

# Bristol Conference 1976-15 Studies in the Judges

by Bob Clark

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal, private Bible study and a care for God's people in order to be used by God as a deliverer.*

**Duration:** 38:34

**Scripture:** Judges 6:1

**Topics:** "Bible Conference", "Dependence On God", "Discipline"

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## Description

Bob Clark discusses the life of Gideon from the book of Judges, emphasizing the importance of personal discipline and the need for a deep relationship with God. He highlights Gideon's humble beginnings, his perception and care for God's people, and the challenges he faced, including jealousy and indifference from his brethren. Clark encourages the audience, especially the youth, to engage deeply with the Scriptures and to cultivate a personal prayer life, as these are essential for spiritual growth and service. He warns against the dangers of flattery and self-indulgence that can lead to spiritual decline, urging believers to remain humble and dependent on God.

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## Transcript

■ There's not a friend like the Lord with Jesus And He is not near us But He's close and near us Near us No Near us Near us No Near us Near us Only Jesus That's right ... once again, is our brother, Robert Clark from Houston, Texas. Brother Clark. I'd like you to turn to your Bibles, please, to the book of Judges, chapter six.

From the book of Judges, chapter six, we progress now to the life of Gideon And a familiar one. Gideon has the largest bulk of material in the book, and as a result we want to more scan his life and draw some important parallels we trust, and make some applications to our own lives. Chapter 6, the first ten verses, accord for us the subject of planned discipline.

It's an extensive description of the need of the nation and their failure and their sins. The book has had two movements, one general movement going through chapter 5, and now commencing a second thrust through the book. We begin in chapter 6 through 16, and what makes this portion unique is the personal detail that is given concerning attitudes, dispositions, temperaments, personalities, and it merits careful study and reflection upon the information that is given to us concerning this man and those that are to

follow amongst the deliverers.

Again, the pattern is followed, and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. The Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years, and a description of the prevailing Midianite oppression. There's a phrase that occurs a little bit later in the paragraph that says that the Midianites greatly impoverished the nation of Israel.

It would seem to fit in my calculations that this is the great famine that was going on that possibly provoked Elimelech and Naomi and their two sons to leave the land and journey into the land of the Moabites, and the story of the book of Ruth evolved from that. So, while the nation is going through great impoverishment, they're quite a distance away from the arrival of David the king, yet God is working even now behind the scenes in his own secret, quiet and sovereign manner to raise up another place of testimony, a vehicle, a witness to God's grace and his provision for God's people. The Midianites were, from the origin of a child born from the relationship of Abraham and Kethurah, and these close, physical, natural ties keep coming back as a source of problem.

The word Midian, we understand, to mean strife or contention, and there shall be strife and contention when that which is natural in our lives is fed, and I know of no better means than to expose the natural through the written word of God. So, once again, we are driven back to the importance of careful perusal and study of the Holy Scriptures. The deepening need of the nation is emphasized here, where the first half of our paragraph, verses 1-6, give us the discipline, and particularly the failure of the nation, and then verses 7-10 afford for us a unique illustration of God's care.

It would appear that the cry of the nation was not adequate. It was a cry for a desire for relief, rather than a conviction of their sin. God knows the difference in your life, as well, and so he raises up an unknown prophet to give a penetrating exhortation to the people, and that's recorded in verses 7-10.

Now, our thoughts are about the person of the deliverer. It's rather interesting that God affords to us details concerning this man, and it's very important to those of us particularly amongst the young people. There came an angel of the Lord, which is the appearance of the second person of a Godhead, and sent him to the oak which is in Oprah, that pertained unto Joash the Epheserite, and his son Gideon, brashly by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites.

The angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. Gideon said unto him, O my lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? Where behold his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord God looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites.

Hath not I sent thee? And he said unto him, O my lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt make the Midianites as one man. And he said unto him, If now I have found grace in my sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me.

Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again. And Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes, and he put a flower in the flesh he put in a basket, and he put broth in a pot, and brought it unto him under the oak, and presented it.

And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh in the unleavened cake, lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. The angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, touched the flesh in the unleavened cake, and there arose a fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh in the unleavened cake.

Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight, and when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! For because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face, the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee, fear not, thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah Shalom. To this day it is yet an opera of the Byzerite.

We read this portion because it is of great moment and importance to Gideon. It describes to us inner characteristics by suggestion, from which we can draw some parallels, and I pray that the Spirit of God would press it upon your soul. Gideon was a man of perception and patience.

The most important thing in Gideon's life, as our outline suggests, is that God gives us details concerning the person of the deliverer, his private life first. Then there is room for immediate action that same night in public activity. Young fellas and girls, somewhere amongst you there may be one or two to whom God is addressing himself.

If the exercise are part of each parent, I'm sure that you might respond to God's word. But you shall never be any more useful to God, never more spiritual healthy, and proportionate to the degree to which you determine to do something with God's word, to labor over it, to thrash wheat and get something for yourself. Mr. Terrath, in suggesting to you the importance of personal, private Bible study, more than devotional reading, but effort made in studying the word of God, I would urge upon you the great importance that you start now.

If you wait till you're into college, you're going to have reasons and excuses. If you wait until you're married, you shall always have extra pressures. Then after that, you're in your 30s, and your family life begins to press upon you, and your own indifference sets in, and you become deeply involved in your business.

Once you become into the 40s, you feel that it's already past, and you'll pray for the young people, and those of us who are 50 have given up Bible study. You are now browsing through devotional books, and leaning back on what you received at conferences. You must start now to do what you are able to glean from the word of God.

It is of tremendous importance that you sacrifice now in your youth, and you set aside an hour every evening and contemplate the word of God. Pray over the word of God. Read it.

Enjoy it. Soak your soul in it, for there is no other way for you to atone your heart to the mind and the purposes of a living God. God exercised my soul as a young man, concerning my own life and its need for a restoration into fellowship with Him.

It was necessary for Him to cripple and disable my father, and I left playing professional baseball to go home and seek to care for my parents and be in some way a respectable and useful son. Hours of evening were sometimes spent reading the word of God. It became a habit.

It became a necessity. Various pressures came in because of business and schooling and other things. It was imperative that I arise very early in the day, which is not my convenient pattern of life, and to discipline

myself to read and to pray and to study and to expect God to give me something.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, Gideon had something to give back to God. He was a man who had gleaned, and when all the rest of the people of the land were impoverished, starving to death, Gideon had a sufficient to offer it up and burn it on a rock and give it back to God. It's so important that you take time to read, to study, and to devotionally apply the word of God to yourself.

There is nothing that shall empower you in your future life quite like any kind of grasp of Holy Scripture. You then have the tool that God can use, whether it's to the salvation of souls, to the feeding of God's people, or to the comforting and encouragement of those that are tried and burdened and heavy-hearted. We must be familiar with the word of God, and Gideon was threshing wheat, and he had wherewithal to give back to God, but more than that, he had a care for God's people.

A deep concern, and the angel appeared to him and said that you're the man that God desires, you're a mighty man of valor. Why? Because he persisted. He did not surrender to his environment or his circumstances.

He was not defeated. He might have gotten a little bit of grain, and it might have been just a little bit of wheat, but it was sufficient for this man to do what he could for God's people. He had something to feed himself and his loved ones.

Father, shame on us. Newspapers, business magazines, all the other periodicals read necessary for work, and the word of God gets set aside. The television must be turned off.

The newspaper must be set aside. You need something to feed your children. You need something for that business associate.

You need something to share with God, the Lord's people, at the Lord's supper, and it shall not just be imbibed in casual reading. This young man said, Oh Lord, if the Lord be with us, you notice that how he changed the pronoun? Not at all self-occupied, deeply concerned with God's people. If the Lord be working and caring for us, what's happened to us? The Lord has delivered us into the hands of the enemy.

You show me a young man in his teens that has enough sense to see the need of the church. My, I'll bless the Lord and spend time with him in any way possible. So easy to be critical, so easy to be forefinding, so easy to be involved in the things of the world, engulfed deeply in our sports and recreation and our fellowships with the opposite sex, all of which are in some degree reasonable activities.

Yet, here is a man that's got to care for God's people, and it's a blessing to see his concern and interest. He's timorous, he's a humble man. I'm the lease of my father's house, how can I deliver? God says, but your might is in your perception, your care for God's people, your earnest concern.

