

# Morale

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Morale is a state of mind that affects the whole group, and it is essential for achieving great things without counting the cost.*

**Scripture:** Judges 7:1, Psalm 139:23, Matthew 11:28, Mark 9:24, John 14:1, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Ephesians 6:10, 2 Timothy 2:1, 2 Peter 3:9, Revelation 7:9

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Courage"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the story of Gideon, emphasizing the importance of morale in spiritual warfare. The reduction of Gideon's army by the Lord was to ensure a certain quality of fighting force, highlighting the need for active, aggressive service with undivided loyalty to the Lord's cause. The foundations of morale are spiritual, intellectual, and material, with spiritual foundations being the most crucial for enduring courage. The enemy's assaults on morale are countered by personal commitment to the Lord's cause, as seen in Gideon's story where fear and personal interests were eliminated to strengthen the fighting force. The corporate effect of morale underscores the impact of individual spiritual stamina on the entire battle, emphasizing the need for every soldier to stand strong in the Lord for the collective victory.

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## Transcript

"Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and encamped beside the spring of Harod: and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and trembling, let him return and depart from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that

lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thy hand; and let all the people go every man unto his place" (Judges 7:1-7; R.S.V.).

One of the most important aspects of the whole subject treated in our book, *Defeat into Victory*, was the question of 'Morale'. A very great deal of space is given in that record to this matter of morale: for its lack on some occasions, and its collapse on others, were responsible for what was little less than a complete rout; conversely, its recovery played a very large part in the glorious consummation.

### The Reducing Of Gideon's Army

That word 'morale', of course, lies right at the heart of the story of Gideon. It sums up the whole matter, does it not? First of all, there is an elimination of everyone who is fearful and trembling; in the second stage, everyone who has interests which are personal and which, standing to suffer, would cause the breakdown of morale, is bidden to go home. This great reducing movement was called for by the Lord in order to get a certain quality. Of course, as regards numbers, this is no kind of argument either for one thing or the other: it is not an argument for large numbers and it is not an argument for small numbers. Nor, let us be clear, has this anything to do with salvation. The redeemed are to be 'a great multitude which no man can number' (Rev. 7:9). "The Lord is... longsuffering... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord has no reservations in that sphere; He never says that that number is too great. But here it is a question of service--specific service and responsibility for the interests of the Lord amongst His own people. It is a matter of the Lord's honour.

To get the real value of this story, we need to remember the situation which obtained at that time amongst the people of God. For the issue was indeed the honour of the Name of the Lord, as deposited with His own people; and for the deliverance of that Name from reproach and dishonour among His people a certain quality of fighting force is required. That is the heart of the story, and that is what we are considering at this point.

### The Challenge Of Active Service

Now before we go further with the matter of morale, may I come back to the general matter of our warfare. We may have had much teaching on various aspects of Divine truth and revelation, such as the Church, the Body of Christ, and other matters, and it may be that the teaching has not been without value--it may even have been quite profitable. But I wonder whether we have made enough of this matter of our being, as the Lord's people, really on a war footing. Has it really come home to us that we, the people of God, are supposed to be in the field under war conditions? Is there the mentality and consciousness in every section and in every individual that we are in a great campaign; that there is no let up in this matter, and that we are in it up to the hilt? There may be, and indeed often is, a real gap between our teaching, instruction, information, on the subject of Christian soldiering, and the assured conviction of being actually in a war--on active service. So many of the Lord's people listen to the teaching, and are interested in it, but they are not really in the fight, not really counting in the battle. To sing 'Onward, Christian Soldiers!' and to do no fighting, is silly.

Surely, at such a time as this, the Lord would challenge us all, young and old alike: 'Are you really alive to the fact that you are out in active warfare, in a great campaign? that you are a part of something tremendous that is going on in this universe, and that you have a personal and quite definite place in it?' It is a matter of urgency that this should be brought home to us definitely and clearly. It may be that much of our defeat, many of the casualties amongst us, are largely due to the fact that we have not been on the

war path with the enemy: we have been letting him have his way far too much, we have been giving him ground, we have been letting him play around with us and do as he likes. If only we had been standing on our feet in this matter, perhaps some casualties might have been avoided. We have just accepted circumstances--including physical weaknesses--as unrelated things in themselves, instead of standing up and at least raising the question: 'How much is there of the enemy behind this?' Of course, it may not be that in every case of physical or other limitation the enemy is having the ascendancy, but in a great many cases he is, and the way of deliverance is to recognize that we must "lay hold on eternal life" and "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12, A.V.). "Lay hold on eternal life"!

