerful sense that God was calling him to invite her to dance, but he couldn't bring himself to ask her because of his fear of dancing in public. He stood there feeling deeply ashamed and ever since has regretted letting what could have been a beautiful moment pass. Tell us about a time when you let fear or some other impulse keep you from stepping up to the plate and doing something you felt called to. Now, looking back, how do you feel about it?
 - d. Billionaire entrepreneur Lynda Resnick once said, "You will learn more from your failures than your successes – so embrace those mistakes." Do you think she's right? If so, why?
4. When speaking of the End Times, Jesus said, "You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." Matthew 24:44. The same principle applies to all our unexpected step-up-to-the-plate moments in life. Instead of yielding to the temptation to run and hide, we must be ready. On Sunday, Jeff highlighted two things we can do to get ready for those unpredictable decisive moments: (a) pray, and (b) practice. Let's explore both.
- a. Jesus said, "Pray that you may not come into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matthew 26:41. What does it mean to say, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak?" Explain it, then give a practical example from your life.
 - b. General George Patton once said, "Courage is fear that has said its prayers." Do you regularly pray that God will give you the courage to do the scary things God calls you to? Do you think we should regularly pray that kind of prayer? Why or why not?
 - c. Beyond praying for the courage to step up to the plate, we should also practice stepping up even in the little things, because each time we step up to do something small, we're building our capacity to step up when we face the really big things. John McCain said, "Courage is like a muscle. The more we exercise it, the stronger it gets." Have you experienced that? If so, give us an example of what you did and how that affected you.
 - d. Sunday's sermon ended with the true story of *The Red Bandana*, about a young man, Welles Crowther, who always aspired to be a fire fighter, then ultimately was called to act like one when he rescued a dozen people on 9/11. A week before 9/11, Welles even had a premonition that he was "meant to be part of something really, really big." Do you believe that each of us is destined to face certain epic moments in life where we're going to be called to step up to do something really important? Why or why not?
 - e. In your life right now, is there someplace – large or small – where God is calling you to step up to the plate? If so, tell us about it. Are you ready to step up?

Judges 6:2-16, selected verses

[For seven years,] the hand of Midian prevailed over Israel; and because of Midian the Israelites provided for themselves hiding-places in the mountains, caves and strongholds. ³For whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites . . . would come up against them. ⁴They would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the land, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey. ⁵For they and their livestock would come up, and they would even bring their tents, as thick as locusts; neither they nor their camels could be counted; so they wasted the land as they came in. ⁶Thus Israel was greatly impoverished because of Midian; and the Israelites cried out to the LORD for help.

¹¹ Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. ¹²The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior!' ¹³Gideon answered him, 'But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, "Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?" But now the LORD has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian.'

¹⁴Then the LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you!' ¹⁵He responded, 'But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.' ¹⁶The LORD said to him, 'But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.'