You know, in your local assembly to which you shall return, there are many things to be done around the building, many things to be done for God's people, many a widow that needs her screens changed, and many a child or a fatherless boy has need of somebody to take him out to go fishing, go for a walk with him, teach him how to hold a bat, talk with him, pray about his needs. There are so many things that we can do for others. Do you care about God's people at all? Measure yourself in the light of historical accounts of those who sacrificially gave everything that they had.

What do you do for the believer sitting next to you in your local church? What is your care? It's not sufficient to stand at a pulpit and preach. Gift does that, but something must come from you, something of sharing of your person, something that you labored over, something that you love and care for. And dear child of God, it's that compassion, it's that love, it's that squeeze in yourself that you become broken bread and poured-out wine for God's people.

Then you become a holy sacrament, and it means self-sacrifice. Now, we are not predisposed to that, and God knows your tolerance level, and for some of you it may be just enough of a sacrifice just to pray for somebody, or it may be to knock on the door and visit them as a real challenge for you, but do whatever you are able. Gideon had a care for God's people, and as a result he had a personal experience with the living God.

You can study all you want and become an active division, but God does not make theologians. God makes saints. The seminary will make a theologian, but God the Spirit makes saints, and God wants to take his word and permeate your soul.

He wants the truth to soak in and begin to control our lives, and give us the spiritual impetus to yield ourselves and put our faculties and our interests and our desires and our affections at the disposal of the indwelling Spirit, yielding ourselves to God. And then we can do something public. But long before he took his stand in his family's house, long before he became a bold testimony openly, he had dealings with God.

Personal, intimate dealings with God. He heard God himself say, "Peace be to thee. Fear not." How that solidified and strengthened his soul! What sobriety and dignity it gave to him! What a sense of commitment and purpose in his life! Jehovah Shalom! God is my peace.

Yahuwah himself ministered it to my soul. Then he became a worshiper, a man who had something to give to God and bless God and honor God. Have you turned your bedside into an altar? I don't mean to solicitate from God.

I don't mean to be asking. I mean just to be in communion prayer with God and bless Him and praise Him and worship Him. His loving kindness causes us to just lift up our hands and bless the Lord in his holy name.

David knew what it was to turn a wooded area, a simple tent, a cave, into a sanctuary of quiet prayer and worship. You can do the same for your office during your lunch hour. You can do the same thing in your automobile.

You can do the same thing when the children are out to school by the ironing board. Wherever it is that you find a quiet moment, become a worshiper. Pour out your heart to Him.

Have personal dealings with God, for this is the purpose of this discipline that you're going through. The planned discipline was to stimulate and exercise, to enrich and strengthen the person of a man that God was going to use as a deliverer, first in private and then in public. And where? Just as the Lord commissioned in Acts 1, right there in Jerusalem.

Gideon, go to your father's altar of Baal. Gideon was afraid of the men of his city and afraid of his own family, because he stood for God. Some of you teenagers have unbelieving parents, possibly, or a teasing, carnal or unbelieving brother or sister.

You don't want to commit yourself, but be exercised and be concerned. I believe in a large measure, an older brother of mine was very instrumental in the hand of God to shade me and to exercise as a soul that I long should have had before as a believer in Jesus Christ. I am thankful for those in my own family that were used as goads to probe and excite and provoke me into some kind of care for God and his people in the word of God.

You do not realize how influential you are with your loved ones and others in your young people, or others in your prayer group, if only you would venture to expose some of your care and put it into words. Now, that's not the major problem of a young lady. They are very free to communicate verbally, but a lot of us men have difficulties.

It starts when we're about five or six years old, and we fall down on our knees, and we're told, don't cry, what's the matter with you? And it hurts, we're not supposed to cry. So you learn easily from that that you never show any kind of emotion. And everybody mocks and makes fool of the person that talks and gets stammered and tongue-tied, but the boy very quickly learns that it's no competition to his little sister to correct at the dinner table, and that you'd best just keep your mouth closed and be busy eating, and we build it into him.