## The Foundations Of Morale

Now, on this matter of morale, I want to quote an excellent passage from the book of which I have spoken. Says the writer, the great Field Marshal who made this report: 'Morale is a state of mind, it is that intangible force which will move a whole group of men to give their last ounce to achieve something without counting the cost to themselves, that makes them feel that they are part of something greater than themselves. If they are to feel that, their morale--if it is to endure, and the essence of morale is that it should endure--their morale must have certain foundations. These foundations are spiritual, intellectual, material, and that is the order of their importance. Spiritual first, because only spiritual foundations can stand the real strain.' (Is that not fine? Of course there may be varying conceptions of the meaning of the word 'spiritual', but when one interprets this in the realm of heavenly things, the principle is so sound, the wisdom so profound.) 'Intellectual next, because men are swayed by reason as well as feeling. Material last--important but last--because the very highest kinds of morale are often when men's material conditions are at their lowest.' (What a great deal of spiritual profit could be drawn from that!)

He goes on to say: 'I remember sitting down in my office and tabulating these foundations something like this:

### '1. The Spiritual:

- (a) There must be a great and noble object;
- (b) Its achievement must be absolutely vital;
- (c) The method of its achievement must be active, aggressive;
- (d) The man must feel that what he is and what he does matters directly towards the attainment of the object.'

(How full that is of vital and necessary lessons when translated into the realm of things heavenly!)

### '2. The Intellectual:

- (a) He must be convinced in his mind that the object can be attained' (that is searching!);
- '(b) He must see, too, that the organization to which he belongs, and which is striving to obtain the object, is sound and efficient;'

(Perhaps we could interpret that as meaning that we must believe in our cause and recognize the adequacy of the Church's spiritual equipment for gaining the object in view.)

'(c) He must have confidence in his leaders and know that, whatever dangers and hardships he is called upon to suffer, his life will not be thrown away for nothing.'

'3. The Material:

(a) The man must feel that he will get a fair deal from his commander and from the Army;'

(We have no fear about getting a fair deal from our Commander! We know He will give us a fair deal. But perhaps we cannot always be so certain of getting a fair deal from the Army, either individually or as a whole. To be certain of the support of the rest of the Army is an important factor in morale.)

'(b) He must, as far as possible, be given the best weapons and equipment for his task;'

(That throws us back, does it not, upon the responsibility of 'under shepherds' to give instruction in "the whole counsel of God", that the Church may be 'thoroughly furnished' for her warfare?)

'(c) His working conditions must be made as good as can be.'

Having thus analyzed and summarized what he means by foundations of morale, the writer next adds a classic sentence, which I have doubly underlined. Note, this is a Field Marshal of the Army speaking. He dares to say:

'The Christian religion is above all others a source of that enduring courage which is the most valued of all the components of morale!'

And the book contains much more like that. This matter of morale is of the greatest importance. It was against the possible lack or breakdown of such morale that the Lord took those very serious precautions with Gideon; when He said: "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand" (Judges 7:7).

#### The Enemy's Assaults Upon Morale

Now, if we think about it for a few moments, we cannot fail to realize what a great deal our New Testament has to say about morale. For, after all, such admonitions and entreaties as: "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1); "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10); "Quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13); all such exhortations have to do with this strategic matter of spiritual morale--spiritual stamina to go on and to keep going on. I want to stress the importance that the Lord attaches to this. Let me refer for a moment to what we were saying in the previous chapter. The great objective of the enemy is to bring reproach upon the Crown, upon the Throne; to repudiate its rights, its claims, its interests; to rob the people of the Crown, of their heritage. And if that is to be met and countered and overcome, this matter of spiritual stamina that we are calling 'morale' is of tremendous importance.

The writer from whom we are quoting makes some sorry comparisons of conditions in the opposing sides at the beginning of the campaign. Speaking about the enemy's morale, he says that for a long time it was almost impossible to break it, and he puts it down to one thing. He says: 'The enemy fought his battle as though upon every individual there rested the whole interest, the whole issue. For instance, if 500 men were told off to hold a position, 'we had to kill 495 before we got that position and the remaining five killed themselves. Not one man would surrender.' In every individual there was this consciousness that the whole war issue rested upon him and his life: he was in this thing without any reserve or question, or other

interest. That was the secret of his morale, and that lies behind, on the one hand, the great story of the enemy's long continued victory, and, on the other hand, our defeat.