And then suddenly he gets married, and you need to stand with him and say, what do you think, dear? And he knows you don't care, because you've never asked him to proceed in five years. We don't fool each other. He gets into that habit when he's 35, and you're wondering why he's not on his feet, sharing his inner feelings, because you've never allowed him to, and you've never condoned him, and you've never urged him.

When was the last time you ever sat down with a little boy, just a little boy, and asked him how he felt about anything? I think we'd be ashamed if we had to raise our hand to acknowledge we don't even know the names of the children that are around here on the ground. Am I wrong? Yes. Somebody else's? That's the urchin that puts my child.

Beloved of God, we need a care, and Gideon has to take a stand right there in his home, tear down his father's altar, force his father into revival, which is the issue. But now the story goes on very familiar. You know Gideon's priest, you know all about Gideon's battle and the men that joined him, and we need not take time there, but we move for the sake of time to the end of the story, to the presence of discouragement.

The last little paragraph. There shall always be discouragement among those who seek to take a stand. In chapter 7 and verse 24, the battle is in its progress.

The enemy has been disseminated, they're running, they are killing themselves, there's mass confusion because of a clever device of attacking them right during the change of the mid-watch, and when the enemy sounded, they rose up and they began slaying their own guards that were walking back and others that were going out, and in that massive confusion that's what God was using for the very clever and divinely-powered victory. Now Gideon sent messages throughout all Mount Ephraim saying, come down against the Midianites and take before them the waters of Bethphara and Jordan. Then all the men of Ephraim gathered and fell together and took the waters of Bethphara and Jordan, and they also took two princes of the Midianites, Horeb and Zeeb.

They flew Horeb upon the rock, Horeb and Zeeb they flew at the winepress of Zeeb, and pursued Midian and broke the heads of Horeb and Zeeb to Gideon. But the Ephraimites, remember them in scripture, they were blessed, providence of God blessed them above Manasseh, even though he was the oldest. Father had crossed his hands and said, oh boy, I tell you the Ephraimites, they're going to announce us something, and they've lived in the backwash of that kind of slavery and commendation.

It was the blessing of God, but they lived in the light of it, and expected constantly special consideration. Joshua had to say to them, well, if you are somebody, go ahead and prove it, and take your part in the land. If you think it's too small, make yourself more room.

Here they come back, jealous brethren. Gideon is baffling, he's tired, he's involved in the service of God, and we find jealous brethren at Strayman. Why didn't you call upon us in this victory? Why did you only use 300? Now, a brother offended is harder than a fenced city, so that sole answer turns away wrath.

He quietly answers them, well, what's my victory compared to yours? You've killed the enemy, you've done and you've served. The Ephraimites are not going to fare so well when they get with a carnal man by the name of Jephthah. He'll answer them in their own way, and they'll put to him, see they never learn, sometimes kindness to jealous people and carnal people is not the best thing.

In the solicitous, tender way he dealt with them, but there are constantly an irritation in the sides of God's people. Beloved of God, won't you please not be jealous about whatever God is doing in another brother or sister? For if he's using a person, if you don't feel that you can encourage him, do not be as he's heard. Use wisdom in what we say to whomever is serving the Lord, and grace, words that are seasoned with grace.

So often a young person will express some sentence in a prayer meeting, or in a discussion group, or offer their heart in prayer in a sentence or two, and they're doctrinally corrected, or guided, or added in some fashion, and possibly cut down. The first problem that Gideon faced is a serious one, but it's going to get worse. The first is jealous brethren.

Then we find a little bit further on, he comes to Jordan and passes over, and runs into some indifference brethren who will not encourage him. He's faint, and he's pursuing. He's struggling to go on, but he will not get the cooperation of those men, and so divine retribution must be needed out to them.

But that's not the serious problem. Those are only the beginnings of his opposition, the discouragement. Instead of thriving in a spiritual victory and a deliverance from the Midianites, he finds jealous brethren, and then indifferent brethren, and then he runs across flattering brethren.

Verse 18, then said he unto Ziba and Zalmonah, these are the leaders of the enemy that have been captured, what manner of men were they whom you slew at Tabor? And they said, as thou art, so were they. Each one resembled the children of a king. That was a pretty good idea.

Why, there is. Tell him that he looks like a king. Everyone that I kill, why, they look just like you, just like a king.

Don't think that didn't sink into him. The enemy's so nasty, but it's painfully true that when, in verse 22, after the matter is taken care of, and the enemy is slaughtered, then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son, and thy son's son, for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian." Oh, beloved of God flattery! Ill-advised flattery to be devastating to someone who is seeking to

serve God. Just to build up what we are in the natural, and it only takes a little bit of word there, just a little bit of thought.

Rule over us. Why, the enemy said you look like a king. Gideon, rule over us.

Now, we had victory in this temptation, but the seed plot was laid in his mind, and it began to blossom and mature and to grow. And he says, well, I won't take that. I know, but I can't be your king, because it was not I that delivered you.

It was the Lord, and the Lord reigns over us. But I'll tell you what we will do. How about putting together some gold? We've got 42,000 pounds of it.

How about putting together a little bit of gold, and then what we can do is I'll make myself a golden ephod. Now, I won't rule and reign, but he just couldn't resist the priestly privilege, the importance of having influence, and the very thing became a snare to God's people. And I'm sure none of them ever looked back and said, boy, did we really blow it with Gideon.

We never should have offered him to be king. No, not one of them said that. But the flesh had its own evil works, and Gideon spends his last years in his life in a most carnal, self-indulgent fashion, living like an Eastern king, multiplying wives, indulging the flesh, even going out from amongst God's people and having a concubine.

Bearing a child by a concubine, he called that secretly at a faraway place called Shechem, and called that son of Imalek, which means, my father was a king. I don't know how often you have sat in an auditorium or in an assembly room and been bored to tears by the things that you have heard somebody share or speak about, and then for the lack of anything else as you walked by them said, I really enjoyed the work. That was not honest, and you did no encouragement or building up of the body of Christ.

That person was definitely misled by what you said. That was not kind. You fed the flesh with your flesh, and as a result it breathed, and pretty soon said to say in all too often, great damage to God's people.

We need to be very loving and very honest, and very genuine, because we all have those natural fleshly instincts. Now, it's perfectly appropriate that if you enjoyed God's word genuinely, and you felt that God was speaking to you, you might say in appreciation to a brother or a sister, or someone who would visit your home, or some teacher that is shared, or something of the kind. But just to be filling in and saying the right thing.

You can impress a person that they have a gift, or an activity, or a fear of service, and it's just not there, and then they'll be heartbroken when some well-advised and mature elder tries to put them in check, or to protect God's people from misconceptions. Let it be mature and sensible. Gideon can teach us many truths and many valuable lessons.

The simple outline is meant to stimulate you for a little bit of thought, and to go over this man's life which we must cover so very briefly, but remember at the beginning he had exercises of soul, perception, patience, sense of character, genuine, healthy-facing humility, and a spirit of humble dependence upon God, and God tenderly and graciously understood his various needs, even at one time urging them to go and give him another test, and to go amongst the enemy and to see what God was going to do with him. Never impatient with him, God bore with this young man, raised him up to deliver God's people, but his own brethren led him to his own fleshly indulgence, and the sad destruction of what could have been a

vibrant living testimony. The land has rest for 40 years.

God's people are being tested, being tried in times of prosperity. I think maybe one of the most important lessons to learn from Gideon is that here is a humble, genuine, concerned young man who is willing to do what God had asked him to do in the face of real challenge, in fear, but in humble dependence upon God. It might be that God is exercising some of you young men to undertake activity, to express yourself to others, to share some kind of a thought or feeling, or to enter into a sphere of activity.

Do it in dependence upon God with a humble spirit, and then make time in our own personal lives to just be with the Lord. The fellowship at the conference is thoroughly delightful. I pray that it shall turn and exercise your soul and mind into an increasing personal law that you might have that private life that can be used of God in public in his time.

And see on his work of 192, shall we say, of Gideon in his last days. At his birthplace, the father of so many times, this is half of his life, and there will be many ends. They have suddenly started out as well on just a wasteful, father-painting-up-Jesus type of person.

But may we continue on for the Lord Jesus Christ, and be able to look forward to his life, for we may serve him, and may we take instruction from him, and may as we do it, make him better service for thy glory. We ask thee now to be with us, Jesus Christ, in the living.

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