That is the key to the whole matter, is it not? "Whosoever is fearful and trembling..." Why should we be fearful and trembling--why? Why should we be afraid? Is there something in our life for which we care more than for this great issue--that of the Throne and the Crown, the government and our fellow countrymen's heritage of heavenly citizenship? Is there something that to us is of greater importance? Then that is the root of the fear and trembling. The very presence of fear indicates that there is some other interest. If the interests and honour of the Throne are our only concern, it means that all other things have been set aside and we are in this battle to the death. That, clearly, underlay the strength of morale in the story of Gideon; these people had no alternatives, no secondary considerations.

Says our writer: 'The fighting soldier facing such an enemy must see that what he does, whether he is brave or craven, matters to all his comrades, and directly influences the result of the whole battle.' It is this personal aspect to which everything is headed up in this seventh chapter of the Book of Judges. This is clearly brought out in the more modern translation given in the Revised Standard Version: "He of whom I say to you, 'This man shall go with you,' shall go with you; and any of whom I say to you, 'This man shall not go with you,' shall not go" (vs. 4). God was dealing with thousands, yet He would not handle them as it were 'in bulk'. He dealt with them man by man; He made it a personal matter with each man individually. And so it was--'This man shall go with you...', and, 'This man shall not go with you...' The whole thing was made personal.

#### The Corporate Effect Of Morale

But--"none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself" (Rom. 14:7). That is to say, the way you and I individually stand up in this battle affects the whole issue. Did we but believe it, what a wonderful source of support and strength this is! But whether we believe it or not, that is a statement of fact. It is recognized in the natural world, and it is just as true, if not more so, in the spiritual realm. "Now we live, if stand fast in the Lord!" (1 Thess. 3:8). Your behaviour and mine in the battle--whether we stand up or give up--profoundly affects other people. It surely does! We need to lay hold of that and to say: 'The issue, after all, does not begin and end with me. My conduct, my spirit, my attitude affects others. If I am weakening in the fight; if I am an unreliable soldier; if I cannot be trusted from one day to another as to how I shall be and where I shall be: if I am like that, it affects the whole situation. It is a cause of weakness in the whole Body corporate, in the whole constitution.' It must be our constant motive for girding ourselves and being strong, that our brothers and sisters need us so--the whole battle needs us to be like that. We dare not be weak and give up, for in this business we just cannot isolate ourselves.

The Lord was acting on this ground with Gideon's army. He said, in effect: 'If I were to allow any one man, fearful and trembling, to come into this undertaking, he would affect all the others, and I cannot afford that: let every such man go. And if I allowed any man to come in who had personal interests to serve, whose natural pride and conceit would take some glory to himself, that would be disastrous for the whole issue: let all such go home. The men who are to be here, who are to be the instrument of this deliverance, must be men who have been reduced to sheer, intrinsic worth.' That, surely, explains much of the Lord's dealings with us--reducing, emptying, weakening, breaking down, scattering. What is God doing? Just making way for intrinsic values, the values which are to be found when our objective is the Lord, and only the Lord. The issue for us must be the Lord--His glory, His honour.

That, in a few words, is morale. Much more could, of course, be said on this vital matter. Let me close with one other short extract. Says the writer: 'We had the advantage of our enemies in that our cause was based on real, not false, spiritual values. We fought only because the powers of evil' (what a phrase!) 'had attacked those real spiritual values.'

Now we know that he was referring to the values of 'life worth living' (he uses that phrase later), those things which really make life worth living; but let us interpret this in the realm of heavenly things. The passage will bear repeated reading. He proceeds:

'The man must feel this, feel that indeed he has a worthy cause and that, if he did not defend it, life would not be worth the living. Nor was it enough to have a worthy cause--it must be positive, aggressive; not a mere passive, defensive and 'anti something' feeling, but positive and aggressive.'

All that is the foundation of morale. We need to lay it deeply to heart, for we are in something far bigger than the South East Asia Campaign. Far, far greater issues are at stake; a far greater Crown and Throne and Name and Government and Country are involved; a far greater enemy is in the field. And so Paul makes his appeal: "I therefore... beseech you...", and brings the whole matter of the battle for the Church's glorious consummation to this: "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand... Take up the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day".

"Be strong in the Lord"! May the Lord help us!

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